



The Relationship Between Mental Positivity and Marital Status



Kelsey Onyia, Applied Data Analysis, Wesleyan University

Introduction

- More people have been getting married in recent years, going from 28 marriages per unmarried woman in 2021 to 31.2 marriages per unmarried woman in 2022 (Loo, 2023).
- Studies have shown that marriage has certain particular positive implications such as a decrease in negative communication, which could relate to why there have been increases in marriage (Markmann, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan & Whitton, 2010).
- Marriage is also associated with an increase in emotional capital on mundane tasks (Walsh, Neff, & Gleason, 2017).

Research Questions

- Does marriage status correlate with one's levels of mental positivity/mental energy?
- Is there a relationship between marital status and feeling overwhelmed, depressed, or levels of mental energy?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=4196) were asked about marriage history and marriage status in The U.S National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health Wave V (AddHealth Wave 5).

Measures

- Marriage status / Marriage history was measured with the question "How many spouses have you had?/Are you currently married?"
- Mental positivity was measured by asking "How often have you felt confident in your ability to handle your personal problems?", "How often was each of the following things true during the past 7 days? During the past 7 days, I felt depressed / I felt overwhelmed. ?" – Answers for questions ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (very often),

Results

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that marriage status is significantly associated with having confidence in solving personal problems ($p = 0.000$).
- Those who were married had a higher number of individuals with high conflict confidence.



Figure 1: The proportion of conflict confidence in married vs unmarried participants

Multivariate

- There is a higher average of people who are married that have conflict confidence than those who aren't married (Figure 1)
- Logistic regression analyses showed that conflict confidence (OR 0.68, $p < 0.001$). Those who are married have odds of being depressed that are 32% less than those who aren't married. And those who are married, on average feel less depressed than those who aren't (Figure 2)
- The feeling of being overwhelmed is higher in those who aren't married than in those who are married

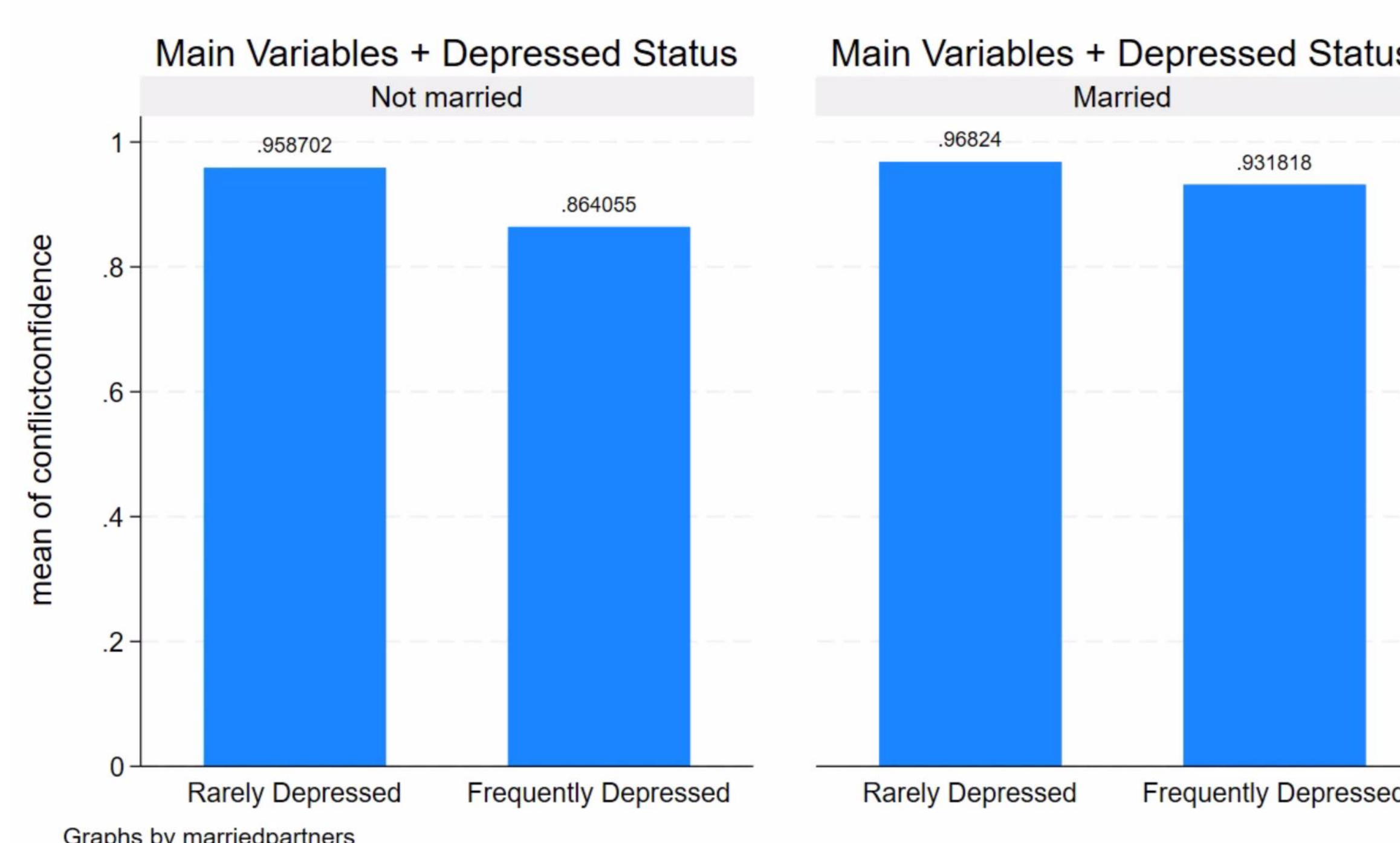


Figure 2: Distribution of feeling depressed in married people vs unmarried people.

Discussion

- These findings show that married individuals are more likely to be confident in handling personal problems and are less likely to be overwhelmed or depressed.
- This suggests that marriage is possible correlated with mental positivity.
- Future research could use these findings in effort to provide guidance to those who wish to seek healthy and positive relationships.

References

- Alsawalqa, R. O. (2019). Marriage burnout: when the emotions exhausted quietly Quantitative research. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.5812/ijpbs.68833>
- Carr, D., Freedman, V. A., Cornman, J. C., & Schwarz, R. (2014). Happy marriage, happy life? Marital quality and subjective well-being in later life. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(5), 930–948. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12133>
- Markman, H. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., Ragan, E. P., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). The premarital communication roots of marital distress and divorce: The first five years of marriage. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(3), 289–298. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019481>
- Lieberman, H. R. (2007). Cognitive methods for assessing mental energy. *Nutritional Neuroscience*, 10(5–6), 229–242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10284150701722273>
- Stutzer, A., & Frey, B. S. (2006). Does marriage make people happy, or do happy people get married? *Journal of Socio-economics*, 35(2), 326–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soec.2005.11.043>
- US Census Bureau. (2023, July 11). *Is Your State in Step with National Marriage and Divorce Trends?* Census.gov. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/07/marriage-divorce-rates.html>
- VanLaningham, J., Johnson, D. R., & Amato, P. R. (2001). Marital Happiness, Marital Duration, and the U-Shaped Curve: Evidence from a Five-Wave Panel Study. *Social Forces*, 79(4), 1313–1341. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2001.0055>
- Walsh, C., Neff, L. A., & Gleason, M. E. J. (2017). The role of emotional capital during the early years of marriage: Why everyday moments matter. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 31(4), 513–519. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000277>