Job Turnover and Divorce

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Abstract

Inspired by Pugh (2015), this paper explores the connection between work and couple stability, using a new combination of data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS). I test the association between job turnover, a contextual variable, and divorce at the individual level. Results show that people who work in jobs with high turnover rates – that is, jobs which many people are no longer working in one year later – are also more likely to divorce. One possible explanation is that people exposed to lower levels of commitment from employers, and employees, exhibit lower levels of commitment to their own marriages

A replication package including Stata code, raw data, and codebooks used for this analysis is available in the OSF project associated with this paper, at: osf.io/h68b5. DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/H68B5.

Introduction

In *The Tumbleweed Society*, Pugh (2015) explores the relationship between commitments at work – between employers and employees – and those at home, between partners. She finds no simple relationship such that, for example, people who feel their employers owe them nothing also have low commitment to their spouses. Rather, there is a complex web of commitments, and views of what constitutes an honorable level of commitment in different arenas. This paper is inspired by that discussion, and explores one possible connection between work and couple stability, using a new combination of data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS).

In a previous paper I analyzed predictors of divorce using data from the ACS, to see whether economic indicators associated with the Great Recession predicted the odds of divorce (Cohen 2014). Because of data limitations, I used state-level indicators of unemployment and foreclosure rates to test for economic associations. Because the ACS is cross-sectional, and divorce is often associated with job instability, I could not use individual-level unemployment to predict individual-divorce, as others have done (see review in Cohen 2014). Further, the ACS does not include any information about former spouses who are no longer living with divorced individuals, so spousal unemployment was not available either.

Rather than examine the association between individual job change and divorce, this paper tests the association between turnover at the job level and divorce at the individual level. It asks, do people who work in jobs that people are likely to leave themselves more likely to divorce? The answer – which is yes – suggests possible avenues for further study of the relationship between commitments and stressors in the arenas of paid work and family stability. Job here turnover is a contextual variable. Working in a job people are likely to leave may simply mean people are exposed to involuntary job changes, which is a source of stress. However, it may also mean people work in an environment with low levels of commitment between employers and employees. This analysis can't differentiate potential stressors

versus commitment effects, or identify the nature (and direction) of commitments expressed or deployed at work or within the family. But it may provide motivation for future research.

Do job turnover and divorce run together?

Because individual (or spousal) job turnover and employment history are not available in the ACS, I use the March CPS, obtained from IPUMS (Flood et al. 2015), to calculate job turnover rates for simulated jobs, identified as detailed occupation-by-industry cells (Cohen and Huffman 2003). Although these are not jobs in the sense of specific workplaces, they provide much greater detail in work context than either occupation or industry alone, allowing differentiation, for example, between janitors in manufacturing establishments versus those in government offices, which are often substantially different contexts.

Turnover is identified by individuals whose current occupation and industry combination (as of March) does not match their primary occupation and industry for the previous calendar year, which is identified by a separate question (but using the same occupation and industry coding schemes). To reduce short-term transience, this calculation is limited to people who worked at least 20 weeks in the previous year, and more than 20 hours per week. Using the combined samples from the 2014-2016 CPS files, and restricting the sample to previous-year job cells with at least 25 respondents, I end up with 927 job cells. Note that, because the cells are national rather than workplace-specific, the size cutoff does not restrict the analysis to people working in large workplaces, but rather to common occupation-industry combinations. The job cells in the analysis include 68 percent of the eligible workers in the three years of CPS data.

For descriptive purposes, Table 1 shows the occupation and industry cells with the lowest and highest rates of job turnover from among those with sample sizes of 100 or more. Jobs with low turnover are disproportionately in the public sector and construction, and male-dominated (except schoolteachers); they are middle class and working class jobs. The high-turnover jobs, on the other hand, are in service industries (except light truck drivers) and are more female-dominated (Cohen 2013). By this simple

definition, high-turnover jobs appear similar to precarious jobs as described by Kalleberg (2013) and others.

Table 1. Jobs with lowest and highest rates of annual turnover, 2014-2016

	<i>Occ</i>	<i>Ind</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Turnover</i>
<i>Lowest</i>						
	3850	9470	908	Police officers	Justice, public order, safety	.015
	3740	9470	394	Firefighters	Justice, public order, safety	.022
	6220	0770	136	Brick masons	Construction	.036
	2310	7860	4147	Elementary/middle teachers	Elementary/secondary schools	.047
	6330	0770	199	Drywall installers	Construction	.054
	6230	0770	1289	Carpenters	Construction	.055
	3800	9470	500	Bailiffs and correction officers	Justice, public order, safety	.059
	2100	7270	891	Lawyers	Legal services	.061
	2015	9470	138	Probation officers	Justice, public order, safety	.063
<i>Highest</i>						
	4040	8690	118	Bartenders	Drinking places	.287
	4720	5380	195	Cashiers	Department/discount stores	.289
	9130	0770	198	Light truck drivers	Construction	.291
	3255	8270	262	Registered nurses	Nursing care facilities	.294
	4760	5170	163	Retail salespeople	Clothing stores	.299
	5700	7270	139	Secretaries	Legal services	.300
	4700	5275	143	Retail supervisors	Sporting goods, camera, hobby/toy stores	.304
	4760	5380	302	Retail salespeople	Department/discount stores	.333
	4700	5090	147	Retail supervisors	Gas stations	.335
	4760	4770	139	Retail salespeople	Furniture/furnishing stores	.343

Note: Jobs with N=100+ in March Current Population Surveys

Although the analysis that follows is limited to the CPS years 2014-2016 and the 2015 ACS, for context Figure 1 shows the percentage of workers who changed jobs each year, as defined above, from 1990 through 2016. Note that job changing, which is only identified for employed people, fell during the previous two recessions – especially the Great Recession that began in 2008 – perhaps because people who lost jobs would in better times have cycled into a different job instead of being unemployed. In the last two years job changing has been at relatively high levels (although note that CPS instituted a new industry coding scheme in 2014, with unknown effects on this measure). In any event, this phenomenon has not shown dramatic changes in prevalence for the past several decades.

Figure 1. Percentage of workers (20+ weeks, >20 hours per week) whose jobs (occupation-by-industry cells) in March differed from their primary job in the previous calendar year.

Using the occupation industry codes from the CPS and ACS, which match for the years under study, I attach the job turnover rates from the 2014-2016 CPS data to individuals in the 2015 ACS (Ruggles et al. 2015). The analysis then uses the same modeling strategy at that used in Cohen (2014). Using the marital events variables in the ACS (Cohen 2015), I combine people, age 18-64, who are currently married (excluding those who got married in the previous year) and those who have been divorced in the previous year, and model the odds that individuals are in the divorced group. In this paper I essentially add the job turnover measure to the basic analysis in Cohen (2014, Table 3) (the covariates used here are the same except that I added one category to the education variable).

One advantage of the ACS data structure is that the occupation and industry questions refer to the “current or most recent job,” so that people who are not employed at the time of the survey still have job

characteristics recorded. Although that has the downside of introducing information from jobs in the distant past for some respondents, it has the benefit of including relevant job information for people who may have just quit (or lost) jobs as part of the constellation of events involved in their divorce (for example, someone who divorces, moves to a new area, and commences a job search). If job characteristics have an effect on the odds of divorce, this information clearly is important. The ACS sample size is 581,891, 1.7 percent of whom reported having divorced in the previous year.

Results from two multivariate regression analyses are presented in Table 2. The first model predicts the turnover rate in the ACS respondents' job, using OLS regression. It shows that, *ceteris paribus*, turnover rates are higher in the jobs held by women, younger people (the inflection point is at age 42), people married more recently, those married few times, those with less than a BA degree, Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and immigrants. Thus, job turnover shows patterns largely similar to labor market advantage generally.

Most importantly for this paper, divorce is more likely for those who most recent job had a higher turnover rate, as defined here. In a reduced model (not shown), with just age and sex, the logistic coefficient on job turnover was 1.39; the addition of the covariates in Table 2 reduced that effect by 39 percent, to .84, as shown in the second model. Beyond that, job turnover is predicted by some of the same characteristics as those associated with increased odds of divorce. Divorce odds are lower after age 25, with additional years of marriage, with a BA degree, and for Whites. However, divorce is less common for Hispanics and immigrants. (The higher divorce rates for women in the ACS are not well understood; this is a self-reported measure, not a count of administrative events.)

Table 2. Regression coefficients for job turnover and divorce on individual variables

	<i>Job turnover (OLS)</i>	<i>Divorce (logit)</i>
Job turnover	--	0.843 [*] [3.64]
Female	0.0143 [*] [55.86]	0.127 [*] [4.03]
Age	-0.00183 [*] [-18.77]	0.0393 [*] [3.64]
Age-squared	0.0000218 [*] [20.27]	-0.000783 [*] [-6.45]
<i>Marital history</i>		
Years married	-0.000144 [*] [-7.67]	-0.00856 [*] [-4.00]
Married once	--	--
Married twice	0.00160 [*] [4.19]	0.443 [*] [11.62]
Married 3+ times	0.00265 [*] [3.78]	0.763 [*] [11.78]
<i>Education</i>		
Less than high school	--	--
High school	0.00948 [*] [18.87]	0.0374 [0.71]
Some college	0.00338 [*] [6.43]	-0.00128 [-0.03]
BA or higher	-0.0247 [*] [-49.35]	-0.372 [*] [-6.53]
<i>Race/ethnicity</i>		
Black	0.00925 [*] [18.30]	0.285 [*] [6.53]
American Indian	0.00147 [1.26]	0.307 [*] [3.34]
Asian	0.0119 [*] [20.72]	-0.208 [-2.23]
Pacific Islander	0.00229 [0.91]	0.228 [1.06]
Hispanic	-0.00445 [*] [-9.95]	-0.0562 [-1.12]
Foreign-born	0.00302 [*] [7.24]	-0.312 [*] [-5.56]
Constant	0.192 [*] [88.18]	-4.102 [*] [-16.47]
Observations	581,891	581,891
Adjusted R^2	0.048	

t statistics in brackets; * $p < 0.005$; divorce model has robust standard errors.

To illustrate the relationship between job turnover and the probability of divorce, Figure 2 shows the average predicted probability of divorce (from the second model in Table 2) for each of the jobs represented, with markers scaled according to sample size and a regression line similarly weighted. Below 20 percent job turnover, people are generally predicted to have divorce rates less than 2 percent per year, with predicted rates rising to 2.5 percent at high turnover rates (40 percent).

Figure 2. Average predicted probability of divorce within jobs (from logistic model in Table 2), by turnover rate. Markers are scaled according to sample size, and the linear regression line shown is weighted by sample size.

Conclusion

People who work in jobs with high turnover rates – that is, jobs which many people are no longer working in one year later – are also more likely to divorce. A reading of this inspired by Pugh's (2015)

analysis might be that people exposed to lower levels of commitment from employers, and employees, exhibit lower levels of commitment to their own marriages. Another, noncompeting explanation would be that the stress or hardship associated with high rates of job turnover contributes to difficulties within marriage. Alternatively, the turnover variable may simply be statistically capturing other aspects of job quality that affect the risk of divorce, or there are individual qualities by which people select into both jobs with high turnover and marriages likely to end in divorce. This is a preliminary analysis, intended to raise questions and offer some avenues for analyzing these questions in the future.

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