A Generalized Linear Model for Marital Disruption in Namibia

by

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Abstract

Marital disruption has attracted wide attention among researchers. In recent years, the world has experienced reductions in marriage rates, along with significant increase in cohabiting unions, divorce and separation rates, leading to rising conjugal and family instability. While some have seen this as a sign of social and moral disruption with a potential to shatter the family institution and the foundations of society itself, others have embraced these trends as signaling increased individual liberty and the loosening of suffocating social mores. There is limited research on the factors influencing marital disruption in Namibia. This paper used the Namibia Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), 2013 data to establish patterns, trends and determinants of marital disruption among women using generalized linear models. Results indicated that marital disruption is influenced by region, socio-economic status, employment status and birth cohort. Policy efforts should encourage one lifetime partner in marital relations. Information and education on the negative effects of divorce and separation should be targeted towards the younger generation, richer women, employed women and those from vulnerable regions

Keywords: Marital Disruption, Namibia, DHS, GLM

1. Introduction

In recent years, the world has experienced reductions in marriage rates, along with significant rises in cohabiting unions, divorce and separation rates, leading to rising conjugal and family instability (Laplante, 2016; Menard, 2011; Strong & Cohen, 2013). Divorce laws have changed markedly through the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. For example, divorce was prohibited in Italy until 1974; Spain until 1981, Ireland until 1997; and Malta until (2011). Most of the time divorce could only be granted on the basis of serious faults (e.g. adultery, violence, or mental illness). The process was also prohibitively lengthy and expensive (Harkonen & Dronkers, 2006; Harkonen, 2013). California was the first state to implement unilateral 'no fault' divorce where either spouse could exit marriage without having to provide specific reasons (Gonzalez and Viitanen, 2009).

Many functional marriages end in divorce (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007) but not all troubled marriages breakup, underlining the heterogeneity of divorces and the importance of factors that act as barriers to divorce or the possible options beyond it, and the need for looking beyond marital quality and satisfaction as determinants. Heaton (2002) associated stabilization of marriage with increases in educational level and older age at marriage. Young couples have consistently higher divorce rates due to their lower psychological and economic maturity, potentially unreasonable expectations; and a shorter search that led to an unstable match or the seemingly better outside options. Marital satisfaction generally declines over the course of marital life and couples have highest risk of divorce between the fourth and seventh year after the wedding. After this divorce risk begins to decline gradually as couples develop inertia due to their accumulated investments; and children in their marriage which now act as barriers to exit. Couples with small children, in some cases especially boys, have lower risk of divorcing than childless couples but this also depends on the country and time period (Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010). Increases in non-marital cohabitation (which are more likely to dissolve) could mask the overall instability of couple relationships (Raley & Bumpass, 2003). Other reasons for divorcing include growing apart; never being suited to each other in the first place; always arguing; infidelity; low marital satisfaction, incompatibility, behavioral and relationship problems that include violence. More recently psychological and relational problems and reasons to do with division of housework have increased in importance (Amato & Previti, 2003; De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006). The changes in gender roles were mostly driven by women's roles and activities, and as such, men have been much slower in taking up previously female tasks. (Andersen & Billari, 2012).

The more the previous marital partnerships one has accumulated, the higher the divorce risk because s/he who once divorced would be likely to do it again (Poortman &Lyngstad, 2007). Couples who cohabited before marriage are more likely to divorce because they are usually less traditional and may have different ideals and marriage expectations (Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010). However, some authors argue that once cohabiting couples have more experience and information about each other and life together and therefore tend to have more stable relationships (Amato, 2010, Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010).

Martin (2006) and Vignoli & Ferro (2009) suggested that there is a growing association between socio-economic disadvantage and family instability. Men's economic resources such as education, employment and earnings stabilize marriages whereas wives resources destabilize them (Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010) due to weakening a household's division of labour; increasing the opportunities for maintaining independent households; and chances to meet new partners (Harkonen, 2013). Other authors argue that female employment actually stabilizes marriages by strengthening

the family's economic security, balancing the spouses' roles and responsibilities as long as they adhere to the values of the couple or the surrounding society (Amato et al, 2007; Cooke et al, 2013).

A study on migration and residential mobility on marital union dissolution in Australia showed that couples who move frequently have a significantly higher risk of union dissolution. Migration as a major life event can have divorce-inducing effect, especially since one of the spouses can benefit from the move more than the other. Further, migrating couples usually find themselves in a society (usually western countries where divorce rates are higher) in which marital values and divorce rates differ markedly from their country of origin, and exposure to this new environment can entail increases in the divorce rates of these couples (Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010; Kalmijn, 2010; Qureshi et al, 2014). Phillips & Sweeny (2006) also observed large racial and ethnic differentials in the risk of marital disruption in the United States. As such migrating couples have to strive harder to preserve marital features from their countries of origin. Intermarriages between migrant groups and the indigenous people and between migrant groups themselves, which can also be positively regarded as a sign of integration, can face higher dissolution rates especially if cultural differences between the spouses are miles apart (Dribe & Lundh, 2012).

Amato (2010) noted that research on divorce in recent years has focused on predictors of divorce, association between divorce and wellbeing of children, and former spouses, and interventions for divorcing couples. Boettcher (2006) established that in both East and West Germany, before the reunification in 1990, women's labour force participation was connected with a higher divorce risk, but the effect was stronger in West than in East Germany. The study gave evidence for a weaker negative relationship between women's labour force participation and marital stability in societies that are egalitarian in comparison to traditional role expectations. The presence of a child, even of a stepchild; increased the stability of common law unions as it brings greater commitment to the relationship. It was only in the traditional family setting, in which children are conceived after the formation of the union that decreased the risk of dissolution (Menard, 2011). Bhuiya et al (2005) revealed that in Bangladesh, divorced and abandoned women and their children were extremely vulnerable both socially and economically. The most important factors contributing to marital disruption were aspects determining the process of marriage; various family problems due to non-fulfilment of demand for dowry.

The negative effects of marital disruption have been well documented. For most women, divorce or separation implies dealing with feelings of bitterness or sadness (Wang & Amato, 2004), changing the place of residence, a decline in the standard of living (Callens & Croux, 2009), and adopting a single lifestyle. Compared to married individuals, divorced exhibit more symptoms of depression, anxiety, more health problems especially in communities where stigmatization

is high (Monden & Uunk, 2013), more substance abuse and a greater risk of mortality. Individuals adjust to divorce differently with others fast adjusting to their new situation while for some divorce represents a longer term chronic problem from which they might never fully recover (Amato & James, 2010). This could be explained by the supposed long term damaging effects the divorce has on health. An economic perspective points to the loss of resources, both material and emotional as divorced individuals report more social isolation, a lower standard of living, less wealth, a greater economic hardship. Women are more likely to be deprived in monetary terms because of their greater reliance on the partner's income, while on the other hand, men experience a drop in the standard of living because of a rise in expenses due to alimony payments, new housing costs, etc. (Callens & Croux, 2009). With regard to the social support perspective, Hollard (1990) established that loss of marriage benefits include companionship, everyday assistance, emotional support, encouragement to engage in healthy behaviour, such as smoking less, eating well and having regular medical checkups. Transition out of marriage may also lead to subsequent changes in the patterns of use and costs of health care and preventive health services. Among women who did not smoke initially, divorce increased the likelihood of starting to smoke and the odds of skipping regular breast cancer screening (Lee et al, 2005). The magnitude of the differences in wellbeing among divorced women and married women varies significantly across countries (Monden & Uunk, 2013, Kalmijn, 2007).

Children of divorced couples tend to have lower educational performance than others. Parental divorce can disturb the child's educational career through affecting their economic or psychological well-being, relationships with parents, friends or teachers. This disturbance may translate into lower levels of socio-economic attainment and physical and psychological well-being in adulthood (Garriga & Harkonen, 2009; Amato and James 2010). Children of divorced parents are more prone to divorce themselves as they may hold interpersonal skills that are not conducive to marital stability or are more likely to perceive divorce as a viable solution to marital problems. Parental divorce also weakens contacts between children, their parents and grandparents thereby negatively affecting relationships between children and usually their father and the father's relatives. (Wolfinger, 2005; Dronkers & Harkonen, 2008; Garriga & Harkonen, 2009; Albertin & Garriga, 2011). It has also been observed that living in a high divorce risk society may itself affect behavior and wellbeing by lowering obstacles for leaving partnerships and children exposed to peers with divorced parents have been found to fare poorer in school (Pong et al, 2003).

Given the foregoing global experiences on determinants, patterns, trends and effects of marital disruption, this paper focused on a Namibia as a case study. The study used the NDHS 2013 data to establish the determinants of marital

disruption among women using generalized linear models. The method and approach that was followed is given in the next section.

2. Data and Methods

Data was available from the NDHS from 1992 to 2013. The 13 regions were stratified into 26 sampling strata (13 rural strata and 13 urban strata). Samples were selected independently in every stratum, with a predetermined number of enumeration areas (EAs) selected. A complete household listing and mapping operation was carried out in all selected clusters. In the second stage, a fixed number of 20 households were selected in every urban and rural cluster according to equal probability systematic sampling. The woman's questionnaire contained basic information including education, socio-economic status, religion, birth cohort etc. Trends in the percentages of divorced and separated women were established using line graphs. Descriptive summary statistics were computed to profile the background characteristics of the sample. Binary logistic regression model was used to establish factors influencing marital disruption in ever married women. The dependent variable was *Disruption* (divorce or separation) (Whisman et al, 2013; Wagman et al, 2016). Potential predictor variables as guided by relevant literature and availability of data in the DHS included age, region, place of residence, religion, educational level, wealth index, employment status, culture and generation, total number of children born and number of lifetime partners.

3. Results

Sample Characteristics

The sample size of ever married women was 4685. The distribution of the respondents by age in years was 20-24 (2.6%), 25-29 (9.5%), 30-34 (14.8%), 35-39 (15.3%), 40-44 (16.1%), 45-49 (14.4%) and 50 and above (12.3%). By region, the distribution of respondents was Zambezi (8.7%), Erongo (9.3%), Hardap (7.7%) !Karas (8.9%), Kavango (11.2%), Khomas (9.2%), Kunene (7.1%), Ohangwena (5.1%), Omaheke (7.4%), Omusati (5.7%), Oshana (4.6%), Oshikoto (5.9%), and Otjozonjupa (9.2%). With regard to religion, the distribution of respondents was as follows: Roman Catholic (21.8%), Protestant /Anglican (22.7%), ELCIN (36.8%), Seventh Day Adventist (6.6%), and No Religion and others (11.8%). The distribution by marital status was as follows: married (45.0%), living together with partner (cohabiting) (35.8%), widowed (8.0%), divorced (2.7%) and no longer living together with partner or separated (8.1%). More than half of the women were employed (52.9%). With regard to the main language spoken at home by the women, 13.5% spoke Afrikaans, 12.1% Damara/Nama, 1.9% English, 9.6% Herero, 12.1% Kwangali, 8.1% Lozi, 30.4% Oshiwambo, 1.6% San, and 4.3% spoke other languages.

Trends in percentages of divorced and separated women are shown in Figure 1. Even though the percentage of divorced women seems to be on the decline, the percentage of separated women is relatively higher and increased from 2006 to 2013. This is not a good sign as most separations end up in divorce (Emery et al, 2005).
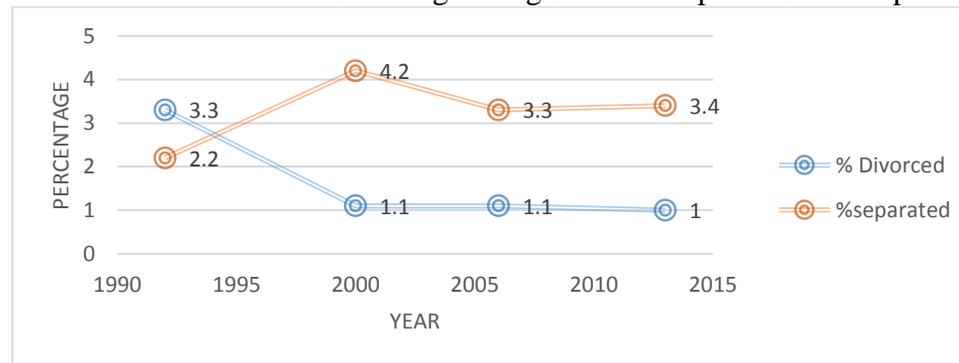

Figure 1: Trends in Percentage of Divorced and Separated Women in Namibia 1992-2013

The perceptions of women regarding domestic violence by husbands is highlighted and shown on Figure 2. Sizeable percentages of women in Namibia felt that wife-beating was justified if the wife goes out without telling the husband (16%), the wife neglects children (21%), the wife argues with the husband (15%), the wife refuses to have sex with the husband (11%) and if the wife burns the food (11%).
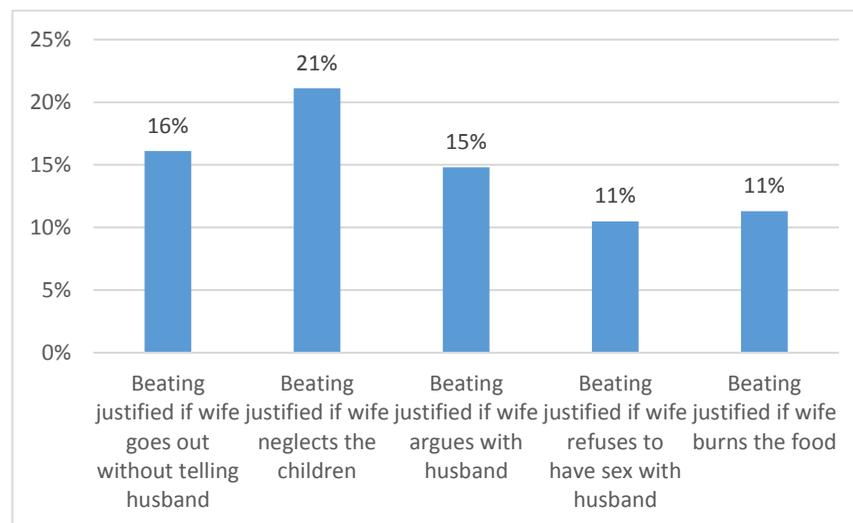

Figure 2: Percentage of women who responded "yes" to the statements on wife beating

The distribution of ownership to property (land or house) among women in marital unions is presented in Figure 3. More than half of the women (59%) did not jointly own land with their husbands while 43% of the women did not jointly own houses with their husbands.
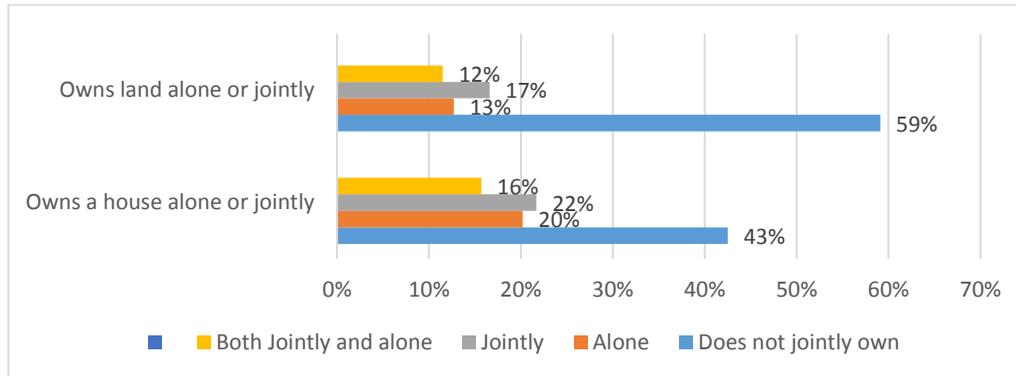
Figure 3: Distribution of ownership to property in marital unions

Income differences in marital unions are shown in Figure 4. Most of the women earned less than their husbands (67%). Only 13% of the women earned more than their husbands while 11% earned about the same. In a few cases the husband/partner did not bring any money home (7%).
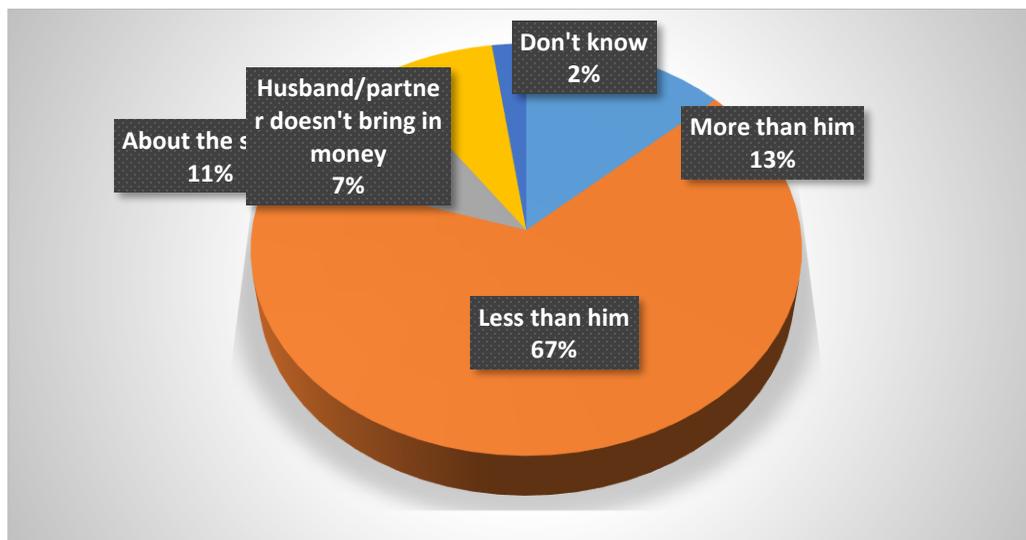

Figure 4: Income differences in marital unions

The distribution of budgeting decisions in marital unions is shown in Figure 5. The person who usually decided how to spend the wife's earnings was the wife alone (39%), the wife and husband/partner (51%) or the husband partner alone (10%) or someone else (0%). The person who usually decided what to do with the money the husband earns was the wife alone (15%), the wife and husband / partner (53%), the husband partner alone (25%) or someone else (0%). The results seem to suggest that more than half of the women made joint budgeting decisions with their husbands /partners.
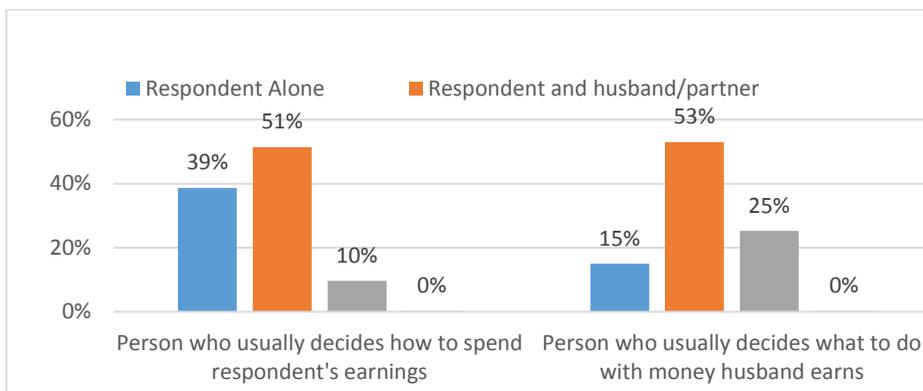
Figure 5: Distribution of budgeting decisions in marital unions

The percentages of respondents experiencing various challenges with their husband or partners are shown on Figure 6. Challenges that the women experienced with their husbands/partners ranged from husband/partner jealous if woman talks with other men (37%), insisting on knowing whereabouts of the woman (37%); accusing woman of unfaithfulness (19%); not permitting the woman to meet female friends (19%); not trusting the woman with money (15%); to limiting the woman's contact with family (10%).
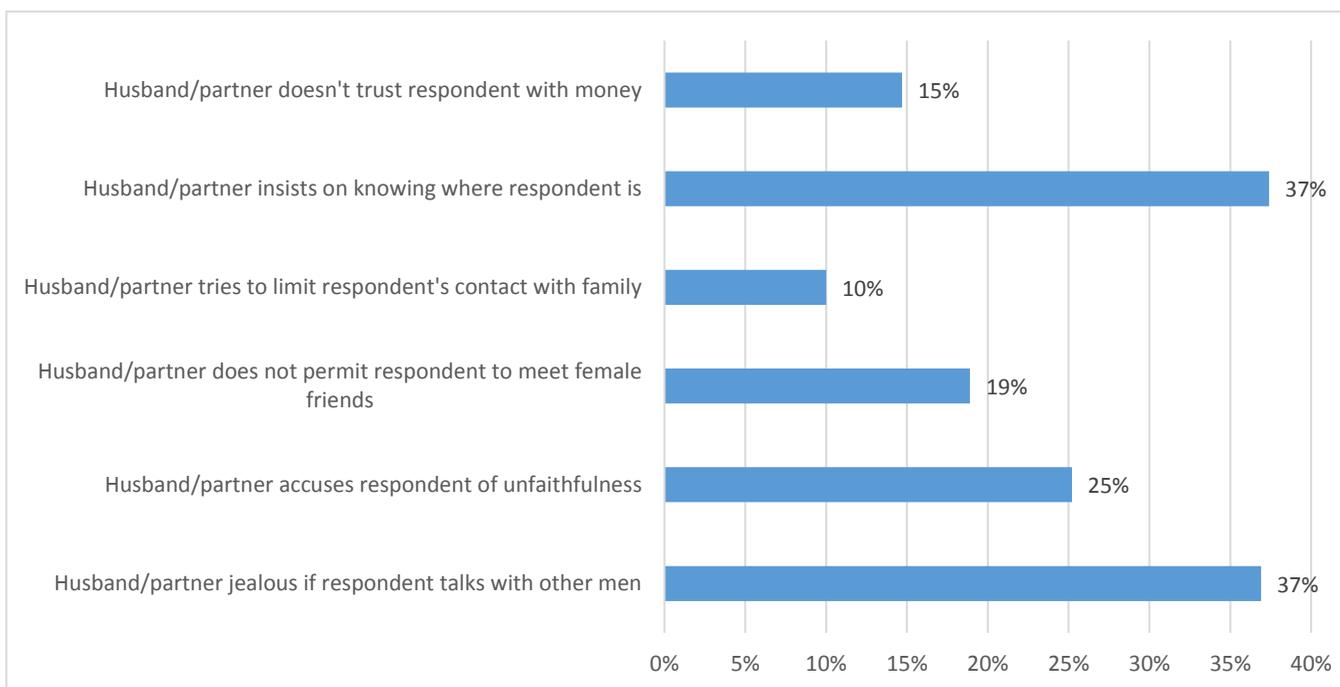

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents who experienced various challenges with their husband /partners

Results of binary logistic regression to establish determinants of marital disruption are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that women from Erongo (OR=0.552, 95%CI 0.357-0.855, p=0.008); Hardap (OR=0.552, 95%CI 0.357-0.960, p=0.033); Kunene (OR=0.305, 95% CI 0.172-0.540, p<0.001); Omaheke (OR=0.407, 95%CI 0.243-0.679, p=0.001); Omusati (OR=0.401, 95%CI 0.188-0.854, p=0.018); and Oshana(OR=0.385, 95%CI 0.178-0.832, p=0.015) were significantly less likely to have marital disruption compared to women from the Otjozonjupa region. Richer women were more likely to experience marital disruption compared to their richest counterparts (OR=1.487, 95% CI 1.055-2.096, p=0.023). Employed women were less likely to experience marital disruption compared to their unemployed counterparts (OR=0.728, 95%CI 0.576-0.919, p=0.007). With regard to cultural factors (measured by the main language spoken at home) women who mainly spoke Oshiwambo less likely to experience marital disruption compared to those who spoke other languages (OR=0.424 95%CI 0.243-0.739, p=0.002). Generational effects were also observed with women from older generations birth cohort 1948-1969 (OR=0.0.215, 95%CI 0.109-0.425, p<0.001); and birth cohort 1970-1979 (OR=0.251, 95%CI 0.123-0.512, p<0.001) less likely to experience marital disruption compared to women in the 1990-1999 birth cohort. Women with two or more lifetime partners were more than twice more likely to experience marital disruption (OR=2.405, 95%CI 1.806-3.203, p<0.001) compared to those with one lifetime partner. The woman's place of residence (p=0.844), educational level (p=0.194), the total children born to the woman (p=0.403) and religion (p=0.653) did not significantly influence marital disruption.

Table 1: Logistic regression results for Marital Instability (* p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)

	P-value	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval for Odds Ratio	
			Lower	Upper
Region				
Zambezi	.140	.541	.240	1.222
Erongo	.008	.552**	.357	.855
Hardap	.033	.594*	.367	.960
!Karas	.052	.646	.416	1.005
Kavango	.335	.761	.437	1.326
Khomas	.152	.726	.469	1.125
Kunene	<0.001	.305***	.172	.540
Ohangwena	.475	.787	.409	1.517

Omaheke	.001	.407**	.243	.679
Omusati	.018	.401*	.188	.854
Oshana	.015	.385*	.178	.832
Oshikoto	.058	.567	.315	1.018
Otjozonjupa (Reference)		1.00		
Place of Residence				
Urban	.844	1.028	.784	1.347
Rural (Reference)		1.00		
Highest educational level				
No formal Education	.603	1.184	.627	2.236
Primary	.111	1.541	.905	2.622
Secondary	.070	1.546	.964	2.480
Higher (Reference)		1.00		
Religion				
Roman Catholic	.127	.746	.513	1.087
Protestant Anglican	.178	.781	.544	1.120
ELRCIN	.086	.731	.512	1.045
Seventh Day Adventist	.516	.832	.478	1.449
No Religion	.535	.742	.289	1.907
Other Religion (Reference)		1.00		
Wealth index				
Poorest	.209	1.378	.836	2.274
Poorer	.205	1.332	.855	2.073
Middle	.569	1.126	.749	1.691
Richer	.023	1.487*	1.055	2.096
Richest		1.00		
Employment Status				
Unemployed	.007	.728*	.576	.919
Employed		1.00		

Main language spoken in home				
Afrikaans	.053	.572	.324	1.008
Damara/ Nama	.164	.681	.397	1.170
English	.429	.708	.301	1.666
Herero	.113	.622	.345	1.119
Kwangali	.050	.586	.344	.999
Lozi	.377	.700	.318	1.543
Oshiwambo	.002	.424**	.243	.739
San	.192	.487	.165	1.436
Other languages		1.00		
Birth cohort				
1948-1969	<0.001	.215***	.109	.425
1970-1979	<0.001	.251***	.123	.512
1980-1989	.067	.572	.315	1.039
1990-1999		1.00		
Total Children born				
No children	.403	.822	.519	1.301
One or more children (Reference)		1.00		
Number of lifetime partners				
More than one life partner	<0.001	2.405***	1.806	3.203
One life Partner (Reference)		1.00		

Results indicated that marital disruption was significantly influenced by age region, socio-economic status (wealth index), employment status, birth cohort and number of lifetime partners. However, level of education, religion, rural/urban place of residence, and the total number of children born to the woman did not significantly influence marital disruption.

4. Discussion

Brickwell (2014) found culture and politics to be significant predictors of marital dissolution. Jennings (2014) suggested that both spouses' perceptions of discord are important for marital outcomes, even in settings where the costs of marital dissolution are high. Attitudes about divorce not only differ significantly between countries, but also

differ significantly between regions within countries. In regions where there is more disapproval of divorce, women experience greater declines in contacts with friends and relatives after divorce, men and women experience greater declines in neighborhood contacts, and men are more likely to end their club memberships (Kalmijn & Uunk (2007).

With regard to employment, Boetcher (2006) found evidence of a weak negative relationship between women's labour-force participation and marital stability in societies that are dominated by egalitarian in comparison to traditional role expectations. Couch et al (2015) found that among those who do not remarry, divorce increases men's long term probability of both self-reported work limitations and federal disability receipt. On the issue of religion, the effect of infidelity on marital disruption was substantially stronger for very religious couples but weaker when the wife was in the labour-force (Whisman et al, 2016). De-Maris (2013) established that approximately 40% of the effect of extra-marital on marital disruption was accounted for by the mediating factors of marital quality, tolerance of divorce and wife's employment. When it comes to the number of lifetime partners, another predictor of union disruption was a woman having two or more sexual partners. The reports of problems due to extra-marital involvement were strongly related to marital disruption, even holding constant the quality of the marriage. Although men were 3 times more likely to be the cheating spouse, there were no differences in the effect of an affair on the marriage according to the gender of the cheater. Wagman et al (2016) established that severe physical Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) was significantly associated with divorce or separation after adjusting for other covariates.

As also found in this study, factors protecting against divorce or separation included an increasing number of co-resident biological children and longer duration of union. According to Mernard (2011) the presence of a child, even a step child, increased the stability of marital unions especially in the more traditional family setting, in which children are usually conceived after the formation of a marital union.

With regard to education, Puur et al (2016) and Matysiak et al (2013) suggested a weakening of the positive educational gradient in marital disruption over time and even to a reversal in the direction of this gradient in some countries. Their findings also showed that the change in educational gradient can be linked to an increase in access to divorce. Their results also suggested that women's empowerment has played an important role in changing educational gradient, while liberalization of divorce laws has not. Peters et al (2014) found that the most vulnerable group after marital disruption appeared to be lower educated women with children, because the increases in private, own-name and public insurance were not large enough compared to the large decrease in dependent coverage. They highlighted that as the US implements federal health reform, it was important to understand the ways in which life-course events, specifically marital disruption, shapes the dynamic patterns of health insurance coverage.

Karraker and Latham (2015) suggested health status as a determinant of marital dissolution in later life via both biological and gendered social pathways. Dahl et al (2015) observed that in Norway, the sickness absence rate increased in the year preceding divorce, peaked in the year of the divorce, and decreased in the following year, but not to the level before the divorce. Whisman et al also associated marital disruption with poor health and all-cause mortality. They highlighted that marital disruption may accelerate cellular aging. Socio-economic disadvantage was also associated with family instability (Martin, 2006). This would be an interesting aspect for further research in Namibia. With regard to generational effects, there were significant differentials in marital disruption among the different birth cohorts and these findings agree with Vignoli & Ferro (2009).

5. **Conclusion**

Results indicated that marital disruption was significantly influenced by region, socio-economic status (wealth index), employment status, birth cohort and number of lifetime partners. However, level of education, religion, rural/urban place of residence, and the total number of children born to the woman did not significantly influence marital disruption. Policy efforts should encourage one lifetime partner in marital relations. Information and education on the negative effects of divorce and separation should be targeted towards the younger generation, employed women and those from vulnerable regions.

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