

# The Effects of Divorce on Men's Employment and Social Security Histories

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**Abstract.** Analyses of the economic consequences of divorce have emphasized the negative effect of divorce for women. For men, consequences of divorce are most often believed to be social or psychological. This is not consistent with an economic literature showing the positive effects of marriage on men's wages. Using a nationally representative life-history survey among men in the Netherlands, this paper reanalyzes the possible negative effects of a divorce for the careers of men. Complete life histories provide information on upward and downward occupational mobility as well as on unemployment and disability. Multivariate event history models show that after divorce, men experience an increased chance of becoming downwardly mobile, an increased chance of becoming unemployed, and an increased chance of becoming disabled. Additional analyses are done to assess whether these effects are spurious, due to the influence of earlier problems that men experienced in their lives, as measured by indicators of employment problems, health problems, and problems in social relationships. While these variables have an effect on the future career, they are not strong enough to eliminate the divorce effect. Implications are discussed for different theoretical hypotheses about the importance of marriage and divorce for men's employment.

**Key words:** divorce, employment, life course, marriage, occupational mobility, social security

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**Résumé.** Les analyses des conséquences économiques du divorce mettent l'accent sur l'effet négatif du divorce chez les femmes. Pour les hommes, on considère souvent qu'il s'agit davantage de conséquences sociales ou psychologiques. Ceci ne cadre pas avec la littérature économique qui montre que le mariage a un effet positif sur les revenus masculins. Grâce à une enquête représentative au niveau national, menée sur les histoires de vie des hommes néerlandais, cet article analyse les possibles effets négatifs du divorce sur les carrières masculines. Les modèles multi-variés d'analyse biographique, appliqués aux histoires complètes de vie, montrent qu'après le divorce, les hommes ont des risques accrus de mobilité vers le bas, de chômage et d'incapacité. Des analyses complémentaires cherchent à déterminer si ces effets sont réels ou dus à l'influence de problèmes antérieurs vécus par les hommes, problèmes d'emploi, problèmes de santé ou difficultés dans les relations sociales. Ces variables ont

effectivement un effet sur la suite de la carrière mais leur prise en compte ne suffit pas à annuler complètement l'effet du divorce. Les résultats permettent de discuter différentes hypothèses théoriques sur le rôle du mariage et du divorce dans l'emploi masculin.

**Mots clés:** aide sociale, cycle de vie, divorce, emploi, mariage, mobilité professionnelle

## 1. Introduction

There has been a rapidly growing literature on the socioeconomic consequences of divorce. Most studies have focused on income differences and show that women experience a considerable deterioration in household income (Smock, 1993; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; Peterson, 1996; Jarvis and Jenkins, 1999; Poortman, 2000; Uunk, 2004). The reasons for this decline are well-known. Women lose the share in their husband's income after divorce, they lose the economies of scale that marriage brought them, and alimony payments only compensate for these losses in a partial and temporary fashion. In addition, women's investments in the labor market are often limited during marriage so that it is more difficult for them to rely on their own labor income, in particular when they also bear the sole responsibility for children. The net effect is generally a considerable deterioration in standardized household income, varying from a 30 to 40% decline in the first few years after divorce.

The socioeconomic consequences of divorce for men are less well-known. Studies analyzing the economic consequences of divorce for women sometimes also make a comparison with men and these studies show that on average, men experience an improvement in their income position, although the magnitude of this improvement is limited (Smock, 1994; Poortman, 2000). A few more recent studies have found that a nontrivial subset of men also experience a decline in their income position after divorce, but this decline is largely attributed to the loss of the wife's income (McManus and DiPrete, 2001). With these more recent exceptions aside, the overall picture of the literature has been neutral, suggesting that in contrast to women, men do not experience much negative economic consequences of divorce. This is not to say that there are no costs of divorce for men, but these costs are generally believed to be social or psychological rather than economic (Amato, 2000).

In this paper, I challenge this view by examining the consequences of divorce for men's employment careers. More specifically, I test the hypothesis that the experience of a divorce has a negative effect on the career of men, as exemplified by an increased risk of unemployment and an increased risk of downward occupational mobility. Hence, rather than simply arguing that there may be negative consequences of divorce for men due to the loss of the wife's income, which is the approach followed by McManus and DiPrete

(2001), I argue that there can also be a negative impact on men because a divorce hurts their own career trajectories.

This hypothesis is inspired by the economic literature on the male benefits of marriage. In this literature, it is argued that men experience a wage benefit from marrying, an effect that is usually described as the marriage premium. This hypothesis is usually tested by comparing men before and after marriage and the evidence is supportive: men's wages increase after marriage and they do so at a faster rate than they do before marriage (Korenman and Neumark, 1991; Blackburn and Korenman, 1994; Gray, 1997; Loh, 1997). The focus has been on the comparison between the single and the married stage and little attention has been paid to divorce in this literature. If there indeed is such a marriage premium, however, it is plausible to expect that there may also be a divorce penalty. At least one previous paper on unemployment in Germany does find a significant negative effect of divorce (Kraft, 2001).

A first reason why there may be a divorce penalty lies in the role of specialization. When gender roles in society are traditional, men take on the role of breadwinner while women take care of the home and the children. Specialization not only has consequences for the level of efficiency in the household, it is also believed to make men more productive at work (Gray, 1997). This economic argument is strengthened by a more sociological argument about the male breadwinner role. Under conditions of specialization, men feel normatively obliged to provide for their family and this increases their feeling of responsibility (Waite and Gallagher, 2000). The male breadwinner role increases men's attachment to the labor market and may also lead to a more positive development of the career (Kalmijn and Luijckx, 2005). When a divorce occurs, specialization ends, the male breadwinner role disappears, and this may weaken men's attachment to the labor market.

A second reason for expecting a divorce penalty is that the wife serves as the husband's social capital (Bernasco et al., 1998; Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001). The wife may encourage the husband to invest in his career, she may provide information that is helpful to his career, and she may offer support and advice when the husband faces problems at work. Support by the spouse is not limited to a situation of traditional gender roles. When more married women work, couples more often do similar work and this may increase the value of the information the wife can give. More importantly, in dual-career couples, values emphasizing the importance of work are shared by the partners. The social capital argument is also relevant for divorce. A divorce implies that the husband loses part of his social capital and this may lead to a negative or less positive development of the career.

Third, there may be important indirect effects. Divorce not only has economic and social consequences, the immediate effect of a divorce is probably more psychological. Psychological studies have regarded divorce as

a stressful life event and have shown that a divorce increases feelings of depression, anxiety, and tension (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1990; Booth and Amato, 1991; Kitson, 1992). This applies to both men and women, although studies on health outcomes suggest that men suffer more than women (Booth and Amato, 1991; Joung et al., 1997; Williams and Umberson, 2004). If divorce has strong emotional effects on men, it is plausible that as a result, men can also experience problems in other settings, such as leisure, health, and work. Such spill-over effects may in the most extreme case lead to unemployment, sickness, or downward mobility. Important to emphasize is that the stress hypothesis suggests that the effects of divorce are short-term (Booth and Amato, 1991), whereas the specialization and social capital hypotheses suggest enduring effects. Moreover, the stress hypothesis suggests an effect that is not dependent on remarriage, whereas the specialization and social capital effects suggest that the divorce penalty will be reduced when the husband remarries.

Against these causal arguments about the divorce penalty, one can also place a competing theoretical argument. Divorce is not a random event and the consequences of divorce that are observed can therefore be spurious. Although there are many social, economic, and psychological variables, which affect divorce, only those variables are relevant here that also affect the employment career. More specifically, the observed effect of divorce can be spurious if there are characteristics that lead to both marital and employment instability. One such characteristic is the degree to which men experienced problems earlier in their life course. Three types of problems are examined: work problems, health problems, and problems in relationships. The general idea behind these characteristics is that such problems either directly lead to marital instability or that they are correlated with certain negative personality characteristics that in turn affect marital instability.

First, I consider prior problems in the employment career. Several studies have pointed to the importance of men's employment position for understanding marital problems and subsequent divorce (Voydanoff, 1990; Menaghan, 1991). The risk of divorce is increased when the household has a low level of income and when men are unemployed or have unstable incomes (Cherlin, 1979; Hannan and Tuma, 1990; Hoffman and Duncan, 1995; Jalovaara, 2003; Hansen, 2005). Given these effects, it is plausible to expect that the effect of divorce on the career of men is at least partially due to earlier problems in their career. After all, the problems that we may see after divorce may simply be a continuation of the problems that existed during marriage.

Second, I consider health problems. Health problems are clearly a factor, which contributes to a negative career development. Several studies have shown that health problems have a negative effect on employment, for instance, by increasing the chances of becoming disabled and decreasing the chances of upward mobility (Van de Mheen et al., 1999). In addition, studies

have shown that health problems also increase the risk of divorce (Lillard and Panis, 1996). As a result, one would expect that health problems before the divorce are partly responsible for a possible negative effect of divorce on the career.

Third, I consider prior problems in social relationships. I argue that some people have a tendency to come into conflict with others and that this tendency has negative effects on both marriage and career. Several studies have suggested that personality characteristics have an important influence on how people behave in relationships. Assendorpf and Wilpers (1998), for example, have shown that young adults who have a disagreeable personality are more likely to get into conflicts with peers. Agreeableness is assumed to be a stable characteristic of people and is found not to be affected by the content of relationships (Assendorpf and Wilpers, 1998). Similarly, Appelberg et al. (1991) show that high levels of hostility and neuroticism are associated with higher levels of conflicts with colleagues at work. A possible observed negative effect of divorce on the career may therefore be due, in part, to an underlying tendency to be antagonistic in social relationships.

The goal of the present paper is twofold. The first goal is to describe the effect of divorce on career development. More specifically, I examine whether the experience of a divorce is associated with the risk of unemployment, the risk of downward occupational mobility, and the risk of upward occupational mobility. I not only examine if there is an effect, I also assess how strong the effect is, how long it lasts, and whether remarriage compensates a possible divorce effect. The research hypotheses are as follows. All three theoretical arguments suggest that a divorce has a positive effect on unemployment and downward mobility and a negative effect on upward mobility. Based on the argument about the spouse as social capital and the notion of the breadwinner role, I expect that these effects will last and that they will be compensated by remarriage. Based on the argument about divorce as a stressful life event, I expect that the effect is most pronounced in the first few years after divorce and that remarriage itself will not compensate the effect.

The second goal is to assess whether the effect is spurious. To do that, I examine the divorce effects again after controlling for (a) earlier problems in the career, (b) health problems before the divorce, and (c) problems in other relationships before the divorce. I compare the divorce effect before and after controls are included to see to what extent the effect is due to a history of problems during the life course.<sup>2</sup> The research hypothesis is that part of the divorce effect is due to prior problems in the life course of divorced men, although I do not expect that the effect will disappear completely.

The analyses are based on a retrospective life history survey among a national sample of 913 men in the Netherlands. In the interview, data were obtained on the complete occupational career as well as on the complete history of prior social security dependency spells. Because the sample

contains an oversample of ever-divorced men, it is highly suitable for the problem at hand.

## 2. Data, measures, and method

I use data from a life history survey of men and women in the Netherlands (Kalmijn and De Graaf, 1998). The survey was based on a sample of 19 municipalities evenly distributed across regions and degrees of urbanization, and a subsequent sample of first married and ever-divorced persons aged 25–75 in these municipalities. The municipalities provided random names and addresses of first-married and ever-divorced persons, which made it easy to construct an oversample of the divorced. The interview response rate of the survey was 58% (the percentage of respondents interviewed out of the respondents who were asked to be interviewed). This is normal for the Dutch context. The present analysis is based on a subset of 913 men who were either in their first marriage at the time of the survey or who were divorced from their first marriage. The ever-divorced group consists of 669 men.

### 2.1. DEPENDENT VARIABLES AND MODEL

In the face-to-face interviews, two types of longitudinal data were collected. For the first history, the respondent was asked about all the jobs he had since his first job, and was then asked to provide the beginning and ending years of each job, as well as information on the kind of work or occupation. The median number of jobs that men held is between 3 and 4, which shows that, in most cases, it is not difficult to obtain information about the full career. The occupations were coded into scores on the scale of economic status. This scale was developed by De Graaf and Kalmijn (2001) and is based on the average income of full-time workers in an occupation. The scale is strongly correlated with the more frequently used scale of occupational prestige but is a better reflection of the income dimension of status than prestige.

The second history provides complete information on the reception of social security benefits. Men were asked if they ever received social security income, and if so, they were asked what types of social security income they received and in which year the payments began and ended. Of those who ever received social security, 70% had one period of social security dependency and 30% had two or more periods.

The two histories are analyzed using discrete-time event history analysis (survival analysis). The job history is used to analyze occupational mobility and the social security history is used to analyze unemployment. Unemployment can in principle also be measured in the job history, but that history provides no information on the type of inactivity in a nonworking period. More importantly, because the beginning and ending dates were

recorded in years, periods of unemployment within a calendar year are missed. For analyzing unemployment, the social security history is therefore more suitable.

In the job mobility analyses, the dependent variable is the risk of experiencing a job change in a given year, given that one is employed in the year before. Three career events are considered: (a) changing to a job with a lower economic status (downward mobility), (b) changing to a job with the same economic status (lateral mobility), and (c) changing to a job with a higher economic status (upward mobility). The year in which a new job begins is used to locate the event. When a job ends in year  $t$  and the new job begins in year  $t+1$ , this is considered a continuous period of employment. Other employment gaps are censored observations in the person-period file. Note that all job episodes are included for all respondents.

In the second set of analyses, the dependent variable is the risk of beginning a period of social security benefits in a given year, given that one has no social security in the year before. I make a distinction between receiving (a) unemployment benefits or welfare, (b) sickness or disability benefits, (c) pension or early retirement benefits. Because we truncate the life history at age 65, there were few 'pension events' and these were censored. Note that when people become ill, it takes a while before they will receive disability benefits. However, people will usually receive sickness benefits immediately, and this is combined with disability benefits.

Because, in both sets of analyses, there are multiple and mutually exclusive events, we use a competing risk model in which we compare the risk of experiencing a given event, rather than not experiencing an event, controlling for the risk of experiencing another type of event. These models are estimated using a multinomial logistic regression model on the person-year data (Yamaguchi, 1991). The frequency distributions for the event histories are in Table 1.

## 2.2. INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

My main variable of interest is the life course stage. Using a complete marriage and cohabitation history, I construct a variable which indicates for each year the respondent is in the sample, whether he is first married, divorced, or remarried. The data begin at the beginning of (first) marriage and are truncated at the end of the survey or the divorce of the second marriage (if that occurs). The year of cohabitation (married or unmarried) is used to start the event history. Information on divorce and remarriage was transformed into two cumulatively coded dummy-variables indicating the following transitions: (a) from married to divorced, (b) from divorced to a new marriage or cohabiting relationship. The year in which the couple stopped living together is used to locate the divorce event and separations

Table 1. Percentage of men having experienced occupational mobility or social security dependency

	Downward mobility	Lateral mobility	Upward mobility	Sickness or disability	Unemployment
Never	64.6	58.1	54.3	87.5	78.0
1 time	25.8	23.8	32.6	12.4	19.4
2 times	7.4	10.8	9.9	0.1	2.1
3 times	2.0	3.9	3.0	0.0	0.3
4 or more times	0.1	3.4	0.2	0.0	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	913	913	913	913	913

Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 ( $n=913$  men).

that were not formalized into a divorce were also counted (i.e., separation).<sup>3</sup> A control variable was constructed for whether the respondent cohabited with someone else before his first marriage. Since this variable did not have a significant effect in any equation, it was dropped from the analyses.

To assess possible spuriousness, the following variables were considered. All variables are either time-varying or they refer to the beginning of the (first) marriage for both the ever-divorced and the married.

#### 2.2.1. *Prior social security spells (time-varying)*

The number of times in the past 10 years before the current year in which the respondent experienced a period in which he received social security benefits. If the history is shorter than ten years, the number of times is calculated over a shorter period.

#### 2.2.2. *Prior jobs held (time-varying)*

The number of jobs held in the past 10 years before the current year. More than average job changes may signal career problems.

#### 2.2.3. *Occupational status growth (time-varying)*

The sum of the annual change in economic occupational status during the past 10 years before the current. Positive values indicate upward moves in the career, negative values indicate downward moves.

#### 2.2.4. *Job tenure (time-varying)*

The number of years employed in the current job.

### 2.2.5. *Financial difficulties*

Questions were asked about whether the respondent had the following financial problems in the first period of marriage: not being able to make ends meet, not being able to replace broken household appliances, having to borrow money for necessary consumption, being late with paying the rent or mortgage, having had bailiffs at the door, and having been financially supported by family or friends. The sum was taken of the standardized items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.74$ ).

### 2.2.6. *Mental health treatment (time-varying)*

The survey asked whether the respondent was ever treated for mental health problems and if so, at what age that occurred for the first time. The year in which this occurred and subsequent years are coded 1 (0 otherwise).

### 2.2.7. *Medical specialist treatment (time-varying)*

The survey also asked whether the respondent was ever treated by a medical specialist, and if so, at what age that occurred for the first time. The year in which this occurred and subsequent years are coded 1 (0 otherwise).

### 2.2.8. *Physical handicap (time-varying)*

The survey asked whether the respondent was physically handicapped in any way, and if so, since what age this handicap was present. The year in which this occurred and subsequent years are coded 1 (0 otherwise).

### 2.2.9. *Social problems*

Questions were asked about if and how often the respondent had conflicts with the following persons in the first period of marriage: neighbors, colleagues, and official organizations (e.g., the police). The mean of the standardized items was taken (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.42$ ). The reliability is low but there are only three items and most of these are highly skewed which tends to reduce the inter-item correlations. When odds ratios are used, all pairs of items appear to have significant and positive associations (i.e., in the range of 2.5 and 3.8).

Several control variables were included that are considered more or less standard determinants of careers and/or divorce risks: the calendar year (and the calendar year squared), current age (and age squared), years of schooling, current economic occupational status, whether the respondent is a non-Western immigrant or the child of a non-Western immigrant, and whether the respondent had children living at home (broken down in two dummy-variables: any children from 0 to 6 years of age, and any children from 7 to 18 years of age). I also considered labor market experience but this variable was highly correlated with age ( $r = 0.90$ ). Note that job tenure is included.

### 3. Results

Before discussing the results of the event history models, I look at descriptive statistics of the independent variables. In Table 2, I present the means of all the independent variables for married men and for ever-divorced men. For the time-varying variables, I looked at the third year of the marriage for both groups to calculate the means or proportions. For the time-constant scales of financial difficulties and social problems, the survey questions referred to the period in the beginning of the marriage for both divorced and married men. Hence, the comparisons in Table 2 reveal to what extent there were initial differences between the groups. The differences in means are tested using a *t*-test; differences in proportions are tested using a Chi-square test.

The results first show that ever-divorced men married or began living together at an earlier age than married men, in line with findings from the divorce literature. More importantly, we see important differences in the groups for the selection characteristics that were introduced. Men who ever divorced were more likely to experience financial difficulties in early marriage than men who are still married. Ever-divorced men also report having had more social conflicts with other persons such as neighbors and colleagues in the beginning of their marriage than married men. In addition, we see that ever-divorced men more often reported treatments for mental health problems in their early marriage days than married men. These results are in line with one aspect of the selection hypothesis that I proposed. Note that differences in labor market characteristics are also in the expected direction, at least for some of the measures. In the beginning of marriage, ever-divorced men had shorter job durations and they held fewer jobs (marginally significant). We do not observe more social security spells for the ever-divorced men but that may be because the beginning of marriage is too early to observe such differences.

I now will discuss the results of the event history models, starting with the effects in the baseline model (Model A). This model only controls for basic economic and demographic control variables (age, calendar year, education, occupation, children, and ethnic background). When looking at occupational mobility first in Table 3, we see a positive and significant effect of divorce on the chance that a respondent moves to a job of lower occupational status. The effect is  $b = 0.350$ , which implies a 42% increase in the risk of downward mobility after divorce. This finding is in line with expectations: the experience of divorce is associated with negative employment outcomes for men. There is no (negative) effect on upward mobility, showing that a divorce does not reduce chances of moving in an upward direction. There is also no effect of divorce on lateral mobility.

When looking at the social security transitions, we see even stronger evidence (Table 4). There is a strong and significant effect of divorce on the

Table 2. Differences in independent variables between married and ever-divorced men in the Netherlands

	Married		Ever-divorced		t-test or $\chi^2$ -test	p-value
	Mean or proportion	SD	Mean or proportion	SD		
Age at marriage/cohabitation in years (means)	25.6	4.2	24.5	4.0	3.84	<0.01
Economic status of most recent job (means)	4.03	1.85	4.00	2.04	0.16	0.87
Years of schooling completed (means)	11.98	3.18	12.65	3.47	2.64	0.01
Ethnic minority (proportion)	0.05	-	0.05	-	0.01	0.91
Duration of current job spell (logged, means)	1.53	0.75	1.36	0.74	3.00	<0.01
Number of jobs held in past 10 years (means)	0.40	0.71	0.31	0.70	1.69	0.09
Number of social security spells in 10 years (means)	0.06	0.26	0.04	0.19	1.30	0.19
Average annual status change in past 10 years (means)	0.14	0.95	0.17	1.09	-0.28	0.78
Scale of poverty (standardized, means)	-0.11	0.88	0.04	1.04	-2.08	0.04
Treated for mental health problems (proportion)	0.09	-	0.16	-	7.66	0.01
Treated by medical specialist (proportion)	0.33	-	0.27	-	2.69	0.10
Having a physical handicap (proportion)	0.26	-	0.21	-	2.68	0.10
Scale of social problems (standardized, means)	-0.11	0.89	0.04	1.04	-2.04	0.04

Note: All variables refer to the period of the beginning of marriage (except age, education, ethnicity).  
 Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998 (n = 913 men).

Table 3. Discrete time event history analyses of men's occupational mobility given employment

	Model A						Model B					
	Downward		Lateral		Upward		Downward		Lateral		Upward	
	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p
Intercept	5.592	0.02*	3.405	0.08**	5.715	0.01*	4.703	0.05*	2.620	0.19	4.915	0.02*
Current age	-0.155	0.00*	-0.148	0.00*	-0.122	0.00*	-0.111	0.02*	-0.073	0.06**	-0.056	0.19
Current age squared	0.001	0.13	0.001	0.03*	0.001	0.29	0.001	0.24	0.000	0.33	0.000	0.98
Calendar year	-0.164	0.00*	-0.115	0.02*	-0.163	0.00*	-0.138	0.02*	-0.097	0.05*	-0.144	0.01*
Calendar year squared	0.001	0.00*	0.001	0.01*	0.001	0.00*	0.001	0.01*	0.001	0.05*	0.001	0.00*
Occupational status	0.208	0.00*	0.046	0.03*	-0.383	0.00*	0.148	0.00*	0.042	0.06**	-0.364	0.00*
Years of schooling	-0.036	0.03*	0.080	0.00*	0.127	0.00*	-0.040	0.03*	0.046	0.00*	0.094	0.00*
Ethnic minority	0.342	0.12	0.167	0.37	0.010	0.96	0.194	0.39	0.052	0.78	-0.084	0.68
Children 0-6	-0.107	0.32	0.009	0.92	-0.086	0.36	-0.096	0.38	0.030	0.74	-0.022	0.82
Children 6-18	-0.008	0.95	0.102	0.33	0.276	0.02*	-0.003	0.98	0.112	0.29	0.336	0.00*
Marriage - divorce transition	0.350	0.02*	0.038	0.77	-0.001	1.00	0.319	0.03*	-0.025	0.85	-0.004	0.98
Divorce - remarriage transition	-0.061	0.72	0.086	0.57	0.124	0.45	-0.090	0.60	0.114	0.45	0.164	0.32
Job tenure (in years, logged)							-0.596	0.00*	-0.630	0.00*	-0.630	0.00*
Jobs held in past							0.023	0.45	-0.029	0.31	-0.104	0.01*
Social security spells in past							0.156	0.28	0.199	0.09**	0.011	0.94
Status change in past							1.025	0.00*	-0.348	0.24	-1.008	0.01*
Poverty status in beginning of marriage							-0.029	0.54	-0.017	0.64	-0.058	0.15
Mental health treatment							-0.137	0.36	-0.023	0.84	-0.066	0.61
Medical specialist treatment							0.103	0.38	-0.259	0.01*	0.056	0.59
Physical handicap							0.148	0.25	0.086	0.43	-0.123	0.29
Social problems							-0.020	0.66	0.039	0.26	-0.027	0.49
Number of men	913		665		913		913				913	
Number of events	430		665		567		430		665		567	
Chi-square/df	867	18			1196	60						

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed); \*\*  $p < 0.10$  (two-tailed).

Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998.

risk of obtaining unemployment or welfare benefits ( $b = 0.665$ ). In addition, there is also a positive effect of divorce on the risk of obtaining disability benefits ( $b = 0.585$ ). The two effects are stronger than the effect on downward mobility in Table 3.

We also see effects of remarriage but only in the models for social security. Remarriage has a negative (though insignificant) effect on disability and a negative and significant effect on unemployment. This shows that the increased chances of becoming unemployed after divorce are again reduced when men remarry. We can also contrast the situation of marriage and remarriage. When we make this comparison, we see that there is no significant difference in unemployment risks ( $p = 0.13$ ) and no significant difference in disability risks ( $p = 0.43$ ). Hence, there appears to be no remaining negative effect of a prior divorce when we focus on married men.

Are the effects observed to some extent spurious? To assess this, I add measures of prior problems to the model (Model B). I begin by discussing effects of previous work characteristics. In line with expectations, we see that men who had social security in the past are more likely to become unemployed in the future. In addition, we see that men who experienced poverty symptoms in the past, are more likely to become unemployed or disabled. Previous social security and poverty problems had no significant impact on upward or downward mobility. We do see effects of previous mobility experiences on future mobility experiences. Men who held more jobs in the past are less likely to move upward in the future (Table 4). In addition, the status change variable has a positive effect on downward mobility and a negative effect on upward mobility. This probably points to the possibility of bottom and ceiling effects: the more men have moved upward (downward) in the past, the less room there is to move upward (downward) again. Tenure, finally, has negative effects on all transitions except disability, showing that the longer a person has been in a job, the more likely it is that he will stay in the job.

To what extent do health problems have an effect? We do observe effects of health problems, although not as pronounced as one would perhaps expect. The clearest and most obvious effects are on disability. All three indicators of health problems increase the chances of entering a period of disability benefits. A physical handicap has the strongest effect. Health problems do not affect the risk of unemployment, which is probably due to the fact that in the Netherlands, disability benefits are more attractive for the employee. In addition, it has long been easier for employers to let someone leave the work force via the route of disability than via the route of unemployment. Finally, we observe a small effect on mobility. Men who were treated by a medical specialist in the past are less likely to experience job mobility in a lateral direction.

Finally, I discuss the scale of social problems, which aims to measure the extent to which a person has an antagonistic or disagreeable orientation in

Table 4. Discrete time event history analyses of men's unemployment and disability

	Model A			Model B			
	Disabled		Unemployed	Disabled		Unemployed	
	b	p	b	b	p	p	
Intercept	-29.844	0.00*	-24.492	-31.483	0.00*	-26.525	0.00*
Current age	0.231	0.02*	-0.188	0.241	0.02*	-0.075	0.21
Current age squared	-0.002	0.04*	0.002	-0.003	0.03*	0.001	0.49
Calendar year	0.486	0.03*	0.526	0.475	0.03*	0.553	0.00*
Calendar year squared	-0.003	0.04*	-0.003	-0.003	0.05*	-0.003	0.00*
Occupational status	-0.103	0.07**	-0.100	-0.091	0.18	-0.109	0.01*
Years of schooling	-0.147	0.00*	0.062	-0.104	0.00*	0.036	0.13
Ethnic minority	0.422	0.24	0.593	0.436	0.25	0.509	0.04*
Children 0-6	-0.118	0.63	-0.140	-0.134	0.59	-0.189	0.22
Children 6-18	0.206	0.34	0.217	0.141	0.52	0.217	0.20
Marriage - divorce transition	0.585	0.01*	0.665	0.584	0.02*	0.511	0.00*
Divorce - remarriage transition	-0.391	0.14	-0.383	-0.386	0.16	-0.296	0.14
Job tenure (in years, logged)				0.030	0.79	-0.551	0.00*
Jobs held in past				0.011	0.90	-0.086	0.13
Social security spells in past				-0.410	0.33	0.455	0.01*
Status change in past				0.626	0.45	0.756	0.13
Poverty status in beginning of marriage				0.151	0.06**	0.116	0.04*
Mental health treatment				0.546	0.02*	0.246	0.15
Medical specialist treatment				0.840	0.00*	0.079	0.61
Physical handicap				1.202	0.00*	0.116	0.51
Social problems				0.026	0.76	0.142	0.01*
Number of men	913		913	913		913	
Number of events	115		232	115		232	
Chi-square/df	217	22		404	40		

Note: \*p < 0.05 (two-tailed); \*\*p < 0.10 (two-tailed).

Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998.

relationships with others. The scale of social problems has no effect on mobility but it does have a significant positive effect on unemployment. In other words, men, who experienced regular conflicts with others in the beginning of their marriage, are more at risk of losing their job than other men. One standard deviation increase in social problems is associated with an increase of unemployment of 15%, which is a modest effect.

To what extent are the effects of the divorce transition spurious, due to the possible underlying effects of work problems, health problems, and social problems? To assess this, we need to compare the effect of divorce with and without the problem variables. The difference between these two effects represents the degree of bias that is due to the influence of variables omitted in Model A but not in Model B (Pindyck and Rubinfeld, 1991). The bias can be calculated without estimating a model for divorce – this model is implicit.

When comparing Model A and B for the mobility history, we see no clear reduction in the effects of divorce. This shows that the effects of prior problems in understanding the divorce effect are limited. When comparing the models for the social security history, we do see a difference. The effect of divorce on unemployment is reduced from  $b=0.665$  to  $0.511$ . In terms of odds ratios, these effects are 1.94 and 1.67, which shows that the bias is 14%. For the effects of disability, we see no reduction in the effect.

Are the effects of divorce short-term or enduring? In Table 5, I replace the divorce transition dummy with three mutually exclusive dummy-variables indicating the stage a person is in after divorce. Note that this also reduces the significance levels since the number of persons in each group is smaller than the number of persons in the total group. Remarriage is again controlled. A distinction is made between short-term (0–3 years) and long term (in two

Table 5. Effects of the divorce transition by the length of time since the divorce: men in the Netherlands

	Effect of divorce transition								
	0–3 years ago		4–7 years ago		8+ years ago		Remarriage		
	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p	
Effect on:									
Downward mobility	0.308	0.06	0.333	0.15	0.348	0.17	–0.099	0.61	
Lateral mobility	–0.052	0.72	0.121	0.53	–0.085	0.69	0.097	0.56	
Upward mobility	0.106	0.48	–0.558	0.03	–0.096	0.69	0.318	0.10	
Sickness/disability	0.807	0.00	0.196	0.60	0.149	0.69	–0.121	0.69	
Unemployment	0.639	0.00	0.207	0.46	0.224	0.45	–0.142	0.53	

Note: Two-tailed  $p$ -values. Control variables listed in Tables 3 and 4 are included.

Source: Divorce in the Netherlands 1998.

groups, 4–7 years and 8 years or more). The control variables included in Model B are included in these models as well, but they are not reported in the table. For downward mobility, we see that the effect of divorce exist in all three durations. We also see that a divorce effect is present on upward mobility. When the divorce happened 4–7 years ago, men are less likely to experience upward mobility compared to married men. When looking at the social security history, we see that the strongest effects on unemployment and disability occur in the short term. There are also effects in the long-term, but these effects are smaller and are not statistically significant.

Interesting to note is that the effect of remarriage on unemployment declines when adding time-specific divorce variables. In the last model, the remarriage effect is no longer significant. In other words, remarriage appears to compensate for the earlier impact of divorce but this is to a considerable extent due to the passing of time, not to the presence of a new spouse.

A final note is in order to discuss the control variables. First, we see that highly educated men are more likely to be upwardly mobile and less likely to be downwardly mobile. Highly educated men are also less likely to become disabled. Men in higher status occupations are less likely to become unemployed and less likely to become disabled. Although high status positions thus appear to have an advantage, we also see that men in high status occupations are more likely to be downwardly mobile and less likely to be upwardly mobile. This is probably due to bottom and ceiling effects. The effects of age show that mobility chances are higher at the younger ages than at the older ages – mobility takes place early in the career. The age effect on disability is nonlinear, first increasing with age and later decreasing. Unemployment chances decline with age, but it should be noted that we here look at the period after men are married. Hence, most of the youth unemployment effects will not be present in the data.

#### 4. Conclusion

When authors examine the socioeconomic consequences of divorce, the focus is largely on women. For men, divorce is primarily believed to have negative consequences in other domains, such as social and psychological outcomes. This paper focuses on the economic consequences of divorce for men and examines consequences for the employment career, using two types of retrospective data, a history of prior job periods and a history of prior periods of social security dependency. Although the retrospective nature of the data has its limitations, its main advantage is that a long period of history can be covered. Moreover, the sample used contains an oversample of divorcees, making it possible to examine the effects of divorce in a statistically convincing fashion.

Analyses indicate first and foremost that there is a negative effect of divorce on employment. After divorce, men are more likely to experience a period of unemployment and sickness or disability. Remarriage attenuates the negative effects somewhat. Moreover, the effects appear to be stronger in the short term than in the long term. I also find a negative effect on the experience of downward occupational mobility. After divorce, men are more likely to change to a new job with a lower occupational status. In combination, these findings confirm the general notion advanced in this paper that a divorce can also have negative economic consequences for men, a point which has recently been proposed by others as well (Kraft, 2001; McManus and DiPrete, 2001).

In the paper, I also tried to assess possible sources of spuriousness in the effects of divorce. I examined the role of prior employment problems, prior health problems, and prior social problems. I first find that there are initial differences between divorced and married men in these respects. Ever-divorced men were more often poor in the beginning of marriage, they more often had conflicts with others in that period, and they more often were treated for mental health problems. I also found some initial career differences between ever-divorced and married men. Second, I find some significant effects of these selection variables on the employment careers, but these effects were not strong and not very systematic. Third, when I include these selection variables in the model, I do not find important reductions in the effect of divorce. The effects of divorce on downward mobility and disability remain the same and the divorce effect on unemployment is reduced by 14%, a modest reduction.

It is too soon to say that the employment effect is not spurious at all, because some of the measures are imperfect. The measures of social problems, for example, refer to the beginning of marriage, which makes it more difficult to find strong effects, and which subsequently makes it more difficult to reduce the divorce effect. Nevertheless, results do present negative evidence for the argument about selection. On the basis of the literature, I formulated four falsifiable hypotheses about possible characteristics that are believed to be the cause of selection. I developed measures for these hypotheses and my tests of the hypotheses are largely negative. There are some associations with both divorce and careers, but in combination, these associations are too weak to explain away the effects of divorce. My conclusion is that these results do not so much tell us that selection is *not* operating, but rather that selection effects are probably much weaker than is often believed. Of course, one can argue that there are other selection effects operating, but without specifying these other effects, this is not a falsifiable hypothesis.

To the extent that the effect is causal, the question arises what the theoretical interpretation can be. In the paper, three arguments were suggested: the loss of the male breadwinner role after divorce, the loss of social capital

after divorce (i.e., spouse support), and the psychological stress that a divorce can bring. It is not possible to quantify the importance of these three arguments, but the pattern of findings does give some insight into the underlying mechanisms.

First, we see stronger effects on unemployment and disability in the short-term than in the long-term. This points to the importance of the emotional and psychological problems that a divorce may bring and that may spill-over in the realm of work. The stress effect is often more important in the first few years after divorce than later on. Second, we find that the divorce effect is the same for the two types of social security (disability and unemployment), which also points to the stress hypothesis. After all, it seems less plausible that the breadwinner and spouse support hypotheses also imply an increased risk of illness. Third, the effect of remarriage is not significant when including the time-specific divorce variables. This suggests that the presence of a new spouse is not enough to compensate for the earlier divorce effect and this is also evidence against the social capital and breadwinner arguments.

Although the stress hypothesis seems more plausible for the social security analyses, the mobility analyses are less clear. For the experience of downward mobility, the effects remain strong over time, suggesting that the negative effect on the career is also due to the loss of a supporting wife. At the same time, however, we do not see a compensating effect of remarriage either, which is evidence against the breadwinner and social capital arguments.

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Other common methods are estimating models while controlling for sample selection bias (Lillard and Panis, 1996) or models using fixed effects regression (Korenman and Neumark, 1991). The present paper aims to test a hypothesis about specific common determinants, which can simply be done by adding these variables as controls in an event history model. Other unmeasured common determinants obviously remain a possible source of bias.

<sup>3</sup> The demographic transition variables are not lagged. This means that simultaneous occurrences of divorce, for example, and unemployment, are also included in the effect of divorce or remarriage on employment and social security transitions. Since the actual separation is usually preceded by a long process of marital and related problems, this seems a fair assumption, although one can not fully rule out simultaneity.

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