

DO MEN REALLY BENEFIT MORE FROM MARRIAGE THAN WOMEN?

A recently published study¹ continues to generate media interest. In May 2016, *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's largest newspaper, cited its findings purportedly showing that married men were less likely to have metabolic syndrome than unmarried men; however, marriage produced no health benefits for women. The newspaper columnist reinforced a popular, yet out-dated idea: only men reap the health rewards of marriage. To be safe, young women are advised they should not get married at all.

It is unfortunate that the study by Ploubidis et al. invites such advice because it is clear that the authors never conducted the formal statistical test supporting this conclusion. The authors simply compared marital status differences in different biomarkers *separately* for each gender. A proper test of whether marital status differences in health depend on gender requires testing the interaction between marital status and gender in a single model.^{2,3} To quote a primer on statistical analysis:

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If the coefficient is statistically significant in one group but not in the other, then the conclusion is that X is more important for the one group than for the other. This logic is flawed because the researcher never performs a formal statistical test of the *difference* between the coefficients for the two groups.^{2(p17)}

In the study, it is clear that only an eyeball test backs the statement "observed effects differed between men and women."^{1(p1599)} I believe the proper test would produce a different result.

Research suggesting men derive greater health benefits from marriage than women do (aka the gender role hypothesis) first emerged in the 1970s.⁴ The prevailing explanation for the absence of health benefits for married women was that marriage produced greater stress for women by making them economically dependent on their breadwinner husbands and confining them to hearth and home.

A world where women largely stay at home to raise children no longer exists. In most households today, both spouses tend to be employed, mainly out of economic necessity. Consequently, the roles of men and women have become much more equal (though not completely so), with both sexes balancing paid work and domestic tasks. Given the trend toward greater gender equality, researchers have increasingly questioned the validity of the gender role hypothesis. Recent studies evaluating the interaction between marital status and gender have reported that the health effects of marriage are equally distributed among men and women.⁵⁻⁷ Nonetheless, the perception marriage only benefits men persists, resistant to current realities and compounded by improper analysis. **AJPH**

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PLOUBIDIS ET AL. RESPOND

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Stroschein's letter regarding our published article in *AJPH*. The main issue raised by Stroschein is that our study lacks a test of interaction for one of our findings, namely that men derive more health benefits from marriage than women.

Stroschein cites a newspaper article, which appears to reference our article. Unfortunately, the newspaper article misrepresents our findings. We simply did not find and certainly did not report that marriage does not benefit women. Our findings clearly demonstrate that marriage is beneficial for both men and women. The newspaper article advises young women they should not get married; however, there is nothing whatsoever in our article that would "invite" or suggest this. Furthermore, we have never shown that married men are less likely to have metabolic syndrome compared with unmarried men. We are disappointed that Stroschein reiterates this false representation of our findings.

Stroschein demonstrates a commonly held misconception, namely that interaction and