Reexamining the Economic Costs of Marital Disruption for Women*

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Objective. Changes in labor force participation and returns may have lessened divorce's traditionally severe economic consequences for women. *Method.* We use recent data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) to analyze the economic well-being of women whose marriages ended between the first and second waves of data collection. *Results.* Comparing pre- and postmarital median per capita income shows that marital disruption now has much more modest economic consequences for women than in years gone by. A multivariate analysis suggests that their higher postdivorce incomes can be primarily attributed to labor force participation and human capital. *Conclusions.* These findings suggest better life chances for divorcées and their children.

Introduction

Although the magnitude of the consequences has sometimes been overstated (see Hoffman and Duncan, 1988; Peterson, 1996a), researchers consistently find that women suffer economically after a divorce[1] (for a review, see Holden and Smock, 1991). Moreover, Smock (1993) showed almost no change in the economic costs of marital disruption for women from the late 1960s through the mid 1980s. The lack of progress can largely be attributed to the unequal distribution of assets following divorce, low female participation in the labor force, and limited job skills among those

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[1] For convenience we use the terms "marital disruption" and "divorce" synonomously except where noted.

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who did work (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Peterson, 1989; Smock, 1993).

Today women may no longer fare so poorly after their marriages end. Child support laws have changed in favor of custodial mothers, and average payment size is now larger than it used to be (Cancian and Meyer, 1996). Even if they have children, women are increasingly likely to work during marriage and are therefore more likely to have labor force experience should their marriages end (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Moreover, educational attainment for women has risen significantly (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Partially as a consequence of these developments, the gender gap in earnings has steadily narrowed in the last 15 or so years (O'Neill and Polachek, 1993).

Despite these changes, no research has investigated the economic consequences of divorce for women using recent data. In addition, the most recent research has studied only subsets of divorced women. Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn (1999) analyzed data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) that extended through 1990 but included only women with children. Smock (1993, 1994), using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth that extended through 1988, considered just women who had married and divorced by age 31.

In this paper we update research on the economic consequences of marital disruption using data from both waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). These data are recent, are nationally representative, and include women of all ages. Analyzing women of all ages will better capture how changes in vocational opportunities and human capital have benefited divorcées. We assess median income losses resulting from marital disruption, which show that divorce now affects women's economic well-being less severely than in the past. A multivariate analysis allows us to determine which women fare better.

Previous Research

Table 1 summarizes prior research on the economic cost of divorce. Looking first at family income, there is a slight trend toward decreasing consequences over time. Both the mean and median of the distribution of change in family income show slight declines since the late 1960s. The median loss drops from around 46 percent to 43 percent for whites and from 51 percent to 45 percent for blacks; for both groups the mean loss decreases from around 44 percent to between 27 percent and 33 percent. In contrast, the change in mean family income shows no clear trend because of the average drop of 31 to 37 percent reported by Mott and Moore (1978) for data from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Because nearly half (47 percent) of their sample of divorced women lost at least half of their family income, the median decline in income must be close to 50 percent. If we consider the

median and not the mean, Mott and Moore's result better conforms to the overall trend.

Alternatives to family income include per capita income, calculated by dividing family income by family size, and income-to-poverty line (IPL) ratios, calculated as the ratio of family income to a government-set poverty standard. Research using these measures does not show a clear trend. Median per capita income losses range from 19 percent to 22 percent for whites and from 27 percent to 44 percent for blacks, and median declines in IPL ratios vary from 34 percent to 39 percent. Mean declines in IPL ratios do decline somewhat, from 18 percent for all respondents between 1967 and 1975 to 9 percent for black respondents and 15 percent for white respondents between 1970 and 1984.

The heterogeneity of income measures used in past studies makes comparison difficult. Additionally, these studies cover variable time periods, from as few as two to as many as 14 years. Insofar as a trend is evident, it is in the direction of reduced consequences. An analysis of recent data, in which we calculate several different measures of economic well-being, will enable us to ascertain whether this trend has persisted.

Data

A national sample survey of adults age 19 and over in the United States, the NSFH, contains detailed information on family composition and income, so it is ideal for studying economic status (Sweet and Bumpass, 1996). Thirteen thousand eight primary respondents were interviewed in 1987 and 1988. Spouses were also interviewed. From 1992 to 1994, 10,008 respondents were reinterviewed. New interviews were also conducted in 1992 to 1994 with those who were spouses at the time of the primary respondent's Wave 1 interview, whether or not the spouse and the primary respondent were still married. We analyze female spouses and female primary respondents who were married (and not yet separated) at Wave 1 and were separated, divorced, or remarried at Wave 2. For separated respondents only those with separations lasting a year or more were included in the analysis, since Bumpass, Martin, and Sweet (1991) show that the chance of reconciliation after a year's separation is slim. We use case weights supplied with the NSFH so the data comprise a nationally representative sample. Our final sample size is 472, including 261 remarried or cohabiting women and 211 single (unremarried) women. All analyses measure income in 1988 dollars, adjusted using the consumer price index (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995).

The 114 respondents who either report zero income or are missing data on income in either wave of data collection are excluded from all analyses and are not included in the final sample count of 472. This information was missing at random; income data were evenly distributed on the independent variables and on income from the other survey wave (when such data were

TABLE 1

Consequences of Divorce on Women's Income, Nonremarried Women

	Time Period	Median Change in Family Income	Mean Change in Family Income	Change in Mean Family Income	Median Change in Per Capita Income	Mean Change in Per Capita Income	Change in Mean Per Capita Income	Median Change in Income to Needs	Mean Change in Income to Needs	Change in Mean Income to Needs	*N*
Corcoran (1979)	1967–75		–44						–18 (DA)		56
Mott and Moore (1978)	1968–73			–31, –37			–21, –32				405
Duncan and Hoffman (1985)	1969–75		–30						–13 (DA)		282
Smock (1993, 1994)	1968–77	–46, –51			–22, –44						479
Nestel et al. (1983)	1967–77			–54, –50			–20, –33[b]				126
Weiss (1984)	1968–79		–23 to –55								173
Stirling (1989)	1968–81			–46						–30 (DA)	99
Peterson (1996a)	1977–78								–27 (BLS)		161
Sorenson[a] (1992)	1970–84	–46, –51	–33, –27	–43, –39	–19, –27	+5, +15	–3, –3	–29, –33 (BLS) –34, –39 (DA)	–8, –1 (BLS) –15, –9 (DA)		576
Burkhauser and Duncan (1989)	1981–85							–37 (DA)			301
Burkhauser et al. (1990, 1991)											
Smock (1993, 1994)	1979–87	–43, –45			–21, –35						368
Bianchi et al. (1999)	1984–90				–29			–36 (DA)			199
NSFH data	1987–94	–45	–26	–38	–14	+19	+8	–28 (DA)	–6 (DA)	–23 (DA)	211

NOTE: Two numbers separated by a comma reflect separate estimates for white and black respondents (respectively). BLS = Bureau of Labor Statistics Poverty Standard, DA = Department of Agriculture Poverty Line.

[a]This row refers to couples who were married at least two years. For those married less than two years, the predivorce income is for the year they got married. This will lower predivorce income and slightly skew results. Approximately one-fourth of all couples are married less than two years.

[b]Approximate—based on figure.

not also missing). Furthermore, we repeated the median income change analysis including the respondents with zero income and obtained similar results. The same held when substituting medians for those reporting zero income or missing data. Consequently, the exclusion of respondents missing data or reporting zero income should not have biased our results.

This research design presents two issues of data quality. First, the spousal data may be of lower quality than the primary respondent data. For example, ex-spouses may have been less motivated to answer accurately if they associated the survey with their former partners. We address this issue by verifying that respondent type (primary respondent vs. spouse of primary respondent) is not a significant predictor of women's postdivorce income. Second, women left impoverished by marital disruption may have been less likely to have participated in Wave 2 of the survey. Had this been the case, our results would be biased. We found, however, that median income was not significantly lower at the time of the Wave 1 interview for women who failed to return for the Wave 2 interview, which suggests that income is not a predictor of attrition.

A difference between previous research and ours concerns the timing of marital disruption relative to data collection. Many researchers (e.g., Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Smock, 1993; Sorensen, 1992; but see Nestel, Mercier, and Shaw, 1983) have measured income in the years immediately prior and subsequent to marital disruption. Due to the design of the NSFH, varying amounts of time separate marital disruption from the pre- and postdisruption interviews. This is not a liability, because the economic consequences of divorce generally persist for at least several years after the disruption (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Morgan, 1989; Stirling, 1989; Weiss, 1984). Moreover, time since disruption did not significantly affect income in our multivariate analysis. The reason seems clear: if divorcées lack the resources needed to improve their incomes it will likely take at least several years to acquire them. Conversely, if women have work skills they will probably put them to use soon after their marriages end.

The time between separation and data collection has the advantage of ensuring that all maritally disrupted women are included in the sample. Many would be excluded if we analyzed just women who divorced within a year of separation, as only 40 percent of women who separated in 1988 had actually obtained formal divorces a year later (Ono, 1995). Moreover, poorer women are more likely to divorce quickly; wives with high incomes are less likely to divorce within a calendar year of separation. There is no income effect in the subsequent year, and only a couple of years after separation does income begin to increase the likelihood of divorce (Ono, 1995). We therefore avoid bias by analyzing women several years subsequent to marital disruption.

Changes in Income: Findings from the NSFH

Table 2 presents estimates of pre- and postdisruption median income levels for single divorced women and divorced women who have remarried or are cohabiting. Consistent with prior research we present results based on both family and per capita income. To facilitate comparison our results also appear in Table 1. Women who divorce, even if they subsequently remarry or cohabit, suffer severe declines in family income. Single women's median family income drops 45 percent, and remarried or cohabiting women suffer a 14 percent decrease. As two recent researchers (Smock, 1993; Sorenson, 1992) report similar declines in family income for unremarried women, it would appear that little has changed.[2] However, family income is an inadequate measure of economic well-being. Losing a husband almost always entails the loss of a wage earner, if not the primary or exclusive wage earner. For this reason, ceteris paribus we would always expect family income to decline significantly after marital disruption. Lower family income does not necessarily connote a lower standard of living, though, because family size has also declined with the loss of the husband. Indeed, our data show a mean size of 3.69 persons for predisruption family, compared to 2.53 for postdisruption families in which the divorcée is not remarried or cohabiting. Since postdisruption families have fewer people to support, any improvement in women's economic well-being after divorce should be better captured by per capita income.

In terms of per capita income, marital disruption has a much more modest effect on economic well-being. Women who remain single after divorce have, on average, only a 14 percent drop in median per capita income, and remarried or cohabiting women have a 3 percent decrease.[3] The result for single women represents a considerable decline from the figures of 25 percent (Smock, 1993; late cohort) and 23 percent (Sorenson, 1992) most recently reported. Previous studies show even larger drops in per capita income (see Table 1).

We conducted additional analyses to rule out the possibility that our finding is the product of differences between our sample and those used by Sorenson (1992), Smock (1993), and Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn (1999). Sorenson's (1992) figure of 23 percent reflects only women who had been

[2] Both Smock (1993) and Sorenson (1992) report separate figures for blacks and whites, with larger income losses for the former. For purposes of comparison we compute weighted averages, based on sample size, of their estimates. Sample size considerations prevent us from conducting separate analyses according to respondent race.

[3] It has been suggested that those women who are doing worse economically are more likely to remarry, thus artificially raising the figures we present for divorced women who do not remarry. Divorcées' employment status, highly correlated with income, does not appear to affect the chances of remarriage (Martinson, 1994).

TABLE 2

Median Family Income and Per Capita Income for Maritally Disrupted Women

	Median Income before Separation	Median Income after Separation		Median Percentage Change	
	All Women	Single Women	Remarried or Cohabiting Women	Single Women	Remarried or Cohabiting Women
Family income	$30,938 (472)	$18,490 (211)	$25,137 (261)	−45	−14
Per capita income	$9,054 (472)	$ 8,548 (211)	$8,589 (261)	−14	−3

SOURCE: National Survey of Families and Households, 1987–1994.

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are unweighted *N*s. All incomes are weighted, expressed in 1988 dollars, and rounded to the nearest dollar.

married at least two years prior to divorcing.[4] We repeated the analysis without the three respondents who had been married for less than two years and obtained almost identical results. To replicate Smock's research we conducted additional analyses in which we restricted the sample to women under the approximate age of 31 ($N = 47$). The results show an even smaller median decline in per capita income of 12 percent. Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn (1999), using Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data to examine the economic consequences of divorce for women with children, found a 29 percent decline in per capita income subsequent to marital disruption; we found a 31 percent drop for women with children. The similarity of these figures suggests that the NSFH data are reliable.

We can rule out the possibility that our results are an artifact of aberrant family sizes. Our pre- and postdisruption family sizes reflect the reduction that we would expect from marital disruption. Also, average family size had not changed substantially in the years immediately prior to our study (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). For these reasons our results cannot be attributed to period changes in family size. Finally, there is little doubt that our pre-and postdisruption family sizes are nationally representative: the mean predisruption family size for the entire sample of 472 respondents is almost identical to that of the 211 unremarried women.

Could our results somehow be idiosyncratic to the measure we base them on, per capita income? To address this question we calculated IPL ratios. We found a 28 percent median decline in IPL ratios for single women subse-

[4] Sorenson (1992) also presented results for women from all marriages, including those lasting less than two years, but downplays their validity on the grounds that predivorce income could not be measured accurately.

quent to marital disruption, a smaller figure than the 34 percent to 39 percent declines reported by previous studies. We will not give further consideration to IPL ratios, as they provide substantively different results from those based on per capita income only when considering the impact of divorce on men's economic well-being (Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn, 1999).

A further difference between our study and others concerns the incomes of remarried or cohabiting women. Other researchers found that women who remarried in the year subsequent to marital disruption on average fared better economically with their new partners than they had before they divorced (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Smock, 1993). In contrast, we find that the incomes of remarried or cohabiting divorced women change little. This disparity probably reflects the fact that these earlier studies looked at women in the year immediately subsequent to marital disruption. Divorcées who manage to remarry quickly represent a select group of women. In contrast, the women in our sample who have remarried had on average first spent several years on their own.

Multivariate Analysis

As in previous studies (Bianchi, Subaiya, and Kahn, 1999; Peterson, 1989; Smock, 1993), we conduct a multivariate analysis to test the impact of various factors on women's postseparation economic well-being . Because remarriage and cohabitation are important means of economic betterment for divorcées, only divorced women who remained single are included.

First we consider characteristics of the marriage and disruption. We examine the effects of marriage length, time since disruption, whether or not a formal divorce has been obtained, and who initiated the separation (as reported by the woman). This last item is motivated by the notion that women who choose to leave their husbands may see themselves as well prepared for single life and therefore better able to fare well economically (Peterson, 1996b). The coding for all variables appears in Table 3.

Second, we include variables that measure women's earning potential. These include education, occupational status, labor force participation, and labor force experience (Marini, 1989; Treiman and Hartman, 1981). Unfortunately the data do not contain a precise measure of labor force experience for all respondents. Although the data on employment history of primary respondents are quite detailed, data for spouses of primary respondents are less informative and extend back only to 1970. Thus, we would seriously underestimate the work experience of older respondents if measured just as years worked since 1970. We use two substitutes: labor force participation at Wave 1 of the NSFH, and age and age squared, common proxies for experience in research on income (Treiman and Roos, 1983). Occupational status is measured using a socioeconomic index (SEI) of occupations (Hauser and Warren, 1997). A dummy variable measuring whe-

TABLE 3

Coding of Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Coding
Marriage and divorce characteristics	
Marriage duration	Continuous variable measured in months.
Time since disruption	Continuous variable measured in months.
Formal divorce obtained	Dummy variable coded 1 if couple divorced, 0 if separated but not divorced.
Who initiated divorce	Dummy variable coded 1 if wife initiated divorce, 0 otherwise (as reported by former wife). A second dummy variable is coded 1 if data on this item are missing, 0 otherwise.
Human capital	
Education	Set of four dummy variables, each coded 1 if respondent is a high school graduate, has attended some college, is a college graduate, or has postgraduate education; not a high school graduate is the reference category.
Working at Wave 1 of NSFH	Dummy variable coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.
Socioeconomic index	Continuous variable; calculated from census categories using Hauser and Warren's (1997) coding scheme.
Age	Continuous variable measured in years.
Age squared	Continuous variable measured in years.
Income from nonwork sources	
Receiving alimony/child support	Dummy variable coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.
Interest income	Dummy variable coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.
Received gift of >= $200 in year of Wave 2 interview	Dummy variable coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.
Family characteristics	
Number of adults present	Continuous variable.
Number of children present	Set of three dummy variables, each coded 1 for one child, two children, three or more children; no children is the reference category.
Children under six present	Dummy variable coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.
Respondent lives with parents or other relatives	Dummy variable coded 1 if yes, 0 if no.
Other	
Family log-income at Wave 1 of NSFH	Continuous, instrumental variable constructed with separate regression.
Respondent ethnicity	Set of two dummy variables, each coded 1 if respondent is black or nonwhite/nonblack; white is the reference category.

ther respondents were working at the time of the Wave 2 interview is almost perfectly correlated with a second dummy measuring whether or not re-

spondents were missing data on the SEI variable ($r = .97$), so we included only the former variable in the analysis.

Third, we control for family income at Wave 1 of the NSFH. Wave 1 income proxies both women's economic expectations and unmeasured economic resources. Controlling for income at Wave 1 also allows us to ascertain whether women's Wave 2 incomes are exclusively the product of their attributes at that time. Consistent with previous studies (Duncan and Hoffman, 1985; Weiss, 1984), a lowess[5] plot revealed that women from affluent families suffer a disproportionately larger drop in income. Logging the Wave 1 income variable yields a linear relationship between women's pre- and postdivorce incomes.

Fourth, we consider family characteristics at the time of the Wave 2 interview. These include the number of adults in the family, number of children, presence of children under six years old, and coresidence with parents or other relatives. Previous research suggests that the presence of children lowers women's income, whereas living with parents or other relatives has the opposite effect (Marini, 1989; Smock, 1993).

Fifth, we control for respondent race, given the well-known relationship between race and income and the high rate of marital dissolution for blacks (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991).

Sixth and finally, we ascertain the presence of income from sources other than earnings. We include dummy variables indicating receipt of alimony/child support payments,[6] interest income from investments, and gifts of $200 or more from parents, relatives, or others.[7] Note that the effects of these three measures on the dependent variable must be interpreted differently than those of all other independent variables. When received, alimony/child support, transfer income, or interest income *must* comprise a portion of total family income. Given adequate statistical power, therefore, the relationship between the three and the dependent variable must always be positive and statistically significant (in the ideal case, where nonlogged family income is regressed on alimony/child support and the others, the regression coefficients would have to be 1). Although the coefficients for these variables cannot tell us whether any of the supplementary income sources are of substantial benefit to divorced women, they do contribute to total variance explained, and therefore they allow us to ascertain whether the

[5]This is a locally weighted regression plot that graphically relates two variables without forcing a linear relationship (see Cleveland, Grosse, and Shyu, 1992).

[6]This figure is probably lower than those obtained by prior research because of underreporting.

[7]Note that $200 reflects the minimum transfer amount specified by the survey question and not our coding decision. Detailed data on transfer amounts exist, but we chose to use dummy variables. Only 17 percent of respondents received transfers, so a continuous variable would be skewed. This rationale also motivated our decision to dichotomize alimony/child support and interest income.

effects of the other independent variables are net of the impact of alimony/child support, transfer income, and investment income.

The dependent variable is the natural logarithm of family income. As noted above, we believe per capita income and IPL ratios to be better measures of women's postdisruption well-being than family income. Although the optimal solution would be to conduct a regression analysis of per capita income or IPL ratios, this is ill-advised because such an analysis implies interactions between family size and all independent variables (Smock, 1993:368). For these reasons we use family income as a dependent variable despite its inadequacies as an indicator of economic well-being.

Estimation is conducted via linear regression. As we use logged Wave 1 income as a predictor, it must be entered into the analysis as an instrumental variable (see, inter alia, Greene, 1993; Markus, 1979); it cannot be directly used as an independent variable because it would be correlated with the error term. The solution is the model design often referred to as two-stage least squares. We generated a new variable composed of the predicted values obtained by regressing Wave 1 log-income on a variety of variables. For model identification some of these variables must not also predict Wave 2 income directly. This is easily accomplished, because respondents' husbands directly contribute to Wave 1 income but not Wave 2 income.

The following independent variables are used to generate the predicted values for Wave 1 income: number of hours worked in the previous week by the respondent and her husband, a dummy variable indicating whether each was working, education for the respondent and her husband, number of children present, presence of any children under six, family size, race, age, and age squared. For race, age, and age squared only the wives' characteristics are used, because these variables are highly correlated between spouses.

Thirty-eight respondents in the analysis of median income change are omitted from the regression analysis because of missing data on the independent variables. We repeated the analysis of median income change without these cases and obtained similar results.

Given the sampling design of the NSFH it is important to weight the data for the regression analysis. Some of the demographic groups included in the oversample may report income levels different from those of the main sample. As a result, parameter estimates based on unweighted data would be biased. On the other hand, sample weights often induce heteroskedasticity. We therefore follow Winship and Radbill's (1994) suggestion for weighted data by using Huber-White standard errors. This provides accurate significance tests despite heteroskedastic residuals.

Multivariate Results

Table 4 shows the results of the multivariate analysis of single women's family income after marital disruption. The first two columns in Table 4 show means and standard deviations for the variables in the analysis. The

TABLE 4

Regression Estimates of Postdisruption Women's Family Log-Income Regressed on Personal, Marital, and Household Factors

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error
Dependent variable				
Wave 2 family log-income	9.73	.90	—	—
Independent variables				
Predicted Wave 1 log-income	10.39	.54	.30+	.18
Duration of marriage (months)	164.63	100.83	−.0003	.0007
Woman initiated separation	.42	.50	.15	.12
Separation initiation data missing	.11	.31	.33*	.18
Time since separation (months)	35.23	20.45	.0007	.002
Divorced	.63	.48	.16	.13
Education				
(Less than high school)	.14	.35	—	—
High school graduate	.31	.46	.48**	.19
Some college	.40	.49	.42*	.20
College graduate	.12	.32	.46+	.30
Postgraduate	.03	.18	.67*	.34
Occupational status	31.02	19.71	.01*	.005
Working at Wave 2	.80	.40	.51*	.23
Working at Wave 1	.32	.47	−.002	.13
Received >= $200 in gifts	.17	.38	.02	.17
Interest income	.12	.33	.36**	.14
Receives alimony/child support	.15	.36	.49**	.16
Living with parents/relatives	.22	.42	.06	.18
Number of adults in household	2.53	1.46	.0002	.09
Children				
(No children)	.39	.49	—	—
One child	.21	.41	−.09	.19
Two children	.24	.43	−.14	.25
Three or more children	.16	.37	−.02	.37
Children under six	.17	.38	.10	.16
Race				
(White)	.80	.40	—	—
Black	.11	.31	−.07	.17
Other	.09	.29	.17	.15
Age	41.70	9.86	.08*	.04
Age squared	1836	942	−.0007+	.0004
Intercept	—	—	3.81**	1.40
Adjusted R^2	—	—	.48	—

TABLE 4—continued

SOURCE: National Survey of Families and Households, 1987–1994.

NOTE: *N* is 173. Results are weighted. Standard errors calculated using the Huber-White algorithm. Income is expressed in 1988 dollars. Sample is restricted to women not remarried or cohabiting.

$^{+}p < .10$; $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$, one-tailed tests.

third column shows unstandardized coefficients for the regression of logged Wave 2 income on the independent variables, and the fourth column the standard errors.

Eighty percent of respondents are working, and employment is an important determinant of income. Occupational status is significantly and positively related to logged income. Working has a large and significant positive effect. Human capital is also important. The coefficients indicate that earnings increase with higher levels of education and with age. The latter suggests that women with more labor force experience have higher incomes, and the negative coefficient for age squared indicates that experience has the standard curvilinear relationship to income. Taken together, these findings show that women who are able to obtain high-status jobs fare better after divorce.

In large part marriage and divorce characteristics do not affect women's postdisruption income. Net of other factors, women emerging from longer marriages fare no worse than those who have been married for shorter periods prior to divorcing. Elapsed time since the breakup also does not matter, and women working at Wave 1 of the NSFH do not report higher incomes than those who were not. Moreover, these findings are net of Wave 1 family log-income, which has a positive and statistically significant effect on Wave 2 log-income. All of this suggests that some women are now able to land on their feet after marital disruption, in large part because of their human capital and labor force participation. Receiving alimony, child support, or interest income is also beneficial, but very few women in our sample reported receiving these types of aid (Table 4, Column 1).

The other noteworthy finding revealed by Table 4 concerns economic dependence. Smock (1993) concluded that women's postdivorce economic well-being often depended on parents or relatives, but this is not the case for our sample. Although 22 percent (Table 4, Column 1) of our respondents live with parents or other relatives, this is not significantly related to income. Similarly, few women received financial gifts. These results suggest that women's postdisruption income does not rely upon friends or family. It should be noted that our results reflect women who have had on average about three years to recover from marital disruption (Table 4, Column 1). Perhaps their reliance on relatives or friends was greater immediately subsequent to separation. By way of comparison, 48 percent of Smock's (1993)

late cohort were living with parents, relatives, or others in the year following marital disruption.

Conclusion

Our primary finding is noteworthy given previous research on the economic consequences of divorce for women. On the basis of per capita income, the cost of marital disruption has decreased by about 40 percent. IPL ratios reveal a decline of approximately 25 percent. The multivariate analysis suggests that women's postdivorce incomes are primarily attributable to their labor force participation and secondarily attributable to income transfers from former husbands. Taken together, our analyses suggest that changes in women's labor force participation in recent years have begun to positively affect how they fare after marital disruption.

This is not to say that women have caught up with men. Although there are too many missing data to conduct a similar analysis for men, those for whom we do have data show a large increase in per capita income following divorce: the median increase in per capita income is 80 percent for single men and 40 percent for remarried or cohabiting men. This is no doubt attributable to more lucrative labor force participation and smaller family size, given that children almost always live with their mothers after divorce (Seltzer, 1994).

We of course do not claim that per capita income completely determines quality of life. A two-parent family and a one-parent family of equal per capita income do not have equal resources for raising children. Nevertheless, the improved economic well-being of divorced women is a step in the right direction.

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