



# Divorce and Disability Benefit Receipt Among Men in Later Life

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## Contemporary research in the marriage-health literature implicates divorce as a potential driver of men's later-life health

Divorce may influence long-term health through multiple pathways that include the loss of marital resources combined with the strain of divorce.<sup>1</sup> One measure that can capture a long-term association between divorce and health is Social Security disability benefits receipt.

## Men aged 18–38 who divorced in the 1975–1984 period and did not remarry had an increased probability of receiving DI or SSI benefits decades later

Twenty years after their divorce, these men had a 10-percentage point higher likelihood of receiving DI or SSI benefits than continuously married men. They also had a higher probability of reporting a work limitation. The probability of receiving disability benefits did not differ between divorced men who remarried and continuously married men.

## Controlling for selection bias is important when examining the relationship between divorce and subsequent disability benefit receipt

Alternative estimates show that selection bias influences the relationship between divorce and work disability—for example, as a group, those who divorce may be more likely to have a work limitation prior to the divorce than those who stay married.

## Background

- The long-term effects of divorce can have significant implications for health and thus, disability benefit receipt.
- Examining the long-term effects of divorce on the risk of poor health and disability benefits receipt may provide insight into the complex role of family transitions in shaping disability and work trajectories prior to retirement.

## Key Terms

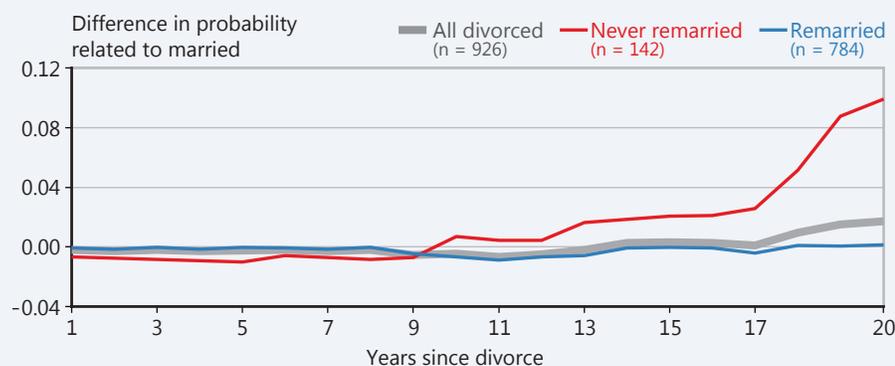
*DI benefits* are benefits received through the Social Security Disability Insurance program.

*Selection bias* is selecting individuals, groups, or data for analysis without proper randomization.

*SSI benefits* are means-tested, disabled, non-elderly benefits received through the Supplemental Security Income program.

*Work limitation* is a health condition limiting or preventing the type of work an individual can do.

## Fixed-Effects Estimates of Disability Receipt (DI or SSI) for Men Following a 1975–1984 Divorce Relative to Married Sample



NOTE: Models control for additional educational attainment, age, and calendar year. Sample size consists of 926 divorced men and 2,810 continuously married men.

<sup>1</sup> Amato, P. R. 2010. "Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 72(3): 650–666.

**SOURCE:** Couch, Kenneth A., Christopher R. Tamborini, and Gayle L. Reznik. 2015. "The Long-Term Health Implications of Marital Disruption: Divorce, Work Limits, and Social Security Disability Benefits Among Men." *Demography* 52: 1487–1512.

**NOTES:** Results are based on fixed-effects methods, using data from the 2004 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and longitudinal records from the Social Security Administration. Wave 2 topical modules provided retrospective information on marital history for the 1975–1984 period. Linked SSA administrative data provided information on observed Social Security disability benefit receipt for the period before the SIPP, from 1975–2004.

All content is simplified for presentation. Please see source material for full details and caveats.

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