DIVORCE AND THE RECESSION, 2008-2010

Philip N. Cohen
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Divorce rates and searches for "tea party"

correlation = .60

Both scales normalized by Google

State divorce rate per 1,000 married women (08-09 avg)

Divorce rates and vote for Obama in 2008

correlation = -.48

State divorce rate per 1,000 married women (08-09 avg)
Help America: Get Divorced!
The coming boom in failed marriages and why it’s exactly what the economy needs. Matthew Yglesias, 1/31/2012
This divorce decline suggests that most married couples have not responded to the economic crisis of the moment by heading for divorce court; instead, judging by divorce trends, many couples appear to be developing a new appreciation for the economic and social support that marriage can provide in tough times. Thus, one piece of good news emerging from the last two years is that marital stability is up.

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(12/09)
DIVORCE RATE PLUMETS DURING RECESSION

4.4

2007

4.2

2009
RAPID-RESPONSE DEMOGRAPHY: GOOGLE?

Divorce-related searches, 2007-2012
Overall, recessions clearly aren’t the driver of divorce trends.
MICRO-LEVEL STUDIES: UNEMPLOYMENT INCREASES DIVORCE

Layoff or firing increases the odds of divorce in the PSID (Charles & Stephens 2004)

Job instability increases odds of divorce in the NLSY79 (Ahituv & Lerman 2005)

Unemployment leads to an increased risk of marital dissolution in Norway panel data (Hansen 2005)

Man’s unemployment increases the odds of union dissolution among two-parent California welfare recipients in the 1990s (Lewin 2005)

Husband’s unemployment increases odds of divorce in Danish panel data (Jensen & Smith 1990).
STATE-LEVEL STUDIES: UNEMPLOYMENT DECREASES DIVORCE

Hellerstein & Morrill (2011): “significant and robust negative relationship between the unemployment and divorce rates,” 1976-2009 (consistent with other studies)

• Why?
  • “macroeconomic conditions may affect divorce probabilities even for those not directly experiencing a job shock”
  • E.g., perturbing the costs and benefits of divorce by altering relative earnings and earnings potentials
RECESSION MICRO MECHANISMS

Stress / conflict
- increases divorce

Costs of divorce and moving out
- decreases divorce

Resilience / ‘silver lining’
- Decreases divorce

Competing hypotheses?

Ads at a urinal: S. Florida family restaurant, 2011
NEW, REAL DATA: CENSUS ACS

Annually since 2008: Marital events questions

- Married, divorced, or widowed in previous year?

“Census data released last week suggest that the economy has indeed caused a dip in divorce ... The Census bureau counted 65,000 fewer divorces in 2010 than in 2008, a 7% drop.”

--USA Today
9/28/2011
Logistic regression for divorce: Women, 2008-2010 (odds ratios)

Age and age^2 not shown
Divorce rates by state, 2010
STATE MODELS

State unemployment rates
- Average increased from 4.3 in 2007 to 8.5 in 2009
- Lagged by one year

State foreclosure rates (percent of housing units)
- Average increased from 0.7 in 2007 to 1.6 in 2009
- Lagged by one year
- Logged skewed distribution (Nevada = 10.2 in 2009)

State divorce laws
- 13 states require delays of 180 days or more before divorce
EFFECT OF DIVORCE DELAY LAWS

Unadjusted / Adjusted (odds ratios)

2008: Unadjusted = 0.859, Adjusted = 0.921
2009: Unadjusted = 0.849, Adjusted = 0.910
2010: Unadjusted = 0.811, Adjusted = 0.869
## STATE MODEL RESULTS

**Final model: Logistic regression coefficients**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Coefficient</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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With individual controls as shown above, and state fixed effects.
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<tr>
<td>BA+ * Unemployment</td>
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PREDICTED DIVORCE RATES

High school or less

Some college

BA or more

Predicted Percent Divorced

State Foreclosure Rate (log scale)

State Foreclosure Rate (log scale)

State Foreclosure Rate (log scale)
CONCLUSIONS

• Possible support for positive recession effect on divorce
  • 2010 slight rebound in rates
• No sign of state unemployment effect at individual level
• Foreclosure state-level effects only for more-educated
  • Possible stress effects, but why them?
• Increasing negative effect of delay laws
  • Evidence of a growing backlog?
• Don’t jump to conclusions
  • Consider long-term effects
BEYOND DIVORCE RATES

User uploaded activity for 2011 Crude Divorce Rate and United States Web Search activity for norinco sks (r=0.8433)

2011 crude divorce rate

Searches for “norinco sks”
BEYOND DIVORCE RATES

User uploaded activity for 2011 Crude Divorce Rate and United States Web Search activity for vasectomy reversal (r=0.7981)

Divorce
Vasectomy reversal
BEYOND DIVORCE RATES

User uploaded activity for Female suicide rate and United States Web Search activity for divorce help (r=0.8316)

Female suicide rate

Searches for “divorce help”
AFTER DIVORCE?

United States Web Search activity for vasectomy reversal and nursery furniture ($r=0.6653$)

Hint: Drag to Zoom, and then correlate over that time only.
AFTER DIVORCE?

Wedding planning $r=0.68$
- wedding chapels
- bridal gowns
- colorado wedding
- wedding planning
- wedding chapel
- boston wedding
- las vegas weddings
- chapels
- discount wedding dresses
- vegas weddings
- bridal salon
- chicago wedding
- bridal gown
- planning a wedding
- wedding package
- bridal salons

Nursery planning $r=0.68$
- nursery furniture
- nursery bedding
- baby nursery
- nursery themes
- baby cribs
- baby furniture
- baby quilts
- nursery design
- infant bedding