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The Effect of Income on the Probability of Divorce

Johanna Bisges

The research question I am proposing is whether the income of a couple has an effect on their probability of getting a divorce, especially among couples in the lower class or upper class. This is of great interest to me because lately I have heard of several divorces of upper class married couples, and I wondered if the reason that they were getting a divorce was related at all to the couples' income. Researchers examining the economic context of American families living in the 1990's noticed several interesting trends (White & Rogers, 2000). White and Rogers (2000:13) found "significant positive effects of both women's and men's earnings and employment on marriage, marital stability, marital quality, and child outcomes." In other words, economic advantage, whether male's or female's, shows a relationship with higher amounts of marriages, lower rates of divorces, happier marriages, and greater overall happiness and well-being of the child.

Another study, involving the geographic context of divorce, had similar findings. South (2001:1) states that "although a multiitem index of neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage is positively and significantly related to the risk of divorce, this association can be explained entirely by the low incomes of husbands in distressed neighborhoods." In addition, couples do not get a divorce just because they live in a low socioeconomic neighborhood, but mostly because of the husband's low income (South, 2001).

My hypothesis is that income will have an effect on the rate of divorce mostly among upper and lower class couples. The rationale for my hypothesis is that they have

more stressors in their lives, which could cause problems in a marriage resulting in their divorce.

Method

Participants

The participants will be married individuals between the ages of 18 and 55 living in Missouri. The participants will be those individuals that complete the questionnaire.

Materials

The materials used in this study will be the questionnaire that will be mailed to the participants. An example of the questionnaire that will be used is located in the Appendix A of this paper. Along with the questionnaire, materials for sending the questionnaire back will be provided.

Procedure

A questionnaire will be mailed to every Missouri mailing address. I will then compare the answers to the questionnaires that are sent back to me.

Implications

If my hypotheses were supported, I would expect to find a higher rate of divorces among low-income and high-income participants. If my hypotheses were not supported, I would expect to find a similar rate of divorce among all three income participants. To compare each group, I would use a One-Way ANOVA. If either of the three groups had a significantly higher divorce rate then psychologists could work with and even teach individuals in that certain group strategies that could make their marriage better.

References

South, S.J. (2001). The geographic context of divorce: Do neighborhoods matter? Journal of Marriage & Family, 63, 755.

White, L., Rogers, S.J. (2000). Economic circumstances and family outcomes: A review of the 1990s. Journal of Marriage & Family, 62, 1035.

Appendix A

Example of the Questionnaire

Circle one

1) Are you currently?

a) Single

b) Married

2) Have you ever been divorced?

a) Yes

b) No

3) If Yes, how many times?

a) 1

b) 2

c) 3

d) 4

4) If you are divorced, what was your combined income of you and your spouse at the time of your divorce? _____.

5) If you are currently married, how many years have you been married? _____