

Women's Socioeconomic Advantage Over their Partners and Relationship Dissolution: A 29-Country Study

Abstract. Research finds that different-sex couples in which women have higher socioeconomic status than their partners are more likely to separate and that the association between women's advantage and relationship dissolution has been weakening in some contexts. In this study, we use harmonized panel survey data for 29 high-income countries to provide a comprehensive analysis of hypothesized explanations for these findings. We leverage country-level measures on gender norms and other macro-level characteristics to provide direct tests of the gender culture mechanism, which has gained popularity in recent years, alongside other potential mechanisms. Our results show that the association between women's socioeconomic advantage and relationship dissolution is positive and statistically significant. Contrary to expectations, we do not find evidence that this association is moderated by gender culture or evidence for other common explanations such as specialization or opportunity structure. However, we find evidence that this association is stronger among couples with children in the household. We conclude that our understanding of the mechanisms driving this association is incomplete and that more research is necessary to develop new explanations.