

Partnership Quality, Conflicts and Intentions to Break up in Russia

The most studies on divorce and union dissolution focus on the characteristics of spouses such as age at marriage, age difference and education difference and other classical factors as the duration of the union, the presence of children, type of union. However, the relationship quality and the frequency of conflicts could influence on the decision to break up union.

Our aim is to analyze how the recorded (during surveys) intentions to break up with the partner influence on the risk of breaking the relationship in the future. It is obvious that the study of such relationships is possible only on the basis of panel surveys, when individuals are interviewed, including on events in their lives, repeatedly.

Data

The analysis is based on the panel data from the Russian Generation and Gender Survey. The panel part of survey gives possibility to follow union status changes from 2004 by 2007 and 2011. Our working sample includes men and women living in 2004 in union (either marriage or cohabitation). We include both initial first union and high order unions. We limited our analyses on unions formed in 1965 and later. The total number of cases included in the analysis is 3162 men and women.

The Russian Generation and Gender Survey contain monthly information about date of co-residentship, marriage, union break-up and divorce. Our event of interest is union break-up. We use the date of actual union dissolution instead of the date of divorce, because the interval between union break-up and divorce in Russia reach several months. The time variable is time in months from 2004 interview. Observations are censored at the date of interview 2011, if there is no event and at the death of partner, when unions end due to this cause.

Variables and definitions

Partnership quality was measured with the following question: «How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner/spouse? Please use this card and tell me the value on the scale» The scale ranges from 0 «not at all satisfied» to 10 «completely satisfied».

Frequency of conflicts was defined using question about disagreements with partner: «Now I am going to read out a list of things that couples may have disagreements about. Within the last 12 months, how often did you and your partner/spouse have disagreement about [household chores]? Please choose answers from this card» The range of conflict issues includes «household chores», «money», «use of leisure time», «sex», «relations with friends», «relations with parents and in-laws», «child-raising issues», «having children» and «drinking alcohol». Answer categories are based on a five-point scale ranging from 1 «never» to 5 «very frequently». Respondents with answer 4 and 5 refers to often conflicting relationship, respondents with answer 1 and 2 refers to rarely conflicting relationship.

The main explanatory variable is the intention to break-up based on questions 4.10. *Even the people who get along well with their partners sometimes wonder whether their marriage or partnership will work. Over the past 12 months, have you thought about breaking up your relationship?* and 4.11. *Do you [singular you] intend to break up with your partner/ spouse during the next 3 years?* The categories are the following: (1) definitely or probably intend to break-up, (2) probably or definitely not intend to break-up, (3) didn't through about it.

Preliminary results

Women think about the quality of their relationship with a partner 2 times often than men. There is no matter how long their marriage-partnership union was formed (Fig.1). At the same time, the less time passed since the beginning of cohabitation with the partner, the more women thought in the last year about the possibility of continuing their relationship with the current partner.

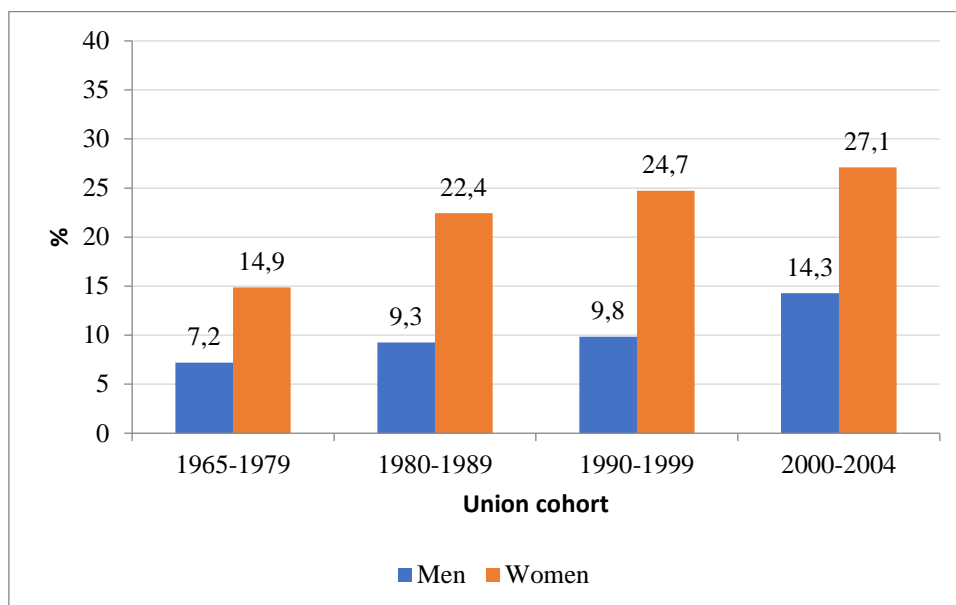


Fig.1 The percentage of men and women which think about current union break up during the last 12 months, by union cohorts.

Source: author's calculations based on GGS-Russia

The intentions to break-up are significantly linked with conflicts according both male and female point of view. Table 1 show that women declare that their have more causes of conflicts with partner and these conflicts are more often that from males' point of view.

Table 1. The prevalence of frequent and occasional conflicts and the percentage of thinking about union break up by total number of causes of conflicts and sex

	Men		Women	
	Prevalence of conflicts	Percentage who think about break-up	Prevalence of conflicts	Percentage who think about break-up
Number of frequent causes of conflicts				
0-1	90,9	7,8	52,9	13,7
2-4	8,1	25,5	35,2	51,9
5 and more	1,0	25,0	11,9	81,8
Number of frequent and occasional causes of conflicts				
0-1	81,8	5,5	42,1	7,9
2-4	15,9	11,7	40,7	25,3
5 and more	2,3	20,3	17,2	44,8

Source: author's calculations based on GGS-Russia

Table 2 contains regression results which sheds light on how intentions to break up are realized. Our regression results reveal that women which definitely or probably want to break-up their current union do it 3,6 times more often than women who didn't even think about breaking up.

However, women which think about break up but had no firm intentions, have 1,8 higher risk of union dissolution. For men the intention to break up union has no impact on risk of union dissolution.

Table 1. Preliminary regression analysis results

	Men		Women	
Intention to break-up				
Definetely or probably yes	2,386 *		3,441	***
Definitely or probably no	1,364		1,775	***
Didn't through about it	(ref.)		(ref.)	
Union order				
First union	(ref.)		(ref.)	
High order union	0,493 *		0,906	
Place of residence				
Urban	2,318 ***		1,700	***
Rural	(ref.)		(ref.)	
Number of common children with partner				
No children	1,535		3,090	**
1	2,446		2,352	
2	1,410		1,708	
3 or more	(ref.)		(ref.)	
Type of union				
Direct marriage	(ref.)		(ref.)	
Marriage after cohabitation	2,306 ***		0,920	
Cohabitation	3,416 ***		1,360	
Union cohort				
1965-1979	(ref.)		(ref.)	
1980-1989	3,915 **		2,641	***
1990-1999	6,120 ***		5,622	***
2000-2004	8,518 ***		7,932	***

Source: Russian GGS; author's calculations; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

The risk of union dissolution is related to the place of residence. Both women and men living in urban areas more often break-up current union.

Our analysis confirms the results of prior studies about the effect of duration of union. Unions are expected to break up more often in younger cohorts. Both among men and women the risk of union dissolution increases from longer to shorter duration.

The risk of union dissolution among cohabiting men is 3,5 times higher in comparison this directly married men. The cohabitation prior marriage makes marriage for men less stable. The results of previous studies about less stability of cohabiting union among women have not been confirmed in case of declared intentions to break up union.

The absence of common children triples the risk of women to go out of relationships. The presence of biological children certainly prevents the union dissolution. However, for men the number of common children with partner plays no role.

The second or high order unions are easily breaking-up by men than first unions. But union order and previous experience of repartnering doesn't matter for women.

To summarize, women, think about the possibility of ending current relations more often than men, and more often express certainty of intentions to break up. Later, women realize their intentions - break relations with the partner. It is logical to assume that the requirements for the quality of relations with a partner in women are higher than in men. The dissatisfaction about the mismatch of expectations is expressed in a more defined and open form, which, after all, is reflected in behavioral practices - in the high risk of breakdown of relations.