

# Short-term physical, emotional and financial well-being after separation:

Does initiator status make a difference?

By

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# Background

- Married “do better” in life than the unmarried
  - Selection or causal
- Separation and divorce negatively impacts:
  - Health
  - Economic resources/income (particularly for women with children)
- Are the negative consequences of separation the same for everyone?
  - Are there differences depending on who initiated?

# Health after separation: why might it vary depending on initiation?

- Ending a poor quality marriage might improve health
  - Majority of time 1 spouse makes the decision (70%)
- This may vary depending on initiator status
  - Initiator: feeling of control = positive health impact
  - Non-initiator: feeling of powerlessness = negative health impact
- Previous research inconsistent
  - Small, local, non-random, non-representative samples
  - Vary in length of time between dissolution and survey (i.e. 1 year after event is very different from 4 years after)
  - Only 1 study examined physical health

# Economic resources after separation: why might it vary depending on initiation?

- No studies have looked at initiation of separation and financial outcomes

(theory is all about women)

- The decision to end marriage is based on expectations of financial well being afterwards
  1. Separation/Divorce initiative:
    - Women with greater economic resources are more likely to initiate separation
  2. Expectations/anticipation literature:
    - Those with lower expected financial costs are more likely to separate

# Research questions and hypotheses

- What are the health consequences of separation and do those who self-initiated separation have better health than those who did not?
  - If respondents separate, those who initiated separation will have better physical and mental health than those who did not
- What are the consequences of separation for household income and are there differences for initiators compared to non initiators of separation?
  - If respondents separate, those who initiate separation will have a higher household income than those who did not, particularly women

# Data and methods

- HILDA:
  - First 7 waves for health analysis
  - First 8 waves for income
- Legally married Wave 1:
  - Longitudinal panel dataset, unbalanced design:
  - 7 wave data set = 1,786 men and 2,068 women
    - 247 transitions from marriage to separation
  - 8 wave data set = 3,149 men & 3,336 women
    - 330 transitions from marriage to separation
- Linear model with random intercept to account for repeated observations on individuals

# Dependent Variables

- Health: 8 dimensions of the SF-36
  - Physical functioning
  - Role Physical
  - Bodily Pain
  - General Health
  - Vitality
  - Social Funtioning
  - Role Emotional
  - Mental Health
- Income: Equivalised disposable household income
  - OECD equivalence scale
  - Includes all transfers into and out of households (i.e. Child support)

# Measure of Marital status, initiation and transitions

- Separation status lagged 1 year:

0. Married - Continuously

1. Married – Transitioned  
(reference)

2. Separated – initiator

3. Separated – partner initiated

4. Separated – jointly initiated

5. Legally divorced

6. Repartnered (cohabiting or remarried)

- Separation status:

1. Married

2. Separated – initiator  
(reference)

3. Separated – partner initiated

4. Separated – jointly initiated

5. Legally divorced

6. Repartnered (cohabiting or remarried)

Initiator question: Who made the final decision to end the marriage?

Wave 1 – 5 retrospective, Wave 5+ prospective



# Controls

## Income Model

- Age
- Marriage duration (months wave 1)
- Number of dependent children ( $< 18$ ) in household
- Ethnic background
- Education
- Employment status
- Time since separation (in months)

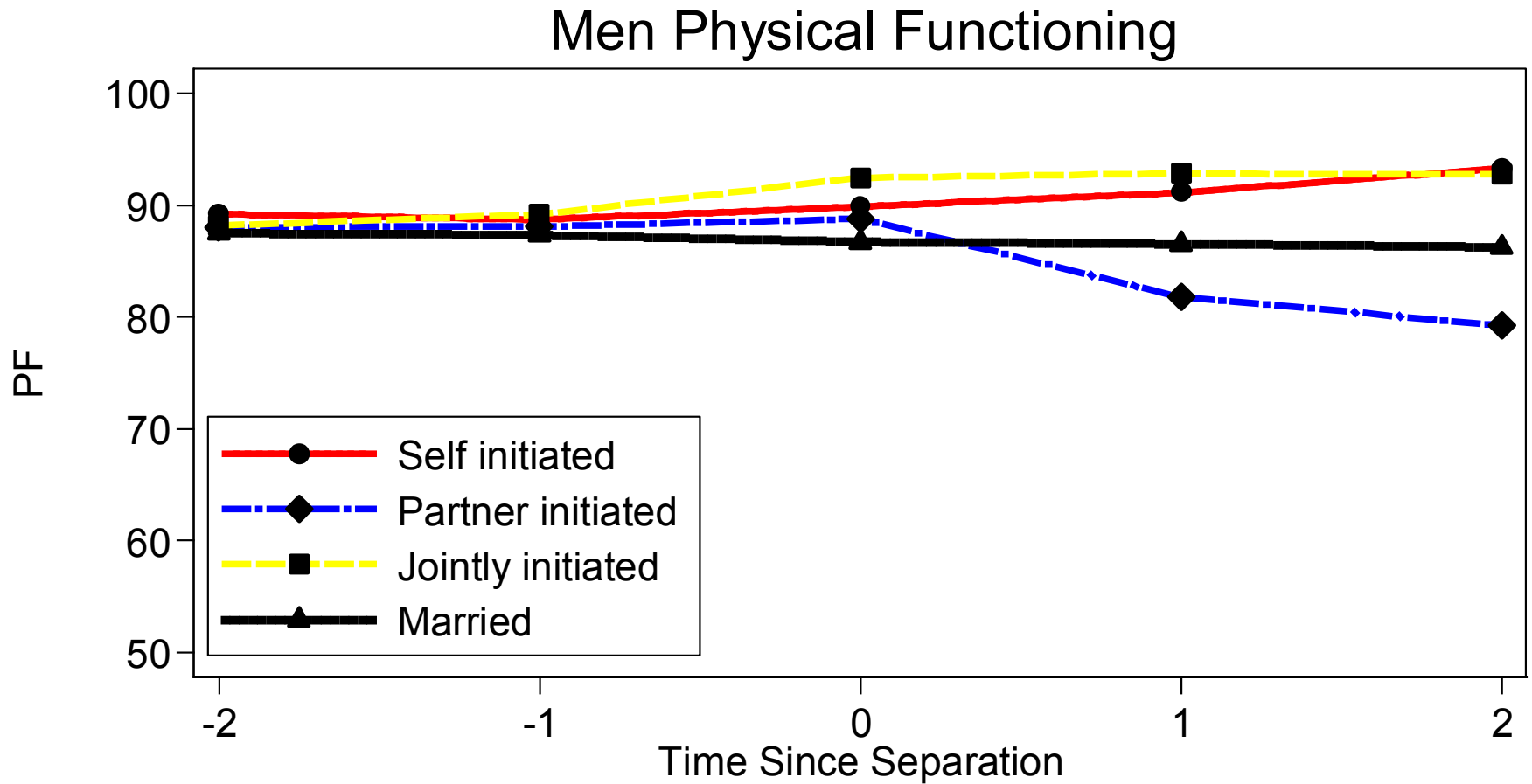
## Health Models

- Age
- Marriage duration (years wave 1)
- Dependent child ( $< 18$ ) in household
- Ethnic background
- Education
- Employment status
- Household Income
- Long term health condition (1 = yes)
- Lagged Health outcome

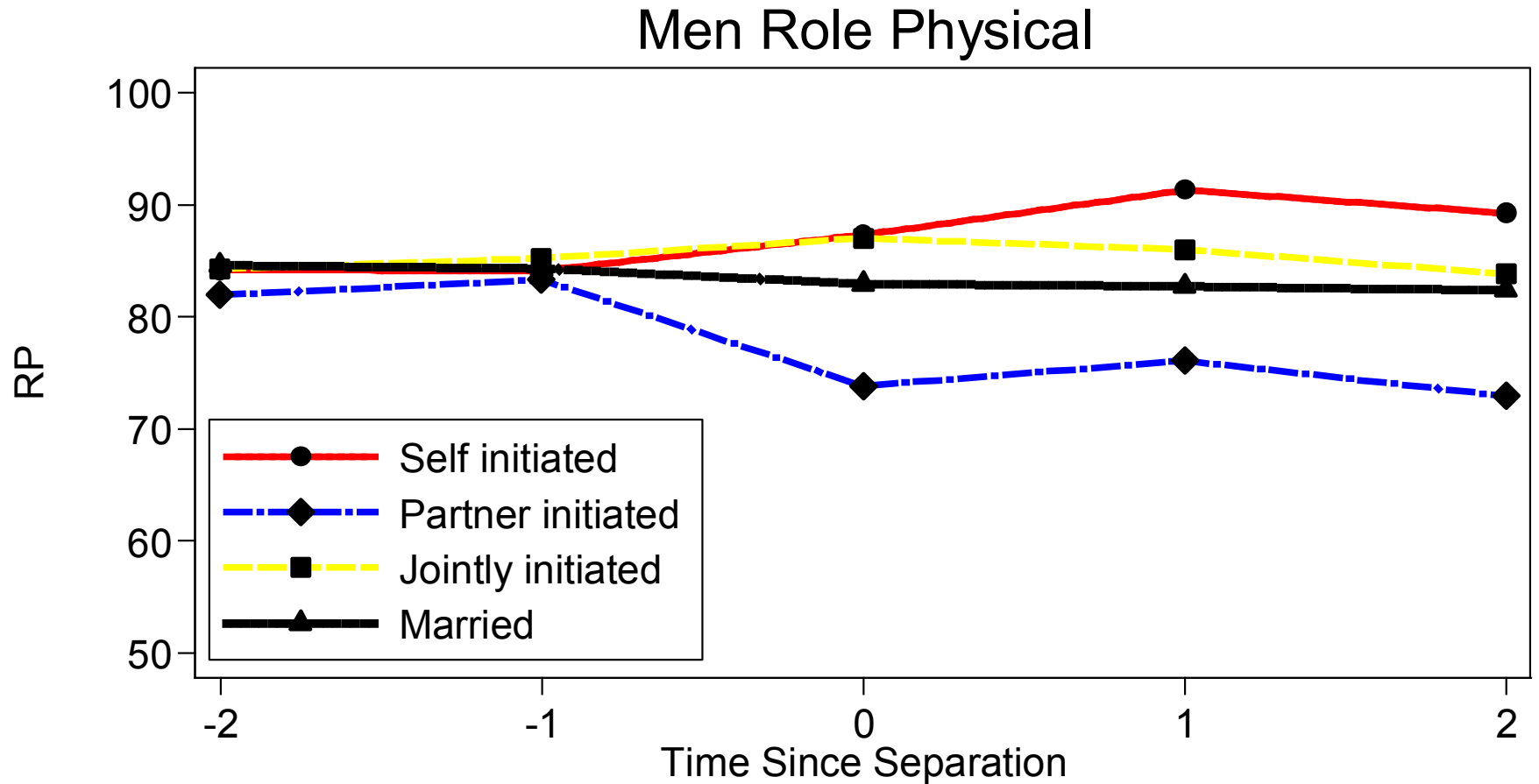
Table 1: Number of respondents who transitioned from married to separated 8 waves, by sex and initiator status

	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
Initiated	35	23	81	46
Partner initiated	66	43	50	29
Jointly initiated	54	35	44	25
Total	155	100	175	100

# Health Results: Physical Functioning

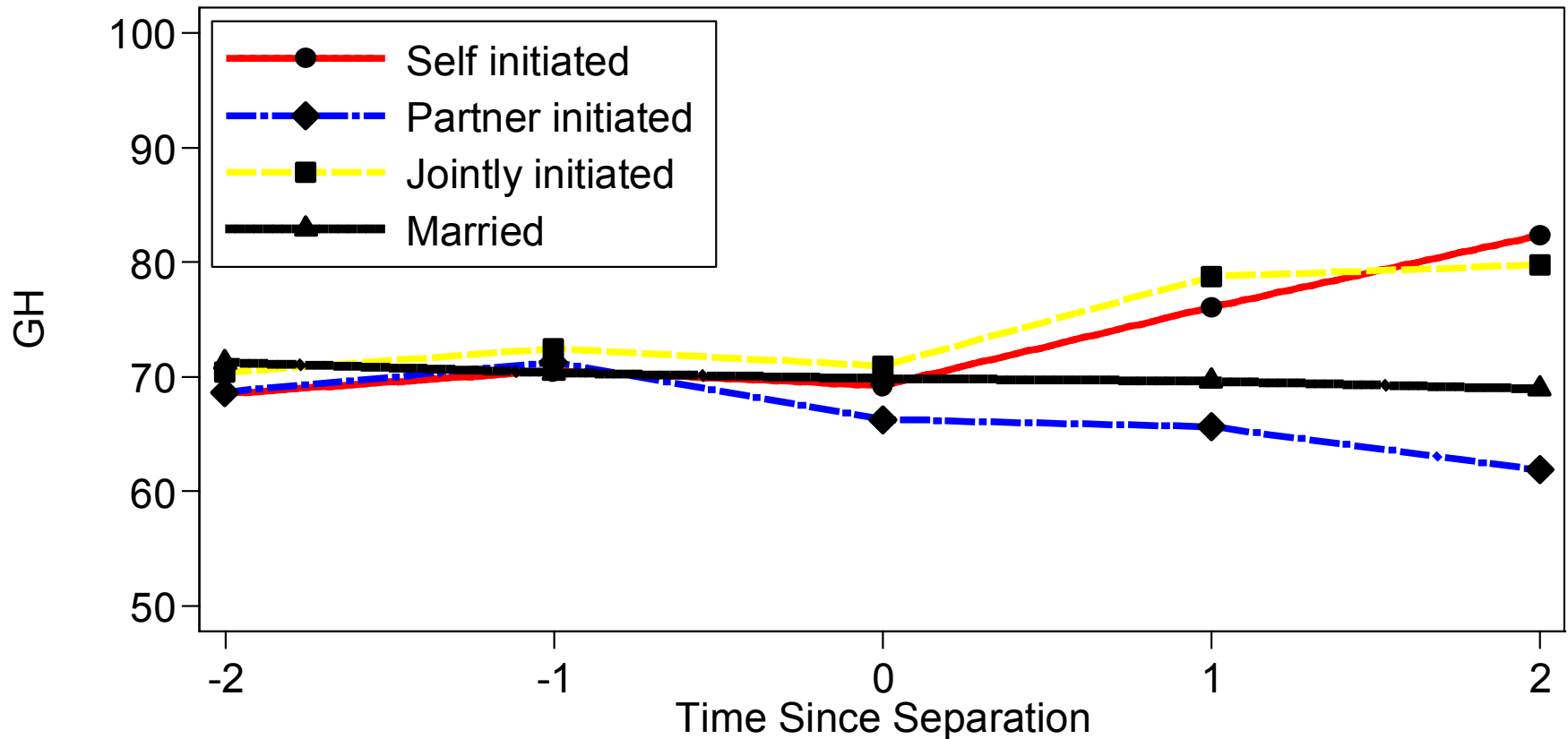


# Health Results: Role Physical



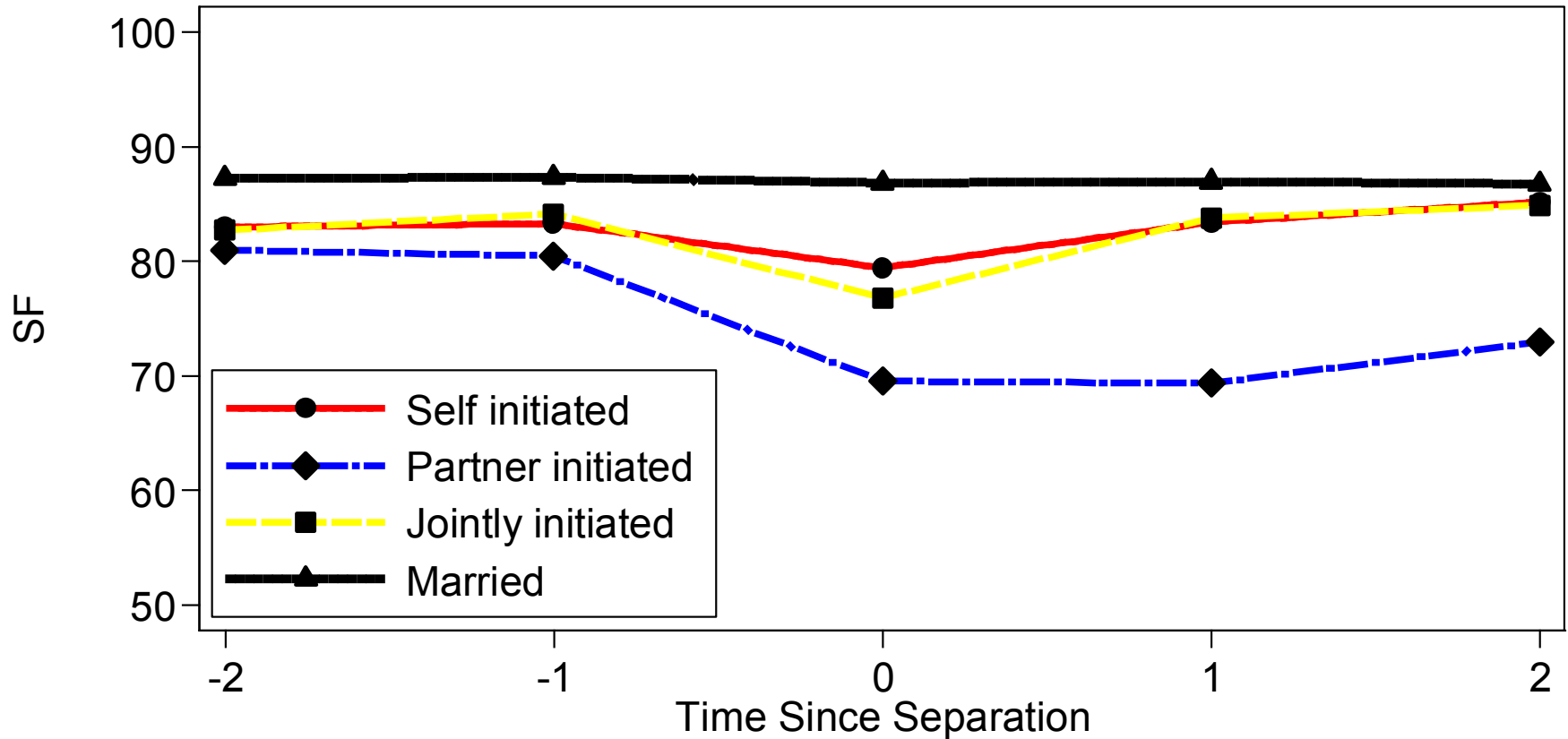
# Health Results: General health

## Women General Health



# Health Results: Social functioning

## Men Social Functioning



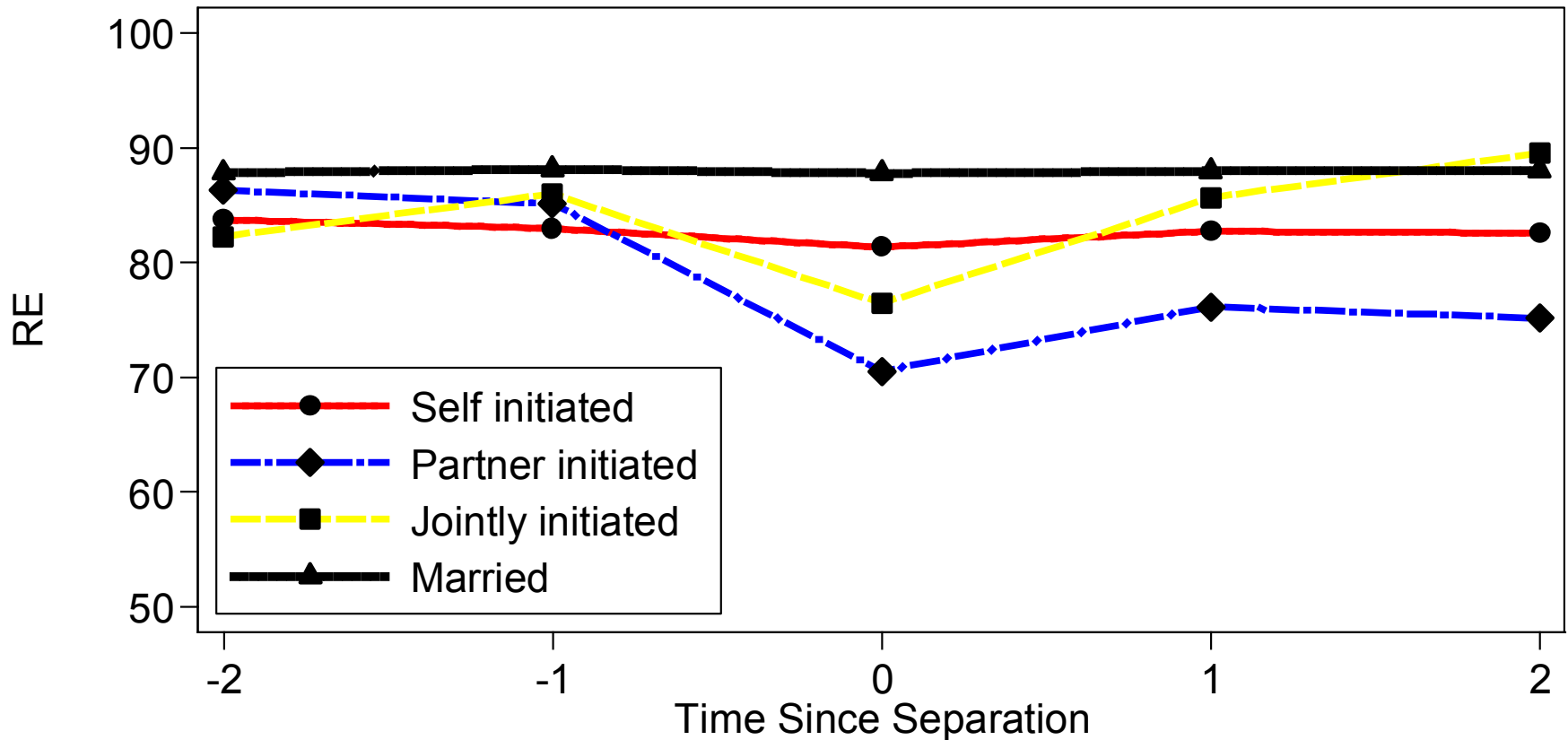
# Health Results: Mental Health

## Men Mental Health



# Health Results: Role Emotional

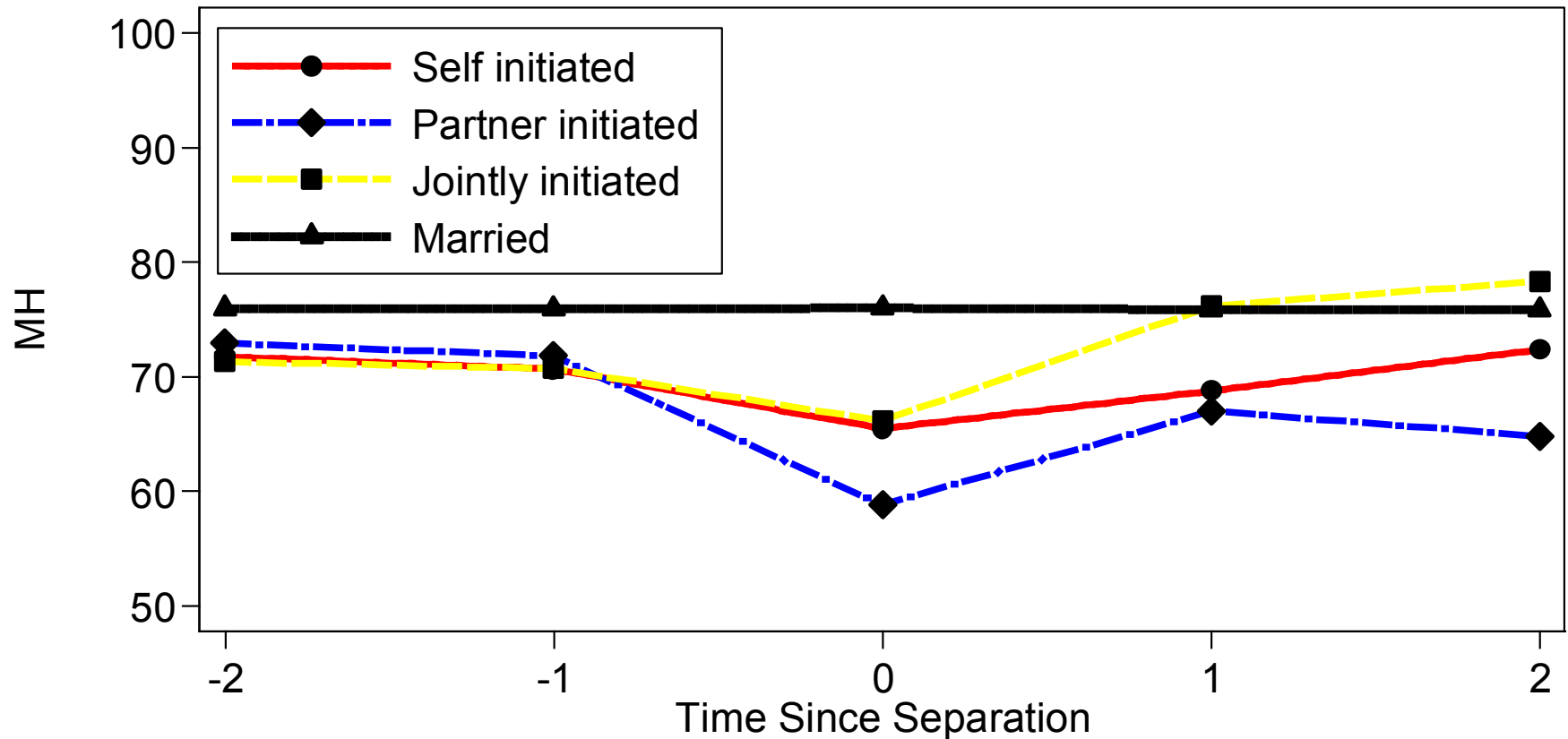
## Women Role Emotional





# Health Results: Mental Health

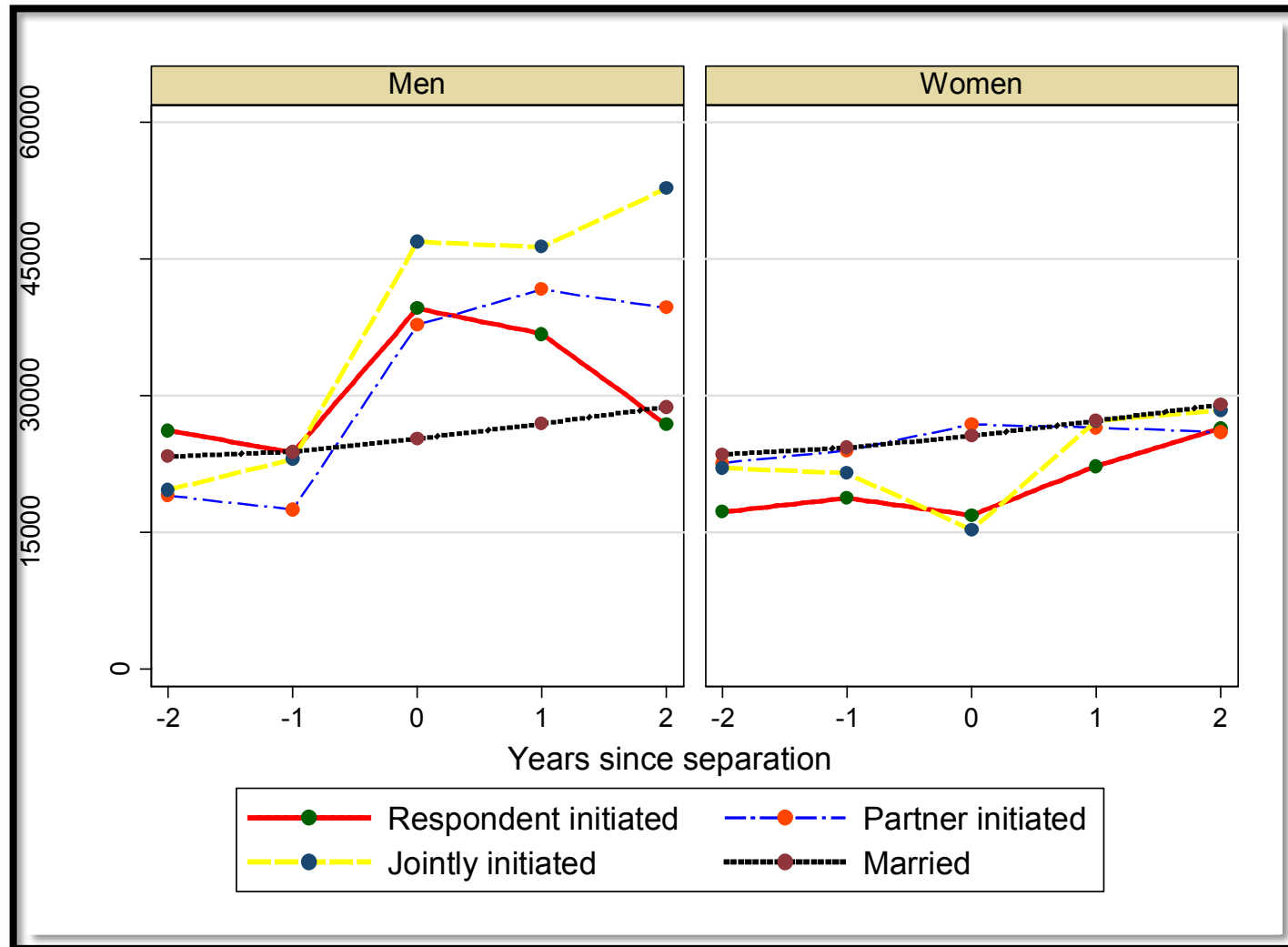
## Women Mental Health



# Summary

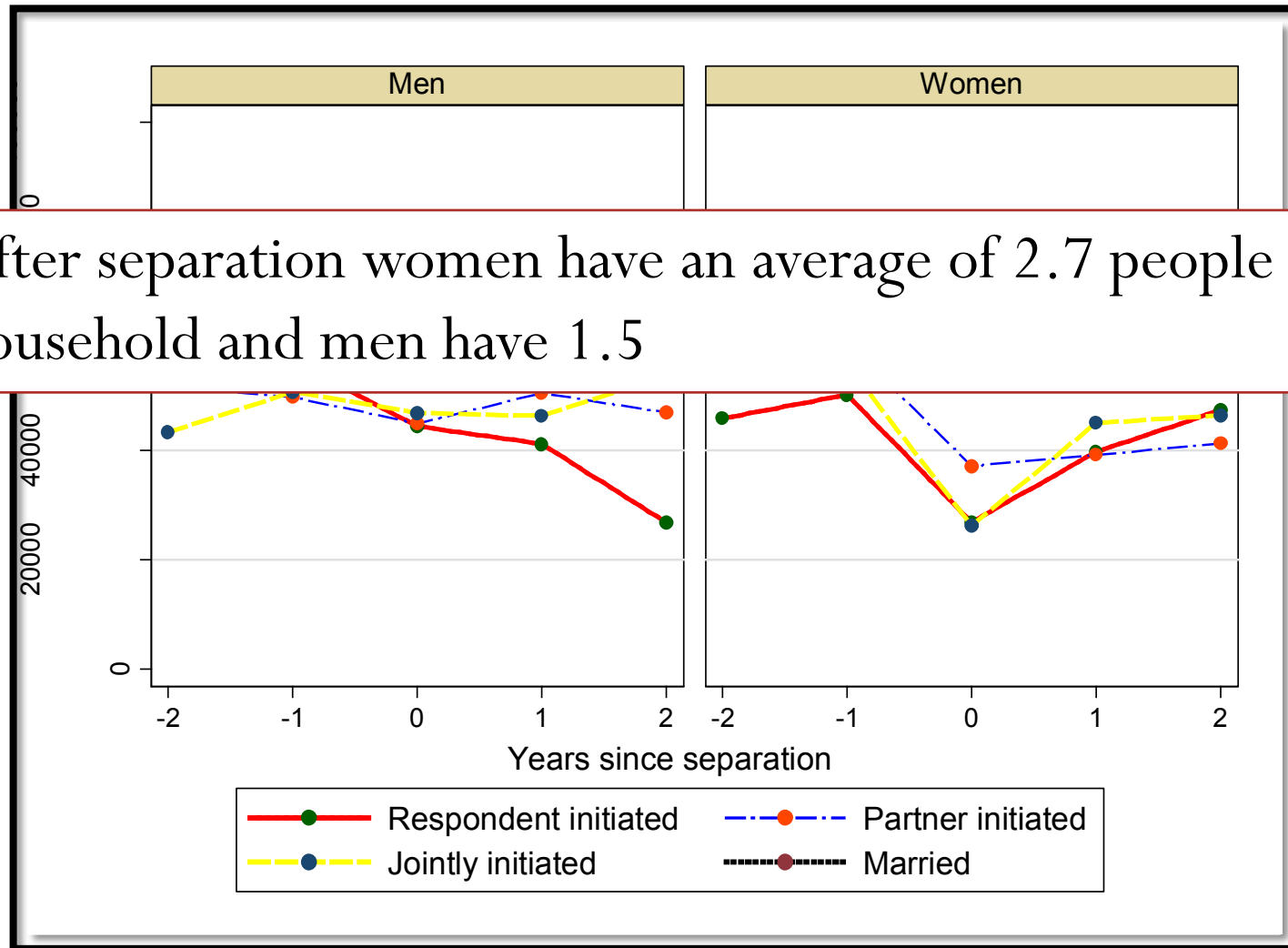
- Physical health:
  - Men's physical health declines more than women's
  - Role physical decline for men suggests reduced capacity to perform work and other daily activities
  - Initiators have better physical health than non initiators
- Mental health:
  - Men's and women's mental health declines after separation
  - Initiators have better mental health than non initiators
- People who report jointly initiated separations have best health overall, and often better than stably married

# Household income results: Mean equivalised household income for men and women, by sex and initiator status



# Household income results: Mean household income (not equivalised) for men and women, by sex and initiator status

After separation women have an average of 2.7 people per household and men have 1.5



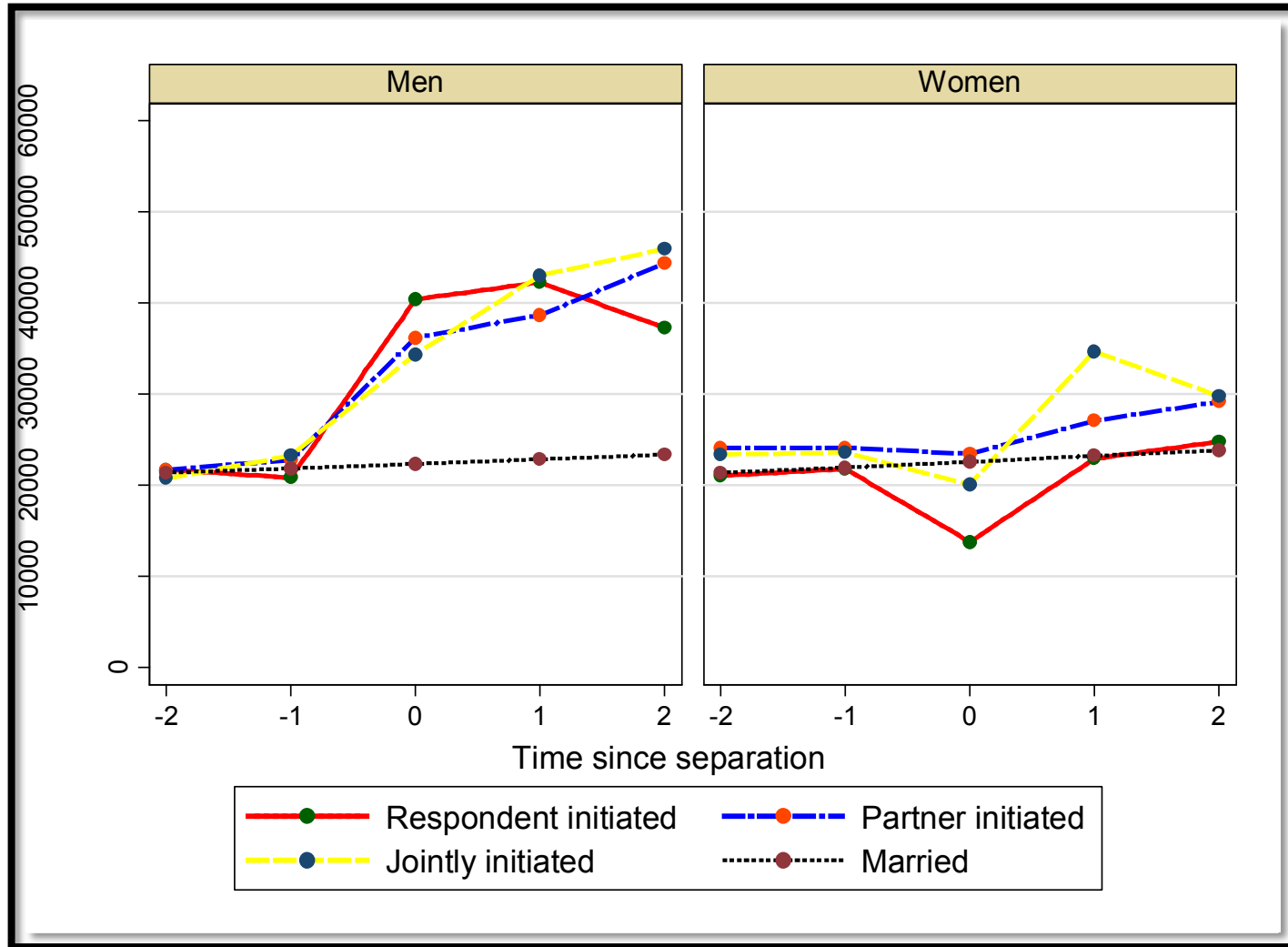
# Household income results: Percentage of household income from government transfers, by sex and initiator status



# Summary

- Women have much lower equivalised household income after separation than men
  - women's equivalised household income decreases when they initiate separation or jointly initiate, but recovers quite quickly
- Men and women have similar total household income after separation
  - Women on average have more people in their household after separation (i.e. they get custody of the children)
- After separation a much greater % of women's household income is derived from government transfers

# Household income results: Predicted equivalised household income before and after separation, by sex and initiator status



# Summary

- Our results are consistent with recent research into financial well being after separation.
  - Men do better than women
  - Women are not as disadvantaged as in the past
- For men initiation does not differentiate household income after separation
- For women – unexpected finding: women who initiate have lower household income immediately after separation
  - Mismatch between expected and actual income
  - Financial costs of separation are not the main consideration
    - Happiness, life satisfaction, children's wellbeing
  - Recovers to similar pre-separation levels by following year
  - Disadvantaged relative to joint and partner initiated for 1 – 2 years after



# Overall conclusions:

- The consequences of marital disruption are not the same for everyone
- They vary depending on:
  - Who initiated the separation
  - The outcome being examined (i.e. income versus health for women)
  - The time since separation
- Has implications for programs designed to minimise the burden of marital dissolution for individuals and society

Co-operative (joint)  
separations are best  
for everyone!