WOHLBEFINDEN NACH SCHEIDUNG UND VERWITWUNG

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SCHWEIZERISCHE HOFFNUNGSKONFERENZ
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OVERVIEW

- Introduction
  The role of intimate relationships for well-being

- Swiss research project IP212 ‘Partnerships in later life’

- Separation/divorce after long-term marriage

- Spousal bereavement in older age
PARTNERSHIPS TODAY

Increase in life expectancy – increase in partnership duration

But: economical progresses and social changes also led to higher divorce rates
## Partnership Status and Well-Being

### Gallup-Study: Well-Being Sub-Index Scores, by Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Life Evaluation</th>
<th>Emotional Health</th>
<th>Physical Health</th>
<th>Healthy Behavior</th>
<th>Work Environment</th>
<th>Basic Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All U.S. adults</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Partner</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2011

Source: Brown & Jones (2012)
SWISS RESEARCH PROJECT IP212
‘RELATIONSHIPS IN LATER LIFE’

- Project leader: Prof. Dr. Pasqualina Perrig-Chiello (University of Bern)

- Study is part of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research “LIVES - Overcoming Vulnerability: Life Course Perspectives” (funded by the National Centres of Competence in Research).

- Aims of the research project are:
  - To examine determinants and outcomes of critical life events related to intimate relationships, whether due to divorce or bereavement in the second half of life and
  - To examine conditions of long-term relationships.

- Longitudinal, interdisciplinary survey-study conducted in the German- and French-speaking regions in Switzerland:
  - Socio-demographic variables, biographical information
  - Personality
  - Well-being (psychological and physiological)
  - Relationships: current status, events in the past (divorce, separation, bereavement)
The Federal Office of Statistics supplied us with a random sample of 6'889 persons: persons, who experienced a divorce or a spousal bereavement in the past 2-5 years as well as long-term married persons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st wave of data gathering</th>
<th>2nd wave of data gathering</th>
<th>3rd wave of data gathering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted persons</td>
<td>6889 persons</td>
<td>2784 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>2856 persons:</td>
<td>2173 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Divorced: 1107</td>
<td>• Divorced: 780</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Widowed: 569</td>
<td>• Widowed: 464</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Married: 1085</td>
<td>• Married: 898</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DIVORCE: A FREQUENT BIOGRAPHICAL TRANSITION IN MIDDLE AGE

Total number of divorces by age groups, 2013

Source: BFS, 2015
REASONS FOR SIGNIFICANT INCREASE OF DIVORCE RATES AFTER LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

- Longer life-time expectancy
- Changing values
- Lower traditional barriers of divorce
- Changes in divorce laws in Switzerland
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ADAPTATION PROCESS TO MARITAL BREAKUP: THE DIVORCE-STRESS-ADJUSTMENT-THEORY (AMATO, 2000)

Possible stressors
- Loss of emotional support
- Continuing conflicts with ex-spouse
- Dissatisfaction with former relationship
- Initiator of separation
- Experience of separation
...

Resources / protective factors
- Interpersonal resources (e.g. new relationship)
- Intrapersonal resources (e.g. personality traits & resilience)

Variables related to ex-relationship (e.g. time since separation)

Socio-demographic variables (e.g. gender, age, education)

Psychological adaptation
- Severity and duration of psychological, behavioural, and health problems
- Function in new roles
- Identity and lifestyle not tied to former marriage
- ...personal growth

Source: Amato (2000)
RESOURCES: TIME HEALS SOME WOUNDS

Duration of time to overcome the separation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of responses</th>
<th>Not enough time elapsed since event</th>
<th>Less than a year</th>
<th>1-2 years</th>
<th>2-3 year</th>
<th>4 years and longer</th>
<th>Never possible to overcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mourning the relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of responses</th>
<th>Yes, very much</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No, on the contrary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of individuals in new relationship, by gender and measurement point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-rated health by partnership-status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuously married</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repartnered divorcees</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single divorcees</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Knöpfl, Cullati, Courvoisier, Burton-Jeangros, & Perrig-Chiello (under review)
SPOUSAL BEREAVEMENT: A NORMATIVE TRANSITION IN OLDER AGE

- Likelihood increases with age
- A gendered experience: women’s higher life expectancy and choice of older partner

CH 2013:
- 331,632 widows
- 76,035 widowers
with average age of 70 years
(BFS, 2014)
BUT ALSO A CRITICAL LIFE EVENT

- Disbalanced person environment fit: unsettling subjective worldview, intense emotions
- Additional loss of resources: cumulative stress in the late period of life with decreasing social and physical resources
- Stress (temporarily) is associated with lower well-being, higher vulnerability for physical and psychological disease
PATTERNS OF ADAPTATION

**Indicators of adaptation:** life satisfaction, loneliness, hopelessness, depressive symptoms, subjective health

- **54% Resilients**
  - Well-being like married ones
  - High personal resources

- **39% Copers**
  - Minor difficulties
  - Personal resources, shorter time since loss

- **7% Vulnerables**
  - Severely affected
  - Low personal resources
Discriminant factors in order of their effect-size:

- Resilience
- Neuroticism
- Extraversion
- Openness
- Conscientiousness
- Agreeableness
- Spousal support
- Emotional valence
- Time since loss
- Gender

Resilient profil

- **High resilience**
  self-reliance, independence, mastery, perseverance, adaptability, flexibility, balanced perspective of life

- **High extraversion**
  surgency, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness

- **Low neuroticism**
  emotional instability, anxiety, irritability, sadness

- **Positive emotional valence**
  regarding the loss experience
What did you do after the loss to cope with the new situation?

61%  I was trying to cope with it on my own.

62%  I was looking for support and comfort from...

62%  family members.

38%  friends and acquaintances.

8%   a religious institute.

9%   I was looking for professional help (doctor, psychologist, ...).

75%  were able to count on the help of someone to deal with the loss (especially children, family, friends).
CONCLUSION

- Divorce and spousal bereavement are frequent critical life events in middle and higher age.
- Even if the loss of a partner is challenging, most of the individuals succeed in adaptation to the new circumstances of life.
- But 7-20% show severe psychological and physical complains.
- Time since loss, personality factors, social and financial resources are decisive for adaptation.
Thank you very much for your attention

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REFERENCES


Nähere Informationen zum Projekt finden Sie auf unserer Homepage der Universität Bern: [entwicklung.psy.unibe.ch/content/forschung/lives/](http://entwicklung.psy.unibe.ch/content/forschung/lives/) oder unter: [lives-nccr.ch/de/page/ip12-n190](http://lives-nccr.ch/de/page/ip12-n190)