PAA 2013 Call For Papers

Annual Meeting, Population Association of America

Marital Status, Mental Health and Mortality: Evidence from the Taiwan Longitudinal Study on Aging

Extended abstracts

A description of the topic to be studied

The lower mortality of married adults versus unmarried counterparts is a consistent empirical finding across populations (Hu and Goldman 1990). Mortality remains higher among unmarried individuals even after controlling for observed socio-economic and health variables that are believed to select people into and out of marriage (Rendall et al. 2011). Although growing numbers of researchers have considered the positive potential of health benefits in marriage, very little attention has been given specifically to link the relationship between marital status, mental health and mortality, that is, mental health may be a mediator. Moreover, few studies have been conducted in Taiwan where increasing aging population and divorce rates may have major impact on health and total mortality. Thus, the aim of the paper is to investigate the relationships between marital status, mental health and follow-up mortality among elderly in Taiwan.

The theoretical focus

Social-structural theory provides the foundation for epidemiological research on family status and mental health. Structuralisms contend that one's social environment has profound implications for life experiences. The social environment is largely shaped by one's position in the social structure as determined by elements of stratification such as gender, marital status, race, and socioeconomic status (Umberson et al. 2012). Sociological research on the family typically adopts a social-structural approach to argue that marriage and family define one's social environment in key ways that affect mental health. In short, the most frequently identified explanations for the positive effects of marriage are that marriage provides its participants with (1) economic resources; (2) social integration, including socio emotional support and attachment; and (3) a sense of meaning and purpose.

Besides the association between marital status and mental health, researchers also find that depression in old age is associated with an increased mortality risk (Rapp et al. 2008). And there also three primary theoretical perspectives for studying the

relationships between social factors and depression, that is stress process theory, SES as a fundamental cause of illness and the life course perspective (Linda 2011). Therefore, based on the marital protection theory and the above theoretical perspectives, we further investigate the relationships between marital status, mental health and follow-up mortality among elderly in Taiwan.

The data and research methods

Our data consist of the "Taiwan Longitudinal Study on Aging (TLSA)" linked to the follow-up records of deaths. This data set combines the advantages of relative large elderly sample sizes in Taiwan and linked death-record data with the advantages of repeat observation of marital status and control variables of panel-survey studies. We use these data to estimate OLS regression models of the relationship between marital status and depression firstly. Then we estimate logistic regression models of the follow-up years probability of death, and we conduct statistical tests of differences not only relative to the married group but also between ages, genders, and unmarried marital statuses.

The expected findings

We find evidence supporting both of the relationship between marital status and mental health as well as the relationship between marital status and follow-up mortality. We find a strong and consistent difference in mortality for married versus unmarried individuals for both men and women, and we find that this effect is still significance for the follow-up 18 years. Finally, we find statistically significant declines in marriage differences with years, but are cautious about interpreting this finding due to selection out of singlehood.

Table1: Multiple regressions of 1989 marital status and CES-D factor scores.

	(1) Base-model	(2) SES	(3) Social support	(4) Full model
divorced/separated	0.262**	0.225**	0.288**	0.261**
	(0.0873)	(0.0802)	(0.0884)	(0.0813)
widowed	0.114**	0.107**	0.131***	0.124***
	(0.0384)	(0.0360)	(0.0388)	(0.0363)
never-married	0.351***	0.304***	0.396***	0.358***
	(0.0809)	(0.0743)	(0.0829)	(0.0762)
education (1-17)		-0.00472		-0.00455
		(0.00381)		(0.00382)
log month income		0.0112		0.0108
		(0.0179)		(0.0181)
eco_much (eco_enough)		-0.191***		-0.192***
		(0.0433)		(0.0432)
eco_short (eco_enough)		0.596***		0.597***
		(0.0384)		(0.0384)
eco_diff (eco_enough)		1.371***		1.371***
		(0.0651)		(0.0653)
receive (Social support)			0.0151	0.0224*
			(0.00990)	(0.00915)
provide (Social support)			0.0408**	0.0297*
			(0.0151)	(0.0140)
age	0.00502	0.00380	0.00514	0.00360
	(0.00264)	(0.00255)	(0.00266)	(0.00255)
female	0.305***	0.241***	0.304***	0.242***
	(0.0333)	(0.0331)	(0.0333)	(0.0332)
_cons	-0.244***	-0.352***	-0.295***	-0.408***
	(0.0347)	(0.0603)	(0.0395)	(0.0641)
N	3,756	3,756	3,756	3,756
R^2	0.037	0.195	0.039	0.197
adj. R^2	0.036	0.193	0.038	0.195

Standard errors in parentheses

$^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

Reference

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