

Divorce hurts health more at earlier ages

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A study by Michigan State University sociologist Hui "Cathy" Liu suggests that divorce at a younger age hurts people's health more than divorce later in life.

Credit: Michigan State University

Divorce at a younger age hurts people's health more than divorce later in life, according to a new study by a Michigan State University sociologist.

Hui Liu said the findings, which appear in the research journal [Social Science & Medicine](#), suggest older people have more coping skills to deal with the stress of [divorce](#).

"It's clear to me that we need more social and family support for the younger divorced groups," said Liu, assistant professor of sociology. "This could include divorce counseling to help people handle the stress, or offering marital therapy or prevention programs to maintain marital satisfaction."

Liu analyzed the self-reported [health](#) of 1,282 participants in Americans' Changing Lives, a long-term national survey. She measured the gap in health status between those who remained married during the 15-year study period and those who transitioned from marriage to divorce, at certain ages and among different birth cohorts, or generations.

Liu found the gap was wider at younger ages. For example, among people born in the 1950s, those who got divorced between the ages of 35 and 41 reported more health problems in relation to their continuously married counterparts than those who got divorced in the 44 to 50 age range.

From a generational perspective, the negative health impact was stronger for baby boomers than it was for older generations – a finding that surprised Liu.

"I would have expected divorce to carry less stress for the younger generation, since divorce is more prevalent for them," she said.

Liu said this may be because the pressure to marry and stay married was stronger for older generations, and so those who did divorce may have been among the most unhappily married – and thus felt a certain degree of relief when they did divorce.

Overall, the study found that those who transition from marriage to divorce experience a more rapid health decline than those who remain married. However, those who remained divorced during the entire study period showed no difference than those who remained married.

"This suggests it is not the status of being married or divorced, per se, that affects health, but instead is the process of transitioning from marriage to divorce that is stressful and hurts health," Liu said.

Provided by Michigan State University

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