

The determinants of repartnering in mid-life in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Repartnering is steadily turning into a common life experience for many as more and more enter a second or higher-order co-residential union. While most remarry during the prime childbearing years, a non-negligible proportion does so in mid-life. For instance, in England and Wales, more than one fourth of those born in 1945 who had remarried by age 65 entered a second marriage between ages 45 and 65. However, little is known about remarriage and repartnering in mid-life and about whether the determinants of repartnering change over the life course. For instance, the role of children - such as their presence, age and number - in repartnering in mid-life is not well understood. The aim of this study is to investigate the determinants of co-residential repartnering in mid-life after a partnership dissolution for two groups: those who experienced a partnership break-up before age 45 (group 1) and those who experienced a partnership break-up between ages 45 and 65 (group 2). It uses data from the first wave of the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study, which collected data on current and previous co-residential partnerships, including on cohabitation, marriage and civil partnerships. It also provides information on the presence and age of children, socio-economic status and physical health. In a first step of the analysis, life table techniques will be used to investigate the time to repartnering for several subgroups. In a second step, event history models will be used to investigate the determinants of repartnering in mid-life. By specifically focussing on repartnering in mid-life, this study will improve our understanding of the determinants of forming co-residential partnerships in older ages.

Extended abstract

1. Background

Repartnering is steadily turning into a common life experience for many people as more and more enter a second or a higher-order co-residential union. While most remarry during the prime childbearing years, a non-negligible and substantial proportion does so in mid-life. According to data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for England and Wales, 16.2% of men and 16.8% of women born in 1945 had ever remarried by age 45 compared to 5.5% and 7.1% respectively of those born in 1925. By age 65, 23.7% of men and 22.4% of women born in 1945 had ever remarried compared to 12.4% and 12.2% respectively born in 1925 (ONS, 2013). Thus, more than one fourth of those remarried by age 65 had entered a second marriage between ages 45 and 65 (men 31.7%, women 25.0%).

Studies reviewing the literature on remarriage have highlighted that little is known about remarriage and repartnering among those not in their prime childbearing years (Cooney & Dunne, 2001; Sassler, 2010; Sweeney, 2010). This has been primarily attributed to a lack of data on partnering of older adults (*i.e.* 45+) and on small sample sizes in US-data (Sassler, 2010; Sweeney, 2010). Furthermore, the age range in many studies on repartnering is unrestricted or very wide, covering young adulthood and the childbearing years, mid-life and later life. Despite this, very few studies have examined whether the determinants of repartnering change over the life course. The few studies which did, suggest that age matters (*e.g.* Vespa, 2013). This represents an important gap in the literature on family formation and dissolution given the rise in remarriage over time and the fact that a substantial proportion remarry after age 45.

Another important gap in previous research is that the role of children in repartnering in mid-life and later life remains not well understood. Several studies have looked at the role of children in repartnering, but have been limited by the lack of detailed, time-varying information on the characteristics of children, especially those using retrospectively collected data (except for de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003 and Poortman, 2007). Cohabitation has become more common over time and this provides an important alternative partnership form which may be preferred over marriage by those who have ever married. However, only a few studies have investigated whether the determinants of repartnering differ between cohabiting and marital partnerships (de Graaf & Kalmijn, 2003; Wu & Schimmele, 2005; Brown, Lee & Bulanda, 2006; Brown, Bulanda & Lee, 2012).

The aim of this study is to investigate the determinants of co-residential repartnering in mid-life after the dissolution of a partnership for two groups: those who experienced a partnership break-up before age 45 (group 1) and those who experienced a partnership break-up between ages 45 and 64 (group 2). It builds on earlier work which has shown that, in the United Kingdom, there has been an increase in living alone in mid-life over time, especially among middle-aged men, and that partnership dissolution is the dominant pathway into living alone in mid-life (Demey *et al.*, 2011; Demey *et al.*, 2013). The study uses data from the first wave of Understanding Society, the United

Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), which collected complete data on current and previous co-residential partnerships, including on cohabitation, marriage and civil partnerships. It also provides information on the presence and age of children, socio-economic status and physical health. The following research question is formulated: What are the determinants of repartnering in mid-life and later life?

In answering this question, this study will contribute to and improve our knowledge of the determinants of forming co-residential partnerships in older ages.

2. Data and methods

2.1. The United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study

This study uses data from the first wave of Understanding Society, the United Kingdom Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) which collects data on a sample of households representative of the UK population. Data for the first wave were collected by face-to-face interviews in 2009 and 2010. In the partnership module of the adult questionnaire all adults (those aged 16 and over) were asked about their current and previous partnerships. Details were collected about cohabitational and marital partnerships, the start and end dates of partnerships, cohabitation before marriage and its start date, and the dissolution type of marriages (separation, divorce or widowhood).

2.2. The sample

The sample is restricted to the following two groups: the first group consists of those who have experienced the dissolution of a (first or higher-order) co-residential partnership before reaching age 45. The second group consists of those who are in a (first or higher-order) co-residential partnership which started before age 45 and which dissolves at or after age 45 but before age 65. This can be through the dissolution of a cohabiting partnership, separation, divorce or the death of a partner. There is also a very small group consisting of those who entered their first partnership after reaching age 45 which dissolves before age 65. This sample is then followed up until the first co-residential repartnering occurring after age 45 (this can be a cohabitation, marriage or a civil partnership), or until age 65 if no repartnering occurred between ages 45 and 65, or, for those younger than age 65 at the time of the interview, until the date of the interview if no repartnering occurred after age 45. Note that if a repartnering occurs from age 45 onwards, that this can be a second or higher-order partnership. The partnership order will be taken into account in the multivariate analysis by including a covariate indicating the number of partnerships experienced before the repartnering.

One of the reasons to select those aged 45 and over is that the role of children for repartnering could be substantively different in mid-life compared to the prime childbearing years (see for instance

Beaujouan, 2012). At younger ages, repartnering will partly be influenced by the motivation to have children. Due to biological limitations to fertility, very few have children after age 45. However, the decline in biological fertility by age is slower for men than for women, so we recognise that middle-aged men's repartnering could be influenced by the motivation to have children.

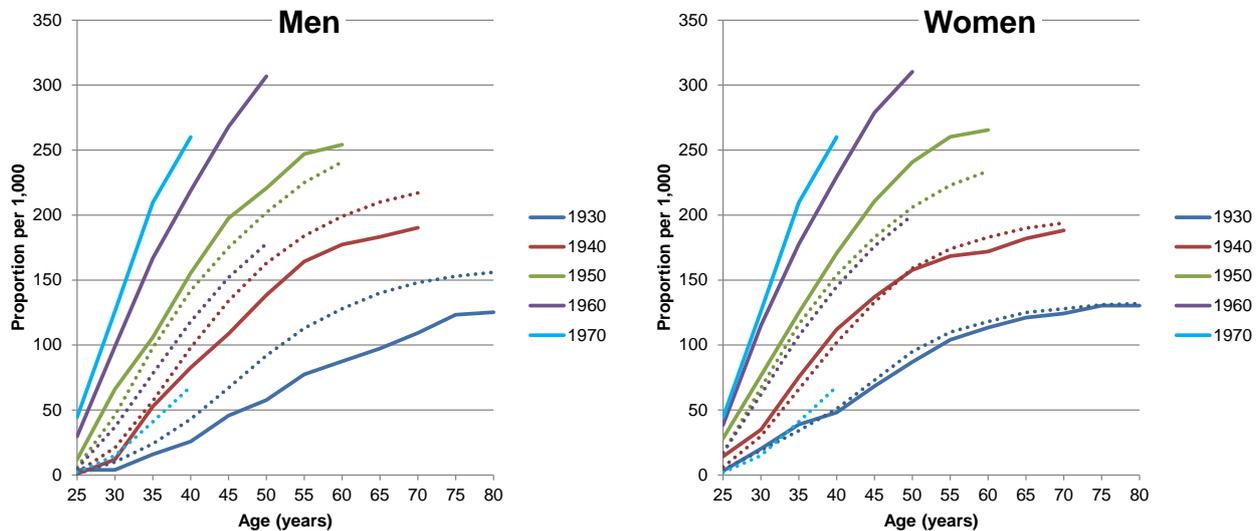
Respondents with the following issues in their partnership data were deleted from the sample: missing start or end year on at least one partnership, negative duration of at least one partnership, negative gap between at least two subsequent partnerships of 13 months or more, the age at the start of a second or higher-order partnership is less than 13, legal marital is missing, or any combination of these issues.

2.3. Methods

In a first step of the analysis, life table techniques will be used to investigate the time to repartnering for several subgroups. In a second step, event history models will be used to investigate the determinants of repartnering in mid-life and later life.

4. Preliminary results

Figure 1: Comparison of the proportions of men and women who ever remarried (ONS, dotted line) to the proportions of men and women who ever repartnered (UKLHS, solid line) by certain ages and birth cohort, England and Wales (proportion per 1,000)



As Figure 1 shows, the proportion repartnering increases moving from the oldest to the youngest cohorts: by age 40, 26.0% of men and 29.0% of women born in 1970 had experienced at least two co-residential partnerships, compared to 5.8% and 4.8% born in 1930 respectively. Figure 1 also shows that, as indicated by the dotted line, the proportion remarriage increases moving from the 1930 to the 1950 cohort, but drops in the 1960 and 1970 cohorts. This reflects the drop in marriage rates and the rising prevalence of cohabitation over time. The latter can be illustrated by comparing the ONS data on remarriage to the UKLHS estimates on repartnering. This comparison shows that the drop in the proportions remarriage in the 1960 and 1970 cohorts has been more than compensated by the rise in cohabitation, either as the first or higher-order partnership form.

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