More education means more likely to be married or to never marry

Adults with more education are more likely to be married. Among those with a bachelor’s degree or more, 75% are married compared to 69% of those with a high school degree or some college, and 62% of those with less than a high school education.

Interestingly, more education also means a lower likelihood of never marrying. Among those with less than a high school degree, only 4% have never married in comparison to 7% of those with a high school degree or some college, and 10% of those with a bachelor’s degree or more.

Marital quality increases with age

Of MIDUS respondents who are married, the vast majority (76%) report that their marital relationship is excellent or very good, however, there are some interesting differences.

Among men, 80% rate their marriages as excellent or very good compared to 72% of women. Women are also more likely to report that their marital relationship is fair or poor (11%) than men (6%).

Older adults are also more likely to report excellent or very good marital relationships (see Figure 2). Among adults under the age of 55, about 70-72% rate their marriages this high compared to about 83% of adults aged 55-74 and 85% of adults aged 75 or older.

Who cares?

Separated or divorced adults are more likely to be current smokers (43%) compared to married adults (27%). Adults who have never married also have more who smoke (28% to 13%) than those who are married.

Wealth or health?

Happily married people feel healthier

The quality of a marital relationship also has important links with health. Happily married adults are more likely to report excellent or very good health (60%) than the unhappily married (50%) (see Figure 3). In fact, adults who are unhappily married report similar health ratings as adults who are separated or divorced (see Figure 3), suggesting that the protective effects of marriage are evident largely for people who are happily married with their relationships.

Older widowed adults report worse health

Health ratings tend to decline with age, but this varies by marital status. Among older women (ages 65+) 49% report excellent or very good health compared to 41% of older widowed women who are widowed.

Interestingly, the gap for men is wider, as 45% of older men who are married report excellent or very good health compared to 30% of older men who are widowed. In fact, 30% of widowed men in this age group actually report fair or poor health.

Unmarried adults are in need of health insurance

On average, 7% of MIDUS participants did not have health insurance, but this varies by marital status. Among adults who are married, 5% of those who are happily married have no health insurance compared to 11% of those who are unhappily married. It is possible that a lack of insurance is contributing to poor marital quality.

Interestingly, men in all unmarried groups are more likely than women in the same groups to have no health insurance (see Figure 5). In fact, 15% of separated and divorced men do not have health insurance compared to 12% of separated or divorced women and 8% of widowed women.

Marital quality is particularly relevant when considering who has four or more chronic conditions. Among younger adults (ages 32-49), only 15% of those who are happily married have four or more conditions compared to 21% of those who are unhappily married (see Figure 6). This gap widens among older adults: for those aged 65-74, 34% of those who are happily married compared to 48% of unhappily married adults.

For all age groups, those who are unmarried are about as likely to have four or more conditions as previously married adults (separated, divorced, or widowed). Those who are unhappily married are less likely than the previously married or unhappily married to report this many conditions.

A happy marriage means fewer chronic conditions

Chronic conditions, which are persistent illnesses or conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease, tend to increase with age (see Figure 6) and, in general, are more prevalent among women than men regardless of marital status. Still, marital status and marital quality are also linked to these conditions.
The majority (71%) of MIDUS participants interviewed in 2004 were married. An additional 15%, who were currently not married, were widowed, and 8% had never been married. However, there were sizeable gender and age variations.

- On average, men were more likely to be married (78%) than women (64%), while women were more likely to be separated or divorced (17%) than men (12%) and more likely to be widowed (11%) than men (3%).

- Among men, the married percentage grows slightly across those who are living with someone of the opposite sex between ages 65-74 (see Figure 1) and then declining thereafter as more men become widowed. For women, the married percentage peaks between ages 32-44 and then begins to drop, especially when women reach age 75, as 48% of women aged 75-84 are widowed.

- Even when the percentage of married men is at its lowest during later life, it is still higher than the percentage of women who are married at age 85. By age 85, 75% of men and 74% of women are still married in comparison to only 40% of women (see Figure 1).