

**EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF MARITAL STATUS TRANSITIONS ON
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION: DOES
AGE MATTER?**

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Examining the impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing and social participation: Does age matter?

Abstract

This thesis reports an empirical study of the psychological and social consequences of heterosexual marital status change. The main purpose of this research is to provide a coherent and convincing account of the experience of marital status change across the life course. Examining changes in psychological health and social participation, this study employs a multi-method approach: secondary panel survey data from the BHPS provides an insight into changes in psychological wellbeing over time ($N=3446$); a questionnaire study considers the associations between marital status, psychological wellbeing and social support ($N=510$); and in-depth interviews with 82 men and women who have entered into a cohabiting ($N=9$) or married ($N=29$) relationship, or experienced a transition out of marriage through widowhood ($N=23$), or divorce ($N=21$) are used to explore the impact of a change in marital status on social participation.

The main findings indicate that marital status transitions have consequences for psychological health and social participation. The never married, remarried and those in cohabiting or Living Apart Together relationships attain similar levels of psychological health to the continuously married. Transitions out of marriage, on the other hand, have a significant negative impact on psychological wellbeing and perceived social support emerges as a significant mediator of this relationship between marital status and psychological health. Entry into cohabitation and marriage are generally viewed as positive life events, while widowhood and divorce are associated with a considerable disruption to the social network, exchange of social support and sense of identity. Transitions out of marriage force people to reconstruct their social and personal identity and this process of identity change emerges as both a cause of and consequence of changes in social participation. Further, there are specific issues that older widowed people tend to experience as a consequence of increasing age. These include physical limitations, financial status, and smaller social networks prior to marital status change. Unique challenges for the younger widowed include the absence of a peer group and a wider range of practical responsibilities, including young children and ageing parents. In this study, there is no

evidence that age plays a significant role in the impact of cohabitation, marriage or divorce.

Together, the findings suggest that the lowered levels of psychological health experienced by the widowed and divorced result from the considerable disruption of a transition out of marriage to the social network, exchange of social support and identity, and highlight the differential impact of widowhood across the life course. Support services should, therefore, work with the aim of minimising the negative social outcomes of transitions out of marriage, including separation, divorce and widowhood.

Declaration

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of any other application for degree or qualification at this or any other University or institute of learning.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

Chapter 1

Overview of the thesis

1.1 Introduction

This thesis presents the findings of a research study that examines the impact of heterosexual marital status change on psychological wellbeing and social participation. Borrowing from Utz, Carr, Nesse and Wortman's (2002) definition, social participation in this thesis can be viewed as a multidimensional construct incorporating the exchange of social support and both formal (e.g. religious participation, meeting attendance and volunteer obligations) and informal (e.g. telephone contact and socialising with other people) social engagement with members of the social network. The overall aim of this thesis is to consider the influence of age on the impact of marital status transition. A multi-method approach is taken in this research. First, a quantitative analysis of secondary longitudinal panel survey data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) investigates the impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing over a 9 year period. Second, a cross-sectional questionnaire design is employed to investigate the contribution of marital status and perceived social support to psychological wellbeing. Regression analyses are undertaken as well as moderation and mediation analyses to assess the interrelations between the variables. Finally, using qualitative semi-structured interviews with 82 adults, this thesis explores the changes in social and familial relationships, social support, social engagement and psychological wellbeing associated with marital status transitions. Throughout the research, the influence of age and timing of marital status change is considered. The thesis is divided into four parts, reflecting the different elements. Research methodologies relevant to each part are described in the relevant chapters.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

1.2.1 Part one: Introduction The thesis begins by presenting the main background literature and theoretical framework, before introducing the aims of this research (**Chapter 2**).

1.2.2 Part two: Quantitative studies The second part of the thesis presents three quantitative results chapters that explore the relationship between marital status and

psychological wellbeing, as well as considering the role of social support in the relationship between marital status and psychological health. Marital status and marital status change have been linked to psychological health and in **Chapter 3** longitudinal U.K. panel survey data from the BHPS is used to evaluate the impact of a change in marital status on psychological wellbeing over a 9 year period where marital status transition is the midpoint. **Chapter 4** presents the results of a cross-sectional questionnaire study investigating the role of marital status and social support on psychological wellbeing. The data from the questionnaire is analysed using a multiple regression analysis where psychological wellbeing is the dependent variable. The aim of this study is to investigate the contribution of social support to psychological health and consider how age and gender interact with marital status to impact on psychological wellbeing. Building on Chapter 4's findings, **Chapter 5** uses moderation and mediation analyses to evaluate the role of social support in the association between marital status and psychological wellbeing.

1.2.3 Part three: Qualitative interviews The third part of the thesis explains the methodology used in the qualitative interviews and explores the findings generated from semi-structured qualitative interviews with 82 cohabiting, married, widowed and separated or divorced men and women. **Chapter 6** introduces the qualitative methodology employed in this research. The chapter outlines the structure of the qualitative interview itself, introduces the method of analysis employed, and demonstrates how the qualitative data was analysed using and adapting the method of grounded theory for the needs of the researcher and the data. **Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10** explore the themes that emerged from the qualitative data. Essentially, transitions into new cohabiting or married relationships involve the growth of the focal social network. In contrast, transitions out of marriage through widowhood and divorce are associated with shrinkage of the focal social network through the gain or loss of a spouse. Moreover, changes in the focal network result in changes in the wider social network. The rich data provides an insight into the experience of marital status transitions, and specifically the impact that a change in marital status has on the social network (**Chapter 7**) and how this, in turn, affects social support (**Chapter 8**), social engagement (**Chapter 9**) and a person's sense of collective and private identity (**Chapter 10**). The findings are discussed in light of previous research examining changes in social relationships and social support following marital status change. These qualitative chapters also consider the role of age and timing of marital status transitions, as well as

the impact that marital quality, gender, social class and parenting status have on the experience of marital status change.

1.2.3 Part four: Discussion and conclusions. The thesis ends with a final discussion of the research study. **Chapter 11** pulls together findings from the quantitative and qualitative chapters and synthesises the key issues from the research study. The chapter provides a theoretical exploration of the contribution to knowledge that this research provides. The implications of this thesis are then discussed. A final conclusion draws this chapter to a close.

Chapter 2

The impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing and social participation: A review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the relevant literature and provides an overview of the main theoretical framework in which this research lies. It outlines the broad themes that underpin this thesis, namely marital status differences in psychological health, theoretical foundations for these differences in psychological health, social correlates of marital status, and the role of age and timing. Further relevant literature will be discussed throughout the thesis.

Marriage has become an increasingly important topic in academic and policy research, and the literature demonstrates that being married provides a wide range of economic, social and health related benefits (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Traditionally, the majority of adults were married. However, the distribution of people according to marital status in the U.K. has changed (Smallwood & Wilson, 2007), with a higher prevalence of unmarried cohabitation, an increased age at first marriage and a growing proportion of older divorced people (Smallwood & Wilson, 2007; Wilson, 2009). Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures in 2005 revealed a marked increase in the number of unmarried individuals in England and Wales, and marriage rates were identified as the lowest rates since they were first calculated in 1982. In addition, there was a corresponding decline in the number of adults who chose to marry and age at first marriage had risen by approximately 3 years between 1995 and 2005, with an average age of 36.2 years for men and 33.6 years for women (Smallwood & Wilson, 2007). Alongside the decline in marriage rates, there has also been a rise in the number of divorces (Haskey, 1999; Smallwood & Wilson, 2007). Haskey suggested that 2 in every 5 married couples would experience divorce. Moreover, age at divorce for both men and women has increased over the last 2 decades (Haskey, 1999). The projected increase in the proportion of older people who are divorced has risen from 1% in 1971 to 5% in 2001, and this is projected to reach over 13% by 2021 (Summerfield & Babb, 2004). Among women aged 65 to 74, there are projected to be almost as many divorcees as widows by 2021. Beside the rise in divorce, there has also been an increasing trend for remarriage (Fox & Pearce, 2000), and divorced men have been found to be more likely to remarry compared to divorced women (Haskey, 1999).

Similar demographic patterns are found in E.U. and U.S. (United Nations, 2005). These recent social trends highlight the importance of gaining a clear understanding of the impact of marital status change.

2.2 Marital status and psychological health

Marital status is an important predictor of physical and psychological health, even when variables such as age and financial status are controlled for (Diener, Gohm, Suh & Oishi, 2000; Waite & Gallagher, 2000) and despite changing demographics, Mastekaasa (1993) demonstrated that the relationship between marital status and health does not seem to be weakening over time. The married are consistently found to enjoy better health compared to their unmarried counterparts across a range of outcome measures including psychological wellbeing (Gove, Hughes & Style, 1983; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977; Peiró, 2006; Strohschein, McDonough, Monette & Shao, 2005), physical health problems and health service use (Bennett, 2006; Iwashyna & Christakis, 2003; Waite, 1995), health behaviours, including alcohol consumption, smoking, diet and exercise (Curran, Muthen & Harford, 1998; Duncan, Wilkerson & England, 2006), and life expectancy (Ebrahim, Wannamethee, McCallum, Walker & Shaper, 1995; Lillard & Waite, 1995; Murray, 2000; Ross, Mirowsky & Goldsteen, 1990).

Marital status transitions are stressful. In a classic article on life events, Holmes and Rahe (1967) listed widowhood and divorce as the two most stressful events in adulthood. Getting married was ranked 7th out of 43. Several longitudinal studies have found that the transition into a married relationship is associated with positive changes in psychological health while marital separation, divorce and widowhood have been found to cause increased psychological distress (Hewitt, Turrell & Giskes, 2010; Lamb, Lee & DeMaris, 2003; Lee & Gramotnev, 2007; Lillard & Waite, 1995; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Mastekaasa, 1994a; 1994b; Simon, 2002; Strohschein et al., 2005; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Divorce and widowhood are still widely accepted as difficult transitions with important negative implications for psychological health (Gähler, 2006; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Marks, 1996; Zisook & Shuchter, 1991) and formerly married people have been found to report lower levels of psychological health than never married people (Fengler, Danigelis & Grams, 1982; Gove et al., 1983; Marks, 1996; Overbeek et al., 2006; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977;

Pienta, Haywayrd & Jenkins, 2000; Verbrugge, 1979). The sections that follow present relevant research for each marital status group.

2.2.1 Married Married adults are most often used as the comparison group in marital status research (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Despite recent demographic changes, being married can be considered the normative status (Bennett, 2006; Cramer, 1993) and the evidence of a positive effect of marriage on health outcomes is compelling (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Entry into first marriage is associated with increases in psychological wellbeing (French & Williams, 2007; Kim & McKenry, 2002; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Simon, 2002), with some suggestion that the benefits may be higher for those who do not cohabit before marriage (Lamb et al., 2003). Research indicates that, across a number of measures of psychological wellbeing including psychological distress, depressive symptoms and life satisfaction, the married report higher levels of health than do individuals who are never married, divorced or widowed (Gove et al., 1983; Lee, Seccombe & Shehan, 1991; Marks, 1996; Verbrugge, 1979; Waite, 1995). In a review of over 130 studies, Coombs (1991) found that married men and women were consistently happier and less stressed than the unmarried. A longitudinal 10 year U.S. survey of adults showed that marital status was one of the most important predictors of happiness, with the married more likely to report being happy compared to the divorced, widowed and never married (Davis, 1984). The psychological wellbeing of the married may vary by marital duration, where those married for a long time report lower levels of happiness compared to the recently married (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis & Diener, 2003) and also by marital quality, where people with high levels of marital satisfaction experience the smallest decline in psychological wellbeing over time (Dush, Taylot & Kroeger, 2008; Proulx, Helms & Buehler, 2007; Ross, 1995; Wu & Hart, 2002). In a longitudinal study of the psychological health benefits of marriage, Williams (2003) found that married individuals who report low levels of marital quality report higher levels of psychological distress than their continually unmarried counterparts. Similarly, St. John and Montgomery (2009) found that partner satisfaction was associated with depressive symptoms where men and women who were dissatisfied with their partner had higher rates of depressive symptoms.

2.2.2 Widowed Widowhood is a stressful transition and is associated with a decline in physical and psychological health (Prigerson, Maciejewski & Rosenheck, 1999; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987; Wilcox et al., 2003). Age at widowhood has increased by almost seven years since the 1970's, from a median age of around 65 to 72 (Hirst & Corden, 2010). Further,

women are more likely than men to be widowed, which may be explained by higher life expectancy for women, women tending to marry older men and women remarrying after bereavement less frequently than men (Stroebe, Stroebe & Schut, 2001). Statistics from 2001 revealed that 7 men out of 10 aged 65 and over were married compared to 5 out of 10 women. Among those aged 85 and over, while 44% of men were still married, nearly 80% of women were widowed (Smith, Tomassini, Smallwood & Hawkins, 2005). Thus, men do not expect to be widowers as much as women expect to be widows (Martin-Matthews, 1991). In line with demographic trends, much of the literature on widowhood focuses on widows. Research demonstrates that the widowed experience lower levels of psychological wellbeing (Hughes & Waite, 2009; Umberson, Wortman & Kessler, 1992), have elevated levels of loneliness (Dugan & Kivett, 1994) and report higher levels of mood and anxiety disorders (Onrust & Cuijpers, 2006; Zisook, Schneider & Schuchter, 1990). Carr et al. (2000) found that level of dependency on the spouse during the marriage is positively associated with reported anxiety in widowhood. There is evidence to suggest that the negative impact of becoming widowed on psychological health may recover over time (Lopata, 1996; Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 1993; Wilcox et al., 2003), and situational variables surrounding the death can impact this recovery following bereavement (Carr, House, Wortman, Nesse & Kessler, 2001; Sanders, 1989; Zisook et al., 1990). For example, when the likelihood of widowhood is very small, as is usually the case for young widows, forewarning of spousal death is important (Balkwell, 1981). Longer terminal illnesses may allow the surviving spouse to prepare for the death and anticipatory grieving may take place (Donnelly, Field & Horowitz, 2001; Gerber, 1974) and people who provided care for their spouse may experience lower levels of depression following widowhood compared to those who were not caregivers (Wells & Kendig, 1997). In sudden death situations, on the other hand, there is usually no opportunity to discuss impending death with the spouse and is, therefore, often associated with more severe grief reactions (Balkwell, 1981; Burton, Haley & Small, 2006; Osterweis, Solomon & Green, 1984; Parkes, 1975).

2.2.3 Divorced Recent demographic trends highlight an increase in the number of divorces and in the age at divorce, with the proportion of older people who are divorced projected to reach over 13% by 2011 (Haskey, 1999; Smallwood & Wilson, 2007; Summerfield & Babb, 2004). Divorce has been found to have a “specific and long-term impact” on health (Richards, Hardy & Wadsworth, 1997: p1121) and existing literature demonstrates that divorced individuals score lower than their married counterparts on a variety of indicators of physical and psychological health (Amato, 2000; Doherty-Su &

Needle, 1989; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger & Elder, 2006; Tcheng-Laroche & Price, 1983; Warheit, Holzer, Bell & Arey, 1976). Research consistently finds that marital separation and divorce have a negative impact on psychological wellbeing (Booth & Amato, 1991; Lucas, 2005; Marks, 1996; Mastekaasa, 1992; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Marital dissolution has been found to bring about increased anxiety and depression, initiate a rise in psychological stress levels, cause an elevated risk for mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders, and is associated with a higher use of mental health services (Chatav & Whisman, 2007; Overbeek et al., 2006; Prigerson et al., 1999; Richards et al., 1997; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Remarriage following divorce may increase psychological wellbeing (Sharpiro, 1996), but not necessarily to the level of people who have never experienced divorce (Hughes & Waite, 2009). As with widowhood, situational variables can affect levels of psychological health following marital dissolution. For example, Kalmijn and Monden (2006) found that divorce following an unsatisfactory or unfair marriage was associated with smaller increases in depression compared to a divorce following a less unsatisfactory or less unfair marriage. Wang and Amato (2000) found that adjustment to divorce was positively associated with income, dating someone steadily, remarriage, having favourable attitudes toward marital dissolution prior to divorce, and being the person who initiated the divorce. The negative effects of divorce may be greatest for those with young children in the home at time of divorce, especially among women (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Overall, shorter marital durations, lower reliance on the former spouse, and being the divorce initiator are associated with better divorce adjustment (Amato, 2000; Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Pettit & Bloom, 1994; Sakraida, 2008).

In addition to the negative impact of marital dissolution, divorce can also be viewed, for some, as a positive transition with beneficial outcomes. For example, Acock and Demo (1994) found that divorced mothers reported improvements in career opportunities, social lives and general happiness following divorce (see also Chiriboga & Catron, 1991). Similarly, Gardener and Oswald (2006) found that divorce might allow for longer-term psychological benefits, with self-reported distress levels falling significantly in the years following divorce. Adopting a qualitative research approach, Reissmann (1990) found that divorce was associated with personal growth for both men and women, with women reporting greater self-confidence and sense of control and men reported more interpersonal skills following divorce.

2.2.4 Never married As a result of the increasing tendency of adults to postpone marriage (Summerfield & Babb, 2004), the proportion of married to never married adults is increasing. Figures from England and Wales suggest that in the decade since 1998, the mean age at first marriage for men and women has increased by approximately 3 years to 32.1 years of age for men and 29.9 years of age for women. In addition, the proportion of people who are single has increased from 40% in 1979 to 47% in 2009 (ONS, 2010). A similar pattern can be seen in the U.S. (Witwer, 1993). Compared to married adults, never married adults have poorer levels of physical health and increased risk of mortality (Ebrahim et al., 1995; Hu & Goldman, 1990). Moreover, the impact of being never married varies by age. For example, Hu and Goldman (1990) found that excess mortality in the never married group reached peak values in the age groups of 25 to 34 and 35 to 44.

However, the self-rated health of the never-married has improved over the past 3 decades, with the suggestion of a narrowing gap in the probability of reporting good health between never married and married (Glenn & Weaver, 1988; Liu & Umberson, 2008). This may be a reflection of the changes in why people remain never married, moving from a selection effect to personal choice, as well as the reduced stigma attached to being never married. In terms of the impact of being never married on psychological health, findings are limited as never-married adults are often considered in marital status research as 'single' and merged with divorced and widowed groups (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Where studies have considered the never married as a distinct group, the never married have been found to report lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the married (Mastekaasa, 1995; Soons & Liefbroer, 2008; Waite, 1995; Ward, 1979). Access to personal and social resources are likely to affect the level of difference in psychological health between the never married and other marital status groups (Bookwala & Fekete, 2009; Soons & Liefbroer, 2008). For example, Bookwala and Fekete (2009) found that although the never married reported lower levels of psychological wellbeing, psychological resources, including personal mastery and self-sufficiency, emerged as protective resources for the never married group. Considering loneliness in an older never married group, Pinquart (2003) concluded that better functional status was associated with lower levels of loneliness. Parental status may also be important and Koropecyki-Cox (1998) found that the psychological wellbeing of the childless never married was comparable to their married peers. Psychological health outcomes for the never married may also vary as a consequence of age (Barrett, 1999; Mastekaasa, 1995). Mastekaasa found the psychological health advantage of marriage increases until about 40 years of age, then

declines. Ward (1979) asserted that the younger never married found life more exciting than did older never married adults (50+). He attributed the relative unhappiness of the older never married to the process of ageing, which lessens the viability of the single lifestyle, and also to the lower levels of social support available to older never married people.

2.2.5 Cohabiting Cohabitation has become a more common feature of the adult life course. Recent demographic trends suggest that younger never married adults are more likely to form a cohabiting relationship as an alternative or precursor to marriage. Population estimates in 2007 for England and Wales indicate that there has been an increase in the number of cohabiters from 2.7 million in 1992 to 4.5 million over a 15 year period, representing a 4% increase in the population over 16 years of age, and suggest that the largest increases in the proportion of never married, cohabiting adults is in those aged over 30 (Wilson, 2009). However, do cohabiters attain the same health benefits as married individuals? Whilst there may be similarities to married relationships, including shared home environment, increased social integration and sexual intimacy, there are important potential differences between cohabiters and the currently married such as differences in the levels of partner support, commitment and inheritance rights (Rindfuss & Vanden-Heuvel, 1990). Cohabiting men and women report lower levels of psychological wellbeing than the married, primarily due to comparatively higher relationship instability, but higher levels than those who are not in a relationship (Brown, 2000; Brown, Roebuck Bulanda & Lee, 2005; Kim & McKenry, 2002; Kurdek, 1991; Marcussen, 2005; Nock, 1995). Compared to entry into a married relationship, Musick and Bumpass (2006) found that entering a cohabitating relationship was associated with smaller health improvements. It is likely that cohabitation has different consequences for psychological wellbeing in different countries, with smaller gaps where cohabitation is more accepted and more prevalent (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009). Stack and Eshleman (1998) assessed the relationship between happiness and marital status across 16 nations. They found that cohabiters reported a higher level of happiness than single persons, but a lower level of happiness compared to currently married. Existing research has noted that compared to the married, cohabiters typically report a lower relationship quality (Brown, 2000) and have a lower socio-economic status (Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel, 1990), which may go some way to explaining differences in psychological health. Cohabitation following a transition out of marriage through widowhood and divorce is common (de Jong-Gierveld, 2004) and the psychological wellbeing of formerly married cohabiters may differ from never married cohabiters. In a

Norwegian study, Hansen, Moum and Sharpio (2007) considered the influence of marital history and found that never married cohabiters, but not formerly married cohabiters, reported lower levels of wellbeing compared with the married. They concluded that psychological wellbeing was related to the meaning of cohabitation and the views of marriage. Similarly, Clark, Diener, Georgellis, and Lucas (2008) suggest that cohabiting people with the intention to marry may have higher levels of psychological wellbeing and may be happier than those without plans to marry. Research indicates that cohabiting people experience lower relationship quality compared to the married (Nock, 1995), particularly if they do not intend to get married (Brown & Booth, 1996). Relationship quality, in turn, is associated with psychological health (Brown, 2000; Kim & McKenry, 2002). In line with this view, Horwitz and White (1998) noted that higher levels of psychological wellbeing in married people over cohabiters disappeared when financial need and relationship quality were controlled for. Thus, cohabitation appears to offer some of the advantages of marriage, but without the strength of commitment and full pooling of resources involved in a married relationship (Horwitz & White, 1998).

2.2.6 Contextual factors The impact of transitions into and out of marriage on psychological health varies by age, ethnicity, level of income and gender (Krause et al., 1995). For instance, researchers have noted that life satisfaction increases, or at least does not significantly decline with increasing age (Diener & Suh, 1997; Herzog & Rogers, 1981; Okma & Veenhoven, 1996), but that positive affect is lower in older age groups, although this may be an age-cohort effect (Costa et al., 1987; Diener & Suh, 1997).

In terms of ethnicity, the research is largely from the U.S., rather than the UK, and the findings from these studies are unclear. Black men and women have been found to report lower levels of psychological wellbeing (Aldous & Ganey, 1999; Neff, 1984). Riolo, Nguyen, Greden and King (2005) found that the prevalence of major depressive disorder was significantly higher in Whites than in African Americans, but found that African American's suffer from chronic dysthemia, a milder form of depression, at higher rates than White people. However, ethnic differences may simply be a reflection of response bias and the cultural influence on how people endorse depressive symptoms, and Bailey, Blackmon and Stevens (2009) concluded that African Americans are under diagnosed for depressive disorders and that, in fact, African Americans seem to have more severe episodes of depression compared to White people.

In terms of social class, the financial stability that comes with marriage appears to have a positive effect on health outcomes (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Kurdek (1993) suggested that the young, poorly educated, unemployed or poorly paid are more likely to experience marital dissolution. Social economic status, as a proxy for income, has been linked with psychological health, where lower social class groups have been found to report poorer psychological health (Warheit et al., 1976; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003).

The findings on marital status transition that consider gender are more mixed. Fox (1980) suggested that women experience more distress than men regardless of marital status. Kessler et al. (1994), on the other hand, indicate that there are no gender differences in the overall prevalence of mental disorders. Instead, they suggest that men and women differ in the prevalence of specific types of disorders where women report higher levels of depression while men are more likely to report substance problems. Some researchers find that the psychological health benefits that accrue from marriage are greater for men compared to women, with a greater disadvantage of being unmarried for men than for women (Chipperfield & Havens, 2001; Coombs, 1991; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Marks, 1996). For example, St. John and Montgomery (2009) found that married men had lower rates of depressive symptoms than unmarried men, but married women did not have lower rates of depressive symptoms than unmarried women. Widowers report higher levels of loneliness and lower levels of psychological health compared to widows (Cramer, 1993; Lee, Demaris, Bavin & Sullivan, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2001; Umberson et al., 1992; Williams & Umberson, 2004), even after controlling for gender differences in contact with children, siblings and friends (Lee, Willetts & Seecombe, 1998; Pinqart, 2003). In a classic study by Radloff (1975), married women emerged as being more depressed than married men, but widowers were more depressed than widowed women. Similarly, using BHPS data, Cramer (1993) found that widowed men had significantly higher rates of psychological distress (as measured by the General Health Questionnaire; Goldberg, 1978) relative to married men than did widows to married women. Gove and Tudor (1973) suggested that these gender differences were linked to gender role differences in household demands. Division of household labour has changed in recent years, and this explanation is unlikely to be consistent in modern society. Umberson (1992) provides a different explanation, finding that women were more likely to control the health of their husbands, and pay an important role in maintaining the health of their spouse. Stroebe et al. (2002) considered the role of gender differences in the process of coping after bereavement, in terms of the nature and appraisal of a particular stressor and the efficacy

of coping strategies. Other researchers find the effects of moving into and out of marriage on psychological distress are similar for men and women (Lund, Caserta, Dimond & Shapper, 1989; Strohschein et al., 2005; Williams, 2003; Zisook & Shuchter, 1991). Stroebe et al. (2002) argue that studies claiming no gender differences may fail to consider baseline rates of psychological health, the higher prevalence of widows, or potential selection factors. In divorce, Kitson and Sussman (1977) found that although neither men nor women were more adversely affected, the nature of impact for male and female participants differed. Women were found to report more subjective emotional distress in terms of anxiety and depression whilst men were found to exhibit more behavioural disturbances (e.g. risk drinking behaviour). Similarly, other researchers have found little difference between level of overall health decline in male and female divorcees but noted that there were specific gender related patterns of change (Gardner & Oswald, 2006; Simon, 2002).

2.3 Theoretical foundations

The psychological benefits of marriage are well documented but conclusions are often challenged by the question of causality. Does marriage allow for better psychological health or is marriage just more likely for those reporting better psychological health? Although a variety of explanations have been offered for marital status differences in psychological health, most can be categorised as belonging to one of four models: marital selection (e.g. Stutzer & Frey, 2006); marital protection (e.g. Waite, 1995), social causation (e.g. Pearlin & Johnson, 1977), or the crisis hypothesis (e.g. Booth & Amato, 1991). Marital selection hypothesis suggests that healthy individuals are selected into marriage, and unhealthy ones are selected out (Cheung, 1998; Joung, van de Mheen, Stonks, van Poppel & Mackenback, 1998). Here, marital status is seen to be dependent on health. On the other hand, both marital protection (e.g. Waite, 1995), social causation (e.g. Pearlin & Johnson, 1977), and the crisis hypothesis (Booth & Amato, 1991) explanations all consider health to be dependent upon marital status but they differ in their view of the pathways by which marital status affects health. First, marital protection hypothesis postulates that marriage, and the social and economic resources that it confers, protects individuals from ill health and from poor health behaviours, including alcohol use and not seeking health advice (Ebrahim et al., 1995; Umberson, 1992; Waldron, Hughes & Brooks, 1996). Second, the social causation hypothesis posits that poor health is the result of the marital status

transition out of marriage and the associated changes in social support and health care access (Fenwick & Barresi, 1981; Prigerson et al., 1999; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Finally, the crisis model hypothesis suggests that the process of transition out of marriage is stressful and causes a short-term 'spike' in poor psychological health (Booth & Amato, 1991). Each one is addressed in detail over the following sections.

2.3.1 Marital selection Marital status differences in psychological wellbeing may be explained by a selection effect where healthier people may be more likely to enter and maintain a relationship compared to less healthy people, because they are viewed as more attractive marriage partners (Amato, 2000; Fu & Goldman, 1996; Joung et al., 1998; Mastekaasa, 1994a; Teitler & Reichman, 2008; Wade & Cairney, 2000) and that those who become less healthy may also be selected out (Cheung, 1998; Simon, 2002). For example, Mastekassa (1992) found a selection effect of life satisfaction when predicting first marriage in a sample of young Norwegian adults. A longitudinal study by Stutzer and Frey (2006) illustrated a selection effect into marriage, finding that single people who marry were happier before they married than those who remain single, even after taking socio-demographic characteristics into account. They found that selection effects were greatest for those who marry at a young age and those who marry late in life. Further, they found evidence of selection effects out of marriage where those who divorced were less happy before they got married. Similarly, Aseltine, Robert and Kessler (1993) noted that although there were increases in depressive symptoms following marital disruption, there was a significant selection effect after controlling for variables including financial resources, role demands and marital quality. Using British Household Panel Survey data, Wade and Pevalin (2004) compared the longitudinal patterns of psychological wellbeing in divorced and widowed groups and found that prior chronic mental health problems predicted a higher likelihood of marital disruption and poor psychological health following marital disruption. However, while the selection hypothesis may be applied to the case of divorce where poor levels of health may precede marital disruption, Wade and Pevalin concluded that it does not provide an explanation for widowhood, where in fact the widowed have potentially better levels of psychological health compared to their spouses. Against an exclusive selection explanation, longitudinal research consistently suggests that marriage has a positive influence on psychological wellbeing even after controlling for selection factors and that there is evidence of adaptation effects following marital status transitions (Horwitz, White & Howell-White, 1996; McCrae & Costa, 1993; Waite, 1995; Williams, 2003).

2.3.2 Marital protection and marital resources In contrast to the selection explanation, marital protection suggests that there is a health protective benefit of marriage, which results from the marriage itself rather than an individual's characteristics, where being married is the cause of better health (Waldron et al., 1996). Differences may be explained by married individuals typically having more financial and material resources, indulging in less risky health behaviour, and having more social and emotional support available to them (Lillard & Waite, 1995; Marks, 1996; Ross et al., 1990; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Waldron et al., 1996). Marriage has been found to provide financial advantages and allow for a higher socioeconomic status (Rindfuss & van den Heuvel, 1990). Health behaviours are important in the association between marital status and self-reported health (Joung, Stronks, van de Mheen & Mackenbach, 1995; Wyke & Ford, 1992) and a spouse may play an important role in monitoring and encouraging healthy behaviours and discouraging health poor behaviours. For example, marriage has a deterrent effect on negative health behaviours such as smoking and heavy alcohol consumption and the married are more likely to engage in positive health behaviours such as exercise and eating breakfast (Duncan et al., 2006; Joung, van de Mheen, Stronks, van Poppel, Mackenbach, 1994; Umberson, 1987; 1992). Readily available social support may also be a contributor to the protective effects of marriage (Marks, 1996; Ross, 1995). Marriage provides an intimate support relationship and married couples also tend to receive more social and financial support from both extended families (House, Umberson & Landis, 1988b; Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Marriage might also create an important sense of identity and self-worth (Gove, Style & Hughes, 1990).

2.3.3 Social causation Marital status differences in psychological wellbeing could be a result of social causation. Marriage is believed to have a health promoting effect, whereas not being married has a negative effect on health, and people who experience a change in marital status are more vulnerable to psychological health problems. Social causation takes the view that the negative impact in the time after transition occurs as a result of the stresses associated with the transition to divorced or widowed status, and that marital status differences in health reflect the strains of marital dissolution more than they reflect any benefits of marriage (Williams & Umberson, 2004). This includes the stigma attached to divorce and widowhood, as well as the impact that living alone has on access to both social support and health care opportunities (Fenwick & Barresi, 1981; Marks, 1996; Prigerson et al., 1999; Williams & Umberson, 2004). Here, the widowed and divorced would be expected to have lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to

the married and the never married as a consequence of the social and economic difficulties experienced as a result of the transition out of marriage and the social stigma attached to being single (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). In line with social causation, the recently divorced and widowed show decreases in psychological wellbeing following transition and they report significantly more distress than the continuously married (Marks, 1996; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977; Strohschein et al., 2005; Umberson et al., 1992) and the never married (Gove & Shin, 1989; Hughes & Waite, 2009; Marks & Lambert, 1998). Cross-sectional research by Williams, Takeuchi and Adair (1992) compared the psychological wellbeing of the never married and previously married to that of the continuously married and found that only the previously married revealed any psychological disadvantage. Perceived social support, stress and material resources have been used to explain changes in health following marital dissolution (Sharpiro, 1996; Weiss, 1975; Wyke & Ford, 1992). For example, Umberson et al. (1992) found that widowhood was associated with financial strain for women and household management for men. Pearlin and Johnson (1977) considered the differences in depression between the married and divorced and noted three ongoing life strains to which divorced people were more exposed and more vulnerable to compared to the married, including financial strain, social isolation and increased parental responsibilities. They stated, "clearly it is where one is confronted both by social and economic strain and is single that one is prone to depression. The combination most productive of psychological distress is to be simultaneously single, isolated, exposed to burdensome parental obligations and, most serious of all, poor" (p714). However, in a panel study spanning 12 years, Johnson and Wu (2002) tested the social causation explanation against a selection explanation and found that while the stresses associated with marital dissolution explained the increase in psychological distress following separation and divorce, prior levels of psychological distress were also important, presenting evidence for both social causation and selection processes.

2.3.4 The crisis model Finally, the crisis model explanation suggests that marital transitions are disruptive and cause short-term changes in psychological wellbeing through the upheaval of a transition out of marriage, including a reduced access to social support (Booth & Amato, 1991; Kitson & Morgan, 1990; Williams et al., 1992). However, as people adapt to the transition, psychological health should return to pre-transition level and differences between marital status groups should disappear once time since transition is controlled for. Compared with continuously married individuals, the recently divorced or separated were at elevated risk for mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders (Amato,

2000; Chatav & Whisman, 2007; Lorenz et al., 2006; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Booth and Amato (1991) proposed that the transition from marriage to divorce is stressful and causes poorer mental health, noting a pre-divorce rise in stress reported by the proportion of their sample that later divorced. Over a period of time following divorce this level of stress returned to that of married counterparts. Providing evidence of a 'recovery' following divorce, Gardner and Oswald (2006) found that divorce may allow for longer-term psychological benefits, with psychological distress falling significantly in the years following divorce. Although the model proposed by Booth and Amato was specific to a divorced population, it is possible that a similar profile may exist following widowhood with the suggestion that the effects of bereavement on psychological distress are short-term and may weaken over time with adjustment (Mastekaasa, 1994b; McCrae & Costa, 1993; Wade & Pevalin, 2004; Wilcox et al., 2003). Mastekaasa (1994b: p688) suggested that widowhood has a "clear negative effect on subjective wellbeing, but the effect seems to be entirely temporary". Using longitudinal research data, McCrae and Costa's (1993) findings suggest that there may be few long-term effects of widowhood on psychological health. However, Mastekaasa's (1994b) findings on divorce challenge the crisis model explanation for divorce in his finding that marital disruption produces both short-term and long-term negative effects on psychological wellbeing. Using U.K. Medical Research Council National Survey of Health and Development data, Richards et al. (1997) found no association between psychological health and time since separation or divorce. Further, using the same data set as Booth and Amato (1991), Johnson and Wu (2002) found no significant effects of time since divorce. Similarly, Aseltine et al. (1993) demonstrated that the negative impact of divorce on psychological wellbeing is long-lasting.

2.4 Marital status and social participation

Alongside marital status, social support has also been recognised as an important predictor of psychological health and better access to social support is associated with better levels of psychological health (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House, Landis & Umberson, 1988a; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Thoits, 1995). Social support is likely to be a central factor in understanding the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing and the social support inherent in a marriage offers psychological health benefits, while the loss of social support following widowhood and divorce is likely to have a negative impact on psychological wellbeing. Further, a supportive social network and positive social exchanges

following widowhood and divorce promote wellbeing and dense support networks offer better adjustment over time (Balaswamy & Richardson, 2001; Hewitt et al., 2010; Kaunonen, Tarkka, Paunonen & Laippala, 1999; Lamme, Dykstra & Broese van Groenou, 1996; Thoits, 1995; Vachon et al., 1982; Zisook et al., 1990). Supportive relationships are associated with lower levels of psychological distress while strained relationships or an absence of social support is associated with high levels of psychological distress (Kanacki, Jones & Galbraith, 1996; Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins & Slaten, 1996) and so changes in the social network and exchange of social support following widowhood and divorce have implications for psychological health.

Across the literature, social support has been defined in a variety of ways, with research considering social network structure, support functions and the nature of social relationships (Williams, Barclay & Schmied, 2004). Broadly, social support can be defined as the existence of social relationships and the availability of their supportive resources (Williams et al., 2004). Structural characteristics of the social network influence the availability of social support (Stylianios & Vachon, 1993). Social support is a transactional process and interpersonal relationships provide a platform for the exchange of emotional, informational, appraisal and tangible support as well as social companionship (House, 1981; Jacobson, 1986). Structural characteristics such as total network size, number of face-to-face contacts and number of proximal ties are associated with greater availability of both instrumental and emotional support (Seeman & Berkman, 1988) and social network size has been found to be negatively correlated with depression (Dimond, Lund & Caserta, 1987). However, social networks are not necessarily supportive and social network size does not guarantee adequate access to social support (Bowling, 1991). Furthermore, not all social connections are beneficial, with research to suggest that negative social interactions are more strongly associated with psychological wellbeing than are positive social interactions (Ingersoll-Dayton, Morgan & Antonucci, 1997; Rook, 1984). Cohen and McKay (1984) suggested that the protective effects of social support are largely cognitively mediated, and the perceived adequacy of support is more important than received support for psychological wellbeing (Chan & Lee, 2006; Thoits, 1995; Turner, 1994). The quality of the perceived social support is, therefore, an important factor in its relationship with psychological health (Paykel, 1994), with evidence that functional aspects of social support, including informational and emotional support, instrumental support and social companionship are more strongly related to psychological wellbeing compared to social network size (Cohen & Wills, 1995; Schaefer, Coyne & Lazarus, 1981; Vandervoort,

1999; Wyke & Ford, 1992). However, although availability of social support may affect psychological wellbeing, it is also important to recognise that an individual's psychological wellbeing will likely affect the availability and use of social support resources (Turner, 1981).

2.4.1 Married Marital status is often accepted as at least a partial index of social support and married individuals typically report having more social and emotional support compared to their unmarried counterparts (Brown, 2000; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Waldron et al., 1996; Ward & Leigh, 1993). Marriage is often regarded as a fundamental basis for support, providing a large personal network and facilitating integration into social networks (Gerstel, 1988; Milardo & Duck, 2000). Ward, Logan and Spitze (1992) found that patterns of social involvement vary by marital status and suggested that, while those without a spouse may seek social support from family and friends to compensate for the absence of a spouse, married couples may not need these additional forms of social support. For the married, spousal support makes up a large portion of the total support received (Wellman & Wellman, 1992). For example, an intimate, confidant relationship offered in a marriage provides the opportunity for emotional support (Gove et al., 1983), which may in turn improve psychological wellbeing (House et al., 1988a). In line with this, Pahl and Pevalin (2005) considered friendship choice over the life course and found that the recently married were more likely to move from nominating a non-relative as their closest friend to having a family member as their closest friend. Similarly, Kalmijn (2003) suggested that couple's networks shrink to a more family-centred network over time after marriage. On the whole, research acknowledges that entry into a married or cohabiting relationship can lead to an initial widening of the social network and greater access to social support through increased involvement with the spouse or partner's social network, although over time the overall level of sociability often drops (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005; Kalmijn, 2003; Loitron, 2001).

2.4.2 Widowed Widowhood is a "social crisis" (Stylianios & Vachon, 1993: p397), removing the primary source of support, the spouse (Glaser, Tomassini, Racioppi & Stuchbury, 2006), typically having a negative impact on access to social support and significant changes in the wider social network (Catron & Chiriboga, 1991; Connidis, 2010; Duffy, 1993; Guiaux, van Tilburg & Broese van Groenou, 2007; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005; van den Hoonaard, 2001; Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). Spousal bereavement is associated with a reorganisation of the social network, with changes in both friend and kin ties

(Lamme et al., 1996; Ungar & Florian, 2004; Utz et al., 2002). Often, changes in social relationships occur not only after spousal bereavement but also before the loss when there is a period of illness (Carr & Utz, 2002). In an older adult sample, Wenger and Burholt (2004) found that recent widowhood created a risk of loneliness and that the risk of isolation was positively associated with length of widowhood. The bereaved must learn to socialise as a single person, and may face the loss of relationships with other married couples as well as losing links with their shared friends. In the immediate period after spousal bereavement, familial support appears to be the primary source of help and an important centre of social activity (Anderson & Dimond, 1995; Kaunonen et al., 1999; Lopata, 1979; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005). The social network then evolves over time, with the duration of widowhood positively related to the likelihood of forming new friendships and for some, new romantic relationships (de Jong Gierveld, 2003; Lamme et al., 1996; Zettel & Rook, 2004). Further, Morgan, Carder and Neal (1997) suggested that recently widowed women may shift their social networks toward greater association with other widows. In terms of gender, spousal bereavement has been found to result in a decrease of social support for widowers but not for widows (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993) and there has been research to suggest that there is a higher rate of remarriage, or consideration of remarriage amongst widowers than widows, with a probability of men remarrying at twice that of women (Burch, 1990; Smith, Zick & Duncan, 1991).

2.4.3 Divorced Divorce significantly disrupts the social network and exchange of social support (Kitson, 1990; Milardo, 1987). Connidis (2010) has suggested that divorce may have a more negative effect on the social network than widowhood, as a result of fewer normative expectations concerning the role of the self and others following marital dissolution (Martin Matthews, 1991). Marital dissolution may lead to the loss of jointly held relationships and extra-familial kin ties and has negative consequences for the availability of social support (Albeck & Kaydar, 2002; Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005; Pahl & Pevalin, 2005; Sprecher, Felmler, Schmeckle & Shu, 2006; Terhell, Broese van Groenou & van Tilburg, 2004; 2007). For those without a spouse, confidants assume greater importance in providing emotional support (Barrett & Lynch, 1999; Seeman & Berkman, 1988; White, 1992). Research suggests that newly separated individuals are more likely to look to non-family members for support (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005) and that the availability of friends during divorce buffers the degree of psychological distress more than support from kin (Milardo, 1987). Spanier and Thompson (1984) found that 1 in 3 divorcees experienced disapproval of the separation by their parents and that parental

disapproval was often matched with a withdrawal of support. Older divorced men have been found to have the smallest social networks of all (Mugford & Kendig, 1986). On the other hand, divorce may provide the opportunity for a widening of the social network and the creation of new supportive social relationships as the divorced engage in new activities (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005; Gerstel, 1988).

2.4.4 Never married and cohabiting Compared to the married, the cohabiting and never married represent heterogeneous groups with diverse sources of social support (Rubenstein, 1987). In 1982, Fengler et al. found that the never married were the least isolated of all the marital status groups when assessed on a social isolation index comprising of three measures including frequency of visits from neighbours, number of friends living in the neighbourhood and whether they felt part of their community. Other studies find that the cohabiting and never married typically have higher levels of social interaction with friends, but not kin, and are less likely to be integrated into important social support networks (Nock, 1995; Seccombe & Ishii-Kuntz, 1994). Reflecting changes in the meaning of being never married over the life course, the negative effects of being never married on access to social support become greater with increasing age (Barrett, 1999; Ward, 1979).

2.4.5 Contextual factors Social support varies by gender (Kendler, Myers & Prescott, 2005). Women tend to be more successful compared to men at maintaining social networks and are more likely to report having a close confidant other than their spouse (Antonucci, 1994; Vaux, 1985). Moreover, emotionally supportive social relationships offer substantially more protection on psychological health for women than men (Kendler et al., 2005). Parental status is also associated with access to social support (Wellman & Wortley, 1990) and the parent-child relationship provides an important source of support to both sides (Umberson, 1992). Burholt and Wenger (1998) used data from the Bangor Longitudinal Study of Ageing and considered changes in the relationships of older parents, aged 80 and above, with their children and siblings. First, the findings highlight that while the need for support may increase with age, older adults do not necessarily have access to support from adult children. Moreover, older women are almost twice as likely to report having a close relationship with kin compared to older men. For those in receipt of support from children, these relationships are most strongly related to aspects of instrumental support, while relationships with close friends and relatives are more strongly related to the provision of emotional support (Seeman & Berkman, 1988). For those without children,

ties with close friends and relatives assume a larger role relative to the perceived adequacy of both emotional and instrumental support (Seeman & Berkman, 1988). Having children is a confounding issue for both widows and divorces and transition out of marriage may lead to changes in the exchange of support between parents and their children. Eggebeen (1992) suggested that adult children were more likely to provide support to parents following widowhood compared to divorce. Non-custodial divorced parents of younger children typically lose both their spouse and their child as sources of support and divorced people with adult children have fewer interactions with their children compared to the married (Barrett & Lynch, 1999; White, 1992). Marks (1995) highlighted the importance of giving social support to adult children for psychological wellbeing, as well as receiving support from adult children. She found that compared to the continuously married, divorced and widowed mothers were more likely to receive support whilst remarried and single fathers were more likely to be uninvolved in support.

2.5 Age and the timing of marital status transitions

Transitions into and out of marriage have consequences on psychological health and social relationships (e.g. Prigerson et al., 1999) and research suggests that age has a significant effect on psychological resilience in facing the challenges of a marital transition (e.g. Marks & Lambert, 1998). Younger adults may have a larger repertoire of coping skills or fewer competing role demands, therefore, enabling them to adapt more easily to undesirable life events (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley & Novacek, 1987) and there is some evidence that the timing of marital status transitions may influence the relative impact of marital status change, particularly for the transition to widowhood (Ensel & Lin, 2000; Kitson, 2000; Neugarten, 1979; Williams & Umberson, 2004). For example, Williams and Umberson (2004) noted that the physical health consequences of a transition out of marriage through widowhood or divorce were dependent on the age at which the change marital status occurred, and that vulnerability to the short-term strains of widowhood and divorce increase across the life course. Most likely, this is in part attributable to the fact that it aggravates existing health problems which are more prevalent in older adults.

Researchers have suggested that there exists a socially prescribed timetable for the ordering of major life events, and it is widely believed that this social 'normative' timetable governs the impact of major life events (Neugarten, 1976; Neugarten, 1979; Rook,

Catalano & Dooley, 1989). This life course perspective suggests that the disruption of, and adjustment to, a major life event is related to the extent to which it is anticipated or 'on-time', or unanticipated or 'off-time' (Elder, 1985). Neugarten states that the "normal, expectable life events do not themselves constitute crises, nor are they trauma producing" (1976: p18). In contrast, departures from the normative timetable are stressful both because the life event is likely to be unexpected, thus allowing limited or no time for anticipatory rehearsal and coping, and because it may reduce opportunities for social support through the absence of a peer group and invite social disapproval (Neugarten, 1979; Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976; Rook et al., 1989). Although the literature was published mainly in the 1970's and 1980's, Williams and Umberson (2004) argue that applying a life course framework to marital status research may help to "clarify who is most likely to benefit from marriage and to identify those who are most vulnerable to the negative consequences of widowhood and divorce" (p81). The life course perspective emphasises that the timing of marital status transitions creates an important social context that influences the individual's adjustment to their new roles. It can also affect the degree to which these new roles are accepted by others and the nature of the resources that are available to aid adjustment. In turn, this may influence the effect that marital status transitions have on both psychological health and social relationships (Elder, 1985; Williams & Umberson, 2004).

Being newly married is predominantly an experience of younger adults, although recent demographic trends highlight an increasing age at first marriage. Marriage is considered to be a desirable life event, and older adults may have more to gain by becoming married since being never married at older age is non-normative. However, several classic studies indicate that people who marry at an atypical age, earlier and later, experience lower life satisfaction, lower marital satisfaction and greater marital instability than people who marry at a normative age (Hogan, 1978; Lee, 1977; Rose, 1955).

Adopting a life course perspective, spousal bereavement in later life may be expected, or on-time and consequently the negative impact of a transition out of marriage through widowhood may be reduced, regardless of whether the loss was sudden (Arbuckle & deVries, 1995; Lopata, 1996; Stroebe & Schut, 2001; Zisook et al., 1990). Off-time widowhood is seen to be the most disruptive since younger adults are generally less prepared emotionally and practically than older adults to cope with the loss of a spouse (Scannell-Desch, 2003; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). People who are widowed young present

more psychological problems and have fewer friendships than people who are widowed in later life (Blau, 1961; Lopata, 1979; Parks & Weiss, 1983; Sanders, 1980-81). Baler and Golde (1964) found a higher risk of mental illness, physical illness, and mortality in younger compared to older widows and widowers, and Parkes (1964) reported higher consultation rates for psychiatric symptoms from widows under 65. In a study that compared the experiences of widows over three age groups, young widows were found to be more symptomatic and, moreover, the symptom severity was more pronounced for those widows who had lost their husband suddenly (Ball, 1977). In contrast, physical health symptoms are more strongly associated with spousal bereavement for older compared to younger adults (Ensel & Lin, 2000; Williams & Umberson, 2004). A longitudinal study by Sanders (1980-81) found that although initially younger adults had poorer psychological health, after 2 years the levels significantly improved. For those widowed older, the opposite pattern was found. Considering social relationships, Lund, Caserta, van Pelt and Gass (1990) found that younger (50-75) widows and widowers have a more stable social network compared to older (over 75), and that those over the age of 75 experienced a reduced sense of closeness to members of their social network. Spousal bereavement at a young age may involve substantial restricting of the social life, and may result in single-parent hood (Lopata, 1979).

Divorce is mainly an experience of younger adults, but it is an undesirable, non-scheduled event that is not usually anticipated, at least in the same way as spousal bereavement. As a consequence of increased prevalence of later life divorce, and of cohorts with earlier-age divorces getting older, the proportion of divorced adults reaching later life is increasing (Kreider & Simmons, 2003; Wu & Penning, 1997). It is recognised that relatively little is known about the impact of divorce when it occurs in later life. Although the volume of existing literature addressing this question is small, older adults have been found to experience poorer adjustment to marital dissolution compared to younger individuals (Wallerstein, 1986; Wang & Amato, 2000) and compared to older adults who have not experienced divorce, older divorced men and women have a higher risk for depression (Wu & Penning, 1997). Chiriboga and Catron (1991) argue that younger divorced adults can benefit more than older adults from the separation stage of divorce with older adults reporting fewer positive events in life areas such as personal, work, dating, and non-family relationships. Adults who experience divorce late in life, or off-time, have been found to feel more uncertain about the future and felt less control over their lives than those who experienced marital dissolution at a younger age (Chiriboga, 1982).

Admittedly, most of the literature cited in this section relating to the influence of age at marital status transition is old and may be outdated. It is possible that the timetable proposed by the life course perspective has begun to loosen in contemporary society, giving way to a more fluid life cycle which is less prescriptive and has greater variability in the timing of life events (Peterson, 1996). However, most of the literature on widowhood to date considers an older age group and has an emphasis on on-time spousal bereavement. There is a gap in the knowledge about the impact of widowhood on social relationships and social support for those widowed young, and the differences in the consequences of on-time and off-time spousal bereavement. Given the well established association between psychological health and social support (e.g. Thoits, 1995), research needs to address the social consequences of marital status transitions and consider how a change in marital status affects access to social support. Further, the changing demographics of a later age at first marriage and an increased prevalence of later-life divorce demands a thorough investigation of the consequences of marital status transitions across the life course on both psychological wellbeing and social relationships.

2.6 Research questions

This thesis uses quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing and social participation. The research investigates how marital status transitions affect psychological health and considers the differences in psychological wellbeing between marital status groups. Further, the research considers the association between social support and marital status and the impact of marital status change on social participation, in terms of the social network, exchange of support and social engagement. This study extends the existing literature by examining the link between psychological wellbeing and social participation to find out what contributes to different levels of psychological wellbeing between marital status groups. More specifically, this research examines the following question: *How, and to what extent, does social participation explain marital status differences in psychological wellbeing?* To address this question, Part 2 of this thesis includes a quantitative analysis investigating the role of social support on psychological wellbeing and Part 3 adopts a qualitative semi-structured interview method and the richness of the interview data provides information on both structural and functional elements of social support, including social network size, frequency of interaction, exchange of social support and relationship quality. This thesis

also assesses the influence of age at marital status transition to gain an insight into the impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing and social participation across the life course. In the quantitative studies, information about age and, where possible, the age at marital status change is included in the quantitative studies (Part 2). In Part 3 of this thesis, qualitative interviews conducted with men and women across a wide range of ages are explored in detail.

PART TWO

QUANTITATIVE STUDIES

Chapter 3

Marital status change and psychological wellbeing: Evidence from BHPS data

3.1 Introduction

The married enjoy better health than those who remain single, separated, divorced or widowed (Bennett, 2006; Lillard & Waite, 1995; Strohschein et al., 2005) and the transition to married or cohabiting status is associated with positive changes in psychological health (French & Williams, 2007; Kim & McKenry, 2002; Musick & Bumpass, 2006). In contrast, marital dissolution and widowhood causes increased psychological distress (Lee & Gramotnev, 2007; Strohschein et al., 2005). This study uses longitudinal survey data in the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) and aims to establish the impact of marital status and marital status change on psychological health, as measured by the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12: Goldberg, 1978), over a 9 year period where transition is at the mid-point. BHPS data is used as it contains longitudinal data on marital status and health and has been previously used in investigations into marriage trends and the impact of marital status on health (e.g. Bennett, 2006; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Existing research typically considers the difference between the married and unmarried. This study benefits from using seven marital status groups, including four stable groups (never married [NM]; continuously married [CM]; continuously widowed [CW]; and continuously divorce [CD]) alongside three newly transitioned groups (recently married [RM]; recently widowed [RW]; and recently divorced [RD]). In view of previous research, it is expected that marital status groups will show different profiles of psychological wellbeing from one another and that, over the 9 year period, there will be significant differences in psychological wellbeing within marital status groups over time. Specifically, that the impact of marital status change for the recently married, recently widowed and recently divorced groups will occur at point of transition (T) and that the recently divorced group will show a decline in psychological wellbeing in the years preceding point of transition. To test these hypotheses a number of planned comparisons are conducted.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Data and sampling Nationally representative longitudinal data from fifteen waves of the BHPS were used in this study (BHPS, 2006). Secondary data sets allow access

to large scale representative samples and researchers have argued the practical and financial benefits of secondary data analysis (Cole, Wathan & Corti, 2008; Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985). The BHPS is an annual survey with data from a representative sample of a total of approximately 10,000 adults from over 5,000 households in England, Scotland and Wales. Survey waves from the start of the BHPS in 1991 through to 2007 were used in this study. Each annual wave is given an initial starting with wave A in 1991 and running through to the fifteenth wave, wave O, in 2005. Missing data due to drop out or item non-response is a common problem in survey data. Only BHPS respondents with a complete marital status record over the 15 year period were included in this sample and cases with at least one non-response item for marital status were omitted from the analysis, providing a total of 3,446 cases.

3.2.2 Variables Self-defined marital status, gender, and social class were included as between subject variables. Marital status transition was identified as the change in marital status between 2 consecutive waves in the BHPS data. Marital status variable categories included never married (NM), continuously married (CM); continuously widowed (CW); continuously divorced (CD); recently married (RM); recently widowed (RW) and recently divorced (RD). Social class information came from BHPS variable 'Registrar General's social class of most recent job'. In all cases this was taken from survey wave B. Three social class groups, professional/managerial, skilled, and partly/unskilled were collapsed from the 7 original BHPS categories. Psychological wellbeing was measured using GHQ12 (Goldberg, 1978) since this was the only psychological wellbeing measure available within the secondary data set for all waves of the BHPS. GHQ12 scores (range 0-36) over 9 consecutive years were used and a higher GHQ12 score indicated lower levels of psychological wellbeing. For the stable marital status groups, GHQ12 score was taken over nine consecutive years (T_{-4} to T_{+4}). To maximise the sample, BHPS respondents with a stable marital status for 9 consecutive survey waves at any stage of the survey were included in the study sample. Of these stable cases, 2782 (91%) were taken from wave A; 69 (2.3%) from wave B; 50 (1.6%) from wave C; 44 (1.4%) from wave D; 37 (1.2%) from wave E; 42 (1.4%) from wave F; and 32 (1%) from wave G. In the newly transitioned groups the 9 consecutive years were made up of 4 years leading up to marital status transition (T_{-4} , T_{-3} , T_{-2} , T_{-1}), the midpoint, T , marks the point of transition, and then the 4 years following transition (T_{+1} , T_{+2} , T_{+3} , T_{+4}). A missing value analysis was conducted using SPSS for GHQ12 on variables T_{-4} through to T_{+4} , using a procedure of expectation maximisation for cases

with 2 or fewer missing values. GHQ12 was then transformed due to non-normal distribution using a square root transformation.

3.3 Data analysis

A 9x7x3x2 mixed analysis of variance was employed, with a within-subject variable of time ($T_{-4}; T_{-3}; T_{-2}; T_{-1}; T; T_{+1}; T_{+2}; T_{+3}; T_{+4}$) and between-subject variables of marital status (NM $N=464$; CM $N=2330$; CW $N=162$; CD $N=108$; RM $N=25$; RW $N=131$; RD $N=226$); social class (professional/managerial $N=1117$; skilled $N=1583$; partly/unskilled $N=746$); and gender (male $N=1556$; female $N=1890$). Age at T_{-4} was considered as a covariate since sample numbers were small and significant age differences existed between groups (CM $M[SD]=45.13[11.95]$; CW $66.18[9.11]$; CD $49.45[11.00]$; RW $60.60[12.77]$; all $p<.05$) with the exceptions of the NM ($37.29[17.90]$), RM ($35.93[8.18]$) and RD ($36.68[9.92]$) groups where there was no significant differences in age between these groups. Significant effects were explored using pairwise comparisons using Bonferroni corrections to control the Type I error rate.

3.4 Results

Table 3.1 presents descriptive statistics for GHQ12 score by marital status over time. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2(35)=888.55, p<.05$) therefore degrees of freedom were corrected using Huynh-Feldt estimates for sphericity ($\epsilon=0.93$). The results show there was a significant main effect for time ($F_{(7.53, 25583.35)}=3.66, p<.05, \eta^2=0.001$), most notably that there were significantly higher GHQ12 scores, or lower levels of psychological wellbeing, at T compared to all other time-points (all $p<.001$). This is not particularly surprising given that 3 groups experienced transition at point T. There were significant between-subjects main effects for gender ($F_{(1, 3395)}=35.23, p<.001, \eta^2=0.010$) where women ($12.46[0.22]$) generally reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing than men ($10.35[0.28]$; $p<.001$); and for marital status ($F_{(6, 3395)}=4.84, p<.001, \eta^2=0.009$) explained mainly by the recently divorced group having significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the never married ($p<.001$), continuously married ($p<.001$) and continuously widowed ($p=.033$). No significant main effects were found for social class ($F_{(2, 3395)}=1.04, p=.353, \eta^2=0.001$) or age ($F_{(1, 3395)}=1.87, p=.172, \eta^2=0.001$).

Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics (M (SD)) for GHQ12 by marital status over time

	NM	CM	CW	CD	RM	RW	RD
N	464	2330	162	108	25	131	226
T ₋₄	8.02 (3.80)	10.39 (4.34)	11.39 (4.50)	12.07 (5.68)	12.40 (5.83)	10.95 (4.97)	12.47 (6.25)
T ₋₃	10.75 (4.94)	10.78 (4.68)	11.07 (4.38)	13.29 (6.36)	12.19 (6.25)	11.18 (4.56)	12.80 (6.62)
T ₋₂	11.28 (5.29)	10.80 (4.73)	11.24 (4.38)	13.26 (7.26)	11.55 (5.19)	11.82 (4.45)	12.21 (6.14)
T ₋₁	11.22 (5.42)	10.83 (4.73)	10.80 (4.03)	13.09 (6.54)	11.28 (3.82)	12.32 (5.58)	13.76 (6.93)
T	11.14 (5.19)	10.90 (4.79)	11.29 (4.64)	12.43 (6.34)	12.56 (5.24)	16.09 (7.39)	14.94 (7.40)
T ₊₁	10.96 (5.20)	10.90 (4.83)	11.15 (4.13)	12.80 (6.17)	12.74 (5.67)	11.67 (5.40)	12.80 (6.63)
T ₊₂	11.28 (5.42)	11.08 (4.90)	10.81 (3.52)	12.00 (6.53)	10.68 (5.79)	11.64 (5.28)	11.58 (6.17)
T ₊₃	11.33 (5.44)	10.93 (4.85)	10.92 (4.20)	11.60 (5.77)	10.58 (4.34)	11.00 (5.48)	11.53 (6.37)
T ₊₄	11.08 (5.44)	10.82 (4.86)	10.82 (4.40)	13.02 (7.62)	12.22 (4.21)	10.85 (4.80)	12.02 (6.45)

Significant interactions emerged between marital status and gender ($F_{(6, 3395)} = 3.12$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.005$), where women reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to men in all groups (all $p < .010$) with the exception of the recently married group ($p = 0.497$); between gender and social class ($F_{(2, 3395)} = 4.79$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$), where men in skilled occupations reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing than men in partly/unskilled occupations ($p = .043$) while women in partly/unskilled occupations reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing than those in professional/managerial occupations ($p = .049$); and between time and gender ($F_{(7.54, 25583.35)} = 1.96$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$) where men's psychological wellbeing was generally more stable over time compared to women. The results revealed a significant interaction between time and marital status ($F_{(45.21, 25583.35)} = 9.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.016$) and significant three-way interactions between time, marital status and gender ($F_{(45.21, 25583.35)} = 1.60$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = 0.003$) and between time, marital status and social class ($F_{(90.42, 25583.35)} = 1.43$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = 0.005$). The nature of these final three interactions will be explored in more detail in the sections that follow. Other interactions were non-significant.

3.4.1 Interaction between marital status and time Figure 3.1 shows mean GHQ12 score over time by marital status. It was expected that the never married and continuously married would present a stable GHQ12 score over time. Pairwise comparisons showed that at T₋₄, that the never married had significantly higher levels of psychological wellbeing compared to all other groups (all $p < .01$). It is not clear why this pattern emerged and the never married remained relatively stable over the 8 time points that followed. The continuously married also showed a stable pattern of wellbeing over time with the only significant change in psychological wellbeing in the group emerging between T₋₄ and T₊₃ ($p = .027$). Likewise, the previously married stable groups, the continuously widowed and continuously divorced showed no significant variation in psychological wellbeing over time. In contrast, the transitioning groups showed a changing profile of psychological wellbeing over time. It was expected that the recently divorced group would experience a decline in psychological wellbeing. As expected, the recently divorced reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the continuously married in the years preceding transition, including time points T₋₄ ($p < .001$), T₋₃ ($p = .042$) and T₋₁ ($p < .001$). This pattern was not found in either the recently married or recently widowed groups. At T₀, point of transition, the recently widowed and recently divorced reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to all of the stable groups (all $p < .001$). The recently married showed a decline in psychological wellbeing with higher GHQ12

scores at transition but the differences between groups was non-significant. There were no significant differences at T between the recently widowed or recently divorced groups. Post-transition, the recently divorced reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the never married ($p=.022$) and continuously married ($p=.009$) at T_{+1} . No other significant differences emerged over time between marital status groups.

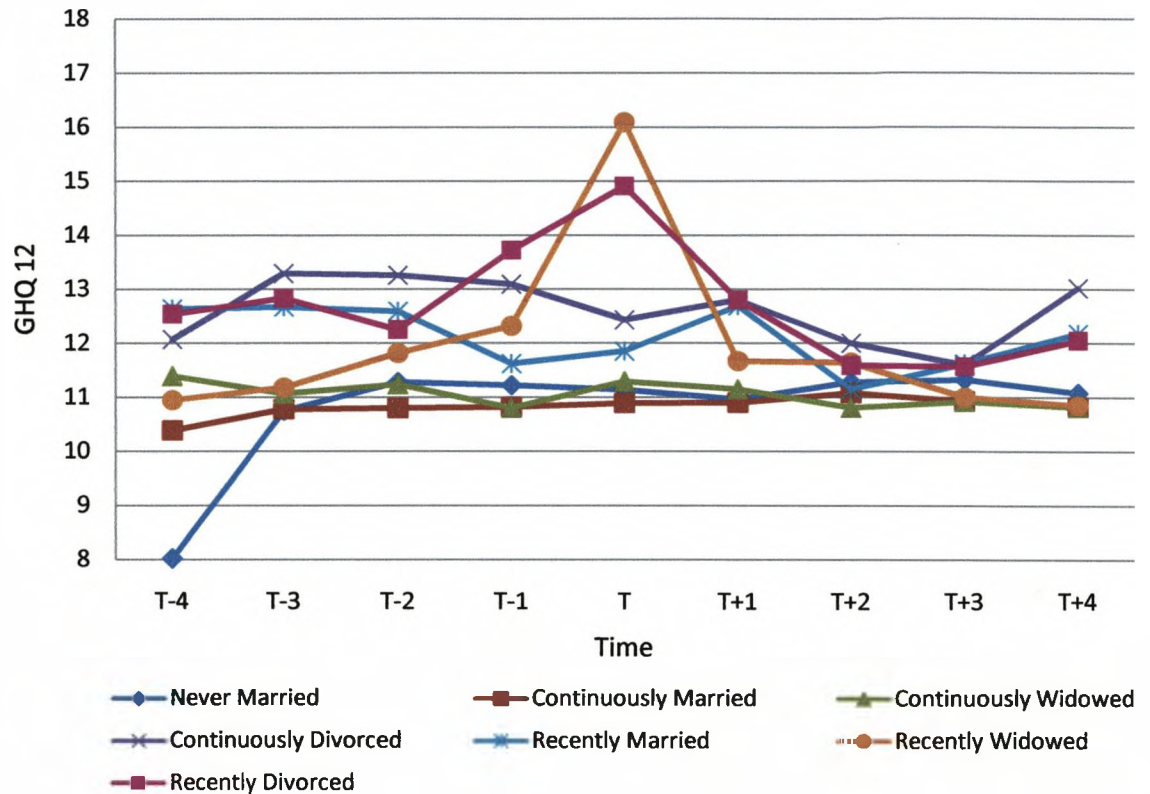


Figure 3.1 Psychological wellbeing (GHQ12¹) over time by marital status group

3.4.2 Interaction between time, marital status and gender First considering the stable marital status groups: never married ($N=208$), continuously married ($N=1210$) and continuously divorced ($N=75$) women reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to men (NM $N=248$; CM $N=1120$; CD $N=33$) at each of the 9 time points (all $p<.05$ with the exception of T_{+1} for never married: $p=.078$). Although women had higher mean GHQ12 scores, no significant differences emerged between continuously widowed men ($N=13$) and women ($N=149$), except at T_{+3} ($p=.009$). No significant differences emerged over time by gender for the recently married group, although contrary to the emerging pattern of lower psychological wellbeing for women, mean

¹ Scoring range 0-36. Lower GHQ12 score indicates better psychological wellbeing.

GHQ12 scores at T_{+2} and T_{+3} were higher for the recently married men ($N=10$) than women ($N=15$). For the recently widowed, both men ($N=36$) and women ($N=95$) reported a similar level of psychological wellbeing at T_{-4} and T_{-3} but in the 2 years before transition (T_{-2} and T_{-1}), at transition (T), and post-transition (T_{+1} , T_{+2} and T_{+4}) women reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing (all $p<.05$). Findings from the recently divorced group (Figure 3.2) were particularly interesting. Recently divorced women ($N=135$) reported significantly higher levels of distress compared to recently divorced men ($N=91$) before transition (T_{-4} , T_{-3} , T_{-2} ; all $p<.001$) and after transition (T_{+2} , T_{+4} ; all $p<.010$) but in the immediate period around transition (T_{-1} , T , T_{+1}), there was no significant difference between men and women.

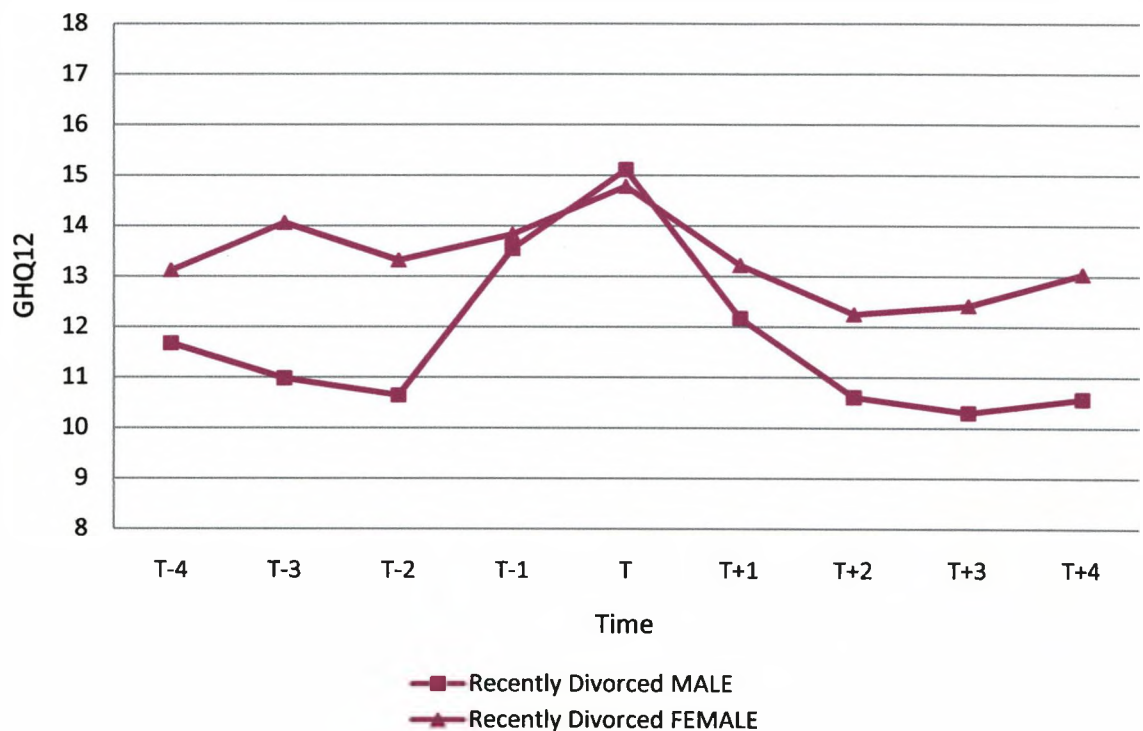


Figure 3.2 Recently divorced: Psychological wellbeing over time by gender

3.4.3 Interaction between time, marital status and social class The significant 3-way interaction between time, marital status and social class was mainly explained by differences in psychological wellbeing between the social class groups over time in the recently divorced group. Partly/unskilled social class group had significantly higher levels of psychological wellbeing at T_{-1} when compared with the professional ($p<.001$) and skilled groups ($p=.002$). Moreover, although there were no further significant differences between social class groups at each of the 9 time points, pairwise comparisons revealed that the

patterns of change in psychological wellbeing over time varied by social class, as illustrated in Figure 3.3. The professional/managerial group reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing 1 year prior to transition (T_{-1}) and at transition (T) and compared to all other time points except T_{+3} (all $p < .05$), and by 2 years post-transition (T_{+2}) GHQ12 scores were significantly lower than pre-divorce levels ($T_{-3}, T_{-2}, T_{-1}, T$; all $p < .05$) suggesting improvements in psychological wellbeing for those in professional/managerial occupations. Similarly, the skilled recently divorced group had significantly elevated GHQ12 scores at T_{-1} and T compared to all other time points (all $p < .05$) and from T_{+2} , levels of psychological wellbeing were significantly lower than at T_{-1}, T and T_{+1} (all $p < .05$). In contrast, the partly/unskilled reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing at T compared to T_{-1} ($p = .005$) and means indicated a slower recovery in psychological wellbeing post-transition.

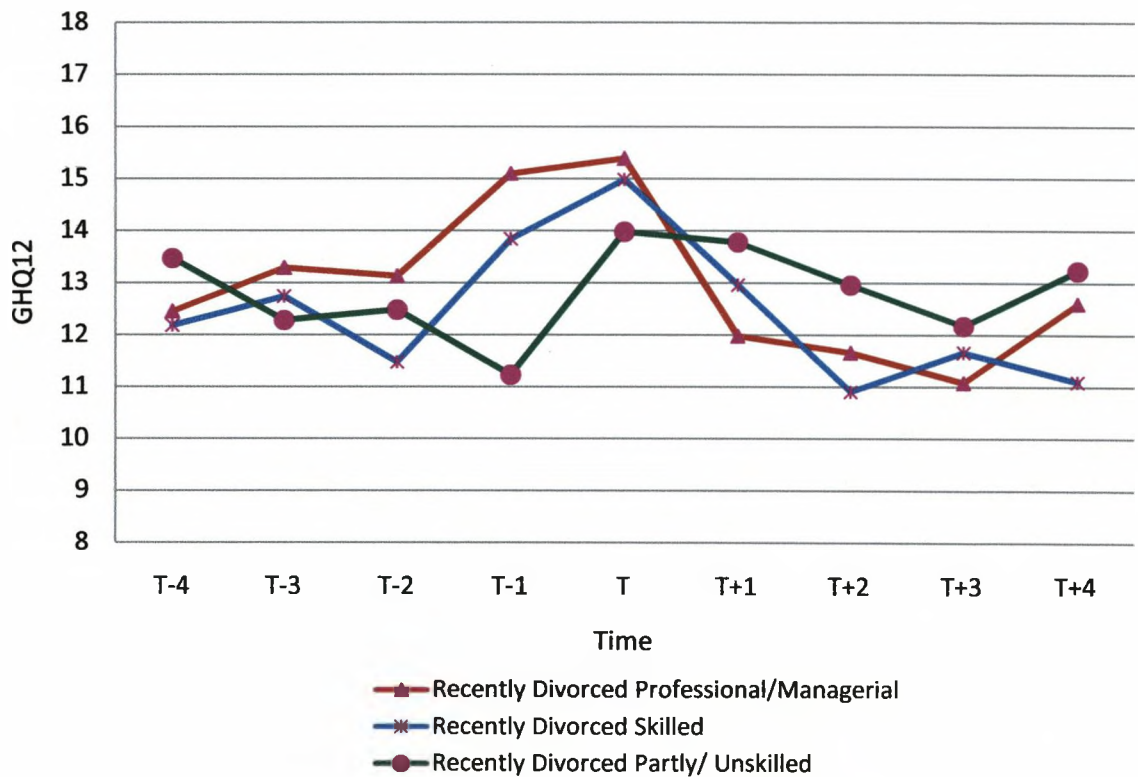


Figure 3.3 Recently divorced: Psychological wellbeing over time and social class

3.4.4 Age An exploratory repeated measures ANOVA was also conducted to investigate the contribution of age to psychological wellbeing over time. The data file was split by marital status; age at T_4 was included as a continuous between-subjects factor in the original analysis (Section 3.3), with marital status removed from the between subjects

factor list. Age had a significant main effect in only the continuously married group ($F_{(59, 2030)} = 1.42, p = .020, \eta^2 = 0.04$), which is likely to reflect an increased psychological wellbeing as a function of increasing age (Diener & Suh, 1997). Interestingly, a significant interaction emerged between time and age for the continuously widowed ($F_{(320, 560)} = 1.17, p = .05, \eta^2 = 0.40$) and continuously divorced ($F_{(328, 152)} = 1.28, p = .041, \eta^2 = 0.73$) groups. No such interaction emerged for recently widowed or recently divorced groups. Comparisons were not made between age groups since sample sizes were small but Figures 3.4 and 3.5 show the average pattern of change (mean GHQ12) by age group for the continuously widowed and continuously divorced, respectively.

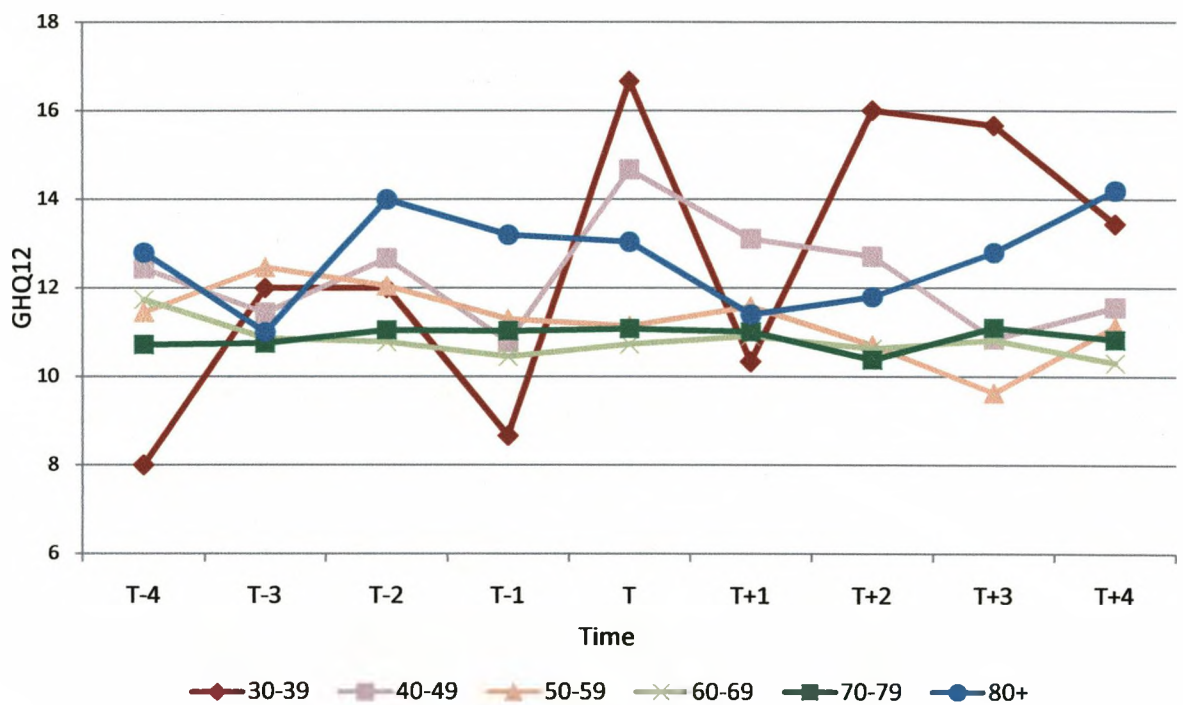


Figure 3.4 Continuously widowed: Psychological wellbeing over time by age group

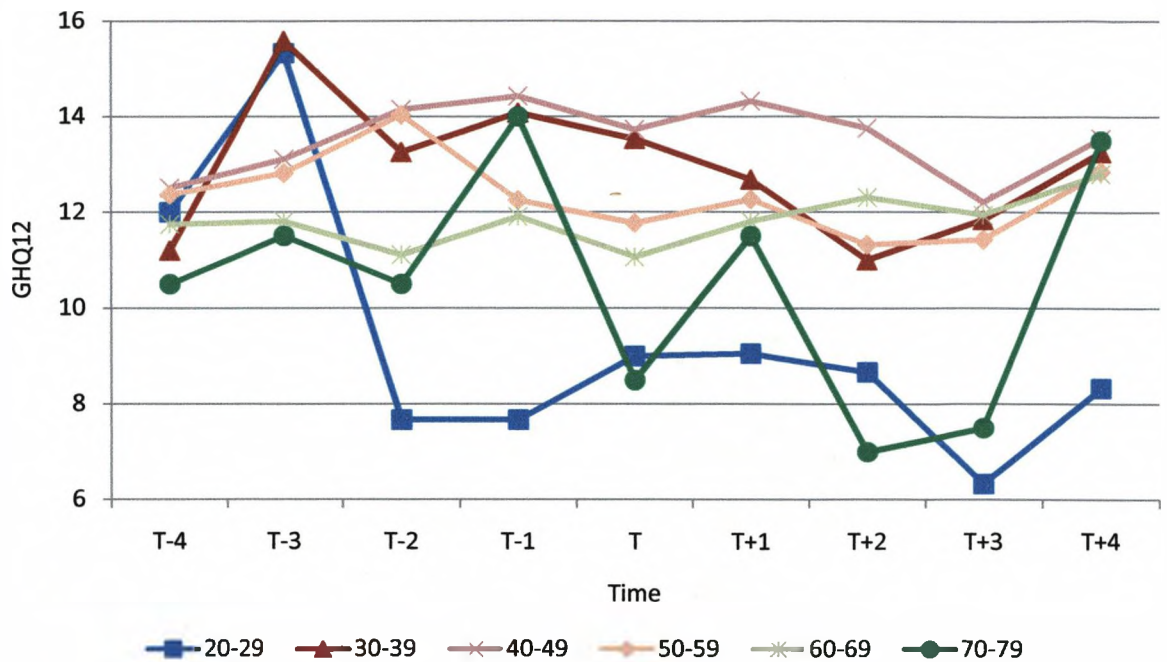


Figure 3.5 Continuously divorced: Psychological wellbeing over time by age group

3.5 Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate longitudinal changes in psychological wellbeing for four stable and three newly transitioned marital status groups over a nine year period, with transition at the mid-point, with the expectation that there would be significant changes in level of psychological wellbeing. Further, it was expected that the patterns of change would vary between marital status groups, gender and social class. Through the use of a 9 year time frame and the inclusion of seven marital status groups and three social class groups in the investigation, this study is able to identify three key findings. First, the results reveal an absence of gender difference in psychological wellbeing at the time of divorce. Second, they demonstrate a social class gradient for the impact of, and adjustment to, divorce. Third, there is no evidence of improved psychological wellbeing amongst the recently married.

Gender and social class were important considerations in the analysis. As expected, the findings indicate that women generally report lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to men. However, this is not the case amongst the recently divorced. Interestingly, in the recently divorced group, at transition and one year either side, there is no significant gender difference in reported distress. Previous findings on gender

differences by marital status are mixed, but divorce transitions may be more harmful for women because of the loss of economic resources (Dupre & Meadows, 2007). However, the results in this study, which benefit from a longitudinal time frame, suggest that the negative impact of divorce is, in fact, higher for men. The typical pattern of psychological wellbeing by gender, where women have lower levels compared to men, is being reversed and the difference becomes non significant around the point of transition. This makes theoretical sense, since previous research notes that women are more likely to have a strong network of friends to support them, and have higher levels of contact with adult children, siblings and friends than men, making men more vulnerable to loneliness and to the loss of social connections (Pinqart, 2003). Furthermore, women are more likely to initiate divorce, which is associated with better divorce adjustment (Sakraida, 2008; Wang & Amato, 2004).

In terms of social class, the pattern of post-transition adjustment, particularly in the divorced sample, varies by social class, with professional/managerial people experiencing a more speedy recovery compared to the skilled and partly/unskilled groups. Existing literature considers the relationship between social class and health (Marmot et al., 1998; Warheit et al., 1976), but very little research has been conducted to identify social class differences in the adjustment process to marital transitions including divorce and widowhood. The findings show that patterns of adjustment following divorce are markedly different for different social class groups. Prior to divorce, the professional/managerial report lowered levels of psychological wellbeing prior to and at divorce, but experience a quick recovery to lower levels of distress. The skilled also experience high levels of distress before divorce and over a two year period after transition experience an improvement in wellbeing. In contrast, the impact of divorce for the partly/unskilled group is at point of transition itself, and levels of distress continue to be high over a longer period of time compared to the other social class groups. Overall, the results suggest that the impact of, and the adjustment to, transitions out of marriage is worse for lower social class groups, which is likely to reflect a difference in social and material resources. For example, using social class as a proxy for income, the partly/unskilled group would be expected to have a lower level of financial resources. Socioeconomic status is associated with social network size, social interaction and the availability of social support (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998), which in turn are related to psychological wellbeing (Windle & Woods, 2004). Social causation proposes that reduced financial and material resources following divorce and widowhood may contribute to changes in health following

transition (Dolan, Peasgood & White, 2008; Wyke & Ford, 1992). In line with social causation theory, the negative impact of marital status change is generally higher for lower social class groups.

A subsequent analysis considering the influence of age on patterns of change in psychological wellbeing between groups provides support for increased psychological wellbeing with increasing age (Diener & Suh, 1997). Further, there is some evidence of age related differences in the longer term impact of widowhood and divorce on psychological health. However, although this continuous variable represents life course stage, as used by Williams and Umberson (2004) in their analysis, caution is taken when drawing conclusions here since there was no information about when the continuously widowed or continuously divorced experience marital status change.

As expected, there are significant differences between the marital status groups when collapsed across time, gender and social class. Marital protection hypothesis posits a health protective benefit of marriage (Waldron et al., 1996). However, in this study, the recently married report higher levels of distress than do both their never married and continuously married counterparts and entry into marriage does not appear to have a positive impact on wellbeing in the four year period that follows. This suggests that the health benefits of marriage are related to marital duration rather than married status. Additionally, the continuously married show no significant difference in psychological wellbeing from the never married group, providing evidence against marital protection and marital resource hypotheses. In line with the initial predictions, transitioning marital status groups report more distress compared to stable groups (Strohschein et al., 2005; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). The married and never married show significantly lower levels of distress compared to the recently widowed and recently divorced, especially at point of transition, and the change to widowed and divorced status has a significant negative impact on psychological wellbeing (Bennett, 2006; Lee & Gramotnev, 2007; Strohschein et al., 2005). The impact of widowhood on psychological health occurs at transition and the recently widowed show no significant difference to the continuously married prior to widowhood, or any declines in psychological wellbeing over the four years leading up to transition, thus rejecting any selection effect for widowhood (Wade & Pevalin, 2004). The sharp decrease in psychological wellbeing specifically at point of widowhood is consistent with previous research (Marks & Lambert, 1998; Mastekaasa, 1994b; Wade & Pevalin, 2004) and is likely to be a reflection of the difficult adjustment into single status following the loss of a

spouse. No significant differences were found between the continuously married and recently widowed following transition, with a seemingly rapid improvement in psychological health for the recently widowed. This could be explained by the cessation of caring for a terminally ill spouse in the case of anticipatory bereavement. An alternative explanation is a study selection effect where by those with higher levels of distress choose not to complete the survey in the years following their bereavement, and were, therefore, excluded from the current analysis due to missing data. The recently divorced report significantly lower levels of psychological health compared to their married counterparts in the four years prior to marital status transition (Wade & Pevalin, 2004). The findings suggest psychological distress, associated with marital discord, occurs prior to divorce. Moreover, there is a post-transition improvement in psychological wellbeing after divorce, which sits well with divorce crisis theory and suggests that divorce may allow for longer term psychological benefits (Booth & Amato, 1991; Gardner & Oswald, 2006).

In using the fifteen existing waves of BHPS data to maximise the size of the data sample, this study is limited to using only GHQ12 as a measure of psychological wellbeing. Bennett (2006) has illustrated that marital status groups respond differently on a variety of health measures. A wider range of measures would allow discrimination between different aspects of psychological health. A further methodological consideration is the selection of the stable marital status cases, which was largely from survey wave A, collected in 1991. It is important, therefore, to consider the potential influence of a period effect in the data where wider social and economic circumstances may have influenced psychological wellbeing. Another limitation in this study is that cohabiting men and women were not able to be included in the sample. The prevalence of cohabitation as a precursor to, or indeed as an alternative to marriage, has increased in recent years (Smallwood & Wilson, 2007). It would, therefore, be important to consider cohabiter status in future analyses. This would certainly be an interesting avenue to explore in future research. In addition, this study does not consider parental status, which is likely to have an important impact on psychological health (Koropecy-Cox, 1998). To overcome some of these limitations, Chapter 4's analysis includes cohabiters and considers the role of parental status (Chapter 4).

3.4.1 Conclusions This longitudinal study highlights the importance of marital status, gender and social class to psychological wellbeing, and sheds light on the interplay between these factors. The depth of the current methodology allows for three important

new findings to be identified. First, while men in other marital status groups fare better than women, there is no gender difference for the impact of divorce on psychological wellbeing at transition. This suggests that divorced causes more considerable, negative changes in psychological health for men compared to women. Second, that the negative impact of marital status change, particularly divorce, has a social class gradient where there are different trajectories of psychological wellbeing post-transition for different social class groups. Third, that entry into marriage does not allow for immediate improvements in psychological wellbeing. Transitions out of marriage including divorce and widowhood have a significant negative impact on psychological wellbeing at point of transition. The inclusion of four years pre-transition in the analysis allows for the conclusion that the newly divorced experience declining levels of psychological health prior to transition, which could point to a selection effect for divorce. By the same token, the peak in level of distress for both the recently divorced and recently widowed may be explained by social causation hypothesis, where the adjustment to new marital status causes a negative impact on health. However, in this chapter, there was no consideration of additional variables such as social support on psychological wellbeing that would allow consideration of a process of social causation. This will be considered in Chapter 4. Based on the findings in this study, the pattern of psychological wellbeing reported in the recently divorced group of increased distress levels prior to divorce, peaking at point of transition, and a gradual recovery over time following transition suggests that the explanation lies in divorce crisis hypothesis, particularly for divorced men, and moreover, for divorced men in lower social class groups.

This study confirms previous research findings that marital status differences exist in psychological health, and that widowhood and divorce have a significant negative impact on psychological wellbeing. Moreover, this study provides some evidence for age related differences in the impact of transitions out of marriage. This study has not considered why differences in psychological health exist between marital status groups and in Chapters 4 and 5 the results of a quantitative questionnaire study are examined to assess the role of social support in the association between marital status and psychological health.

Chapter 4

Predicting psychological wellbeing from marital status and social support

4.1 Introduction

The psychological and social benefits of marriage are well documented, with the married enjoying higher levels of psychological wellbeing and wider social networks (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Findings from Chapter 3's longitudinal investigation of psychological wellbeing following a change in marital status (BHPS data) support previous research on marital status differences in psychological wellbeing and suggest that the widowed and divorced experience higher levels of psychological distress following a transition out of marriage compared to their continuously married counterparts.

Existing literature suggests that better access to social support, which can be described as the emotional, instrumental or tangible aid exchanged between members of the social network (e.g. House, 1981), is associated with better psychological wellbeing (e.g. Thoits, 1995). Further, the perceived adequacy of support is more consequential than received support for psychological wellbeing (Chan & Lee, 2006; Thoits, 1995; Turner, 1994). However, it is unclear whether this relationship is due to a direct influence of perceived social support on psychological health, or if perceived social support simply buffers, or moderates, the effect of negative experiences, such as daily hassles or stressful life events (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Perceived social support may act independently and have a direct effect on psychological wellbeing, where those with higher levels of social support experience better psychological wellbeing and those with lower levels of social support experience poorer psychological wellbeing, regardless of levels of stress experienced. Alternatively, perceived social support may buffer the negative effects of stress, where individuals with strong social support systems will cope better compared to those with little or no support. Here, at times of high stress individuals with high levels of social support, in contrast to individuals with low levels of social support, have better psychological wellbeing and at times of low or 'normal' levels of stress differences in absolute level of social support may be less related to the level of psychological wellbeing experienced.

With both pathways, social support emerges as an important coping resource associated with better psychological wellbeing. Coping refers to the cognitive or behavioural strategies employed to manage or reduce stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

Across a variety of contexts the use of specific coping strategies has been found to be a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing (Aldwin, 1999; Griffith, Steptoe & Cropley, 1999; Healy & McKay, 2000; Mosley et al., 1994). The literature on stress and coping is large, but there is a broad agreement that there are at least five general types of coping strategies: problem-focused coping, emotion focused coping, social support, religious coping, and making meaning (Aldwin & Yancura, 2003; Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). The COPE (Coping Orientation of Problem Experience) inventory (Carver et al., 1989) is a widely used, multidimensional coping inventory measuring conceptually distinct aspects of problem-focused coping (active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking of instrumental social support); emotion-focused coping (seeking of emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, turning to religion); and “less useful” (p267) coping responses (focus on and venting of emotions, behavioural disengagement, mental disengagement). Understanding which coping strategies contribute to psychological wellbeing is important, particularly since previous research highlights that the number of daily hassles a person has to cope with has an impact on psychological wellbeing (Clark & Watson, 1988; Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer & Lazarus, 1981; Landreville & Vézina, 1992; Serido, Almeida & Wethington, 2004). Earlier research has suggested that active coping strategies and the use of social support direct attention towards the stressor in attempt to control it may be associated with more positive psychological wellbeing outcomes (Felsten, 1998; Folkman, 1997; Zautra et al., 1995) while avoidant coping strategies are typically associated with poorer psychological wellbeing outcomes (Billings & Moos, 1981; Carver et al., 1989; Felsten, 1998). Importantly, coping strategies are not mutually exclusive and the use of coping strategies is contextual, influenced by how a person appraises the demands of the situation (Folkman, 1984).

4.1.1 Current study This study examines the role of marital status and perceived social support on psychological wellbeing. A questionnaire based design is employed to explore the relationship between marital status, psychological wellbeing health and social support. In Chapter 3, the use of BHPS data in the investigation limited the data analysis to the presence of only one measure of psychological wellbeing (GHQ12). Here, two broad aspects of psychological wellbeing were measured using three different measures of psychological wellbeing: an affective component, in terms of psychological distress and depressive symptoms, and a cognitive component, referred to as life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993). In addition, as partnership status may have a separate effect on health than

marital status (Joung et al., 1994), partnership status categories (cohabiting; Living Apart Together [LAT]) are included in the marital status variable. In this study, LAT represents people who define themselves as being in a non-cohabiting relationship. This definition may differ from those in gerontology literature, which consider older adults who define themselves as a couple but chose to live in independent households (e.g. De Jong Gierveld, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999). The aim of this study is to discover whether marital status and perceived social support are unique predictors of psychological wellbeing, and to what extent psychological wellbeing can be explained by demographic differences, coping strategies and the number of daily hassles.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Sampling Two routes were chosen to reach potential participants ($N=510$). First, the questionnaire was sent out in a mail shot to a random sample of adults in three wards in the city of Liverpool, U.K. ($N=86$). Second, the same questionnaire was completed online using opportunity sampling ($N=424$). The first stage was completed between June and December 2008. The online data collection started in January 2009 and ended in September 2009.

4.2.1.1 Mail shot: Liverpool The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of deprivation nationally and ranks geographical areas relative to each other. To provide a representative sample, IMD figures from 2004 for each super output area for all Liverpool City wards were reviewed (2007). From this review, three Liverpool wards were identified and categorised as high, medium and low areas of deprivation. Table 4.1 presents the wards and relevant deprivation indices. Edited electoral registers were obtained from Liverpool City Council for each of the three wards, and 1500 addresses were selected at random from the database. Residents at the selected addresses were invited to complete the questionnaire. Three mail shots were conducted. A total of 1500 postal questionnaires, plus reply paid envelopes and a covering letter/information sheet, were distributed across Everton, Norris Green and Mossley Hill. Completed questionnaires were returned to the University of Liverpool. The total number of completed questionnaires was 86, corresponding to a response rate of 5.73%. (By ward: Everton 3.40%; Norris Green 5%; and Mossley Hill 8.80%). The mail shot sample ($N=86$) included 36 men and 50 women and had a median age of 51 years and a range from 18 to 91 years.

Table 4.1 *Liverpool City Council wards with deprivation statistics*

Ward	Everton	Norris Green	Mossley Hill
Mean Household income (2006)	£17, 255	£22, 000	£33, 165
% Job seekers allowance (2007)	9	7	2
No of benefit claimants	4455	3597	920
% Worklessness rate	48	35	13
% Council housing	22	8	1
No. void properties	748	203	156
% of area in most deprived 1% nationally	89.1	29.9	0
% of area in most deprived 5% nationally	97.6	91.3	0
% of area in most deprived 10% nationally	97.6	100	0
<i>Overall 'Deprivation'</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>Low</i>

4.2.1.2 Internet questionnaire The response rate to the postal questionnaire was much lower than anticipated. In response, to maximise the questionnaire sample, an internet questionnaire was built using HTML and PHP web coding and questions were identical to the postal questionnaire. Using the internet as a method of collecting experimental data has been recognised as a speedy, low cost way of accessing a wide and diverse research sample, increasing external validity, and decreasing experimenter and demand effects, and the use of web based research is increasing (Reips, 2002; Skitka & Sargis, 2006). Men and women over the age of 18 were invited to complete the internet questionnaire. The internet questionnaire web-link² was circulated widely via e-mail lists, international web experiment lists and a range of internet forum groups. The impact of self-selection effects was minimised by using multiple sites to host the survey link with the view that different sites would be likely to attract different types of participants. Multiple submissions have been found to be rare in internet experiments (Krantz & Dalal, 2000; Reips, 1997). However, they were controlled in the current study by checking personal identifying items, and checking time and date consistency of responses, as recommended by Schmidt (1997). Responses were submitted online and anonymous PHP web-scripts

² <http://www.ponte-carlo.co.uk/laurasurvey.html>

were sent to the research email inbox. The online questionnaire sample ($N=424$) included 99 men and 325 women. The median sample age was 32 years, with a range from 18 to 79 years.

The collection of the data by means of the internet can make it difficult to define the population from which the sample was drawn and may reduce data generalisability. However, the findings from this study come from a large adult sample including men and women across different age groups, from a broad range of marital and social class backgrounds. Demographic indicators including employment status were considered in the analysis.

4.2.1.3 Study sample The study sample included a total of 510 adults, with 375 women and 135 men completing the questionnaire over a range of age, marital statuses and social backgrounds (Table 4.2). A Mann-Whitney U test showed that there was a significant age difference between the two samples ($U=-7.32$, $N=510$, $p<.001$). The lower age in the internet sample compared to the postal questionnaire sample is not surprising since internet users tend to be younger (Lenhart, 2003).

4.2.2 Questionnaire measures The questionnaire comprised seven parts: demographics including gender, age, ethnicity, current employment status (are you currently employed? yes/no), marital status and parenting status (do you have children? yes/no); followed by six quantitative questionnaire measures relating to psychological wellbeing, general coping, social support, and life satisfaction. Reliabilities of the questionnaire measures were all acceptable, averaging $\alpha=.92$ (range: $\alpha=.89$ to $\alpha=.96$).

4.2.2.1 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12; Goldberg, 1978) The GHQ12 was used to measure psychological wellbeing. As a self-administered instrument that is frequently used as a measure of mental health, the GHQ12 is based on the respondents' assessment of their present state relative to their usual state in terms of feelings of happiness, ability to cope, sleep disruption, confidence, and depression, amongst others. Responses are made on a four-point scale of frequency of a feeling in relation to a person's usual state: "Better than usual", "Same as usual", "Less than usual" and "Much less than usual". GHQ12 items were coded using Likert coding 0 to 3, generating a total score from 0 to 36, with a higher score being indicative of poorer psychological wellbeing.

Table 4.2 Questionnaire sample (N=510)

	Men	Women	Total
<i>Marital status</i>			
Married	34	88	122
Widowed	10	40	50
Divorced	10	32	42
Cohabiting	21	53	74
Never married	26	78	104
LAT	20	43	63
Remarried	14	41	55
<i>Employment</i>			
Employed	104	287	391
Unemployed	31	88	119
<i>Parenting status</i>			
No children	73	229	302
Children	62	146	208
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
White	122	358	480
Other	13	17	30
Total	135	375	510

4.2.2.2 Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) CES-D is a widely used self-report instrument for assessing the symptoms of depression in the general population. It consists of twenty items that consider mood, somatic complaints, social interaction and motor functioning and scored on a 4-point Likert-scale responses ranging from "rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)" to "most or all of the time (5 - 7 days)". Scoring was 0 to 3 and the scoring of positive items (4, 8, 12, and 16) was reversed. Scores on the CES-D range from 0 to 60, with the higher scores indicating higher levels of depressive symptoms.

4.2.2.3 Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) The SWLS was used as a global measure of life satisfaction, assessing a cognitive rather than affective component of wellbeing (Pavot & Diener, 1993). The five item self-report scale measured the individual's evaluation of satisfaction with life in general (e.g. "I am satisfied with my life," and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing"). Items were

coded on a 7-point Likert response scale and scores could range from 5 (low satisfaction) to 35 (high satisfaction).

4.2.2.4 Medical Outcomes Study Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS; Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) The MOS-SSS is a 19 item self-report scale used to assess perceived social support from family, friends and a significant other. The survey consists of four separate functional dimensions of social support and respondents are asked to rate the perceived availability of emotional/informational support, involving the expression of positive affect, empathetic understanding or offering of advice or feedback; tangible support, involving the provision of material aid or physical assistance; affectionate support, involving expressions of love and affection; and positive social interaction, involving the availability of others to do fun things with. The 5-point Likert response scale, ranging from "none of the time" to "all of the time" gave a continuous overall functional social support index with values ranging from 0 to 95 where a higher score indicates higher levels of perceived support.

4.2.2.5 Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) Coping was assessed using the Brief COPE: a 28 item instrument, modified from the original COPE (Carver et al., 1989). It was designed to assess coping strategies used in stressful situations and comprised of fourteen two-item coping subscales including active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, humour, religion, using emotional support, using instrumental support, self-distraction, denial, venting, substance use, behavioural disengagement and self-blame. Responses were made on a 4-point Likert scale (from "I usually don't do this at all" to "I usually do this a lot") for how much they adopt a particular strategy e.g. "I've been making jokes about it". Item scoring was 1 to 4, with each 2-item subscale score ranging from 0 to 8 where a higher score represents greater use of a coping strategy.

4.2.2.6 Survey of recent life experiences- short form (SRLE; Kohn & Macdonald, 1992) A shortened 41-item version of the SRLE (full version: 51 items) was used to ascertain the extent of the respondent's experience of daily hassles over the last month. The SRLE was developed as an alternative to the Daily Hassles Scale (Kanner et al., 1981) which has been found to be contaminated by items pertaining to psychological and physical distress and by a response format that may reflect such distress rather than predict it (Kohn & Macdonald, 1992). Examples of items on this shortened self-report scale include: "Dissatisfaction with work"; "Experiencing high levels of noise" and "Conflicts with friend(s)". Responses were made on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 ("Not at all part of my life") to 4 ("Very much part

of my life"). Overall scores range from 41 to 164 and are positively related to the amount of experienced daily hassles.

4.3 Data analysis

Marital status³ had 7 levels (married; widowed; divorced; cohabiting; never married; Living Apart Together (LAT); and remarried). Dummy coding (0, 1) was applied, with the married group used as the reference category as it is considered the normative status (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Ethnicity was collapsed into a dichotomous variable (White $n=480$; Other $n=30$). Psychological wellbeing was assessed using the GHQ12, CES-D and SWLS. New variables were created as total (or subscale) scores for each questionnaire measure. For questionnaire measures that had responses missing responses < 10% of the items, a replacement by means method was used to allow the computation of total scores for the measure so that the missing item was assigned the mean value for other items on that particular scale for that participant. Missing data replacement was not completed for COPE scores since this measure is broken into smaller two-item subscales. Participants with missing responses >10% for a questionnaire measure were not included in the data analysis involving that questionnaire measure. Consequently, the number of scores available varied for each measure. Due to skewed distributions, all three dependent variables were transformed using Log10.

4.3.1 Factor analysis of COPE measure First, to reduce the number of overall variables and to develop coherent coping variables which reflect the data in this study, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out on the COPE variables (Carver et al., 1989). Total scores for each of the 14 COPE subscales were generated as new variables, where a higher score represented greater use of that coping strategy. Kolmogorov-Smirnov's (KS) test showed that these COPE variables were all non-normally distributed ($p<.001$). Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum and Strahan (1999) recommend using principal axis factor analysis if the assumption of multivariate normality is "severely violated" (p277). The data were, therefore, submitted to principle axis factoring with varimax rotation in SPSS. Factors were identified using a scree test, which involved examining the graph of the eigenvalues and finding the natural bend or break point in the data where the curve flattens out. The

³ Marital status in this study was self-defined by the respondent and included partner/ living status. It may differ from legal marital status. Divorced level is a collapse of separated and divorced. Never married level represents individuals who have never married and have not defined themselves as being in a relationship.

number of data points *above* the 'break', not including the point at which the break occurs, is usually the number of factors to retain (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

4.3.2 Regression analysis Second, a hierarchical regression analysis was used to investigate the contribution of demographic variables, social support, coping responses and hassles in predicting psychological wellbeing, as measured by GHQ12 (Goldberg, 1978), CES-D (Radloff, 1977) and SWLS (Diener et al., 1985) variables. Demographic variables were entered in the first step of the regression. In the second step marital status dummy variables were added; in the third step SRLE variable was added; in the fourth step three new variables derived from the COPE variable were added; and MOS-SSS (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) variable was added in the fifth step. Finally, a trimmed regression model was then created by only entering significant predictors from the first regression (Field, 2009).

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Factor analysis of COPE measure COPE variable scores were submitted to principle axis factor analysis using varimax rotation. Three main criteria were considered in determining the number of factors to extract: the scree test; the amount of common variance explained by the factors; and the meaningfulness of the rotated factors (Russell, 2002). Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) cite .32 as a good rule of thumb for the minimum loading of an item. The scree test suggested three factors. As suggested by Costello and Osborne (2005) two, four and five factors were also extracted but these were difficult to interpret, having few salient loadings onto factors. The final three factor solution to the COPE measure accounted for 51% of the variance and is detailed in Table 4.3. The factor analysis revealed a factor structure similar to Carver et al.'s (1989) scales of coping. Loadings onto Factor 1 included planning, positive reframing, active coping, acceptance and humour (.34 and above) and could be labelled active, or problem focused coping. Factor 2 was a clear negative coping factor, with loadings of .36 and above on self-blame, behavioural disengagement, denial, substance use, venting, and self-distraction. Factor 3 involved coping strategies that made use of the support of others, with loadings of .84 and above on using instrumental support and using emotional support. Factor 3 might be labelled as passive or assisted coping. Religion did not load onto any of the three factors (.18). This does not mean that religion is not an important coping strategy. Rather, this

finding is likely to reflect the relatively small sub-set of people who are likely to use religion as a coping strategy (Carver et al., 1989).

Table 4.3 *Item loadings in principle axis factor analysis with varimax rotation*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Eigenvalues	3.21	2.40	1.47
Variance explained (%)	22.96	17.12	10.51
Cronbach's α	.73	.72	.85
Active coping	.80		
Planning	.79		
Positive reframing	.65		
Acceptance	.46		
Humour	.34		
Self-blame		.65	
Behavioural disengagement		.61	
Denial		.59	
Substance use		.48	
Venting		.45	
Self-distraction		.36	
Using emotional support			.84
Using instrumental support			.84

4.4.3 Regression Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations between all variables are shown in Table 4.4. Importantly, there were no significant differences in scores on all three psychological wellbeing measures between the postal questionnaire and internet questionnaire samples (GHQ12: $U=-0.33$, $N=510$, $p=.741$; CES-D: $U=-1.73$, $N=509$, $p=.084$; SWLS: $U=-0.55$, $N=508$, $p=.581$). Three separate regression analyses were conducted with the same set of predictor variables regressed on three different measures of psychological wellbeing: GHQ12; CES-D; and SWLS. When the GHQ12 measure was used as the dependent variable, the full regression model predicted 36% of variance in GHQ12 scores (adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$, $F_{(19,499)} = 16.59$, $p < .001$). For CES-D, the full regression model predicted

51% of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.51$, $F_{(19,498)}=27.83$, $p<.001$) and for SWLS the full regression model predicted 47% of the variance adjusted (adjusted $R^2 = 0.47$, $F_{(19,498)}=23.75$, $p<.001$). Table 4.5 presents model summary and individual beta values for each predictor variable when predicting GHQ12, CES-D and SWLS scores.

A trimmed regression model was created for each dependent variable by removing the non-significant predictors from the regression equation. In the final trimmed model predicting GHQ12 score, being widowed (compared to being married) ($\beta=0.11$, $p=.002$), SRLE (daily hassles) score ($\beta=0.33$, $p<.001$), using active coping strategies ($\beta=-0.18$, $p<.001$) as well as using negative coping strategies ($\beta=0.19$, $p<.001$), and MOS-SSE (perceived emotional and informational social support) score ($\beta=-0.22$, $p<.001$) all significantly predicted variance in GHQ12 score. Being widowed, number of daily hassles and using negative coping strategies all had a significant positive association with psychological distress. Using active coping strategies and reporting a higher level perceived emotional and informational social support were negatively associated with psychological distress. The final trimmed model predicted 37% of variance in psychological distress (adjusted $R^2 = 0.37$, $F_{(8,500)}=59.85$, $p<.001$).

In the second model, where CES-D was the dependent variable, being younger ($\beta=-0.11$, $p=.003$); widowed (compared to being married; $\beta=0.15$, $p<.001$); a higher SRLE score ($\beta=0.40$, $p<.001$); and using negative coping strategies ($\beta=0.20$, $p<.001$) all had a significant negative association with psychological distress. Using active coping strategies ($\beta=-0.12$, $p<.001$), and a higher MOS-SSE (perceived emotional and informational social support; $\beta=-0.26$, $p<.001$) were negatively associated with psychological distress. MOS-SST (perceived tangible social support) was not significant in the trimmed model ($\beta=0.05$, $p=.198$). The trimmed model predicted 50% of the variance in depressive symptoms (adjusted $R^2 = 0.50$, $F_{(7,499)}=71.96$, $p<.001$).

Table 4.4 Descriptive statistics and correlations between psychological wellbeing, coping strategies, daily hassles and social support measures

	N	Mean (\pm SD)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>Psychological wellbeing</i>									
1. GHQ12	510	1.10 (0.23)	0.71**	-0.55**	-0.20**	0.41**	-0.18**	0.48**	-0.41**
2. CES-D	509	1.10 (0.42)		-0.56**	-0.14**	0.48**	-0.23**	0.59**	-0.48**
3. SWLS	508	1.32 (0.19)			0.18**	-0.41**	0.30**	-0.49**	0.54**
<i>Coping strategies</i>									
4. Coping 1	501	28.27 (5.75)				0.36	0.31**	0.09*	0.20**
5. Coping 2	501	14.02 (4.15)					0.05	0.57**	-0.24**
6. Coping 3	501	22.26 (5.93)						-0.18**	0.54**
<i>Daily hassles</i>									
7. SRLE	507	71.37 (17.65)							-0.33**
<i>Social support (functional)</i>									
8. MOS-SSS	510	71.92 (19.65)							

 $p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

Table 4.5 Full hierarchical regression analysis predicting psychological wellbeing (GHQ12; CES-D; SWLS)

	GHQ12										CES-D					SWLS							
	Step 1	Age	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	R ²	ΔR ²	B	SE B	β	
																							R ²
			0.02	0.01	-0.00	.00	-.11	0.04	0.03	-0.01	.00	-.16**	0.01	-0.00	-0.00	.00	-.05						
	Gender				.01	.02	.01			.03	.04	.03			.00	.02	-.00						
	Employment status				.05	.03	.09			.12	.04	.12*			-.02	.02	-.04						
	Parenting status				.06	.03	.13*			.10	.04	.11*			-.02	.02	-.05						
	Ethnicity				.01	.04	.01			.07	.08	.04			.03	.04	-.04						
Step 2	Age	0.07	0.04	.00	.00	-.20**	0.09	0.07	0.07	-.01	.00	-.24**	0.11	0.09	.00	.00	.07						
	Gender			.01	.02	-.01				.01	.04	.01			.01	.02	.03						
	Employment status			.04	.03	.07				.09	.05	.09			-.00	.02	-.01						
	Parenting status			.06	.03	.12*				.10	.05	.12*			-.02	.02	-.01						

Ethnicity	.02	.04	.02	.08	.08	.05	-.03	.04	-.03
Widowed	.18	.04	.23**	.33	.07	.23**	-.19	.03	-.29**
Divorced/ Separated	.13	.04	.15**	.29	.08	.19**	-.19	.03	-.27**
Cohabiting	.01	.04	.02	.05	.07	.05	.00	.03	.00
Never married	.06	.03	.10	.11	.06	.11	-.08	.03	-.16*
Living Apart Together	.03	.04	.05	.12	.07	.10	-.05	.03	-.08
Remarried	.09	.04	.12*	.11	.07	.08	-.07	.03	-.11*
Step 3 Age	0.28	0.26	-0.05	0.40	0.39	-0.06	0.34	0.33	0.00
Gender	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	.03	-0.02	.02	.02	.05
Employment status	.04	.03	.07	.10	.04	.10*	-.01	.02	-.02
Parenting status	.02	.03	.04	.01	.04	.01	.02	.02	.04
Ethnicity	-.03	.04	-.04	-.02	.06	-.01	.01	.03	.02
Widowed	.16	.04	.20**	.29	.06	.20**	-.17	.03	-.27**
Divorced/ Separated	.04	.04	.04	.10	.06	.07	-.12	.03	-.17**

Cohabiting	-.01	.03	-.01	.02	.05	.01	.01	.03	.02
Never married	.04	.03	.08	.08	.05	.08	-.06	.02	-.13*
Living Apart Together	.01	.04	.02	.08	.06	.06	-.03	.03	-.05
Remarried	.06	.03	.08	.05	.06	.04	-.05	.03	-.07
SRLE	.01	.00	.49**	.01	.00	.60**	-.01	.00	-.51**
Step 4 Age	0.35	0.33	-.07	0.46	0.45	0.42	0.41	0.00	-.07
Gender	-.02	.02	-.03	-.00	.03	-.01	.01	.02	.02
Employment status	.03	.02	.05	.08	.04	.08*	.00	.02	.00
Parenting status	.02	.02	.04	.01	.04	.01	.02	.02	.04
Ethnicity	-.02	.04	-.02	.01	.06	.01	.01	.03	-.01
Widowed	.15	.04	.19**	.26	.06	.19**	-.16	.03	-.24**
Divorced/ Separated	.03	.04	.04	.08	.06	.06	-.11	.03	-.15**
Cohabiting	-.02	.03	-.03	.00	.05	.00	.02	.02	.03
Never married	.02	.03	.04	.05	.05	.05	-.05	.02	-.10*

Living Apart Together	.00	.03	.01	.07	.06	.06	-.03	.03	-.05
Remarried	.05	.03	.07	.04	.05	.03	-.04	.03	-.06
SRLE	.01	.00	.38**	.01	.00	.46**	-.00	.00	-.36**
Coping1	-.01	.00	-.22**	-.01	.00	-.14**	.01	.00	.16**
Coping2	.01	.00	.20**	.02	.00	.22*	-.01	.00	-.23**
Coping3	-.01	.00	-.03	-.01	.01	-.10**	.01	.00	.15**
Step 5 Age	0.38	0.37	-.10	0.53	0.51	-.00	0.49	0.47	0.00
Gender	-.01	.02	-.02	.00	.03	.00	.01	.02	.02
Employment status	.03	.02	.04	.07	.03	.07	.01	.02	.01
Parental status	.01	.02	.03	.00	.03	.00	.03	.02	.08
Ethnicity	-.03	.04	-.04	-.00	.06	-.00	.00	.00	.01
Widowed	.11	.04	.13**	.21	.06	.15**	-.11	.03	-.18**
Divorced/ Separated	.02	.04	.00	.05	.06	.03	-.08	.03	-.13**
Cohabiting	-.01	.03	-.03	.02	.05	.02	.01	.02	.01

Never married	.01	.03	.00	.02	.05	.02	-.02	.02	-.05
Living Apart Together	.03	.03	.02	.12	.05	.08	-.03	.03	-.08
Remarried	.05	.03	.07	.04	.05	.03	-.03	.02	-.06
SRLE	.00	.00	.34**	.01	.00	.40**	-.03	.00	-.29**
Coping1	-.01	.00	-.20**	-.01	.00	-.11**	.01	.00	.13**
Coping2	.01	.00	.16**	.01	.00	.18**	-.00	.00	-.19**
Coping3	.01	.00	.08	.01	.01	.05	.00	.00	-.01
MOS-SSE	-.01	.00	-.27**	-.01	.00	-.29**	.00	.00	.16*
MOS-SST	.00	.00	.09	.1	.00	-.11*	-.00	.00	-.11*
MOS-SSA	-.00	.00	-.07	-.00	.01	-.03	.01	.00	.11*
MOS-SSI	-.00	.00	-.01	-.01	.01	-.10	.01	.00	.19**

$p < .05$ * $p < .01$ ** (Significant effect marked in RED)

The third trimmed regression model, predicting life satisfaction, revealed that being widowed (compared to being married; $\beta=-0.14$, $p<.001$); being divorced ($\beta=-0.09$, $p=.008$); a higher SRLE score ($\beta=-0.30$, $p<.001$), and using negative coping strategies ($\beta=-0.18$, $p<.001$) significantly predicted lower levels of satisfaction as measured by SWLS. Significant positive predictors included using active coping strategies ($\beta=0.13$, $p<.001$); MOS-SSE score ($\beta=0.32$, $p<.001$); MOS-SST score ($\beta=-0.09$, $p=.055$); MOS-SSA score ($\beta=0.14$, $p=.006$); and MOS-SSI score ($\beta=0.17$, $p=.001$). MOS-SST (perceived tangible social support) was approaching significance in the trimmed model, where higher levels of tangible support predicted lower levels of life satisfaction ($\beta=-0.09$, $p=.055$). The trimmed model accounted for 46% of the variance in SWLS (adjusted $R^2=0.46$, $F_{(9,498)}=48.93$, $p<.001$).

In the overall regression model, respondents' age explained a significant amount of variance in CES-D scores but not in GHQ12 ($p=.063$) or SWLS ($p=.567$) scores. Age had a significant negative relationship with CES-D score, where increased age predicted lower CES-D scores. Since higher CES-D scores indicate more depression, the results suggest that older adults enjoy better levels of psychological health. A second set of exploratory analysis was conducted for each marital status group considering the impact of respondents' age by marital status on psychological wellbeing. Active and negative coping strategies, SRLE and MOS-SSS scores were held constant in the analysis. Regression analyses showed that, for the widowed, increased age predicted significantly lower CES-D scores ($\beta=-0.01$; adjusted $R^2=0.61$, $F_{(5,47)}=15.41$, $p<.001$), and significantly higher SWLS scores ($\beta=0.01$; adjusted $R^2=0.46$, $F_{(5,47)}=9.06$, $p<.001$). Essentially, the younger widowed experience lower levels of psychological health. For the never married group, increased age significantly predicted lower levels of life satisfaction (SWLS: $\beta=-0.004$; adjusted $R^2=0.32$, $F_{(5,102)}=10.39$, $p=.034$). No other age differences were found for other marital status groups.

4.5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that contribute to psychological wellbeing, including social support. The results of the regression analyses indicate that being widowed, the number of daily hassles, use of active and negative coping strategies, and perceived social support, when regressed on GHQ12, CES-D or SWLS scores, predict a significant amount of the variance in psychological wellbeing. Some differences in

predictors exist between the three measures of wellbeing. Specifically, age is a significant predictor of CES-D score (depressive symptoms) but not of GHQ12 (psychological distress) or SWLS (life satisfaction). Similarly, being divorced predicts lower levels of life satisfaction but is not a significant predictor for the other measures of psychological wellbeing, with the variance explained by SRLE score instead. These differences may reflect the specific components of psychological wellbeing being measured in each scale. For example, life satisfaction is generally conceptualised as a relatively stable orientation toward life that is less affected by transient moods. Psychological wellbeing measured by happiness, depression or distress on the other hand is said to change frequently in response to the immediate environment (George, 2010).

Overall, compared to their married counterparts, widowed and divorced people are more likely to report lower levels of psychological wellbeing (Gove et al., 1983; Simon, 2002). In step 2 (in the full model), being remarried compared to being continuously married explains a significant amount of the variance in psychological wellbeing (GHQ12 and SWLS only), but the addition of SRLE variable reduces the contribution to non-significance. Thus, the variance explained by being remarried overlaps with that explained by the number of daily hassles. Through the inclusion of partner status within the study's marital status variable, the findings highlight the similarity in psychological wellbeing between the married and those who have never married, are in cohabiting or LAT relationships, and those who have remarried. Psychological wellbeing emerges as being dependent on marital status, and specifically on those individuals that are widowed, or divorced (SWLS only), having experienced a transition out of marriage. Of course, as the analyses are limited to using cross-sectional data this study cannot account for any potential selection effects that might mean those with lower levels of psychological wellbeing are more likely to be selected out. Nevertheless, this would not account for the psychological wellbeing for the widowed group. The findings point to social causation explanations of marital status differences in psychological wellbeing which would highlight the negative impact of a transition out of marriage, including the loss of spousal support and the change to living alone. Further, the results suggest that remarriage, perhaps through the access to social support it provides, can minimise the negative effects of widowhood and divorce.

As expected, higher levels of social support predict psychological wellbeing (Fuhrer, Stansfeld, Chemali & Shipley, 1999; Thoits, 1995; Vanderhorst & McLaren, 2005). Social

support appears to have a direct relationship with psychological wellbeing, where greater perceived access to social support is associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing. Some caution is exercised in interpreting this result since there is also the potential problem that perceived social support might be influenced by psychological wellbeing, where people who feel lonely, unhappy or depressed will be more likely to report inadequate support (Gore, 1981). Consistent with previous research, use of negative coping strategies is associated with lower levels of psychological wellbeing while being older, using active coping strategies and having a lower number of daily hassles are all associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Serido et al., 2004). Marital status and perceived access to social support may affect a person's use of particular coping strategies, as well as the number of and perhaps nature of daily hassles they are likely to experience. This would be an interesting avenue for future research. Parenting status has no significant effect, which is consistent with previous findings from McLanahan and Adams (1987) and Ross et al. (1990).

Previous findings on gender differences in psychological wellbeing are inconsistent. Some conclude that women are at greater risk of depression compared to men (Piccinelli & Wilkinson, 2000; Wilhelm, Parker & Hadzi-Pavlovic, 1997) while others report the same, or higher, levels of life satisfaction and happiness in women when compared to men (Haavio-Mannila, 1971; Herzog, Rodgers & Woodworth, 1982). In this study, gender is not a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing, indicating that there may not be a difference in psychological wellbeing between men and women. However, this may also be a consequence of having a smaller number of men in the sample compared to women.

Overall age emerges as a significant predictor of depressive symptoms where older adults are more likely to report higher levels of psychological wellbeing. Unfortunately, this study could not consider the impact of age at transition due to high volumes of missing data for age at widowhood and age at divorce. However, a secondary analysis reveals that younger widowed participants have significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to older widowed participants. Previous research indicates that off-time widowhood may be particularly disruptive to psychological health since those widowed at a younger age may be less prepared to cope with spousal bereavement and are less likely to have a peer group (Lopata, 1979; Scannell-Desch, 2003; Stoebe & Stroebe, 1987). While the conclusions drawn from this study are limited by the cross-sectional nature of the data

and use of age at response rather than age at transition, they suggest that there are age related differences in the impact of widowhood on psychological health where older widowed adults generally experience better levels of psychological wellbeing. In addition, older never married participants have significantly lower levels of life satisfaction when compared with younger never married participants, suggesting that the impact of being never married has more negative consequences for older adults (Barrett, 1999; Ward, 1979). In contrast to Chapter 3's findings, there is no significant relationship between age and being divorced. Chapter 3 made use of large-scale, nationally representative panel survey data and the difference in results may be a consequence of the smaller, cross-sectional sample used in this study. Alternatively, the age differences in the psychological wellbeing of divorced people may be explained by the additional variables included in this Chapter's analysis, namely coping strategies, number of daily hassles and perceived social support.

4.5.1 Conclusions The findings of this study help to confirm marital status and social support, as well as coping strategies and number of daily hassles, as significant predictors of psychological wellbeing. The findings lend support to the existing literature and shed light on the pathways by which marital status may affect psychological wellbeing. The outcomes of this study provide a platform from which to further investigate the interrelationship between marital status, psychological wellbeing and social support. As access to social support is generally reduced following a transition out of marriage, it would be reasonable to expect that perceived social support might play an important role in the association between marital status and psychological wellbeing. Chapter 5 builds on the results of this study and investigates the pathways by which social support may influence the relationship between marital status and psychological health.

Chapter 5

Associations between marital status, social support and psychological wellbeing

5.1 Introduction

Researchers have yet to fully understand how marriage protects people from poor health and the relationships between marital status, social support and psychological wellbeing are not well understood. Previous research has acknowledged the associations between marital status and psychological wellbeing (e.g. Waite, 1995); social support and psychological wellbeing (e.g. Thoits, 1995); and marital status and social support (e.g. Pugliesi & Shook, 1998). Yet limited research attention has been paid to the inter-relationships between marital status, social support and psychological wellbeing, or the role of social support in the association between marital status and psychological health.

Marital status is associated with access to social support, and several pathways by which social support may be associated with psychological wellbeing have been outlined in the literature (Cohen & Wills, 1985; see Chapter 4 for a review). First, perceived social support may be associated with psychological wellbeing because it provides a buffer and, therefore, protects against the negative effects of stressful events. For example, research on spousal bereavement demonstrates that social support influences the coping process and buffers the effects of stressors on health (Walker, MacBride & Vachon, 1977). Alternatively, social support may directly influence psychological wellbeing independent of any external stressor. Sherbourne and Hays (1990) found an indirect effect of marital status on psychological health through social support, but the findings were drawn from a chronically ill sample and may not be a reflection on the wider population. In a longitudinal study investigating marital loss, Hewitt et al. (2010) found a mediation effect of social support for psychological health with widowhood and marital separation.

Moderation and mediation analyses allow for the estimation of direct and indirect effects of social support on psychological wellbeing. Moderation analyses would test the buffering hypothesis to see if the direction and/or strength of the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing vary depending on the level of perceived social support. Mediation analyses would test the direct effect of perceived social support on psychological wellbeing and evidence of mediation would suggest that marital status would have an indirect effect on psychological wellbeing through perceived social support. According to Cohen and Syme (1985), there is sufficient evidence for both pathways to be

considered valid. For the married, social support may have a direct, health-promoting effect on psychological wellbeing through the high availability of support and from being embedded in a secure social network. Consistent with the buffering hypothesis, social support may lessen the negative impact of widowhood and divorce on psychological wellbeing (Amato, 2000; Bankoff, 1983; Caldwell & Bloom, 1982; Gähler, 2006; Schwarzer, 1992).

Coyne and DeLongis (1986) suggest that the support provided by a spouse is not easily obtained elsewhere. However, Seeman and Berkman (1988) found that access to instrumental and emotional support was strongly associated with the presence of a confidant, but not with the presence of a spouse. McLaughlin, Horwitz and White (2002) have suggested that it is the presence of a supportive partner rather *than marital status* per se that best accounts for psychological wellbeing. Similarly, Hicks and Diamond (2008) found that the availability of a partner to both tell, and be told, about positive daily events has a significant impact on end-of-day positive affect. Dush and Amato (2005) considered relationship status in terms of level of commitment and found that married individuals reported the highest level of subjective wellbeing, followed by cohabiting individuals, individuals dating one person in a steady relationship, followed by individuals dating multiple people, and finally, individuals not dating. Similar results have been found by Ross (1995) and Soons and Liefbroer (2008). Together, these findings suggest that being in a relationship has a positive effect on psychological wellbeing, and that level of commitment in a relationship is important. This may, at least in part, be related to the level of social support exchanged within the relationship.

5.1.1 Current study Following on from the multiple regression analyses in Chapter 4, where both marital status and perceived social support emerged as significant predictors of psychological wellbeing, this study aims to investigate the interrelationship between marital status, psychological wellbeing and perceived social support in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the causal relationships. A central question in this study, therefore, is to what extent can marital status differences in psychological wellbeing be explained by differences in perceived social support? Specifically, is perceived social support either a moderator (buffer) or a mediator of this relationship? If perceived social support is viewed as a moderator then the direction and/ or strength of the causal relationship between marital status and wellbeing would change under different values of perceived social support. Evidence of moderation would provide support for the buffering

hypothesis. Instead, if perceived social support is viewed as mediator then marital status would have an indirect effect on psychological wellbeing through perceived social support, providing evidence for a direct pathway between social support and psychological health (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

5.2 Method

Study sample and questionnaire design are described in detail in Chapter 4. Briefly, the sample included 510 adults across seven marital status groups. Psychological wellbeing was measured by three separate measures (GHQ12; Goldberg, 1978; CES-D; Radloff, 1977; SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) and perceived social support was measured by the MOS-SSS (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991).

5.3 Data analysis

5.3.1 Moderation analysis It was hypothesised that marital status might be related to psychological wellbeing, as measured by GHQ12, CES-D and SWLS score, via moderating effects of perceived level of social support. In moderation, the effect of an independent variable on an outcome variable depends on the value of a moderator variable and may be assessed using linear regression in which Y is regressed on X , Z and XZ where the independent variable is labelled X (e.g. marital status), the moderator as Z (e.g. perceived social support) and the dependent variable as Y (e.g. psychological wellbeing). Moderation is indicated by significant effect of XZ when X and Z are controlled (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

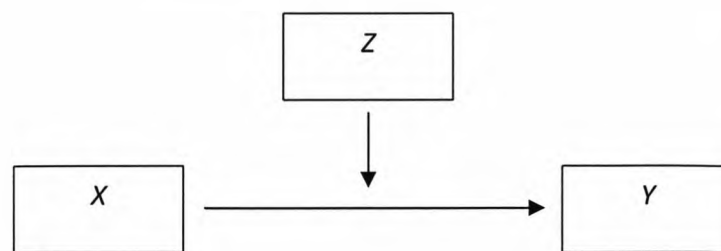


Figure 5.1 Moderation model where social support (Z) is a moderator of the relationship between marital status (X) and psychological wellbeing (Y)

Moderation was assessed using Hayes and Matthes' MODPROBE macro in SPSS (2009). The macro estimates model coefficients and standard errors for a model estimating an outcome variable (e.g. psychological wellbeing) from a focal predictor variable (e.g.

marital status), a proposed moderator variable (e.g. perceived social support), the product of the focal and moderator variable, and any additional variables used as statistical controls. It improves on Baron and Kenny steps (1986) by allowing the user to probe the interaction and find the specific pattern of effects of the focal predictor variable as a function of the moderator i.e. to understand the conditions under which the relationship between the focal predictor and the outcome is strong vs. weak (Hayes & Matthes, 2009). Psychological wellbeing was used as the outcome variable (Y), perceived social support as the potential moderating variable (Z), and each marital status dummy variable was entered in turn as a predictor variable (X), with significant predictors from Chapter 4's regression analyses (SRLE score; active coping and negative coping; age [CES-D only]) and remaining marital status dummy variables entered as covariates. Transformed scores were used in the analysis due to non-normal distribution of all three dependent variables. Values of perceived social support were set by MODPROBE macro at the sample mean and $\pm 1 SD$ from the mean. The married were used as the comparison group since it is the normative status. Independent samples t-tests revealed that the variable of age, but not gender, was significantly different between groups in all marital status dummy variables. Thus, the variable of age was also included as a covariate in the regression model.

5.3.2 Mediation analysis To assess the potential effect of third variable social support on the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing, partial correlations were first conducted to compare the partial correlation of marital status and psychological wellbeing, controlling for perceived social support, to the zero-order correlation of marital status and psychological to demonstrate support for an effect. If when social support is introduced, the partial correlation between variables is reduced compared to the simple correlation then social support may be viewed as a mediator.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a variable may be called a mediator "to the extent that it accounts for the relationship between the predictor and the criterion" and may wholly or partly explain that relationship (p1176). Rather than specifying *when* certain effects will occur, as in moderation, mediation describes *how* effects occur. Mediation analysis allows the researcher to identify variables which intervene in the relationship between a predictor variable and outcome variable. A variable can be considered a mediator (M ; in this case, social support) if it carries the influence of a given independent variable X (e.g. marital status) to a given dependent variable Y (e.g. psychological wellbeing) (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Preacher and Hayes (2008) state that mediation can

be established by testing product of paths coefficients a and b ($a*b$), known as the indirect effect (Figure 5.2).

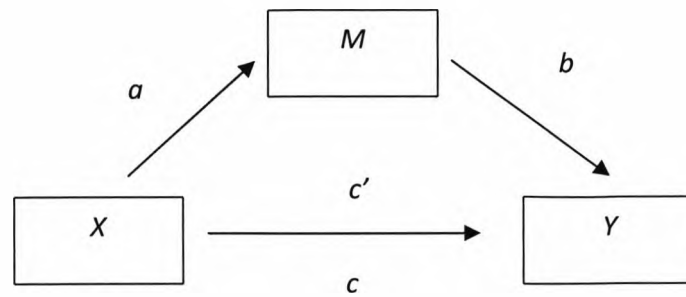


Figure 5.2 Mediation model where path c is the direct effect of X (marital status) on Y (psychological wellbeing), and path c' is the X to Y path coefficient after the addition of M (social support)

Mediation was assessed using the non-parametric bootstrap approach developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Preacher and Hayes' Sobel test (2008) determines the significance of the indirect effect of the mediator by testing the hypothesis of no difference between the total effect (path c) and the direct effect (path c'). According to Hayes (2009), this approach is superior to the Baron and Kenny causal steps approach (1986) as it can address the significance of the indirect effects, has higher power and has lower Type I error rates. Bootstrapping is a way to overcome the limitations of statistical methods that make assumptions about normality (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) and offers a powerful method for obtaining confidence limits for indirect effects (Mackinnon, Fairchild & Fritz, 2007). The analyses and bootstrap estimates that follow are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples (confidence intervals set at 99%). As with the moderation analysis, the outcome variable (Y) was psychological wellbeing, predictor variable was marital status (with dummy coding), and perceived social support was entered as the potential mediating variable (M). Significant predictors from the regression analyses in Chapter 4 were added in as covariates in the analysis alongside remaining marital status dummy variables.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Social support as a moderator The results provided no support for perceived social support as a moderator in the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing for most of the marital status groups. However, when GHQ12 was used with the cohabiting group perceived social support emerged as a significant moderator (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Regression coefficients for marital status (X), social support (Z) and interaction (XZ) on psychological wellbeing

	GHQ12			CES-D			SWLS		
	X	Z	XZ	X	Z	XZ	X	Z	XZ
Widowed	.05	-.01**	-.01	.25	-.01**	-.01	.03	.01**	-0.01
Divorced	.08	-.01**	-.01	-.15	-.01**	.01	-.13	.01**	0.01
Cohabiting	-.28*	-.01**	-.01*	.25	-.01**	-.01	-.10	.01**	0.01
Never married	-.04	-.01**	.01	.02	-.01**	-.01	-.06	.01**	0.01
LAT	-.04	-.01**	.01	-.17	-.01**	.01	-.27*	.01**	0.01
Remarried	.07	-.01**	.01	-.17	-.01**	.01	-.01	.01**	0.01

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ (Significant moderation marked in RED)

Figure 5.3 presents the conditional effect of being in a cohabiting relationship on GHQ12 score for high (mean +1SD), medium (mean) and low levels (mean -1SD) of perceived social support. Specifically, only low levels of social support predict significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing, as measured by GHQ12 (lower confidence interval [LCI] .01, upper confidence interval [UCI]: .20). This effect was not found when CES-D or SWLS were used as dependent variables, which may reflect slight differences in what aspects of psychological wellbeing are being measured in each scale.

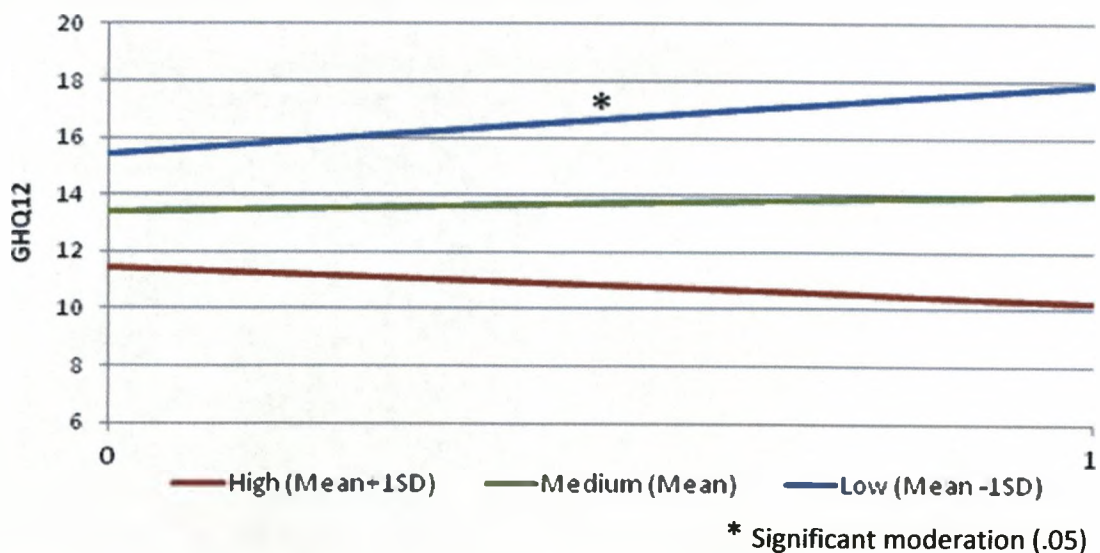


Figure 5.3 Conditional effect of being in a cohabiting relationship⁴ on GHQ12 at high, medium and low levels of perceived social support (MOS-SSS)

⁴ Dummy coding where 1 represents being in a cohabiting relationship and 0 represents all other marital status groups.

5.3.2 Social support as mediator Partial correlations showed that when perceived social support (MOS-SSS) was controlled, marital status predictor variables including being married, widowed and divorced, which were significantly correlated with psychological wellbeing measures (GHQ12; CES-D; SWLS) in the Spearman's analysis, became non-significant or attenuated when perceived social support was controlled for (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Zero order and partial correlations coefficients

	N	GHQ12		CES-D		SWLS	
		Spearman	Partial	Spearman	Partial	Spearman	Partial
Married	122	-.16***	-.09*	-.16***	-.09*	.21***	.15***
Widowed	50	.12**	.03	.13**	.00	-.18***	-.07
Divorced	42	.10*	.02	.11*	.02	-.15***	-.06
Cohabiting	74	-.40	.03	-.03	.06	.08	.01
Never married	104	.40	-.04	.05	-.03	-.07	.01
LAT	63	.01	.06	.03	.11*	.01	-.09*
Remarried	55	.00	.036	-.06	-.03	-.00	-.01

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Mediation analyses were performed using a non-parametric bootstrap macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Table 5.3 presents the results of the mediation analysis for all models using GHQ12, CES-D and SWLS as the dependent variable. The bootstrap results indicated that the total effect of being widowed, divorced and never married was significantly reduced when perceived social support was included as a mediator. No significant mediation of perceived social support was found for the relationship between psychological wellbeing and being in a cohabiting relationship, LAT or remarried. While perceived social support was not a significant mediator in the remarried group, when GHQ12 and SWLS were entered as the dependent variables the remarried had significantly poorer levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the married. This result was not present when CES-D was entered as the dependent variable and may be a result of subtle differences between the three measures. Patterns of mediation were generally consistent across all measures of psychological wellbeing. Total and direct effects and confidence intervals are presented below for each of the significant mediation models using results from mediation analyses.

Table 5.3 Mediation analyses with perceived social support as mediating variable (M) and covariates of remaining MS dummy variables and age

Dependent variable (Y)	Independent Variable (X)	Effect of X on M (a)	Effect of M on Y (b)	Direct effect (c')	Total effect (c)	Indirect effect (ab)	99% CI Lower	99% CI Upper
GHQ12 (N=501)	Widowed	-17.88***	-.11***	2.80**	4.72***	1.92**	1.1232	2.9527
	Divorced	-12.82***	-.11***	.50	1.88*	1.38**	0.7308	2.1643
	Cohabiting	2.82	-.11***	-.10	-.40	-.30	-0.7230	0.0679
	Never Married	-7.60***	-.11***	.21	1.02	.82**	0.3593	1.4986
	LAT	4.17	-.11***	.45	.01	-.45	-0.9531	0.0415
	Remarried	-3.46	-.11***	1.73	1.35	.37	-0.1230	1.0109
CES-D (N=500)	Widowed	-16.19***	-.21***	5.76**	9.19***	3.42**	2.0573	5.1260
	Divorced	-11.60***	-.21***	1.05	3.50*	2.44**	1.3741	3.9328
	Cohabiting	.72	-.21***	-.52	-.68	-.14	-0.9392	0.6818
	Never Married	-9.80***	-.21***	-.79	1.28	2.09**	1.0767	3.4486
	LAT	1.75	-.21***	.55	.18	-.38	-1.2801	0.5006
	Remarried	-2.62	-.21***	.99	1.54	.56	-0.4752	1.7025
SWLS (N=500)	Widowed	-17.88***	.14***	-4.57***	-7.01***	-2.43**	-3.5403	-1.5596
	Divorced	-12.86***	.14***	-2.50*	-4.26***	-1.76**	-2.6520	-1.0155
	Cohabiting	2.82	.14***	-.23	.15	.38	-0.0623	0.9275
	Never Married	-7.60***	.14***	-1.53	-2.56*	-1.05**	-1.7733	-0.4602
	LAT	4.17	.14***	-1.99*	-1.42	.57	-0.0518	1.1748
	Remarried	-3.46	.14***	-1.93*	-2.40**	-.47	-1.1842	0.1659

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 (Significant mediation marked in RED)

5.4.2.1 Widowed The bootstrap results indicated that the total effect of being widowed on psychological wellbeing, as measured by GHQ12 score (total effect = 4.72, $p=.001$) was reduced when perceived social support was included as a mediator in the model (direct effect= 2.80, $p=.010$). Furthermore, the analyses revealed, with 99% confidence, that the total indirect effect (i.e. the difference between the total and direct effects) of being widowed on psychological wellbeing through perceived social support was significant, with a point estimate of 1.92 and a 99% BC (bias-corrected) bootstrap confidence interval of 1.12 (lower: LCI) to 2.95 (upper: UCI). Similar results were found when CES-D and SWLS were used as the predictor variable (for path coefficients please refer to Table 5.3). Being widowed, therefore, exerts an indirect effect on psychological wellbeing through lower levels of perceived social support. Figure 5.4 illustrates the partial mediation of perceived social support in the relationship between being widowed and psychological wellbeing.

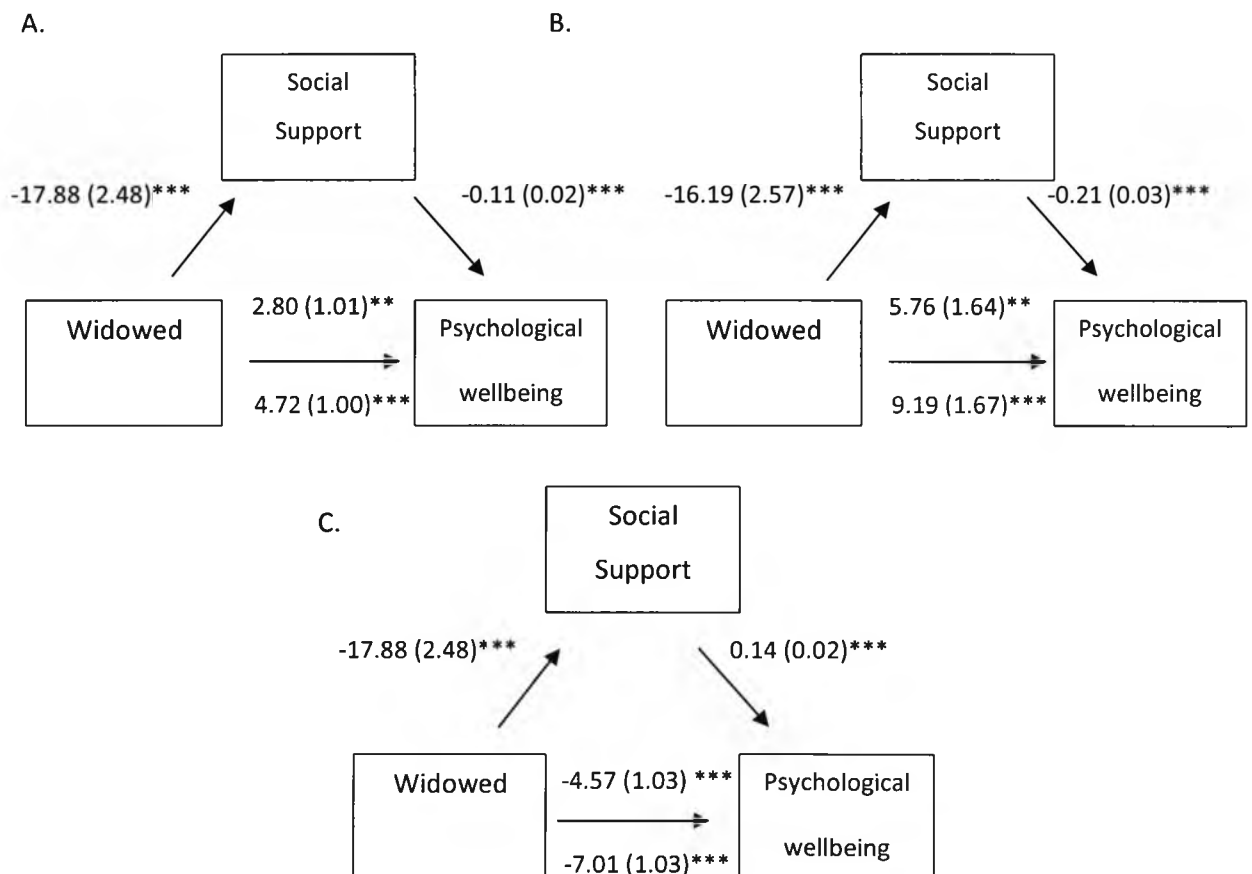


Figure 5.4 Mediation model where being widowed exerts an indirect effect on psychological wellbeing (A. GHQ12; B. CES-D; C. SWLS) through perceived social support (MOS-SSS)

model (direct effect= 0.21, $p=.788$), with a significant indirect effect (point estimate= 0.82, LCI=0.36 UCI=1.50). The never married were not significantly more distressed than the married. However, it is possible for M (perceived social support) to be causally related between X (marital status) and Y (psychological wellbeing), even if X and Y are not significantly associated (Hayes, 2009). Being never married, therefore, exerts a significant indirect effect on psychological wellbeing through lower levels of perceived social support (Table 5.4). When SWLS was used as the predictor variable, the never married reported significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the married (total effect = -2.56 $p=.002$). When perceived social support was controlled for the difference became non-significant (direct effect= -1.53, $p=.052$), indicating significant mediation of social support (point estimate= -1.05, LCI=-1.77 UCI=-0.46).

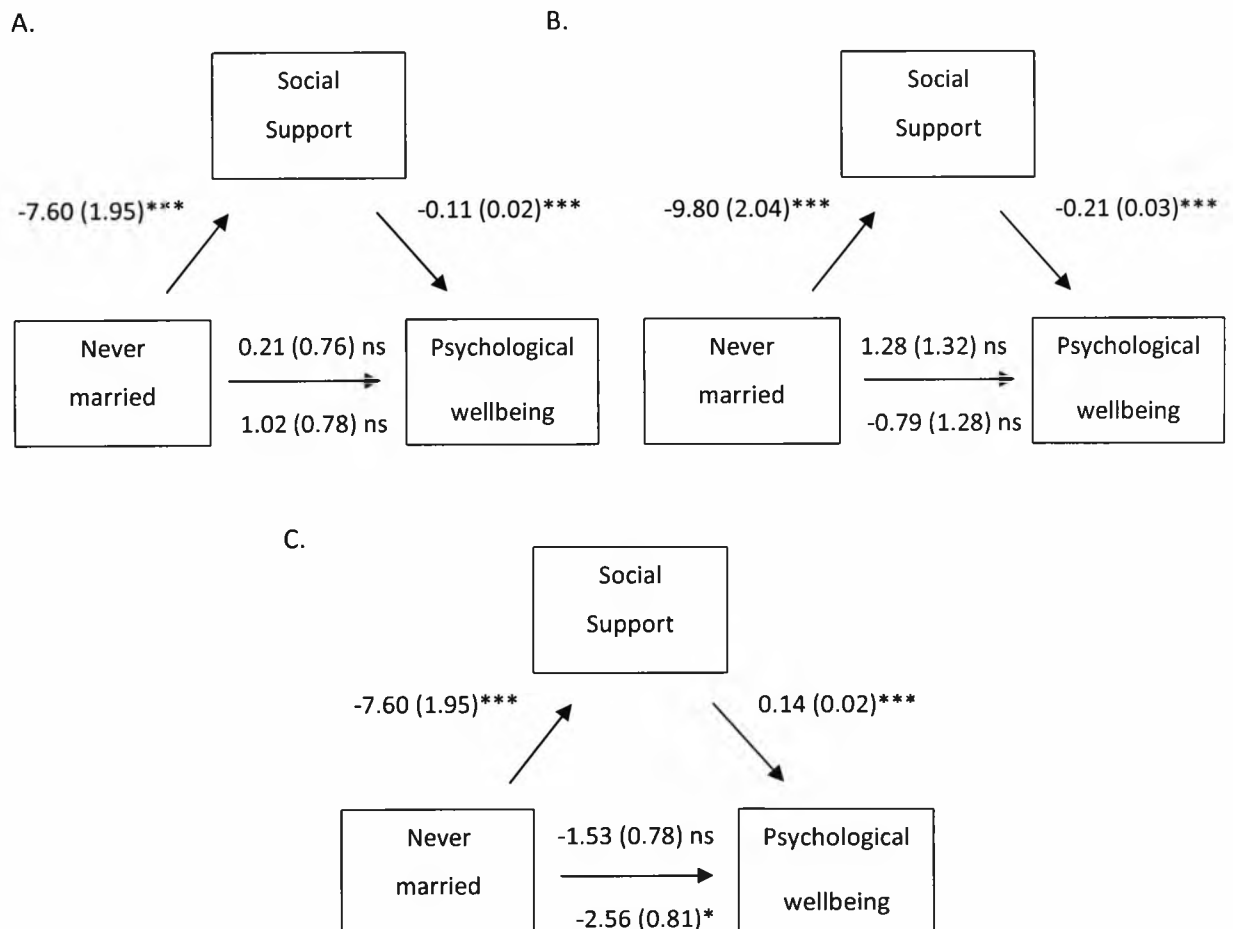


Figure 5.6 Mediation model where being never married exerts an indirect effect on psychological wellbeing (A. GHQ12; B. CES-D; C. SWLS) through perceived social support (MOS-SSS)

5.5 Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the role of perceived social support in the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing. Bootstrap mediation analyses indicate that, when the married were the comparison group, the psychological wellbeing of the widowed, the divorced and the never-married is significantly mediated by perceived social support. No significant mediation of perceived social support is found for those in a cohabiting or LAT relationship, or those who had re-married. This series of models supports perceived social support as a mediator of the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing. The results of the mediation analyses complement previous findings of a relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing (Wyke & Ford, 1992; Waldron et al., 1996), and of marital status differences in perceived social support (Duffy, 1993; Ross, 1995; van den Hoonaard, 2001). Moreover, the current study examined the relationship of perceived social support in the association between marital status and psychological wellbeing using moderation and mediation analyses. This permitted exploration of the pathways by which perceived social support affects psychological health (buffering or direct relationship) and protection/causation explanations for the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing. The findings add to the existing literature by highlighting perceived social support as a key mechanism through which marital status affects psychological health (Barrett, 1999). In line with past research, the results demonstrate a relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing for all marital status groups (Thoits, 1995; Wyke & Ford, 1992). Further, there is no significant moderating function, or buffering effect of perceived social support in this analysis, except for the cohabiting group where social support emerges as a moderator between cohabiter status and GHQ12. Instead, the analysis reveals perceived social support has a significant mediating effect on psychological wellbeing. This pattern of findings provides persuasive support for a direct relationship between psychological wellbeing and perceived social support, where higher levels of perceived social support allows for better levels of psychological wellbeing.

Findings from this study lend empirical support to the proposed model where the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing is mediated by perceived social support, even when other important variables including number of daily hassles and coping strategies are held constant. The data show that those in cohabiting and LAT relationships report levels of psychological wellbeing similar to that of the married.

Further, the results indicate that the lowered levels of perceived social support for the widowed and divorced accounts for the higher levels of psychological distress in these marital status groups. Together, the results provide support for the notion that relationship status is more important for psychological health than marital status (Dush & Amato, 2005; Ross, 1995; Soons & Liefbroer, 2008) and suggest that it is the presence of a supportive spouse or partner that impacts on psychological wellbeing. Interestingly, perceived social support accounts for lower levels of psychological wellbeing in the divorced compared to the married more than was the case in the widowed group, where perceived social support only partially mediated the relationship between being widowed and psychological wellbeing. This indicates that in widowhood, but not necessarily in divorce, there may be other key factors, such as the circumstances of the loss, which were not measured in this study affecting psychological wellbeing.

Examining the processes by which marital status may affect psychological health, the cross-sectional nature of the data restricts the analysis to those explanations which consider health to be dependent upon marital status. Unfortunately, marital selection explanations could not be properly explored. Marital protection theory would suggest a health protective benefit of marriage (Waldron et al., 1996). However, contrary to marital protection theory, the findings reveal that the never married, as well as those in cohabiting and LAT relationships, report similar levels of psychological wellbeing to their married counterparts. Perceived social support is clearly an important resource that has a significant impact on psychological wellbeing. However, the findings suggest that its benefits are not unique to married relationships. The cohabiters, LATs and never married are not in a married relationship with access to benefits conferred by being married, yet show the same levels of psychological wellbeing. An 'in relationship protection' theory is also called into question by the fact that the never married group report generally comparable levels of psychological wellbeing to the married with no significant differences between groups on GHQ12 or CES-D score. Importantly, responses for the never married and the married significantly differ on the SWLS, where the never married report significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing. This may be interpreted as reflecting differences in what is being measured on each of the three psychological wellbeing scales. SWLS measures global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life and is distinguished from GHQ12 and CES-D in that it is more cognitively than emotionally driven (Diener et al., 1985). The never married group in this study are likely to represent a heterogeneous group including those who are yet to marry as well as those who do not

intend to marry. Being older and never married may have a negative influence on life review, as measured by SWLS, and Chapter 4 revealed that older never married participants had significantly lower levels of life satisfaction when compared with younger never married participants. It is likely that the significantly lower SWLS scores for the never married can be explained by these age differences in life satisfaction. That the remarried, divorced and widowed groups show significantly poorer levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the married suggests that it is something specific about the experience of transition out of a married relationship that best accounts for differences in psychological wellbeing. The psychological wellbeing in the remarried group, who can be assumed to have transitioned out of marriage some time ago, continues to be significantly lower than the married, providing evidence against a crisis hypothesis explanation. Instead, the results appear to point to a social causation explanation of marital status differences in psychological wellbeing, where the negative impact of a transition out of marriage, including the associated losses in resources and the social stigma attached to being single, have a longer-lasting negative impact on psychological wellbeing, and that for the widowed and divorced access to social support determines psychological wellbeing.

This investigation has both strengths and limitations. There has been increasing interest in the relationship between perceived social support and psychological wellbeing and there is a large existing body of literature that considers the differences in psychological wellbeing between marital status groups. However, there have been few systematic analyses of the relationship between these three variables. Seeking to evaluate these relationships, this study made use of a large sample of men and women across seven levels of marital status, which included relationship status, enabling comparisons within the married and unmarried category levels often used. In addition, three measures of psychological wellbeing are used allowing for conclusions about general wellbeing as well as considering the impact on depressive symptoms and life satisfaction, with generally consistent results across the three measures. However, the generalisability of the findings of this study may be limited by the study's use of opportunity sampling. Further, the results of these analyses are based on cross-sectional data and so may not accurately reflect longitudinal mediation effects. The analyses cannot control for differences in baseline psychological wellbeing in those who marry or enter into relationships, compared with those who do not. Thus, some caution must be exercised in making definitive interpretations of these results. Longitudinal data analysis would allow for the investigation of causal pathways and to evaluate possible selection effects as possible

explanations for the findings. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that there could be other various competing variables that could also play a mediating role in the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing. Future investigations may examine the multiple dimensions of social support, and their effects on the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing. In addition, it would be interesting to consider the role of social interaction in the relationship between marital status and wellbeing, since the patterns should be similar to those for perceived social support.

5.5.1 Conclusions This questionnaire based study sought to examine and test the assumptions that had been made within existing literature about the associations between the variables of social support, psychological wellbeing and marital status. The depth of the study methodology allows for conclusions to be drawn about different marital and relationship status groups, rather than simply grouping people into married and unmarried categories, as in previous research studies. The findings reveal that marriage itself is not the key to psychological health but rather that it is the social support afforded by being in a relationship. In addition, by employing three different measures of psychological wellbeing the investigation was able to consider psychological distress as well as depressive symptoms and life satisfaction. Patterns of mediation are similar across all measures, suggesting that the mediating effect of perceived social support is important for different aspects of psychological wellbeing. The results of this cross-sectional, questionnaire based study confirm previous research findings and add to the existing knowledge base, revealing perceived social support as a mediator in the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing. This study highlights the importance of perceived social support for psychological wellbeing, particularly for people who are not in a relationship, namely the widowed, divorced and never married.

This thesis aims to investigate the impact of marital status change on psychological wellbeing. Adopting a quantitative methodology, Chapters 3, 4 and this chapter, Chapter 5, demonstrate important differences in psychological wellbeing between marital status groups, confirm that transitions out of marriage have negative consequences for psychological health, and reveal that social support has an important role in understanding the relationship between marital status and psychological health. Next, this thesis employs qualitative methods to investigate marital status differences in social support and considers how marital status transitions affect social participation so to better understand the relationships between marital status, psychological health and social participation.

PART THREE

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Chapter 6

Qualitative interviewing

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore marital status differences in social support and gain an insight into the experience of marital status change on social participation. The implications of marital status transitions on social networks and social support are still unclear and previous research has investigated this topic using predominantly quantitative methodology, focusing on social support self-report measures (e.g. Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005; Kaunonen et al., 1999). This study made use of qualitative interviewing methods with the aim of extending the understanding of how social networks and social support changes as a consequence of marital status transition. Qualitative interviewing is a useful method of examining people's experiences of life events and has the potential to explore a research area in depth to allow a deeper understanding of the research topic as a whole (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001; Carr, 1994). The lived experience is context bound and best understood by a person's perceptions (Benner, 1984) and the text rich data generated in qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to capture the details of multiple voices and perspectives (Banyard & Miller, 1998). Despite the potential for qualitative research to enhance knowledge in the field, there are few published studies that specifically consider the impact of marital status transitions on social participation. A small number of researchers in the field of marriage (e.g. Banchand & Caron, 2001), widowhood (e.g. Bennett & Vidal-Hall, 2000; Davidson, 2000; Lopata, 1996; van den Hoonaard, 2010) and divorce (e.g. Abbey & Dallos, 2004; Connidis, 1992) have taken advantage of the inductive, exploratory nature of qualitative methodologies. The current chapter describes the qualitative methodology that was used in this study to explore changes in social networks and social support following cohabitation, marriage, widowhood and divorce.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Ethics, data protection and participant confidentiality The research was approved by the University of Liverpool ethics committee (see Appendix 3 for ethical approval) and followed the ethical guidelines set by the British Psychological Society (BPS: Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants, 2002). Specific ethical considerations apply to qualitative research with sensitive topics and the primary challenge

is to understand the dynamics of the participant/ interviewer relationship and be aware of the trust and power that is associated with the role as a researcher. The researcher was aware that the interviews required participants to share sensitive information and that this could cause distress for some participants. Though there is some research to suggest that participating in interview research may be a positive and cathartic experience (Salmon, 2000), a sensitive approach was taken throughout the interview. The researcher was open and honest about the nature of the research, the topics to be discussed and how the interview data would be used and all participants were made aware that they could terminate the interview at any stage and where a couple of participants were seen to get emotional, interviews were paused and participants were asked if they wanted to continue. All participants were also told that they could refrain from answering a question should they wish to. All interviews were concluded with more questions that were aimed to be neutral and not emotionally charged and participants were provided with the researcher's email address and office phone number in case they required any further support at a later date. As van den Hoonaard (2010) notes, confidentiality of participants in qualitative research is always a paramount concern. In order to preserve confidentiality and anonymity, digital recordings and computer transcripts were held in a password protected computer file and each interviewee was given an identification number (e.g. P001) which was known only to the researcher. All names and identifying features were removed from the interview transcripts and quotes from the interviews used in chapters of this thesis have no reference to the identity of the participants. A further consideration in this study was the impact of the qualitative interviews on the researcher herself. Speziale and Carpenter (2007) suggest that qualitative researchers may also be in a vulnerable position as a consequence of the intense interaction between the researcher and participant. To overcome this, the researcher ensured that she had appropriate support herself.

6.2.2 Sample Qualitative interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of men and women from the United Kingdom. Interview participants were recruited using posters and internet adverts from a range of social organisations⁵; a research announcement on the University of Liverpool daily staff and student announcement system; through snowballing techniques; and through the internet based research questionnaire introduced in Chapter 4⁶. The nature of this study was to understand some

⁵ The thesis cannot mention group by name without compromising the confidentiality of the participants.

⁶ The online questionnaire study contained a final page where respondents were informed that the questionnaire was part of an ongoing investigation into the impact of marital status. If they were interested in receiving more information about future

of the most general patterns in the experience of marital status transitions. The sample included people with a wide range of professional status, financial income and educational levels, as extracted through the interview transcripts. Admittedly, the sample does not represent a larger population and this may limit the conclusions drawn about socio-demographic factors including age, gender and social class. Qualitative researchers tend to recruit a much smaller sample whilst still being able to collect a greater volume and depth of data (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). A total of 82 adults (age range 19 to 86 years) participated in the interviews: first time cohabiters ($N=9$); continuously married ($N=29$); widowed men and women ($N=23$); and divorcees (including marital separation) ($N=21$). Table 6.1 provides details of the characteristics of participants for each marital status group.

Table 6.1 *Characteristics of the qualitative interview sample (N=82)*

			Cohabiting	Married	Widowed	Divorced
Men	N		4	10	7	7
	Age at transition	Median	35.5	28.5	55	38
		Range	22-36	23-38	42-78	24-63
	Age at interview	Median	38	46.5	72	52
		Range	24-46	24-64	45-79	33-77
Women	N		5	19	16	14
	Age at transition	Median	25	32	50.5	31.5
		Range	23-27	17-53	21-78	24-60
	Age at interview	Median	27	45	60	41
		Range	23-32	19-58	33-80	31-86

6.2.3 Data collection In depth, semi structured interviews were held with each participant separately. They were conducted in person in participants' homes or in a quiet, private meeting room at the University of Liverpool, except for three telephone interviews with participants who lived further away. The nature of the data collection for these interviews presented no major problems to the results. Each interview began with a standard verbal introduction, and sought permission to record the conversation. Conversations were recorded at the time of the interview using an Olympus WS-210S digital recorder and each interview was subsequently transcribed into a Microsoft Office Word document. The dictaphone was small and did not seem to affect or influence participants in their answering of questions during the interview. Most interviews lasted

studies, they were asked to provide their name and contact details. This information came via email, separate from the questionnaire responses to ensure anonymity in the questionnaire study.

about ninety minutes. The interview schedule was devised and employed to allow freedom of question direction and an extensive narrative (see Appendix 8).

A fluid interview schedule was developed and comprised of six core sections. The interview began with factual questions, covering age, marital status, and questions covering age at marriage and at transition out of marriage, if relevant. This was followed by a second section including a series of questions that sought to find out more about the interviewee as an individual with questions including "Can you tell me about hobbies you've got?" and "How does married life affect how and how often you socialise outside of the house?". The third section took the form of a written activity which involved the interviewee (or the interviewer on behalf of the interviewee if requested) drawing a social network diagram. An example of a social network spider diagram can be found in Figure 6.1. The interviewee was asked to draw a social network spider diagram, writing down all the people they would see or speak to during a typical week. This process was then repeated on a separate social network spider diagram and the interviewee was asked to think about the people around them before they began cohabiting, or became married, widowed or divorced, again writing down anybody they would have contact with in a typical week. The social network spider diagrams helped to identify changes in the structure of the social network following marital status transition. This activity also allowed for a dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee about the people in the social network, including the quality of the relationship, the frequency of and nature of social contact with that person, and the social support exchanged with members of the social network.

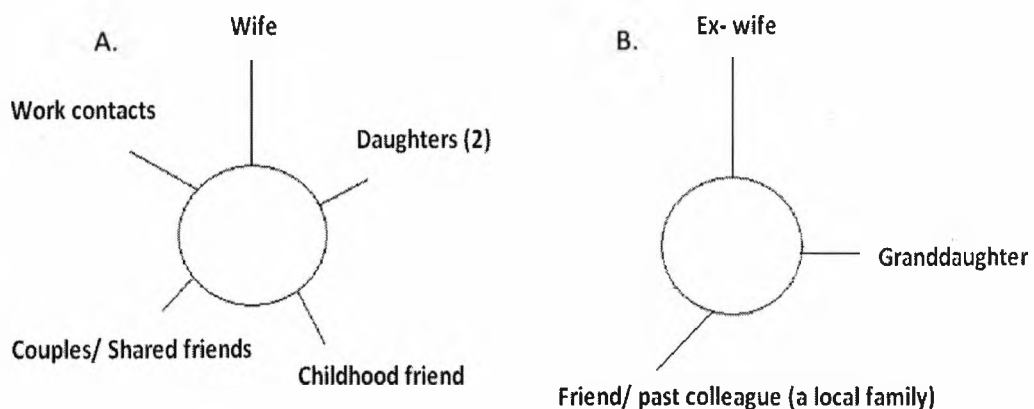


Figure 6.1 Example social network spider diagrams: P080, a separated man of 77 years A. before and B. after his separation at age 63

The fourth section contained questions relating to social support. It was usual for this to be covered during the social networking diagram, so these questions were shorter in the response they demanded. For example, "Who would you turn to for advice about how to deal with a personal problem?" and "Do you feel like you have all the support you need available to you?". Next, the interviewee was asked about their wellbeing, and how their marital status affects how they feel day to day. Questions included "What kinds of things really cheer you up, make you feel happy?" and "Would you say you are content with how things are in your life?". Interviews were usually brought to a close by asking the interviewee less personal questions, inviting them to comment on general issues regarding timing of marital status transitions. Interviewees were asked "How do you think that your experience of (cohabitation/marriage/widowhood/divorce) is different from someone of the opposite sex?" and "... might it be different for someone older or younger? How?".

6.3 Data analysis

Data analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts was largely based on the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Smith, 1995). Grounded theory is one of the most widely used methods of analysis and provides a deeper understanding of text rich data sources (Charmaz, 1995). As a qualitative research method it is theoretically agnostic and open minded, avoiding any preconceived hypotheses and thus allowing the researcher to delineate other theories grounded in the text. The process involves the development of categories following a series of progressively more focussed data coding, and eventually the emergence of generic themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The concluding theory is generated from a synthesis of the perspectives from all of the participants (Horsburgh, 2003).

Each transcript was first read through in its entirety to gain an impression of the interview. Line-by-line coding was the primary analytical stage of the research process and allows for the exploration of emerging themes in the data, without the addition of inferences or personal assumptions. This process was reflexive; as new topics emerged they were looked for in earlier parts of the interview. Following line-by-line coding, a more focused approach is employed to generate categories that emerged as particularly significant or overriding in the data. Once categories have been extracted for each of the interviews the transcripts were cross-compared, in order to identify broader generic themes and commonalities. An example of a coded interview transcript can be found in

Appendix 9. In line with the constant comparative method (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997) data items were checked against one another and compared and contrasted repeatedly to ensure that the full complexity of the data was explored and to ensure sample representativeness. Unique cases were explored as a way of challenging initial categories and to modify and elaborate emerging themes (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Interview transcripts were peer analysed by researchers who were blind to the original coding for inter-rater reliability. The checks for reliability were found to be satisfactory. Transcripts were also imported into qualitative data analysis software package NVivo. This programme was used to manage the interview data and help facilitate analysis and interpretation.

6.4 Summary of results

The interviews sought to identify the key social changes that occurred following a transition into or out of a married (including cohabiting) relationship. Through an iterative process of coding and analysis of coded text four central themes emerge from the interview data that are relevant to this thesis: changes in the structure of the social network; changes in the availability of social support; and changes in identity. Further, the interviews suggest that a change in the focal social network through the loss of or gain of a partner has important implications for the wider social network, and this in turn has an impact on social support, social interaction, and identity. The next four empirical chapters explore each theme in detail, providing illustrative quotes from the interview data: Chapter 7 addresses changes in the social network following marital status change using data from the social network spider diagrams and qualitative interview data; Chapter 8 considers changes in the exchange of social support; Chapter 9 explores changes in social engagement; and Chapter 10 focuses on the impact of marital status change on identity. Together, they provide a picture of the social consequences of cohabitation, marriage, widowhood and divorce.

Chapter 7

The impact of marital status change on the construction of the social network

7.1 Introduction

The transition into a cohabiting or a married relationship, and the transition out of marriage through widowhood or separation and divorce (hereafter described as divorce) were associated with a change in the focal social network in the form of either the gain or loss of a spouse or cohabiting partner (hereafter described as spouse). This change in the focal social network had implications for the wider social network of the participants in this qualitative study. Here, social network, or structural support, refers to the existence of and number of interpersonal relationships. This may include social relationships shared jointly with a spouse, family, friends and colleagues.

The interview data revealed important changes in the social network following a change in marital status with interesting differences emerging between marital status groups, specifically in the composition of the social network and in the loss and gain of relationships over time. Research on social network changes following marital status transitions point to a widening of the social network upon entering a relationship, through pooling of friends and increased involvement with the partner's social network (Kalmijn, 2003; Kim & Stiff, 1991; Milardo, 1982) followed by a more limited social life once the couple begin to live together (Wellman & Wellman, 1992). Following widowhood and divorce there is typically a higher prevalence of social network losses compared to gains (Ferraro, 1984; Lopata, 1996; Milardo, 1987; Terhell et al., 2004; van den Hoonaard, 2001). However, divorce may also re-open the social network and allow for the development of new social relationships (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005). These patterns were generally supported in the interview data and in the corresponding social network diagrams. As expected, transitions into and out of marriage were associated with important changes in the composition of the social network. Specifically, cohabiting and married participants tended to report overall social network growth, whilst the widowed and divorced were more likely to experience the loss of social contacts. Moreover, the composition of social networks differed between those in a cohabiting or married relationship to those who were widowed or divorced, and there were also differences by gender and by age. Using findings from both the social network spider diagrams and the qualitative interviews, the sections

that follow will aim to describe the nature of the changes in the social network for each marital status group before moving on to consider the influence of age and gender.

7.2 Social network spider diagrams

Social network spider diagrams revealed changes in the structure of the social network over time and provided a clear picture of growth or shrinkage of the social network for each interview participant. The social network spider diagrams were valuable as a means of investigating why or how a person or group left or came into the social network. In this study the social network diagrams were used as a conversational aid and, therefore, no quantitative analysis of number of ties has been conducted on the data. Here, a selection of social network diagrams from the interview sample is explored to provide specific case studies of social network change following marital status transition.

7.2.1 Cohabiting man: P016 P016 was a cohabiting man, aged 24 at interview. He started a cohabiting relationship aged 22, after completing his university studies. Before transition he lived in rented student accommodation with four male friends and was in a LAT relationship with his now cohabiting girlfriend. He also had regular telephone contact with his immediate family and maintained a large network of friends that had developed during his time at school and university. The social network spider diagram after cohabitation showed an overall growth in the size of the social network. He gained relationships with his girlfriend's family and friends and developed shared friendships with his girlfriend. In addition, P016 starts his first professional job and benefits from social relationships with new work colleagues. He also gains a brother-in-law when his sister marries.

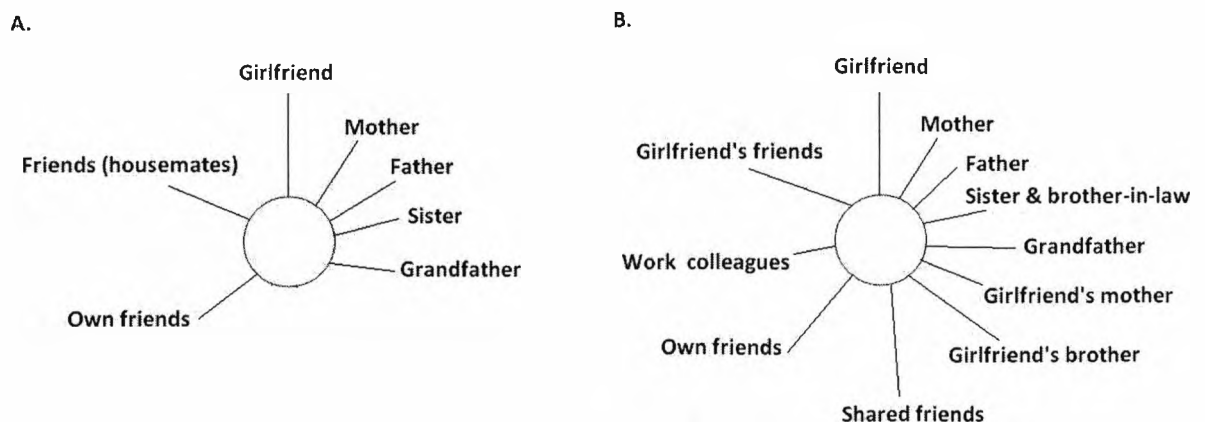


Figure 7.1 Copy of social network spider diagram for P016, a cohabiting man, A. before and B. after transition to cohabiting status

7.2.2 Cohabiting woman: P035 P035 was 32 at interview. Her social network diagram before transition included immediate family, work colleagues, childhood friends and her housemates. At 28 she relocated and entered into a cohabiting relationship. As a result of the geographical relocation, face-to-face contact with immediate family and childhood friends became less frequent and these relationships were maintained primarily over the telephone. She had frequent contact with her boyfriend's family, particularly his grandmother who lived nearby. She also developed friendships with his friends and with his male friends' girlfriends.

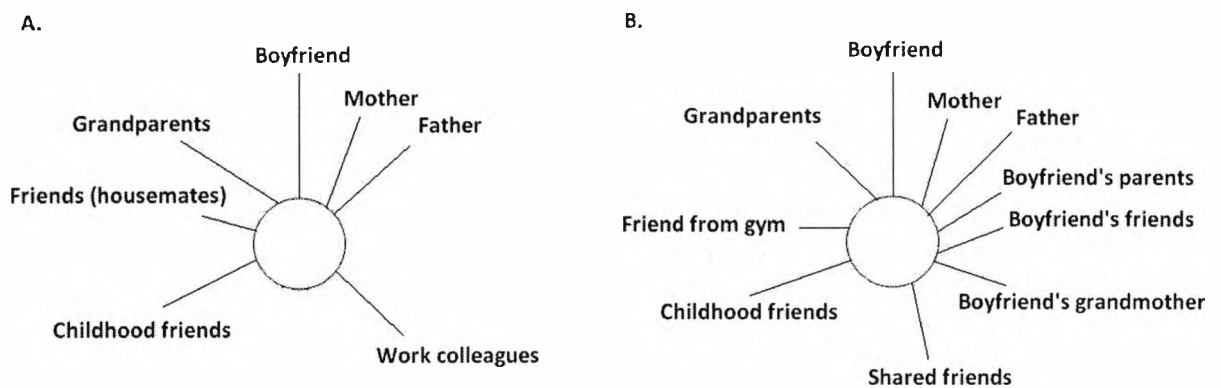


Figure 7.2 Copy of social network spider diagram for P035, a cohabiting woman, A. before and B. after transition to cohabiting status

7.2.3 Married man: P025 P025 was a married man aged 57 at interview. He and his wife did not cohabit prior to getting married at the age of 26. Marriage considerably expanded P025's social network, largely through his wife. He also became involved with two local formal organisations and this allowed the development of new social relationships. In addition, P025 had three children in his married relationship, one of whom is now married. He cited frequent contact with his children and with his son-in-law. His mother and brother sadly died and he has less contact with his own extended family members compared to before he was married.

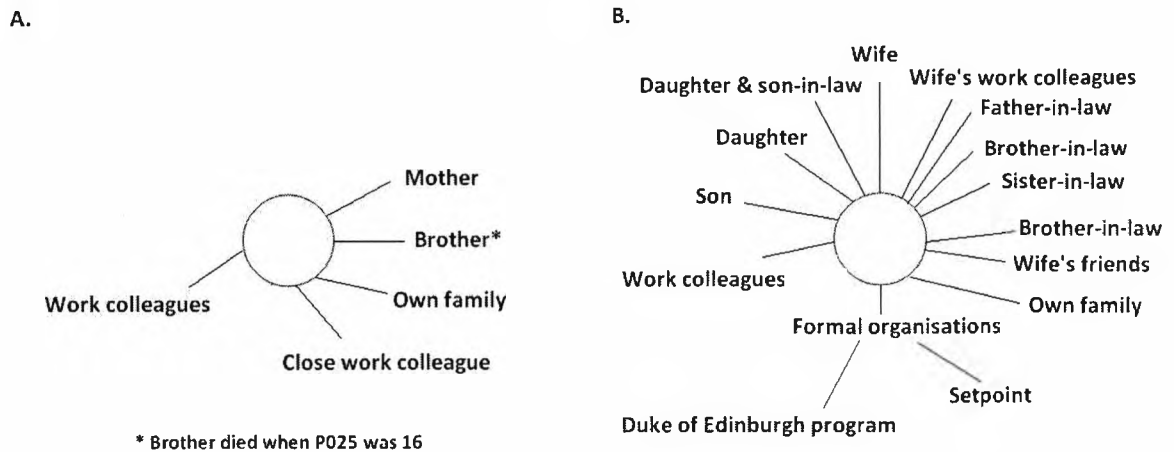


Figure 7.3 Copy of social network spider diagram for P025, a married man, A. before and B. after transition to married status

7.2.4 Married woman: P006 P006, aged 41 at interview, had a long LAT relationship with her now husband. Before transition she had regular contact with her own family, her boyfriend's family and work colleagues, and shared a group of friends with her boyfriend. After transition, she gained a group of her own friends through membership in a hobby group. She also had a daughter and gained a network of other local mums who she meets weekly for coffee. P006 had joined an online wedding forum when she was planning her own wedding and still maintained weekly contact by telephone and internet with friends she met on the forum ('Forum friends').

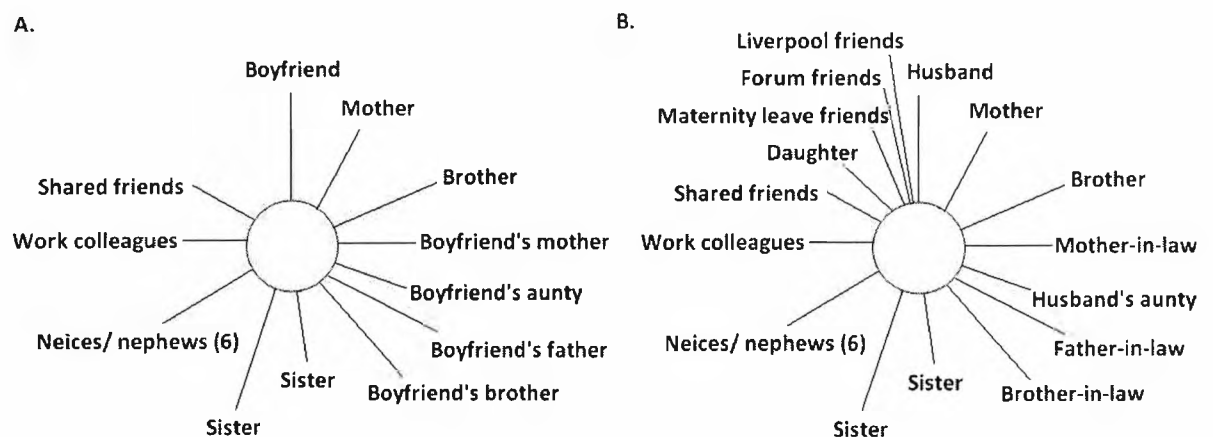


Figure 7.4 Copy of social network spider diagram for P006, a married woman, A. before and B. after transition to married status

7.2.5 Widowed man: P075 P075 was 79 at interview and had been widowed seven years earlier, aged 72. After his wife died, contact with son and daughter became less

frequent as it had largely been maintained by his wife. He also stopped attending Italian classes, as this was a shared hobby, and physical health limitations meant he could not continue with his computing classes and piano lessons. P075's neighbours became more important to him, and he joins several formal organisations to give him something to do and allow him to feel useful.

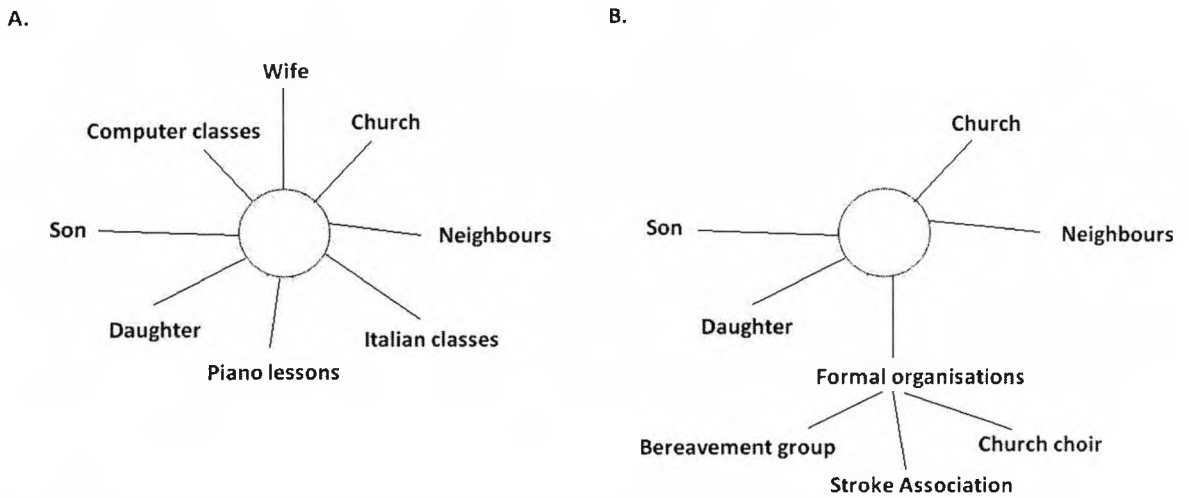


Figure 7.5 Copy of social network spider diagram for P075, a widowed man, A. before and B. after transition to widowed status

7.2.6 Widowed woman: P048 P048, a widow aged 51 at interview, experienced a loss of friendships that she had shared with or been introduced to by her husband. She also lost a close friendship with a friend who she maintained regular contact with before being widowed as a result of the strain on their relationship of her new status as a widow. She now has regular contact with only her young daughter, her own mother, and her mother-in-law.

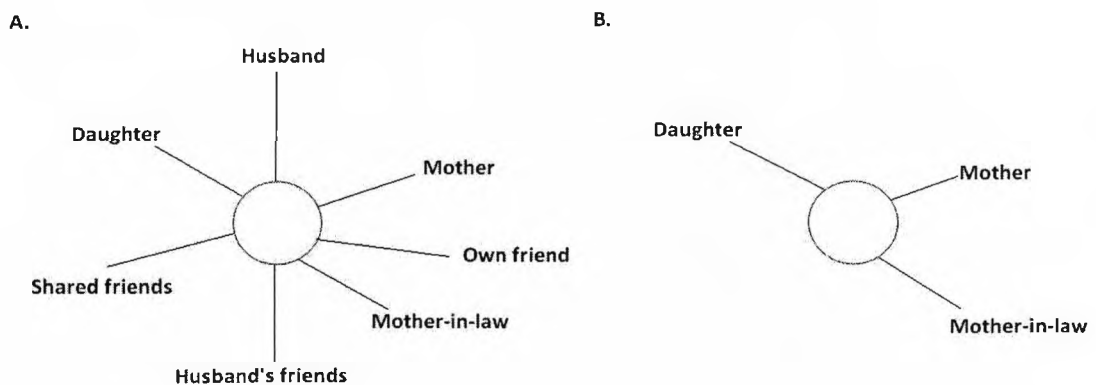


Figure 7.6 Copy of social network spider diagram for P048, a widowed woman, A. before and B. after transition to widowed status

7.2.7 Separated man: P080 P080 separated aged 63 and was 77 at interview. His social network before separation was largely family orientated with a few coupled friends through his wife and work contacts. After separation, P080's social network is very small after a loss of relationships developed through his wife. Unusually, P080 re-established contact with his ex-wife following separation. In the interview, he talks about how he feels it's his responsibility to ensure she is keeping well. He suffers a strained relationship with his surviving adult daughter because she blames him for the breakdown of the married relationship. Sadly, one of his daughters died before his separation, but he has some contact with his granddaughter. Until recently, he had a good relationship with his son-in-law and was employed in one of his business. This working environment had provided him with opportunities for social contact and he held relationships with work colleagues. However, for financial reasons he was forced to leave the job and therefore lost most of these social relationships. His only regular, positive social contact is with one previous colleague and her young family.

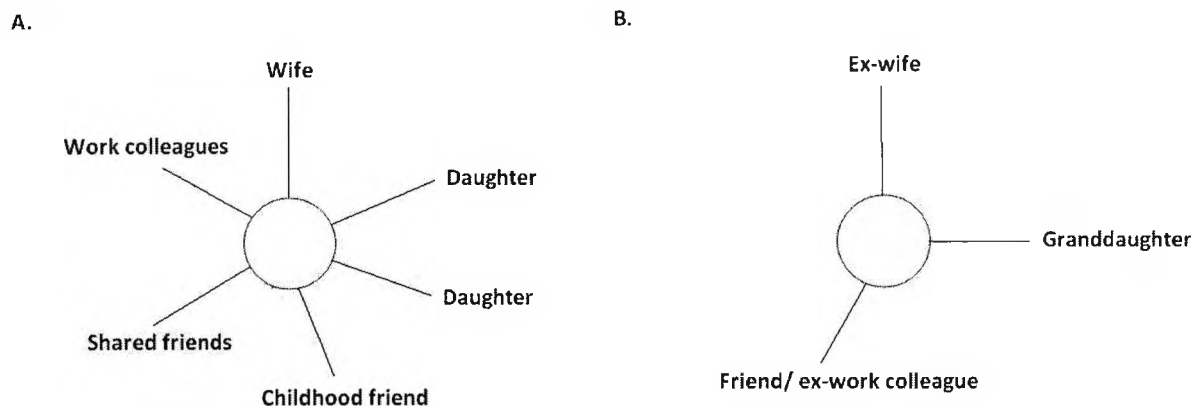


Figure 7.7 Copy of social network spider diagram for P080, a separated man, A. before and B. after transition to divorced status

7.2.8 Separated woman: P047 P047 was a separated woman aged 42 at interview. Her best friends live in Scotland and contact before and after transition was primarily over the telephone. After her divorce at age 39, she lost contact with her mother-in-law, with whom she had suffered a strained relationship during the marriage and lost friendships that she held through her husband. She had to re-locate after her divorce and had started to form a relationship with her new neighbours but has no time to develop other friendships.

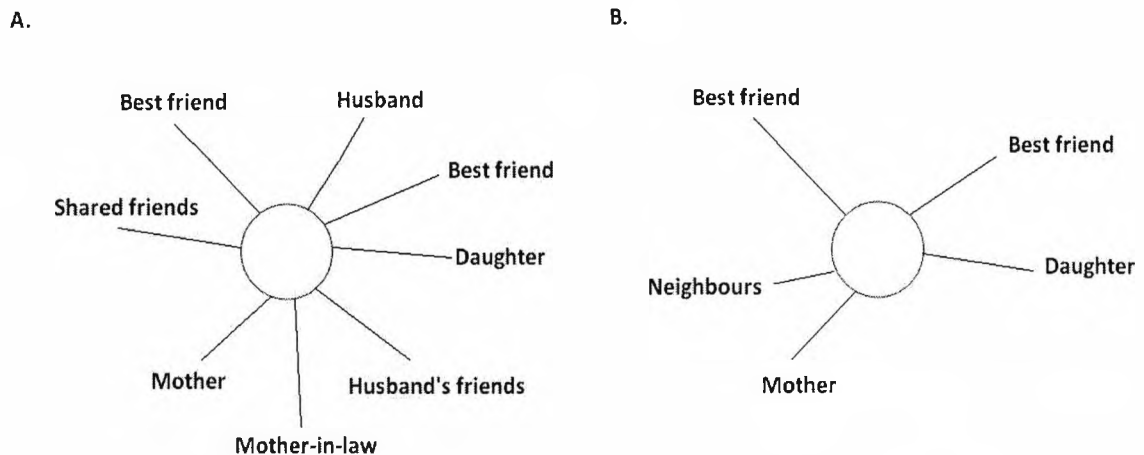


Figure 7.8 Copy of social network spider diagram for P047, a divorced woman, A. before and B. after transition to divorced status

7.3 Qualitative interviews

7.3.1 Cohabiting and married Moving into a cohabiting or married relationship was seen to increase social network size by integrating people into larger networks. In both the interview transcripts and social network diagrams, married and cohabiting participants experienced a growth in their social network through their spouse. P069, a cohabiting man remarked *"I've gained another half of a family"* (P069CM: 33: 38⁷). P045, a divorced woman, reflected back on her transition into marriage and explained:

"Your friends sort of merge together when you're married and you live in a big bubble and your friends are his friends and his friends become your friends."
P045DW: 42: 45

This was particularly the case for married men who described many of their friendships as having stemmed from their wife. Women were usually responsible for maintaining the couple's social network as well as organising social activities with members of the social network during their marriage. For example:

"Probably more because they are friends with my wife than they are friends of mine directly, although they are my friends." P008MM: 25: 48

"Most of the friends we know are certainly facilitated, erm, the relationships have been facilitated by her chatting away to them. I get, I then obviously get to know them through her. I don't think I'm alone in this, I think a lot of men are in a similar

⁷ Represents participant identifier code: age at marital status transition: age at interview

situation, that their circle of friends and their social life centres around people their wife got to know. I think this is quite common.” P014MM: 25: 64

However, this was not necessarily the case for every married couple. For example, P006's social network was built around her husband's work life. His colleagues and their wives were her main social relationships and it was primarily her husband who introduced people to their social network.

“If I didn't have H [husband] my social life would be cut to almost zero, unless I went out of my way to try and build it up again, whereas he would still be invited to a lot of things, because most of the invites come in via him.” P006MW: 38: 41*

Participants were less likely to discuss forming new friendships through social organisation membership upon starting a cohabiting relationship or getting married compared to other marital status groups, but work environments and membership at a church were important sources of social relationships. This is clearly evidenced in the following quote from P063, who was surprised by the changes he noticed in his social relationships.

“I met people at work. I probably got to know people through church. I mean, I suppose we started to make friends there as a couple, which was a bit of an oddity.” P063MW: 34: 55

In terms of the construction of the social network, there was a shift from a broad, friend-centred network to a smaller kin-based social network with the transition into a cohabiting or married relationship, particularly for the newly married.

“I suppose it's been very much home based really rather than having a large group of friends to go out with.” P031MW: 19: 56

“Less friends definitely, more family.// As a whole we are very family orientated.” P040MW: 25: 30

“What we do together as well is spend a lot of time with family relatives as well 'cause we believe in family.” P039MM: 31: 32

Further, several of the cohabiting and married participants described a movement towards coupled friendships. For example:

“I suppose we have a more 'couples' type circle.” P061MW: 39: 51

“I do think it's important to spend time you know, specifically with other couples. With his brother and his fiancé we do.” P004CW: 25: 28

Dyadic withdrawal hypothesis proposes that with the transition into a romantic

relationship there is an initial shrinkage of the social network as the couple becomes more focused on each other, particularly for men (Johnson & Leslie, 1982; Kalmijn, 2003; Milardo, 1982). This pattern towards a more insular social network was documented by most of the married and several of the cohabiting participants, and for many their social life was focused around the home and their family. Most respondents cited experiencing a loss of or a reduced level of contact with independent friends.

"I probably had more friends before although I know that did start to tail off, the more my relationship with D [husband] developed, the more that tailed off."*
P065MW: 35: 38

"I think we see less of friends, I had some friends in [city] who I used to see quite a lot of and they're mutual friends in a way as we both knew them, we do see them but not as much because it seems more awkward to organise the two of us."
P067MW: 53: 58

This change in frequency of contact was attributed to having less time; it being *"more awkward to organise the two of us"* (P067MW: 53: 58); to other people's social circumstances changing; and for some, feeling that their social needs were fully met by their spouse. Women were more likely to report maintaining relationships with their independent friends compared to men, who appeared to be more reliant on their spouse for social contact. The following quotations were typical of the cohabiting and married participants:

"I definitely see less of my mates than I used to, but they've also got married and moved on, and some have had kids." P041MM: 38: 45

"They're still sort of single doing a lot of things on their own, and I think some ways that's more difficult to maintain close relationships." P017MM: 36: 37

"I wouldn't say dropped off or less important but I probably would say since getting married I don't get enough time to spend with them." P039MM: 31: 32

"L[girlfriend] is the main person and, you know, I say that if in terms of socially erm probably about ninety percent of my social needs are met by my partner really. I'm perfectly happy to have her as my main kind of person."* P036CM: 36: 38

Cohabiting men and women appeared to operate more separately than did married couples. They were more likely to maintain independent friendships and were less likely to have experienced an overlap of social networks compared to the married. One cohabiting participant was quoted as saying:

"We both have ownership over our own friends but he knows my friends and I know his friends, so yeah they are shared friends but I would still call them my friends (laughter) and he would still call them his." P029CW: 24: 26

Similarly, P017 said:

"When we first started living together I probably did go out with friends on my own and she went out with friends on her own a lot more than, you know, I suppose since with being together a lot longer and being married I think we do that less really." P017MM: 36: 37

Alongside the impact that a transition into a cohabiting or married relationship had on the social network, geographical re-location and becoming parents had important consequences for the social network. Generally, re-location was associated with a loss of social contacts and an overall shrinkage of the network through difficulties maintaining social relationships over geographical distance. Re-establishing the social network following re-location was difficult and participants discussed the lack of incentive to develop new friendship ties after re-locating. This was more the case for men than with women. Consider these remarks from cohabiting and married participants who had re-located to different areas of the U.K.:

"One of the things about settling down with S [husband] is you didn't have much incentive to make lots of friends locally."* P069CM: 33: 38

"When I moved in with C [boyfriend] first, I had just moved to [city], so I didn't know anyone else really other than him. So I suppose I was to begin with very reliant on him and of course he already had a job so he was going out to work and I was tidying the house and waiting for him to come home really because I didn't know anyone. But as soon as I started working and made friends I was okay."* P035CW: 28: 32

In contrast to geographical relocation, having children was associated with a growth of the social network through mother and toddler groups and meeting other parents on the school playgrounds. This was more frequently described by women compared to men. One married woman asserts that it's hard to make new friends as you age, but commented:

"After you're a mum it becomes much easier [to make friends]." P058MW: 33: 38

Participants without children, on the other hand, felt they lost members of their social network when friends had children, as in the case of P005:

"The big thing that separated us with some of the friends we were friendly with at that time was we didn't have children.// They were taking their kids to school and

built up friendships that way, and of course we didn't." P005MW: 24: 48

In summary, transition into a cohabiting or married relationship was associated in the gain of social relationships through the spouse, including the spouse's family and friendships. Although the overall social network expanded, participants described having regular contact with a smaller group that comprised of family members and other couples. Compared to married participants, cohabiters were more likely to describe an independent social network, less frequent contact with their spouse's family and fewer shared couple friendships.

7.3.2 Widowed For the widowed interview respondents the transition out of marriage involved the loss of a focal member of their social network, the spouse (Umberson et al., 1992).

"I suppose the big change comes when this person that you've loved so much is just not there really." P011WW: 49: 59

When asked to draw and describe their social network before and after widowhood, nearly all participants cited changes in friendships that were based within the married relationship, including the loss of relationships with other couples and friendships made through or primarily maintained by the deceased spouse (Carr & Utz, 2002; Ferraro, 1984; Ferraro & Barresi, 1982; Lopata, 1996; van den Hoonaard, 1994). This was especially the case for men, who seemed particularly isolated after their wife's death since, as in earlier research, wives were usually described as having been responsible for maintaining the social network for the couple (Goldscheider, 1990; Stelle & Uchida, 2004; Waite & Gallagher 2000).

"There must have been about a dozen or so who we knew and socialised with and err, I never heard anything more after she died, they didn't seem to want to know." P001WM: 63: 72

"I think that I've probably got a smaller group of friends than I had before.// A few people that spring to mind is people that I knew through R [husband] rather than me knowing them."* P050WW: 31: 33

"There is nobody that I knew, err, as a friend within the, err, the social circle that went with my marriage that I'm still in touch with." P060WM: 52: 73

Participants understood these changes to be a result of other people's reactions to them no longer being part of a couple themselves; the loss of a common link in their spouse; or

because people did not know how to respond to their grief following bereavement and so withdrew from the social network. Lopata (1996) suggested that friends may desert widows because people find interactions with widows awkward and so limit their contact with them. One widowed woman felt that some people found her *“quite difficult to be around”* (P050WW: 31: 33) after her husband’s death. Another widowed man said simply:

“All the people I, that I knew within the social circle were couples, err and they meet as couples and they were together as couples so when I ceased to be one of those couples, you know it did, it didn’t last long.” P060WM: 52: 73

For widows, there was a sense that married women considered them to be a threat and this made it difficult for them to maintain social relationships with married couples. This was expressed clearly in the following quote:

“Wives are frightened of widows, they think that you’re after their husbands and you’re not, you just want your own.” P055WW: 52: 65

One widow described the consequences of being perceived as a threat, and spoke about feeling uncomfortable in the company of men. She related:

“I felt I could hardly talk to a man about feeling you know, all my boundaries all my normal way of dealing with men changed. And I had to re learn that all over again. I’d just stick to talking to women because it was too complicated talking to men. Either the men would think I was flirting with them or the women come over and think I’m flirting with them. It’s just so complicated.” P048WW: 44: 51

The loss of male company through the loss of male friends as well as their husband following widowhood was noted by several of the widows during the interviews. As one widow aged 70 summarised it:

“You just miss the male presence I think more than anything.” P072WW: 66: 70

Spousal health before death was important for the negative impact of widowhood on the social network. Specifically, the increased demands on time through caregiving responsibilities limited the opportunities the participants had to interact with members of their social network prior to spousal bereavement, and this had consequences following widowhood. One woman who cared for her husband before his death commented:

“My husband was ill for a long time before he died which meant that socialising was near impossible.” P055WW: 52: 65

Frequently, the widowed participants expressed a change in who they themselves wanted in their social network following widowhood. One widowed woman spoke of wanting *"to keep to your little circle"* and explained *"you don't really want to branch out"* (P071: 68: 69). This idea of feeling safer in the familiarity of the company of close family and friends was illustrated here by another widowed woman:

"The friends that I tend to spend most of the time with would be people who've known me for a long time and certainly who've known me since before R [husband] died, yeah. Yeah I think I probably feel a bit safer with people who have known me since before."* P050WW: 31: 33

There was a sense of change in how they perceived themselves and how they felt they were perceived by others. These changes will be explored further in Chapter 10. As a consequence, it was common for the widowed participants to cite feeling less comfortable in the company of other couples, as in this example:

"If you get, sort of two parents two children err, I've got one friend with four children and I feel, I'm um, I will see her on her own, but I won't invite her husband" P048WW: 44: 51

Similarly, P010, a widowed man of 45 commented:

"All of those people are still couples in family units and I am now not a couple and I've, err, and I'm you know, they never make me aware of it but sometimes I feel very, very conscious of that." P010WM: 42: 45

He continued on to say:

"I think a lot of widowed people probably feel this, you feel slightly apart but you feel that no one notices your apartness, I think if that makes any sense.[What do you mean by 'apart'?] You feel different to them, but you think that they probably don't really realise this" P010WM: 42: 45

In line with this, family were often central members of the social network for the widowed and several participants reported strengthened relationships with adult children, parents and siblings (Guiaux et al., 2007). One widowed woman commented:

"The main contacts are my parents, it's not friends. Although I keep in touch with friends by e-mail and things, but in terms of physically seeing people, it's family." P024WW: 49: 53

A number of the younger widowed participants talked about maintaining relationships with in-laws and felt it was important to keep in regular contact following their shared loss.

"I've got a fantastic relationship with my in-laws. We went through my wife's

illness and death together." P010WM: 42: 45

Alongside their relationships with family members, widows talked about feeling more comfortable in the company of other widows and spoke about how they had developed new friendships with other widows following widowhood, as in this quote:

"My support network I suppose is mostly people in a similar situation to me, single or widowed." P048WW: 44: 51

For P048 this was because of the shared experience of being widowed, but also because of the practicalities of organising a social meeting. She explained, "A, they understood and B, it was a lot easier [arranging to meet]" (P048WW: 44: 51). Men are less likely than women to be widowed, and, therefore, widowers may find it more difficult to develop relationships with other widowers. In contrast to the widows, widowers in this study did not mention actively seeking friendships with other widows, although some older widowed men did have existing social relationships with single or widowed men. The different changes that occurred in people's social relationships following widowhood meant that a small number of participants described themselves as feeling social isolated after widowhood. For example, P076 was widowed aged 40 with three young children. Reflecting back she said:

"There was no one but me and the kids when I look back on it now." P076WW: 40: 73

Another widow, P077 aged 40, had been widowed three years prior interview and had lived away from her family during her marriage. One year after bereavement, she made the decision to relocate in order to receive the social contact and support she needed. Through relocating, P077 was able to rebuild her social network and have more frequent contact with her immediate family. Consistent with existing literature, widows were less likely to report feeling socially isolated compared to men and generally described a larger social network of family and friends in the interview and social network diagrams (Dimond et al., 1987).

Zettel and Rook (2004) suggested that the widowed may substitute lost social ties following spousal bereavement and most widowed participants in this study were able to compensate for social network losses in the longer term through the development of new friendships. As in earlier research, the formation of new friendships was positively associated with the duration of widowhood and was related to the level of desire and effort made to make new friendships (Lamme et al., 1996). Previous research has found

that widowhood is associated with a growth in social organisational membership as an alternative source of companionship and identity (Donnelly & Hinterlong, 2010; Ferraro, Mutran & Barresi, 1984; Utz et al., 2002). Involvement in social organisations may provide opportunities for new friendships (Neill & Kahn, 1999) and many of the widowed men and women interviewed had developed new friendships through their existing or new membership of social organisations, support groups and through attending church.

Consider these quotes:

"Recently started attending church, so friendships growing through that, a friend from the access course, new friends through this course." P056WW: 24: 37

"The last couple of months I have gotten more of a life for myself, I've got more involved with Church as I say, I go to the Mothers' Union, and I clean and I go Thursday morning and Sunday night to Church and so I've met more people." P072WW: 66: 70

"Even in the computer class you meet people you sit next to the same people week to week and you get to know them, get their email addresses. Yeah there have been quite a few contacts there and contacts at the present [bereavement support] group." P075WM: 72: 79

However, for P055 some social groups that she had enjoyed before her husband's death became 'closed' to her as a widow and she was either no longer welcome or felt uncomfortable attending these meetings.

"People would say that only couples should join these social groups [local village groups including amateur dramatics club] and not widows, otherwise it would turn into 'widow's corner'. So I thought if I'm not totally welcome I'm not going anymore." P055WW: 52: 65

Lamme et al. (1996) found in their research that only a minority of men in their sample reported new friendships after widowhood. In this study, the interviews revealed that new relationships were more often reported by women compared to men, but men did describe forming new friendships, or strengthening existing social relationships including friendships with neighbours. However, this may be a consequence of sampling techniques used in this research study, recruiting most of the widowed men through social organisations.

Ten of the widowed interviewees had developed a new romantic or platonic relationship after widowhood. Those that had enjoyed a new romantic relationship were more likely to be younger and widowed for a longer time. Other participants spoke openly about their feelings about developing a new romantic relationship. The desire to be in a

relationship varied both by gender and by age. In line with earlier research (e.g. Carr & Bodnar-Deren, 2009; Davidson, 2000; Stevens, 1995; 2002), men were generally more active at seeking a new romantic relationship. One man admitted he was *"always on the hunt for women"* (P033WM: 55: 66). Stevens (2002) found that the desire for a new romantic relationship was more characteristic of those under the age of seventy. In this study, older widowed participants were often dismissive of the idea of a new romantic relationship and were more interested in a platonic friendship rather than a sexual relationship. As one widowed woman summarised it:

"I wouldn't want to get married again or anything like that but, you know just the company really, to go and have a meal with or, to go to the theatre with."
P072WW: 66: 70

When asked about how comfortable he felt about developing a new romantic relationship P075, a 79 year old widower, commented:

"I would but the practicalities put me off (laughter)// Well setting up home, living together, reorganising." P075WM: 72: 79

Others simply had no interest in *"doing it all over"* (P071WW: 68: 69), or were fatalistic about their chances of re-partnering. For example:

"I mean let's face it be realistic would anybody fancy me at 80?" P051WW: 78: 80

In contrast, younger participants were generally more receptive to the idea of a new romantic relationship, and several had made use of the internet with the hope of establishing a new romantic relationship. One younger widower talked about *"skin hunger"*, describing his desire for intimacy (P010WM: 42: 45) and another widower said:

"I would say it is having the knowledge that there is somebody that is actually on your side, looking out for you and vice versa." P060WM: 52: 73

These quotes were typical of those widowed at a younger age and highlight an important difference between those younger and older widowed. P042, widowed aged 55, summarised the differences that appeared by age, saying:

"I suppose when you're younger you still want a relationship, and perhaps older it's more about companionship. And I think I'd still put myself in that younger group."
P042WM: 55: 59

New romantic relationships usually developed through the introduction of mutual friends, or membership in social organisations. For example:

"It was just that almost accidentally, D [friend] and I went out on one occasion and found out we had a lot in common and it simply grew from that."* P001WM: 63: 72

"J [new romantic partner] and I actually met through a networking group."* P011WW: 49: 59

"I actively went, I went to internet dating, err, well its based over the internet but you actually go to a pub, and you know they're hosting a evening there, so it's a evening for singles." P048WW: 44: 51

Forming a new romantic relationship was often difficult practically and emotionally for the widowed interviewees. For example, P010, a man widowed age 42, found that his young son had a *"massive problem"* (P010WM: 42: 45) about him being in a relationship and he made the decision to end a new romantic relationship in response to his son's feelings. For P042, a widowed man, he described feeling vulnerable and was aware of his own age and identity as a 59 year old widower in trying to find a new partner:

"One of the things I noticed when I was thinking about dating again was I was still thinking of myself as I was. You've got to think, well I'm nearly 60 and I've got to be looking at people who are also nearly 60." P042WM: 55: 59

Others described a difficult, emotional conflict between the love they still had for their deceased spouse and their desire to be in a new relationship, as in this quote:

"Trying to, in my own head, wonder how I could feel something still so strong for R [son] and also be considering you know, trying something with someone else, it just didn't make sense in my head."* P050WW: 31: 33

As in the case of P076, new romantic or companionate relationships often facilitated the development of new social relationships and allowed the widowed to be introduced into wider social networks.

"It opened up a whole different world to me he's very sort of Catholic much older than me absolutely charming gentlemen I go to all sorts of I have a wonderful social life like that I think the world of B [platonic friend] nothing physical."* P076WW: 40: 73

Overall, widowhood is characterised by the loss of a central member of the social network, but also by the loss of important and peripheral friendships. These changes that occur in the wider social network appear to be a result of the participants' and other people's response to their new identity as a widow or widower. Over time, the widowed participants in this study were able to compensate for friendship losses by establishing

new social and romantic relationships through membership in social organisations. In all these interviews, there was a clear sense of overall loss post-transition through the absence of the spouse.

7.3.3 Divorced For most divorced participants, the transition out of marriage resulted in the loss of the former spouse from the social network. However, for some divorced parents, contact with the former spouse had to be maintained and usually this was not a positive social relationship.

"He would be perfectly happy for us to be really good friends. I don't think he quite understands that it's not quite that easy for me." P026SW: 44: 45

"It's having to see them all the time because you've got children. You can't just walk away from it and pretend they didn't exist. You've got to see them, every week, and that's like rubbing salt in the wounds stuff to be honest." P049SW: 35: 37

For different reasons, including a sense of duty and responsibility, P080, an older separated man of 77, re-established contact with his ex-wife and now maintains a platonic relationship with her. He regularly visits her and they speak daily on the telephone. He explains:

"I think it is a responsibility, when you're our age." P080SM: 63: 77

Similarly, relationships with in-laws were usually lost from the social network following divorce due to family loyalties. One divorced man commented:

"Where do they put their loyalty? I kept in touch with them by sending them a Christmas card, but never got one in return but I kept trying to maintain the relationship but it didn't work, it didn't happen." P046DM: 45: 64

However, where children were involved participants described having to maintain what were usually strained relationships with their in-laws, as was the case for P032.

"I'll speak to her and I'll be civil to her, but it's a total facade, erm, it's purely to keep the sort of pretence of civility, more for R [son] than for anyone else."* P032SW: 33: 35

Alongside the loss of the spouse and in-law ties, divorced participants also discussed a loss of non-familial contacts, including shared friends and other couples known jointly with their spouse. These social network losses were also evident in the social network spider diagrams. Participants felt that these friendships had been lost as a consequence of their

new single status and noted that they were viewed as a threat or as the odd one out in the friendship group.

"I lost quite a lot of friends when we split up because a lot of the people we knew were sort of couples and then people don't feel comfortable with you, and I think a lot of women feel threatened by." P034DW: 30: 32

The circumstances surrounding the divorce were important for the consequences the transition had on the social network. For example, research suggests that traumatic or stigmatising events can lead social network members to avoid contact with the individuals involved in the events, or to respond in ways that are unhelpful (Wortman & Lehman, 1985). For one older, separated man, P080, his social circle was reduced to no-one after he had an affair. For another interview participant, P047, her husband initiated the divorce after he developed a relationship with another woman. In reaction, she deliberately isolated herself from people and withdrew from the social network because she was upset and embarrassed.

"Just cut myself off from a lot of people because I didn't really want to see them or have anything to do with them because it just became too painful and all that kind of thing." P047SW: 39: 42

In a different case, P028 had to re-locate as a result of her divorce and subsequently lost friends through geographical distance.

"I gave up my whole life, everything changed about my life when that broke up. I changed locations, jobs, all my friends, I lost all my friends, or you know, I thought I had done. My whole lifestyle changed." P028DW: 29: 50

For others, there was little or no change to the social network. This was particularly the case if they had socialised separately as a couple and maintained largely independent social networks during the married relationship. For example:

"I don't think I lost any friends as a result of it, I can't think straight about it, the divorce. Yeah, well I did, I lost one or two that were closer to my husband." P053DW: 60: 67

"None of my friends liked him (laughter). None of my friends liked him! So I lost nobody!" P062DW: 24: 31

Further, for divorced parents with younger children still in the home, parental responsibilities impacted on their ability to maintain existing social relationships and restricted opportunities to develop new friendships to expand the social network. In these cases, children were often the main social contact. One divorced woman reported:

"She [daughter] is really all I've got at the moment." P021DW: 29: 37

Similar to the widowed participants, several of the divorced participants, particularly women, revealed changes in who they wanted in their social network and spoke of how they were more selective with their friendships now as a consequence of their divorce experience. For some, this included a preference for socialising with other singles rather than with couples, or with only one member of a married couple.

"When you look at the spider diagram, I've probably only got about three people, but I'm really choosy. And I think, if you can't show me, not, love or affection or whatever, then there's no point." P047SW: 39: 42

"I suppose when I do socialise it's with other women, they're not single, but it would be difficult I think socialising with couples if you're not in a couple." P026SW: 44: 45

One woman described how the circumstances surrounding her separation meant it was more difficult for her to be in the company of other *"happy couple(s)"*.

"It wasn't what I wanted, so I'm not happy with my situation, so I suppose I would feel uncomfortable in a social situation where there was a happy couple I suppose." P026SW: 44: 45

Alongside the loss of some social relationships, the participants talked about developing new friendships following divorce. The findings from the interviews provide support for Bidart and Lavenu's (2005) suggestion that marital dissolution may allow for a widening of the social network. Many of the divorced participants, particularly women, had taken up new interests or joined social organisations, which facilitated the development of new friendships.

"[Before,] I wouldn't have seen my gardening friends, I wouldn't have seen anybody from singing, I wouldn't have seen anybody from walking." P053DW: 60: 67

"I was effectively single so there was a massive change in my social networks. // I moved into a sort of bed sit with a guy whose wife had just left him as well and another chap whose wife had just left him and I had a very large network of friends built up." P007DM: 32: 44

Moreover, the quality of some existing relationships, namely with immediate family and close friends, was improved. For P079, a separated man, his relationship with his parents had suffered as a consequence of his marriage. He revealed that he had *"a better*

relationship with them now than what I did during the marriage" (P079SM: 30: 33).

Another separated woman said:

"I guess my social network has probably got stronger if anything in terms of the support from friends and family and I'd say stronger and closer." P049SW: 35: 37

Most considered that the friendships they had now were stronger and of a higher quality compared to the friendships they had held during their married relationship. As one separated man summarised it:

"My circle of friends has got smaller, but on the one from before [social network spider diagram] there were more fair-weather friends, who maybe out of loyalty to my wife, some of them, I'd say there was only one or two I wouldn't give the time of day to, so now, even though my circle of friends has got, this is to contradict myself, smaller more eclectic and diverse, but much more valued friends." P078SM: 40: 42

New romantic relationships following divorce were common and ten of the divorced participants, three men and seven women, had developed new relationships. Of these, three had remarried, four were cohabiting and three were in Living Apart Together (LAT) relationships. The participants who expressed an interest in having a new romantic relationship described wanting to have someone to share the day to day experiences of life. One man who remarried following his divorce was determined to find a relationship and said *"there was no way I was going to be on my own"* (P046DM: 45: 64). Another woman spoke about seeking companionship and the opportunity to go out as an adult woman, rather than socialising only through her role as a mother. She commented:

"Just a bit of companionship and being able to be [P045], not 'mum', but to be [P045] when I go out. And that's a biggie I suppose, because you know, when I get dressed up and I go out, and I've not got her with me, I feel like a different person because I'm not covered in crap and glitter and rubbish (laughter)." P045DW: 42: 45

While some were interested in remarriage, several of the participants were keen to maintain their own independence but still enjoy the emotional and physical intimacy of a romantic relationship. P053DW, a 67 year old divorced woman, described her LAT relationship as *"like having a weekend husband!"* (P053DW: 60: 67). Another divorced woman of 50 in a LAT relationship said:

"In a way, a bit like being married, it's just we have a bit of freedom as well, so when I come to make arrangements to see other people, I have to make them on days when I'm not seeing him." P028DW: 29: 50

Other participants described being either disinterested in forming a new romantic relationship or talked about their worries about instigating a new relationship, as in the following quotes:

"I can't really be bothered you know, it's the, you know, you have to consider what they're doing and I can't be bothered you know." P021DW: 29: 37

"I would love to have another partner, but the idea of going about getting one is really quite scary because I've only ever had one partner. I don't know about dating and things, you know, it's a whole new thing." P026SW: 44: 45

"I feel a bit sort of, where would I go to meet someone, 'cos obviously with being mid-thirties I can't exactly go down to a night club or anything, so it's sort of, where do you go to meet people at 35." P032SW: 33: 35

As in the case of the widowed participants, new romantic relationships expanded the social network through being introduced to the family and friends of their new partner.

"She's also got a network of family and friends as well so when I think about that there is her sister, A, and her mum and dad as well."* P079DM: 30: 33

In summary, the transition out of marriage through divorce was associated with important changes in the social network. Divorced participants experienced a loss of both kin and friend ties post-transition as a result of their new status as a single person and through split loyalties of family and friends. There was the potential for participants to develop new friendships after divorce and some had established new romantic relationships which further expanded the social network. Those participants who had maintained an independent social network during their married relationship described fewer changes in their social network post-transition. Further, the implications of divorce for the social network were different for those with children, where contact was usually maintained with the former spouse and their responsibilities to their children restricted opportunities to establish new social and romantic relationships.

7.4 Contextual factors

The extent to which cohabiting, married, widowed or divorced people had experienced changes in their social relationships was influenced by other factors, including age and gender, as well as prior levels of social engagement and marital quality.

7.4.1 Age Increasing age has been related to a decline in the numbers of friends as well as less initiative in making new ones (Cornwell, Laumann & Schumm, 2008) and a greater reliance on family members as social contacts (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005; Wenger & Burholt, 2002). However, the interviews suggest that the construction of the social network may vary, not by age per se, but rather by the social and physical circumstances that relate to growing older. For example, declining physical functioning can reduce mobility and the capacity to socialise (Bury & Holme, 1990; Prince, Harwood, Blizard, Thomas & Mann, 1997). Physical limitations were most usually described by older adults in the interview sample. For example, P051, an older widow of 80, was unable to drive, had difficulty walking for any length of time and had started to experience macular degeneration. In the interview she said:

"The fact that age is catching up on me physically you know, health wise. I can't do things I'd like to do." P051WW: 78: 80

Being in employment was related to age as well as to the construction of the social network. Younger participants talked about relationships with colleagues, and retired women talked about having maintained contact with some of their previous colleagues. For men, retirement seemed to have an important negative impact on the social network as they were less likely to maintain relationships with previous colleagues. Further, social organisations allowed widowed and divorced participants to facilitate new relationships but membership to social organisations was related to age. Older participants typically had more leisure time available and fewer responsibilities to prevent social organisation memberships, although in some cases physical health status limited the level of involvement in social organisations. In addition, a number of participants talked about technology, including text messaging, e-mail and social networking sites such as *Facebook* as being easy ways of maintaining contact with their social network. For example:

"It is easier to keep in contact with people now, because I suppose you use Facebook, but I do tend to email people a lot." P019MW: 42: 55

One young widowed woman of 33 even admitted that text messages and e-mail had been a key tool for communicating in the early stages of bereavement, when she was unable to cope with telephone conversations. Although the use of technology will change for future cohorts, use of technology to keep in touch with friends and family in this sample was negatively related to age and older participants' relied on face-to-face or telephone interactions to maintain relationships with members of their social network.

On the whole, the social network of the married, cohabiting, widowed and

divorced participants reflected the stage they were at in their own life. Consider this quote from one married participant:

"You tend to erm, find yourself drawn to, maybe that's not the right phrase, your social group tends to reflect where you are in your own life I think, so where now most of the people we were socialise with have young kids and I know when I was a student, very single, then I would've socialised with lots of single people, and when A [wife] came along I think it tended to then start to change to socialising with other couples."* P066MM: 33: 41

This quote provides an accurate summary of the changes with age for many of the participants. Younger married adults were more likely to cite other married couples as their main social contacts; parents cited new social relationships with parents of their children's friends; and older widowed participants talked about friendships with other widows and widowers. For most older participants, these changes were fairly subtle and were relatively unnoticed. However, younger participants had to be more active in restructuring their social network following widowhood since it was more difficult to find a peer group. Younger widowed adults in this study sought out a peer group through specific support organisations. However, this may be an artefact of the study's sample selection methods by using bereavement groups to recruit participants.

7.4.2 Gender In the literature, gender has been recognised as an important factor in shaping the social network and suggests that men, and particularly older men, have smaller social networks compared to women (Flaherty & Richman, 1989; Unger, McAvay, Bruce, Berkman & Seeman, 1999). In the interview data, women not only reported having a wider social network than men but they also had more intimate relationships with their friends. Men who were cohabiting or married were more likely to depend on their spouse as their main social contact and women emerged as the people who typically organised and maintained the social network during the married relationship.

"I'm perfectly happy to have her [partner] as my main kind of person." P036CM: 36: 38

"I mean I suppose in a way I rely on her as a companion so when we socialise with other people it's usually as a couple." P014MM: 25: 64

"They're my friends as well, but primary relationship is generally speaking, between my wife and the female members of that group, so the wives and husbands and children do socialise." P007DM: 32: 44

Compared to women, men were more likely to describe themselves as being a loner or experiencing more difficulty forming or maintaining friendships. For example:

"Generally speaking I've never had a lot of friends, and I haven't been very good at maintaining these relationships when I've moved on." P001WM: 63: 72

"I think it's a man thing, erm you know, men tend not to talk on the phone for a long time." P007DM: 32: 44

7.4.3 Prior levels of social engagement Wenger's (1997) social network typologies suggest that those who maintain a smaller, independent or family focused social network may be at greater risk of isolation following widowhood or divorce compared to those with more integrated social networks. In line with this, changes in the structure of the social network after a transition out of marriage were related to the social patterns that had existed within the married relationship. For some participants, maintaining their social network was important and they enjoyed interacting with family and friends. However, in contrast, others have never been active socialisers and described a small social network both before and after marital status change. One man described himself as a loner:

"I'm a bit of a loner so most of the social activities would be either based on the marriage or the family or the kids or the grandpa [father-in-law]." P025MM: 26: 57

Following a transition out of marriage, those who were socially reliant on their spouse and had a small social network prior to transition were less likely to describe having a confidant relationship after widowhood or divorce. Where the participants described their social network as being separate from their spouses' during the married relationship there were fewer network losses following widowhood and divorce (Bloom, Asher & White, 1978).

"I had my friends and he had his. We didn't have like regular friends together so any friends that I know I've still got now really." P057WW: 52: 57

"We weren't close in that sort of way so my social life wasn't affected even vaguely." P022DW: 29: 44

7.5 Conclusions

Across the four marital status groups, all participants described some change in the structure of their social network. There were important differences between marital status transitions into and out of a married relationship in terms of the losses and gains in social relationships over time and the degree of control the participants had over these changes. Specifically, the transition into cohabiting or married relationships tended to allow for a growth of the social network but although the overall network was expanded, the focus

shifted to kin ties and friendships with other couples. This was less the case for cohabiters compared to married participants. In contrast, widowhood and divorce was associated with a loss of some relationships, namely shared friends and married couples. The case of divorce was interesting. Divorce had the potential to be more socially isolating than widowhood with the loss of in-law ties and other family members related to the ex-spouse. On the other hand, divorce also allowed some participants to reconstruct the social network and develop valuable new friendships. The impact of marital status change on the social network also varied by age and by gender.

Whilst social networks are not necessarily supportive and not all social relationships are beneficial (Bowling, 1991), the changes in the structure of the social network may have important implications for the exchange of support for the participants, including the opportunities available for social engagement. Chapter 8 continues to explore the interview data, focusing on the changes in the exchange of social support associated with a change in marital status.

Chapter 8

The impact of marital status change on the exchange of social support

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 highlighted the changes in the social network experienced by men and women in the face of a marital status transition. A person's social network serves as a resource for the receiving of and the giving of social support (Langford, Bowsher, Maloney & Lillis, 1997). Here, social support refers to the exchange of functional support within the social network and differs from social engagement, which involves the social contact between an individual and members of their social network and acquaintances (see Chapter 9). Functional support may include emotional support, which involves caring, love and empathy; informational support, where information, advice, or feedback can be provided in response to a problem; instrumental, or tangible, support, such as providing financial assistance or helping with household duties; and social companionship, which involves spending time with others in leisure and recreational activities (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). Previous research demonstrates that it is these qualitative aspects of social relationships that are important for psychological health, as opposed to the structural characteristics of a social network (Allen & Hayslip, 2001; House et al., 1988a). Further, Stevens (1992) highlighted the importance of reciprocity in the giving and receiving of social support for life satisfaction.

Marital status transitions impact on the availability of social support through changes to the social network. Cohabitation and marriage provide individuals with access to a wide social network of support providers and spouses are often named as the main source of support for married people (Rindfuss & Vanden-Heuvel, 1990; Waite, 1995). In contrast, widowhood and divorce removes the primary source of social support, the spouse (Glaser et al., 2006; Lopata, 1996). Participants in this study described changes in the exchange of social support within the social network and these changes in social support varied by marital status transition, as well as by gender and age. Those participants with higher levels of social support and more opportunities to socialise with family and friends appeared to be better adjusted to their new marital status and described higher levels of general happiness compared to those with lower levels of social support. The sections that follow aim to explore the impact of transitions into and out of

marriage on the exchange of social support and consider how this varies by age and gender. Quotes from the interviews are used to illustrate the themes.

8.2 Cohabiting and married

Cohabiting and married participants described their spouse as becoming the main provider of social support following their transition (Kendig, Coles, Pittelkow & Wilson, 1988).

"When I was on my own I was probably a lot more dependent on my parents where I probably turn to D [husband]." P065MW: 35: 38*

"I think you just feel that you have now got somebody there for support really, you're not on your own." P017MM: 36: 37

P067, who first married aged 53, described having relied upon friends and family for her support for many years prior to marriage. When talking about the support she receives from her husband she commented:

"I mean for me it's a support that I never had before." P067MW: 53: 58

Being in a cohabiting or married relationship provided the participants with emotional support, informational support, instrumental support and social companionship. Over the interviews, men and women talked about the encouragement, spiritual support, financial security, feeling of purpose, self-confidence, sense of stability, and sense of appreciation that they gained from being in a cohabiting or married relationship.

"Now I have more opportunity to talk with somebody and to share, chat with. Because before I married I did not have somebody to talk with. I had my friends but it's not like my husband now, it's totally different things." P059MW: 17: 19

"Absolutely every type of support, you know. Whatever is required, either of us will be there for." P027MW: 31: 41

Emotional support was highlighted by many of the participants as being the most important type of social support exchanged in their relationship and as having the most impact on their psychological wellbeing. P065, a woman who married for the first time aged 35, described the increased availability of emotional and informational support after becoming married:

"It's having someone to talk to, that's the most important thing. Compared to what I had before. It's coming home and somebody being there." P065MW: 35: 38

Social companionship provided by the spouse was also important. P019 was 42 when she first married. She described herself as being a very independent woman with a successful career and a strong social network of friends. Her husband regularly worked away from home for long periods of time. When describing the support she gains from her marriage she said:

"I suppose it's a bit of security and companionship erm, but otherwise not a lot."
P019MW: 42: 55

The following quote from P014 was typical of the way cohabiting and married participants considered the social support exchanged with their spouse:

"Lots of the time at work it makes no odds but when works over and I take my lab coat off and I put my jacket on and get ready to go out I think there's somebody there waiting for me at home or not soon after I get back who I'm looking forward to seeing and that is tremendously important and I'd hate to be without that."
P014MM: 25: 64

Family members, including in-laws, were cited as important sources of social support, but supportive exchanges tended to involve more instrumental rather than emotional or informational support. This was clearly illustrated in the following quotes:

"I mean, financially his mum and dad help him out about, as he's a full time student as well, which is very valuable for us." P038MW: 31:33

"They [family] help us a lot; instrumentally they help us a lot." P043MW: 29: 35

When asked about the type of support they need, cohabiting and married participants discussed not having as much need for the *"network of friends that you might have when you're single"* (P017MM). P006, a married woman said:

"It is nice to sort of, it's nice to meet up for dinner with my friends and have a good old natter, but I think I do enjoy going out as a family because J [husband] is my best friend. So yeah, I'm not that bereft of friends if I've got him."* P006MW: 38: 41

Another married man explained:

"The support I think you really need is the one that really matters, and that for me is the love of your family." P041MM: 38: 45

In general, increasing age was associated with an increased importance of social support from family and friends. P014 commented:

"It's [feeling supported] increasingly pleasant, increasingly important if you like. [Why increasingly?] Because I'm getting older." P014MM: 25: 64

Further, in line with previous research, giving social support to other members of the social network was also important to participants (Antonucci, Fuhrer & Jackson, 1990; Stevens, 1992). For example, P025, a married man, described his need to feel useful:

"I like to feel that I'm useful, I suppose. When the family rings up and says something's gone wrong I like to think and I can go and sort it out. So that's sort of them supporting me in a back to front way isn't it really?" P025MM: 26: 57

Compared to women, men were less likely to describe needing or receiving social support and tended to consider themselves to be fairly independent, as in this example:

"I'd be quite happy living on my own to be honest, except that I enjoy having the children around, seeing the children around. In terms of living with somebody in a partnership, I think it might get a little bit lonely, and you do want to share things, but in terms of support, I don't tend to need an awful lot, unless there's a major support. But then I don't know where I'd find it. But then if I step back and think about how I would feel if I was on my own I don't think I would like it, and yet I find it very difficult to define why." P030CM: 35: 46

Friends often offered participants emotional, informational and instrumental support. This was particularly the case for women, who tended to have a wider network of friends and a greater level of supportive exchange between friends compared to men. Friends were also important providers of social companionship. However, participants cited a change in the type of social activities as well as changes in who they socialised with following a transition into a cohabiting or married relationship (Chapter 9). Most participants cited their spouse as becoming their main source of social companionship over their friends.

"Most of the time we spend our time together." P025MM: 26: 57

In line with previous research, women were socially less dependent on the marriage for social support and were more likely to exchange support with friends, neighbours and colleagues compared to men (Kalmijn, 2003). However, there was still an acknowledgement among both men and women that having friends and socialising with friends was important and that social interaction with friends had a positive impact on their psychological wellbeing.

"The kind of warmth it gives you in a way because there's a group of people that are around that actually care enough about you to actually do it for you and actually do things for you. You know it's a nice feeling, a sense of belonging to a community." P014MM: 25: 64

"The absolute need in your life to socialise, to engage, to speak to people, to show an interest in people, to help them when they need help because they do, don't they, from time to time.// You'd end up socially inept without friends. You can't just rely on your family either because that's far too suffocating, and it doesn't give you a wide enough experience so my friends are really important in that sense."
P041MM

Having children changed the amount of support cohabiting and married participants had to give out and also affected the type of social support needed, with a greater need for instrumental support from family as well as from friends.

"Kids change things more than marriage, the focal point of your life, and they take up all your life." P041MM: 38: 45

"I'd say at this point the support that we need would be really practical [after having child]." P036CM: 36: 38

Further, becoming a parent had an impact on the exchange of social companionship had between participants and their spouse, family and friends. This was particularly the case when the children were younger.

"The friends that we do socialise with are friends who've got kids, from the local school." P043MW: 29: 35

Cohabiting participants, particularly those without children, were less likely to describe their spouse as their main provider of support and sought support from friends to a greater extent than did the married. One explanation for these differences may be the lower level of commitment and security provided within a cohabiting relationship compared to a married partnership (Rindfuss & Vanden-Heuvel, 1990). In line with this, P038 cohabited prior to marriage and described the changes she noticed on becoming married. She highlights commitment as being central to the changes that occurred:

"Having the commitment from R [husband], whether that was the engagement or marriage or even if he just said, 'I really don't want to have anything like a marriage but I promise you I want to be there for you for the rest of our lives', its having that level of commitment definitely enhanced the feeling of wellbeing and security and a feeling (...) that you know you've got support to go out and do other things if you want to."* P038MW: 31: 33

Another married man said simply:

"I suppose when you are married you are more of a unit." P017MM: 36: 37

In line with the notion of a lower level of commitment within cohabiting relationships, any social support differences that emerged between the cohabiting and married participants tended to be related to other factors, including age, duration of the relationship and having children. Generally, those participants who were older and had been in their cohabiting relationship for longer, who were usually cohabiting instead of marriage as opposed being 'yet to marry', tended to describe similar patterns of support exchange compared to the married participants.

In summary, the transition to cohabiting or married status was associated with an increase in social support through the spouse and the inclusion into a wider social network. The exchange of emotional and information support and social companionship emerged as the important types of social support gained from being in the cohabiting or married relationship. Family and friends were also cited as important support providers. The patterns of change varied by gender, where women were more likely to exchange social support with other members of the social network compared to men, and by age, where younger participants were more likely to describe supportive exchanges with a wider range of support providers compared to older participants. Having children increased support demands and was typically associated with receiving a greater level of instrumental support from family.

8.3 Widowed

Given that one of the most important forms of social support is provided within the marital relationship (Kendig et al., 1988), the widowed are at high risk of losing an important source of social support upon spousal bereavement that may not be readily available elsewhere. A widowed woman considered the loss of support upon widowhood and commented:

"Massively significant losing the support of your husband. Some of that has been picked up by my family but if you were to look at that on a percentage basis you kind of lost 50% and maybe picked up 10%, but the vast majority is still you."
P077WW: 37: 40

Cohabiting and married participants revealed that the exchange of emotional and informational support and social companionship with their spouse was particularly important. In line with this, the loss of social support following widowhood was especially pronounced for types of support where the spouse had been the main support provider, including the exchange of emotional and informational support. Consider the following quote:

"I suppose it's the day to day company really, and sharing your life with somebody, I think that's probably the part that you miss, obviously you miss the physical side and the hugs and just you know, depends what you lie, probably the biggest element is just that person that is interested in your life and wants to know how your day's been and you take an interest in their life." P077WW: 37: 40

Widowhood also removed the main provider of social companionship. Widowed participants, particularly older participants, described how most of their socialising before widowhood was with their spouse and commented on the impact this had on their social activities following spousal bereavement.

"We did everything together, well almost everything together. She didn't play golf! But we did everything." P001WM: 63: 72

"It was just the loneliness, I didn't know where to turn after B [husband] died we had always been out together all the time, joined at the hip."* P073WW: 75: 79

As in this quote from P011, a widowed woman, several of the participants discussed the loss of adult company following spousal bereavement, particularly those widowed younger and with young children in the household.

"I think the biggest change was trying to make the adjustment, and sort of the loss of adult company I found it really marked." P011WW: 49: 59

When asked what kinds of support they needed, widowed participants described initially needing a lot of informational and instrumental support in the form of help with practical matters including planning the funeral and completing paperwork. They also described needing emotional support in the form of someone to "off-load" (P056WW) on, to listen to them and to find reassurance from.

"What I needed was, not just people to listen, but just that sense of its okay, this is normal to feel like this, death is a part of life." P056WW: 24: 37

Over time, participants continued to need emotional, informational support and instrumental support with issues concerning the day to day adjustment to being widowed, as well as missing the tactile contact and affection of their married relationship. One widowed woman said:

"What I need is for somebody to hang out my washing not give me a bottle of pills and it was very practical because if you've got a very tiny baby that's crawling around what did you do if you hang out your washing you know it's those kind of things." P077WW: 37: 40

Another widowed man commented:

"This idea of skin hunger that I think a lot of young widowed people feel and it's not always about sex, but it kind of expresses itself that way just about, you know tactile." P010WM: 42: 45

For others, keeping a sense of normality was important and they took support from the fact that members of their social network continued to provide the same support that they did before widowhood.

"My support network is just the fact that people just still act the same with me and I still see them and life has carried on. I really think for me, for me, that's how it's worked. And I think the people around me now know how I am, and know I'm not good at the 'sit down and tell us how you feel' and they've in fairness, spoken to me in a way that's suited me." P024WW: 49: 53

"I can look after myself, I can cook for myself, I can do everything I need to do, erm but I need a social life, err, you know because I don't want to be isolated // I didn't need or want anybody to actually do anything out of the ordinary for me, that made it worse." P060WM: 52: 73

Widowed participants gained extended support from other members of the social network, including family and friends, following spousal bereavement (Ferraro & Barresi, 1982). For younger widowed participants, parents were important providers of support.

"They [parents] literally, practically picked me up afterwards and err, we went and stayed in a hotel together and I couldn't go back to the house and they were pretty much there from the beginning." P050WW: 31: 33

"Really after I lost my husband, I couldn't have done that without my parents, they were absolutely fantastic." P024WW: 49: 53

"My mum's always a good support." P057WW: 52: 57

Siblings and in-laws were also frequently cited as offering support to widowed participants, particularly the provision of instrumental support.

"J [brother] said 'Look, I'll come as soon as I can come'. He just sorted it out, was able to book a flight overnight and came over in the morning with my niece who'd just finished her exams, so they came in the next morning. And that week then, before the funeral and whatever and we had to sort everything out, and J* [brother] was here and was really great and C* [niece] was here, my niece, and we had to just sort everything."* P011WW: 49: 59

"P [husband]'s oldest brother was immense when he died."* P057WW: 52: 57

One widowed woman acknowledged the resultant strain of increased support needs on the quality of her relationship with family.

"Generally my family have been brilliant and really what they have had to do is a really big ask. There have been times where relationships have been strained basically by the sheer demand of what was required." P077WW: 37: 40

Not everyone received the level of support that they had expected from family and friends. Consider the following quotes:

"It was interesting I suppose. We didn't have people around. They didn't come in to the house; he had a brother at [village] but we had very little support. Anyway when he died there was no one around really and for the first year I just had to keep everything going really." P076WW: 40: 73

"T [husband]'s dad and step mum, very nice but either unable or willing to do very much."* P077WW: 37: 40

"I did find that they didn't, err, they couldn't talk about it at all. Um, so, but they were helpful in other ways, like, like the practical support, coming to look after H [daughter] whilst I was away with jobs."* P048WW: 44: 51

P056 reflected back and commented:

"There wasn't anybody that I would call a pal." P056WW: 24: 37

Both P024 and P044 were widowed young and did not receive support from their family. They felt that this had consequences for their adjustment to widowhood.

"They [family] didn't really support me at all, and I got into a few scrapes. And I think, if I had the support of my family, I might not have done half the things I have in my life that I had done." P044WW: 24: 53

"I think that's why I drank. Like I say, my family saw it like this miracle this man who they disliked who was bleeding me dry and they were like "yes". None of them came to the funeral." P056WW: 24: 37

Earlier research has identified the importance of adult children as support providers following widowhood (Farberow, Gallagher-Thompson, Gilewski & Thompson, 1992; Stevens, 1995). Previous studies reveal that, compared to continuously married parents, widowed parents are more likely to receive assistance from their children (Rossi & Rossi, 1990), are less likely to provide help to their children (Cooney & Uhlenberg, 1992), and show higher levels of dependence on children for support (Ha, Carr, Utz & Nesse, 2006). These patterns were reflected in many of the participants' transcripts. Widowed participants described the increased emotional, informational and instrumental support they received from their adult children. Even when there was geographical distance most said that they felt loved by their children and could approach them for emotional, informational or instrumental support.

"I do get so much support off the lads. // G [son] kind of gives me a hug and A* [son] more talk things through with you a lot more."* P071WW: 68: 69

"I didn't realise M [son] was ringing every day, never realised it till after 3 or 4 months, I just took the call and that was it."* P068WM: 78: 78

"My son also has been fantastic, although he lives away, he lives in [city] and he's married, he's got a little baby now which is very nice! But he phoned me every night, for a long time." P024WW: 49: 53

"I still think my three main supports have been my children." P055WW

The following quote from P070 highlights an important difference between the levels of support received from adult daughters compared to adult sons.

"I really feel sorry for her because she's the one who gets it, if I don't feel right it's V [daughter] who gets it, 'V* can you help me?', 'V* can you do this?', whereas I've got boys, but they don't. // I think A* [son] just sees I'm fine. I might say to him, I don't feel right, there's never another comment."* P070WW: 61: 63

As in the previous quote from P070, the participants also acknowledged the pressure that their children were now under to meet their support needs.

"I mean I feel awful because G[son] is taking on erm a lot."* P071WW: 68: 69

However, P072 felt let down by her adult son and daughter who rarely came to visit and offered little support. Comparing her situation to that of a widowed friend, she said:

"I've got another friend who's recently been bereaved and she's absolutely surrounded by her son and her daughter and they give her so much love and take her here, there and everywhere whereas my kids don't, you know." P072WW: 66: 70

Considering the differences with age, widowed participants with young children spoke of the support they needed to give to their children, but also described the affection they gained from that relationship. As one woman explained:

"Actually my daughter, physical affection especially as a small child, I think that was quite that was quite important actually because erm hugs. Otherwise, I'm not touched at all, um a small child who is very physically affectionate so that was, erm, that was a bonus." P048WW: 44: 51

For P011 becoming a grandmother was an important, positive transition that provided her with new opportunities to give support and to feel loved.

"I love it, I just can't believe it really it's quite (laughter), a whole new dimension to my life really, very different now to raising my own children to have this little one." P011WW: 49: 59

Friends may provide important social support following widowhood (Waite & Harrison, 1992) and widowed participants in this study described the emotional, informational and instrumental support they received from friends, both immediately after spousal bereavement and in the longer term, and the importance of friends for social companionship.

"S[friend] I work with and she's always been a friend I've worked with her for 20 years, she's always been there// She's a bolt hole. If things get wrong I can always go to her house."* P057WW: 52: 57

"J [friend] came to see me two or three days after R* [husband] died and we just sat outside (laughter) drinking cups of tea after cups of tea and she just got me talking and talking which was great."* P071WW: 68: 69

P001, a widowed man of 72, developed a platonic friendship with D*, a widow, after his wife's death. He talks at length about the support he gains from his relationship with her, which included having more instrumental support in terms of her cooking him regular meals, emotional support in terms having someone to talk to, and social companionship in terms of having someone to go out with socially. He comments:

"The most important one at present is D [friend] who looks after me from time to time, feeds me, well she's a jolly good cook! Very important that for a man!"* P001WM: 63: 72

The support received from friends was important for the participants' adjustment to widowhood and overall sense of psychological wellbeing. One widowed woman said:

"I'd put all my rehabilitation in the friendships that were created. They are my pals now." P056WW: 24: 37

Most participants talked about having lost friends following spousal bereavement (Chapter 7) and felt that, over time, they became aware who their "real friends" were in terms of the support they provided to them (P077WW).

"I think that it's interesting that those friends, erm, it's quite clear that they are the deepest friendships. And erm, they are, you know, they are what I would call my friends. So, where the relationship has stemmed mainly from me rather than from him or me, or whether it was mainly him." P024WW: 49: 53

As in the case of P001 above, a new romantic relationship or developing a platonic friendship tended to increase the amount of support available to the participants, particularly in terms of emotional support and social companionship. Talking about the support he gains from his new romantic partner, one widowed man explained:

"The support I get from J[new romantic partner] is the, is yeah it's err, a normal male female relationship of having somebody that's on your side err that your having a loving relationship with, the err, from anybody else it's just company from time to time you know somebody to chat to."* P060WM: 41: 73

Participants, particularly older participants, also discussed the increased importance of neighbours following bereavement (Lamme et al., 1996). Neighbours offered the participants instrumental support and opportunities for day to day social interaction and relationships with neighbours were generally improved after widowhood.

"He's [neighbour] been so good to me doing jobs in the house." P073WW: 75: 79

*"Quite often on a Sunday afternoon there'll be a knock on the door and B*ll [neighbour] be there with a roast dinner for me."* P072WW: 66: 70

"H [neighbour] across the way and S* [neighbour], they're supportive. Err, we will go to the local pub once a month. Next door is another Liverpool supporter, so get on well with them."* P068WM: 78: 78

For one widowed woman, her next door neighbour was instrumental in her starting to rebuild her life after her husband died. She said:

"My next door neighbour was very brilliant with me because she came round and said 'look, you'll have to get out'." P073WW: 75: 79

Alongside the social support exchanged between family and friends, a small number of participants identified their pets as being important providers of support. They explained that their pet gave them a sense of purpose, offered them company, and helped them to

avoid being in an empty house. Further, participants with dogs described the important contribution that meeting and talking to people while walking their dog(s) had on their day to day wellbeing.

"They [dogs] give me the reason for getting up in the morning. I wouldn't say now but at the beginning." P072WW: 66: 70

"Strange it may seem I had the dog and I used to sit here and stroke him. // He was a great little comfort in his own little way a great comfort to me." P073WW: 75: 79

Time since widowhood was important and the interviews highlighted important differences in the impact of widowhood between longer-term and recent widows and widowers (Lopata, 1973b). Participants were aware of the changes in the availability of support with the passing of time after spousal bereavement. Lopata (1996) noted that widowed people often have increased contact with friends and family during the initial funeral and mourning period. It was clear from the widowed participants' narratives of social support that available support was high in the initial period around their spouses death, with one woman noting that *"people came out of the woodwork to help"* (P011WW), but that over time the support offered from family and friends was reduced. Several participants explicitly described this pattern, saying:

"People do rally round at the beginning but they are busy with their own lives. People are generally quite stressful with careers, own children etcetera and there is a limit as to what you can expect." P077WW: 37: 40

P048 acknowledged that the reduced support was also related to her own adjustment into widowhood and finding new sources support over time.

"I think sort of in the first few months, in the first few weeks certainly, you get quite a lot of attention and there is so much to do, and anyway I had a legal case to do with the will, so actually I had a lot, it was very dizzy, and then of course it drops off, erm, but peoples concern drops off, their life moves on and your still left trying to process it all, and erm, you can get used to your new life, but gradually you build up a new life and you establish new friendships and new relationships." P048WW: 44: 51

Previous research suggests that older widowed women have a larger network of similarly widowed women to call on for social support (Bennett, Hughes & Smith, 2003), and friends who themselves are widowed provide important emotional support for their peers through sharing their experiences of grief and managing life without the spouse

(Cohen, 2000). Widowed participants expressed the importance of having friends that were widowed, as in the case of these widowed participants:

"The relief to talk to somebody that knew, you know, what it was. So it was wonderful to talk to A [widowed friend] who knew exactly how I felt because amongst all my friends nobody had lost their husband, only me. So it was harder that I didn't have anybody to talk to and J* [widowed friend] who's been my absolute lifeline."* P072WW: 66: 70

"I mean, one of the beauties about D [widowed friend], about my friendship with her, is that she's lost her husband and she lost him, oh, seventeen, eighteen years ago, so we've got something very much in common, that we both lost dear ones, and we can talk about this from a position of knowledge, from a position of experience."* P001WM: 63: 72

Several participants belonged to, and were recruited from, a bereavement support group. They commented about how valuable the opportunity to discuss their experiences of widowhood openly with people who understood their situation was. They could share their feelings and talk about how they were coping with loss. Consider these remarks:

"I felt with the [bereavement support group] group, the [bereavement support group] friends I can do that with them I don't have to keep up this front of being a normal, you know being like everybody else, being a normal person." P048WW: 44: 51

"Knowing that everybody in the room is in the same boat as you. When you all go home at night you all know that there is other people that's going into an empty house because before that Laura, you've got no idea about what other people must feel and whatever." P072WM: 66: 70

"It's definitely a lot about shared experiences that none of my other friends could really talk to me about and in a way I didn't really want to talk to them about it necessarily whereas the group that you're not exactly strangers with but don't have that connection to the rest of your life, I find it really helpful." P050WW: 31: 33

Bereavement support groups also offered participants the opportunity to give support to other members. P077 joined a bereavement support group for young widows and widowers and when asked what support she received from the group she commented:

"You can really have a moan about things and they really understand because they've been there, and I've taken a lot of support from that." P077WW: 37: 40

She then continued on to say:

"Equally, somebody got in touch with me through [bereavement support group] who knew my husband, and I've been able to give him quite a lot of support, and because he's lost his wife."

Some participants said that talking to other widows and widowers in the support groups gave them hope for their future while others admitted it helped them to acknowledge that people were in worse situations than themselves.

“Going to the [bereavement support group] group and seeing them how they are, how they are dealing with it (...) and I can see there how positive they are. It gives me hope.” P070WW: 61: 63

“It was helpful to me that there are people much worse off than I’ve got my house, faculties and abilities sufficient income for my needs count your blessing sort of things so that’s where the support group help.” P075WM: 72: 79

In terms of gender, earlier research finds that widows tend to utilise more of the members of their social support network compared to widowers (Farberow et al., 1992). In this study, widowers less often talked about support from friends compared to widows and compared to the cohabiting and married men, widowers received less emotional and informational support (van Grootheest, Beekman, Broese van Groenou & Deeg, 1999). In line with previous research, widowhood may have had a more negative impact on the social support of men compared to women (Stelle & Uchida, 2004; van den Hoonaard, 1994).

The literature on the influence of age on the impact of widowhood is limited. Blau (1961) suggested that widowhood had an adverse affect on friendship support and that the impact was greater for those still in their sixties compared to those over the age of seventy. In this study, older widowed participants were more likely to have an existing peer group, and found it easier to join bereavement support groups. This was particularly true for older widows. In contrast, younger widowed participants recognised that they could not talk to their friends about their loss, and found that few bereavement support groups existed for younger widows and widowers. One younger widowed woman said:

“Most of my friends if they’ve come across death before, it’s been sort of grandparents and that sort of thing and I feel incredibly uncomfortable in talking about anything like that.” P050WW: 31: 33

While the older widowed may benefit from an existing peer group, younger participants tended to be in receipt of more emotional, informational and instrumental support from family and friends, which may reflect that widowhood is not a common experience of mid-life and thus more support is offered. There were also noticeable differences in the

support needs of younger, compared to older, widowed participants and in the impact that widowhood had on the opportunities for the exchange of support, including social companionship. Consider this quote from P077 who was widowed aged 37 with two young children:

"I mean my life has changed absolutely dramatically because I was a career girl, I'd only got one child, quite an active social life, and both with work and with friends, because its completely different when you've got the support of somebody else, I mean my partner could just say I could go out whenever and I was out, I was working full time, so I went out a lot with work and with my sort of friends, so it is quite a dramatic change but because I've lost, well, you do know actually, because when I lost T [husband], my little girl was only seven months old, so I got a three-year old and a seven-months old, so it's really inevitable that your life is going to change quite dramatically isn't it."* P077WW: 37: 40

Younger widowed participants struggled with worrying about the future, managing family responsibilities and the financial impact of their loss. P010, a younger widowed man talked at length about the emotional and practical challenges of raising his children without the support of his wife. He said:

"There's no-one else to go to for advice or back-up or support." P010WM: 42: 45

On the other hand, older age was associated with a greater number of physical health problems that often necessitated greater instrumental support and restricted opportunities to socialise. One younger widowed compared her own experience of widowhood to someone widowed older and considered the limitations of declining physical health with increasing age at widowhood. She acknowledged that an older widow may not be as active as she can as a healthy woman of 59:

"I can go out and about and I can busy myself sufficiently that it gives me that distraction and I don't have to think too much about it. If I was here all the time, I'm sure it would be different, or if I had some sort of incapacity that meant I couldn't drive or get away, it would be different." P011WW: 49: 59

In summary, in contrast with the transition to cohabiting or married status widowhood was associated with the loss of social support from the spouse. Emotional and informational support as well as social companionship was cited as the most salient support losses following spousal bereavement. Family and friends were able to offer social support, but the exchange of social support appeared to change over time, with greater support available immediately following widowhood followed by a withdrawal of support

with increasing time since spousal bereavement. Bereavement support groups and receiving emotional and informational support from friends who had experienced widowhood was important. Although the sample of widowed participants in this study may not be wholly representative, the data suggest that older widowed men and women were at a disadvantage in terms of the support received from family and friends but highlight that younger widowed participants have no peer group and may have to overcome greater challenges in terms of adjusting to social support losses following widowhood. Widowhood may provide opportunities for establishing new social relationships and new sources of social support, particularly in terms of social companionship. However, there was no evidence that the support from the social network following widowhood was able to replace the level of support lost upon spousal bereavement.

8.4 Divorced

Divorce removed an important source of social support through the loss of the spouse. While changes in social support following divorce were less uniform than in widowhood, the loss of a spouse following divorce was typically related to a loss of a confidant relationship and for those with young children, instrumental support with childcare. P049 said:

"I know I've got people that I can turn to if I was having a bad day, but there's no one there that's just for me. No-one there to just talk about my day to." P049SW: 35: 37

Those who had experienced an unhappy marriage and those who initiated divorce proceedings were less likely to describe a large loss of social support and were more likely to cite family and friends as their main support providers during the married relationship. With the loss of a spouse, divorce was associated with a change in the participants' support needs. Previous research has identified emotional and informational support, financial assistance, need for a partner or spouse, shared social life (e.g. someone to go out with), time for themselves, and child care as being the most frequently cited and most important support needs (Duffy, 1993; Henderson & Argyle, 1985). Similar support needs were identified by the participants in this study. For example, participants discussed greater need for emotional and informational support in terms of needing advice and reassurance, particularly when they had initiated the divorce, and for instrumental support in terms of financial assistance and accommodation, especially when there were large financial losses through division of property and other material resources.

"Financially, I couldn't of afforded to, erm, to put myself up anywhere. So it's just, you want your parents, you want your mum! So you know R [son] needed the support as well."* P032SW: 33: 35

"I think just support to talk to people if I'm feeling a bit down or something. If I've got a problem, or I think I've got a problem, just being able to talk it through to people." P028DW: 29: 50

"Reassurance really, I know it might sound pathetic, but a lot of the time it was just you're an okay guy, I was full of what's the term, self-loathing a lot of the time." P078SM: 40: 42

P034 talked about the lack of childcare support that was available to her following her separation compared to during her married relationship.

"I don't think there was a huge amount of support in terms of parenting and coping with separation when you've got a child and like this whole idea of being alone." P034DW: 30: 33

In addition, some participants expressed needing affectionate support and sexual intimacy.

"Sex (laughter), that's a major issue. Yeah, I suppose, I think it's having that somebody special to, even though you can tell your girlfriends, it's not the same as a bloke I suppose." P045DW: 42: 45

"Sex is still important to me. Physical contact. Erm, a cuddle." P053DW: 60: 67

The limited existing literature on how divorce impacts the availability of social support suggests that friends, including work colleagues, become the main source of support following marital dissolution, followed next by family and adult children (Henderson & Argyle, 1985; Bloom et al., 1978). In this study, both family and friends were cited as being important sources of social support. Compared to the widowed, fewer divorced participants talked about gaining support from support groups or other formal support services, including health practitioners. Participants discussed receiving social support from parents, adult children and siblings. Family members were able to provide emotional, information and instrumental support. In line with previous findings, women tended to receive more support from family compared to men, especially those with younger children (Duffy, 1993).

"The closest people I had around me, was of course my mum and dad, their emotional support was vital." P079DM: 30: 33

"Well, financial obviously, roof over my head. Bless them, it's like, I'm 37 and I'm grown up! Yeah, it's nothing they [parents] wouldn't do for me to be honest, you know, they would drive me, baby sit if I need it, you know they are brilliant." P049SW: 35: 37

"She [daughter] was very mature, and she offered that I could talk to her about the situation if I wanted, she didn't become emotionally upset about it when everything came to light." P026SW: 44: 45

Divorced participants who received support from family members also reported an improvement in the quality of those relationships. For example:

"In some ways, the separation has brought us closer. I've never spoken to my parents about emotional stuff. Erm yeah, that's grown on that front to be honest." P049SW: 35: 37

"It was almost a bit of a rebuilding phase after we split up, I needed them at that time and my sister was there for me, so I was speaking to my sister every day for a few weeks which doesn't really happened very often but she was there for me and my mum and dad were there so for a time after that it was very positive in that relationship." P079DM: 30: 33

On the other hand, some participants did not receive the support they had expected following marital dissolution and felt that this was because their families did not agree with the divorce.

"My dad took a back seat. And my mum would say "If Ke [husband] was around". My mum and dad do a lot more with my sisters kids now, whereas before they did quite a bit with Ka* [daughter]."* P045DW: 42: 45

"I mean things have been rocky even with my parents because they weren't impressed with the whole thing, I mean their criticisms of me." P078SM: 40: 42

Importantly, as P021 explains, even when offered, the support provided by her family did not make up for the loss of social support upon marital dissolution in terms of meeting the day to day support demands.

"I've managed on my own for nearly eight years now you know, and okay, I've got my dad and my mum and everything but day to day it's just me, you know, I'm the only one that keeps the family going." P021DW: 29: 37

Divorce often involves the loss of friends who had closer ties to the spouse (Ward & Leigh, 1993). This was generally true of participants in this study, although where participants had established social lives independent of the marriage prior to separation, there was less disruption to the social network (Chapter 7). Changes in the structure of the participants' social networks led to changes in available support providers. Over the interviews, friends were able to offer emotional, informational and instrumental support. However, the friends that were available to offer social support following divorce tended to be longer-standing friends and friends that were separate from the married relationship, including work colleagues and neighbours.

"My very good friend who I've known for a number of years, who I went to stay with when I left, and she's been very supportive." P053DW: 60: 67

"It's different with this friend D, because she didn't know my husband before, so she's completely separate, so I can talk to her about him and it doesn't matter about it, whereas the couples that we both knew, I wouldn't use them as a sounding board for my grievances."* P026SW: 44: 45

"The people who lived opposite were really nice people. A couple about my age, slightly younger. And again, I didn't get on with these people, didn't socialize with them, but they became a support (...) not support, they adopted me! So we'd celebrate Friday nights with a curry and I'd go to their house for curry." P020DM: 38: 52

Again, the quality of those relationships where social support was exchanged became stronger and more important following divorce. P062, a divorced woman commented:

"I'd say I always put a value on them [friends] but it has grown stronger since my divorce. Since realising that you can't just stake everything on one person, you need other people and they are there for you regardless, and you're there for them." P062DW: 24: 31

Another separated man said:

"As I say this friend of mine, the one in [city], he's really the one whose come through and people I used to work with ten years ago, we used to get on really well, a lot of them have separated now and they've come more to the fore." P078SM: 40: 42

However, a small number of participants discussed not having received the support that had expected from friends, as in the case of the following participants:

"I had people, had friends coming round seeing if I was okay, but that only lasted for about three or four months and then they stopped coming round, and then friends that we had together stopped coming round full stop, and they didn't phone, they didn't text. Erm, and that's when you know, you sort of realise who your friends are." P045DW: 42: 45

"My family did but they were miles away. My sister came down and helped and all that kind of stuff but at the end of the day the support that, maybe I naively thought I'd get from sort of friends and that, it just wasn't there." P047SW: 39: 42

This was usually perceived as being a result of people being more loyal to their former spouse, or simply because friends remained busy with their own lives. In line with this, several participants noted changes in providers of social companionship after divorce. The following quotes concern the loss of social companionship with coupled friends:

"They think differently of you like you know, if I've got friends that are going out as couples, they're not going to invite me because I don't have anyone to go with, which is I suppose simple things like that." P047SW: 39: 42

It was clear from the interview transcripts that separated and divorced women took support from friends who had experienced marital dissolution themselves. None of the men in this study described this type of support relationship. One woman spoke in detail about the emotional and informational support she received from a friend who had been through a similar experience. She said:

"She's been a rock to me. // She tried to take an overdose as well, so in that way we've both got that sense that we've been through that point of desperation shall we say, where you can't see any point forward, so we kind of relate on that level."
P049SW: 35: 37

Another woman said:

"It's quite helpful having her, 'cos she obviously knows what I'm going through. We'll sit there and go 'yeah, yeah, I know, exactly!'." P032SW: 33: 35

Having somebody to talk to about how they were feeling and to feel that somebody understood their situation was very important, particularly in the immediate time around marital dissolution. For one woman, the need for this type of support relationship decreased over time after her divorce. She commented:

"When I was getting divorced, like when we were first separating it was much more frequent but I sort of, as I've felt better I don't tend to need, I don't, I feel like I don't as much sort of need company like that all the time but we're still friends."
P034DW: 30: 33

Other important sources of social support following divorce included work colleagues and work environments. Participants talked about the benefits of a supportive environment at work, as this quote from P020 suggests:

"I think a big support was the work I was doing and the enjoyment in the job and the social contacts with the managers I was working with." P020DM: 38: 52

Forming a new romantic relationship following divorce increased the amount of support available to participants, offering emotional, informational and instrumental support as well as social companionship. Importantly, new romantic relationships also provided affectionate support to the participants, which was often lost following the transition out of marriage.

"Rather than you doing all of it together or on your own you've got somebody who will say well I'll phone up so and so and I'll change the dentist appointment or I'll go and take the dogs to the vets. You haven't got to do all of it." P022DW: 29: 44

"Now the people I draw my support from are my children, because they do give me support, and M [new romantic relationship]. I guess, the majority of my support now comes from M*." P054DW: 38: 40*

However, for P054 above, the formation of a new romantic relationship resulted in the withdrawal of support from her mother who disapproved of the relationship. Family disapproval of new romantic relationships was more characteristic following divorce compared to widowhood.

"What made it more difficult then, was any support my mother would have given me, she then withdrew her support because I had told her that M [new romantic relationship] was around on the scene." P054DW: 38: 40*

Similar to the transition into a cohabiting or married relationship discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, being in a new romantic relationship following divorce reduced the amount of time the participants spent with friends. P028, a divorced woman in a LAT relationship, explained:

"I think what has changed is that I now have a routine that's involves a person which is in a way, a bit like being married, it's just we have a bit of freedom as well, so when I come to make arrangements to see other people, I have to make them on days when I'm not seeing him." P028DW: 29: 50

The impact that divorce had on the exchange of social support was related to circumstances surrounding the divorce itself, including who initiated the divorce and animosity involved in the divorce process; financial status; and marital quality prior to divorce. For example, one interview participant acknowledged the importance of the nature of the divorce proceedings themselves in terms of adjustment to divorce and moving forward with life. She explained:

"I think it depends on the divorce, you know some people have very, very terribly angry, painful divorces. Mine wasn't, it was mutual, so although I was angry my anger did die fairly quickly and I was able to move forward." P053DW: 60: 67

Related to this, financial status was important for the experience of divorce and better financial wellbeing allowed the participants to socialise and maintain their social relationships. Several of the participants noted that there was an absence of social support within the married relationship from their spouse, and so there was little or no difference in the availability of support following divorce. P054 felt that the low levels of support exchanged in her marriage made her adjustment to divorce easier.

"To me I've always been a single parent, I just wasn't divorced. It was no different [after separation], it was easier, because you didn't have anybody coming in and telling you otherwise, it was just so much easier." P054DW: 38: 40

Another woman said:

"That was part of the issue suppose we weren't close in that sort of way so my social life wasn't affected even vaguely." P022DW: 29: 44

Separated and divorced men in this study described having less support, or were less likely to discuss receiving support from family and friends during the interview. P007 offered his perceptions of gender differences in the exchange of social support and said:

"I think women tend to talk more to friends and things erm, men tend to not do that, erm, I don't get much, much benefit, well maybe I do, I don't know, maybe I don't realise I get benefit from talking to other people but personally I don't put much thought by it." P007DM: 32: 44

While men tended to lose more social relationships following divorce, they appeared to be less affected by the loss of interaction with friends compared to women. Women were more likely to talk about changes in social companionship during the interview compared to men. One man said:

"I found previous friends disappeared so there was no socialising there. Erm (...) didn't have quite that much effect in that I'm quite happy to go walking on my own or do things on my own." P046DM: 45: 65

Hagestad and Smyer (1982) suggested that since divorce is more commonly experienced by those in their twenties and thirties than by older people, younger people may receive more social support from peers. In this study, six participants had divorced at the age of 40 or above. The experiences of these participants in terms of the exchange of social support were similar to those who divorced at an earlier age. However, parenthood status and the age of children did influence the level of available social support and the nature of unmet support needs. For example, participants with younger children described needing more support and generally received more support from family or friends compared to those with older children.

In summary, separated and divorced participants experienced important changes in the availability of social support following marital dissolution. As in widowhood, family and friends were able to offer emotional, informational and instrumental support as well as

social companionship. However, unlike in widowhood, attitudes towards the divorce and loyalties to the former spouse affected the level of social support offered from family and friends. Divorce also allowed for the formation of new supportive relationships through the pursuit of new hobbies and development of new romantic relationships. In contrast to the transition to widowed status, transition out of marriage through divorce could be viewed by the interview participant as either a positive or a negative life event. For those who viewed the divorce as a positive transition the changes in social support were seen to be more positive and unmet social support needs tended to be related to practical issues, including financial strain. In both cases, men reported receiving less social support compared to women and divorced participants with younger children in the household had greater instrumental support needs and appeared to have more difficulty adjusting to social support losses following divorce.

8.5 Conclusions

Changes in the structure of the social network following marital status change (Chapter 7) had consequences for the exchange of social support between members of the social network following the transition to cohabiting, married, widowed or divorced status. Specifically, gaining a spouse through cohabitation or marriage provided participants with an important source of emotional, informational and instrumental support and the spouse became the main provider of social companionship, particularly for men. Immediate family and in-laws, followed by friends, were also cited as important providers of instrumental support and women were more likely than men to describe the exchange of emotional support with their wider social network. Participants who married at an older age described fewer support needs and had established supportive relationships with members of the social network before transition. They appeared to be more aware of the changes in social support following transition and described the challenges and rewards of starting a cohabiting or married relationship at an older age.

In contrast to transitions into marriage, widowhood and divorce removed the primary source of social support, the spouse. For the widowed, family and friends tended to become the main provider of social support and were able to offer participants emotional, information and instrumental support. However, there was a sense in the interviews that the support previously received from the spouse could not be found

elsewhere. Widows were more likely than widowers to call on members of their social network for support and in terms of age, younger widowed participants faced different challenges following spousal bereavement compared to those widowed at an older age, particularly younger widowed parents. Divorced participants experienced the greatest disruption to the exchange of support following transition and discussed a more immediate withdrawal of support from both family and friends. However, over time, the divorced were able to find alternative sources of support and many viewed the quality of their social relationships and of the social support exchanged within the social network as being improved. Across all marital status groups, the impact of marital status transition on social support varied by gender and by age. Overall, women were more likely to discuss receiving social support from their social network compared to men and placed greater importance on supportive exchanges. The interview transcripts also suggest that while younger adults may have greater instrumental support needs, social support becomes more important with increasing age. This suggests that marital status transitions that disrupt the availability of social support, including widowhood and divorce, may have more negative consequences for older adults.

Findings in Chapter 7 reveal that marital status transitions have an important effect on the construction of the social network and, in this chapter, the findings highlight that these structural changes have consequences for the functional elements of one's social network, namely the exchange of social support. Each of the various dimensions of social support appear to be important for how people adjust to a change in marital status, particularly for those who become widowed or divorced. Social companionship emerges as one important dimension of social support. Family and friends may offer social companionship and, as part of this, provide opportunities for social engagement. In Chapter 9, this thesis considers the impact of a change in marital status on social engagement with family, friends, and acquaintances.

Chapter 9

The impact of marital status change on social engagement

9.1 Introduction

Previous chapters have focused on social networks (Chapter 7) and social support (Chapter 8). However, there is an additional social variable that is known to contribute to psychological wellbeing, namely social engagement (Issi-Kuntz, 1990). The terminology and definitions used in the literature regarding social engagement varies across the literature but in general, social engagement relates to the one's interactions with other people, over a variety of contexts (Berkman, Glass, Brissette & Seeman, 2000; Glass, Mendes de Leon, Marottoli & Berkman, 1999; Morgan, Dallosso & Ebrahim, 1985). According to Berkman et al. (2000: p149), "(social) engagement results from the enactment of potential ties in real life activity." In this thesis, social engagement represents the formal (e.g. church; hobby club; volunteer group) and informal (contact with family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances) aspects of social involvement and includes meeting or communicating with people, attending membership clubs and church, participating in occupational or social roles, and using virtual communication technology. It differs from social support (see Chapter 8) since social engagement may not necessarily provide any functional, supportive benefits in itself. Social engagement provides people with "meaningful social context" (Berkman et al, 2000: p149) and is positively associated with psychological wellbeing and mortality, independently of social support (Bennett, 2002; Issi-Kuntz, 1990; Pihlblad & Adams, 1972). Social engagement is important in and of itself, but it also may facilitate social relationships and provide access to social support (Neill & Kahn, 1999).

Marital status transitions may impact on social engagement as a consequence of their impact on the construction of the social network (Chapter 7) and also through the associated changes in daily life, in terms of role and responsibilities. For example, the cohabiting and married report lowered levels of social contact with friends and are more likely to describe an overlap of the social network with their spouse (Field & Minkler, 1988; Kalmijn, 2003; Milardo, 1982). Previous research notes that widowhood removes the support of the spouse and may diminish certain social relationships that were primarily maintained by the spouse (Ferraro & Barresi, 1992). On the other hand, widowhood may prompt greater involvement in social engagement to compensate for the loss of the spouse (Balaswamy, Richardson & Price, 2004; Donnelly & Hinterlong, 2010; Ferraro, 1984; Guiaux et al., 2007; Utz et al., 2002). Divorce may initially isolate people and restrict social

engagement but, in the longer term, divorce provides opportunities for new social engagement, particularly with friends that are only loosely connected to the spouse (Gerstel, 1988; Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005). The sections that follow consider the impact of a change in marital status on social engagement for each marital status group.

9.2 Cohabiting and married

Similar to previous research, the findings show that the change from unmarried to cohabiting or married status is usually associated with reduced general social activities (Campbell & Lee, 1990; Wellman & Wellman, 1992) and a shift to more family oriented patterns of socialising (McPherson et al., 2001). For example:

"I suppose A [wife] is the person I spend most of my time with."* P066MM: 33: 41

"It's unusual for us to spend that many weekends apart." P038MW: 31: 33

Entry into a cohabiting or married relationship also prompted a greater level of social engagement with other couples, as in the following quotes:

"Before I was married you tend to find friends that would invite you to more things erm, want to do more different types of activities, and since you become married, your almost very limited, 'cause your friends only wanna invite the single people round, erm, things like that. // So, I find since we have become married it has become quite limited to be honest." P039MM: 31: 32

"I think when we go out we tend to go out with other couples, rather than, you know, a larger group of people." P029CW: 24: 26

Participants cited various reasons for these changes. Some talked about having "settled down" (P061MW), becoming "more domesticated" (P012MW) and experiencing a change in preferences of who they wanted to socialise with. P002, a married woman, explained:

"It's not greatly important [to see friends] because I've got my husband."
P002MW: 46: 52

Others noted that their priorities had changed and they had less time available to socialise. For example:

"I think when you've got (...) family responsibilities, you just, got a different set of priorities, and less, less time (...) and obviously when you leave university, you leave school you get more geographically dispersed over time." P008MM: 25: 48

"I mean that was difference having a regular sex life as it were, that was different and made you wanna stay in a bit more." P064MW: 42: 45

P006 married aged 38 and felt that marrying at an older age meant that she was more comfortable staying at home with her family and had less desire to socialise with friends.

"We enjoy each other's company, but I think because we did get together when we were that bit older and we're quite comfortable with our own company and spending time on our own with our daughter or in our own house, I don't personally have a great urge to go out with the girls drinking." P006MW: 38: 41

Having to consider the new spouse also affected the participants' social activities, often restricting social activities outside of the home. One married man commented:

"I suppose you're more thinking of that other person, you do, like I said, see yourself as more of a unit." P017MM: 36: 37

Another married woman remarked:

"Before I was married to P [husband], I was one of the people who would stay out 'til 4.30 in the morning, you know, singing and generally being raucous. P* is one of those people who needs his sleep and will leave to sleep, so that's sort of kerbed it a bit when we first got together."* P043MW: 29: 35

For several participants, the change to their social activities that accompanied the transition into a cohabiting or married relationship was a challenge. Consider these quotes:

"I still hankered after the single life when we moved in together." P061MW: 39: 51

"It sounds awful but in a way it was like watching my youth die. I guess it was sort of male mid twenties sort of experience of being young and single and the world is just full of possibilities and it doesn't really matter what the relationship is, it's just sort of this massive change because suddenly your moving in and that's really an end, you know." P036CM: 36: 38

Further, those participants who had relocated and were geographically distant from family and friends experienced reduced social engagement with the wider social network and described having to become more reliant on their spouse. For example:

"I think because we've moved away from our friendship groups and we don't have any family living in [city] either, we are you know, it's like, you know, he's my main support and I'm his main support, so I'd say moving to [city] more than perhaps getting married is what's brought us together in that way." P038MW: 31: 33

"At the moment we do quite a lot together, purely because we've moved to a new city where neither of us really know anyone." P015CW: 23: 23

A number of participants felt that the transition into a cohabiting or married relationship had not affected the amount of contact with friends. This was more typical where couples did not have children, had married at an older age or had independent social networks with no or few mutual friends. As one married woman summarised it:

"I don't think it's made a huge difference really, I'll occasionally (...) they'll be some 'do' that I get invited too as well or the other way on (...) but (...) because we've always tended to have sort of parallel lives if you like, (...) I don't think it's made an awful lot of difference." P031MW: 19: 56

Similarly, P063 said:

"I couldn't bear to be one of those couples that have to do everything together. Maybe it's because I got married later, I don't know, but I was used to having my own friends, my own life." P063MW: 34: 55

For a smaller number of participants, the transition into a cohabiting or married relationship provided new social opportunities and they described being more socially active since their transition to cohabiting or married status.

"If I didn't have H [husband] my social life would (...) be cut to almost zero, unless I went out of my way to try and build it up again, whereas he would still be invited to a lot of thing, because most of the invites come in via him"* P023MW: 22: 54

P018 noted that, compared to being in a LAT relationship, she had more time available to see friends as a consequence of living with her spouse.

"I see more people now than I use to. Maybe because when we didn't live together, I'd actually go and see M most nights, whether with other people or just him and me. Whereas, now we can see each other whenever we want to you feel you can do other stuff a bit more."* P018CW: 25: 27

Compared to the married, cohabiting men and women had a greater degree of separation from their partner and were generally reliant on a more diverse collection of members of their social network for social engagement. The following married participants who cohabited prior to marriage offered an insight into the differences between cohabiting and married status:

"Since we got married, we socialise less with the groups of people. Erm, we have defined groups of people, but before we were married, even when we were living together, we socialised more." P027MW: 31: 41

"We probably spend more time socialising as a couple I'd say (...) you know, when we first started living together I probably did go out with friends on my own and

she went out with friends on her own a lot more than (...) you know, I suppose since with being together a lot longer and being married I think we do that less really."
P017MM: 36: 37

The findings show that having a child following entry into a cohabiting or married relationship leads to additional changes in social engagement. Participants reflected back and described the impact of parenthood:

"You don't have the same time to socialise when your kids are young, but it's something that grows again as you get older and start to have more time for yourself, and you start to do more social things, rather than just childrearing things." P013MW: 27: 50

"During the 'children interval' where we were a little bit more, we spent less time socialising with people apart from people who were very close by." P014MM: 25: 64

In another interview, P043 noted that the time available to socialise changed after becoming a parent and restricted the opportunities for social engagement outside the home.

"It's absolutely different [after children]. We just do not socialise in the same way. I think socialising in a couple takes place in the evenings, you know, pre-children, and we just don't have the capacity to do that really" P043MW: 29: 35

Overall, entry into a cohabiting or married relationship triggers changes in both the frequency and the nature of social engagement outside of the home. Over time, patterns of social engagement become centred around the spouse, and the cohabiting and married are more likely to socialise with family members and with other couples than with other members of the wider social network.

9.3 Widowed

Prior to spousal bereavement, widowed participants had become reliant on their spouse as a companion and, like the cohabiting and married participants, their social activities were generally focused on the family and other couples. Thus, widowhood had a marked effect on social engagement post-transition and participants talked about the challenges they experienced. At least initially, becoming widowed had a negative impact on the amount of time the widowed participants spent socialising with friends. Almost all of the widowed

participants cited difficulties socialising in groups with other couples and noted how things are *"quite couple orientated"* (P011WW).

"It is difficult if you go to any village gathering and everybody else is in couples. It is difficult, so I stopped going [to local social gatherings]." P055WW: 52: 65

"I said to G [son] 'I can't, tables are for four, I'd be the fifth'." P071WW: 68: 69*

P010, a young widower, felt supported by his social network and was able to maintain a good, active social life after his wife's death, but he described feeling *"different and apart"* in the company of friends and said that he found socialising more difficult, even still.

Similarly, P070, a widow explained:

"I don't really enjoy going out without him [husband]. When we go and stand at the bar, getting the drinks, and K [friend] be there, P* [friend] will be there and I think, and P* [friend] will be there, J* [husband]'s not there, 'cos they're always in a group. That hurts me, and when we're all sitting down I feel as I'm the odd one out, 'cos I haven't got J* [husband] there." P070WW: 61: 63*

This was a common theme within the interviews and was related to the participants no longer being part of a couple themselves. Alongside this, some widowed participants experienced receiving fewer invitations to socialise with friends, particularly with other couples, as described in the following examples:

"Certainly socialising dried up almost entirely after G [husband] died and it didn't recover much really. // Perhaps they thought it was kinder that I wasn't in the company where the rest were all couples. I don't know. But I didn't get invited to a dinner party again." P055WW: 52: 65*

"I suppose generally it's reduced because people don't invite single people out and as you get older it becomes part of the equation (...) yes, very limited." P075WM: 72: 79

"Dinners at each other's houses, you know, well, dinner parties for want of a better word, and if A [husband] had been here we would have been part of that, and I wasn't part of that on my own." P048WW: 44: 51*

One widow also noted that much of her socialising now took place in the day time rather than the evening and participants recognised that evenings and weekends were the times that married couples usually spent together.

"Well actually meeting in the daytime is easy for her but in the evening she will defer to her boyfriend, so I suppose that's another thing why socialising done in daytime, more in the daytime" P048WW: 44: 51

As in previous research, evenings and weekends were highlighted as particularly difficult times for the widowed participants and was when they described themselves as feeling

most socially isolated (Anderson & Dimond, 1995; van den Hoonaard, 1994). P011 explained:

"Somebody said to me once, the 9 'til 5 is okay, but after that it's difficult. And I know what they mean, because you're working wherever you are and then you come in through the door, close the door and there you are. That's the (...) that's where it hits me a little bit, still." P011WW: 49: 59

She continued on to say:

"I think Monday to Friday you're busying yourself with your routines, and I'm, well I sometimes work from home, but I'm usually out and about, and Saturday, my Saturday probably hasn't changed in all the years really. I still do shopping on a Saturday, I go to the hairdresser, and I get back about 1 o'clock. And that's not changed in all the years from when the children were small. But Sunday's a different day. I don't know if it's because it's the end of an old week, or the beginning of a new, but something about a Sunday."

Existing research has considered the impact of widowhood on social engagement and, generally, research points to an overall increased level of social engagement following spousal bereavement as an effort to compensate for the loss of the spouse (Balaswamy et al., 2002; Utz et al., 2002). Gradually over time widowed participants, particularly older widows and widowers who typically had more time available during the day, developed more active social lives to help them adjust to becoming widowed. P075 explained:

"I realised the best thing to do is get involved with your hobbies and interests and if possible enrol in classes, evening classes whatever so I started a whole range of courses on computer studies." P075WM: 72: 79

Similarly, P055 said:

"You could easily sit at home, cry all day and do nothing apart from stroke the cat. And that's no good to anybody. So I deliberately, well I went out for walks, and things like that and so I deliberately joined lots of groups and it's worked out for me." P055WW: 52: 65

Participants talked about attending church more frequently, taking on new hobbies, enrolling in membership groups or signing up to taught courses as a way of filling their free time, increasing their social activities and coping with their loss. This was illustrated by the following quotes:

"Now that I am on my own, I've got to fill the time. Gone back on the committee of the [local social group], err, as a cooperative member, so I'm involved in that as well. They came and had a meeting yesterday, err, the calendar now is mostly full." P068WM: 78: 78

"I went back to church. J [husband] was a total non-believer but I wasn't and then I just happened to say to one of the ladies after about twelve months 'is there anything at church during the week I can go to?'" P072WW: 66: 70*

Comparing her social life now to before her husband died one widow said simply:

"I socialise a jolly sight more than I would have done because we were always together we would go out as a couple but we didn't join up with couples." P073WW: 75: 79

In contrast, a smaller number of participants felt that widowhood had not had a large impact on their social activities. This tended to be because their social activities prior to widowhood were largely independent of their spouse, as in the case of P057:

"I don't go out as much err, but its not really I don't know really, its not really affected it that much I wouldn't say, I wouldn't say cause we were quite independent people anyway." P057WW: 52: 57

In terms of age, as noted above, older widowed participants were more likely to have time in the day available for formal social engagement, including church and hobby groups and volunteer work, although some older participants were limited by physical health problems or a lack of accessible transport. On the other hand, while younger widowed participants were more restricted by their responsibilities to their career, young children and ageing parents, they typically enjoyed higher levels of social engagement with family and friends compared to the older widowed. In terms of gender, previous research would suggest that widowers are more vulnerable to decreased social engagement following spousal bereavement compared to widows (Blau, 1961; Pihlblad & Adams, 1972). In this study, there was evidence that both widowers and widows made efforts to compensate for the loss of their spouse through new, or continued, membership in social organisations. The lack of a gender difference in these findings may be a consequence of the strategies used to find participants.

In summary, social engagement following widowhood can be emotionally challenging and the widowed may, at least in the short term, avoid social engagement with other couples. The findings also show that, over time, the widowed may increase their social involvements and undertake a greater level of formal and informal social engagement as a source of distraction; to facilitate new social relationships; or to develop their skills. Further, the experience of social engagement following widowhood varies by

age and the opportunities for and barriers to social engagement may be different for the younger and older widowed.

9.4 Divorced

As in widowhood, the transition to divorce was associated with the loss of the spouse. The findings in this study suggest that, at least in the short term, social engagement following divorce is emotionally difficult. Participants described feeling uncomfortable in the company of certain members of their social network, particularly other couples, and admitted that they actively avoided socialising post-transition.

"For the first two years, I don't think I went out the door. I think it was just the lack of friends, the lack of (...) I didn't want to go out with couples because I felt like, I felt like a sore thumb." P045DW: 42: 45

"I don't feel gooseberry but, you, I, I suppose I feel more conscious of being on my own." P032SW: 33: 35

Others experienced practical barriers to social engagement. For example, participants with younger children were more restricted in how often they could socialise out of the house for practical reasons. This was particularly true when the divorce proceedings had caused financial strain. P047 explained:

"It was different because you've got somebody there, haven't you, you've got somebody there. You know I used to go salsa dancing every week, yeah, and I'd go out maybe once a month with my girl friends maybe go for a meal and a drink, stuff like that but to be honest, now it's finding, because I've moved, it's finding, probably finding the time, erm, and I mean, I know the boys are a bit older but I couldn't leave them on their own, I would have to get a baby sitter, so there's a cost involved then as well." P047SW: 39: 42

Another divorced woman commented that although she sees friends regularly, she can only socialise outside of the house when the children go fortnightly to their father's house. This was a typical experience of participants with responsibilities to young children where social activities were often restricted to the home.

"I have friends and family round the house at least three or four times a week. So I do have an active social life, it's just not out of my house." P062DW: 24: 31

"A lot of the time my friends come here, erm, so and that's good but your life's gotta revolve around your children 24/7." P047SW: 39: 42

Unlike the widowed group, this study revealed no major age related differences in the experience of divorce. Rather, it was the responsibilities of having young children that negated how much time people had available for social engagement.

At the other extreme, several participants talked about going *"a little bit off the rails"* (P021DW) in the immediate period following divorce. They described having enjoyed a period of dramatically increased social engagement post-transition and said they had taken advantage of the new-found freedom that came with no longer being married.

"Because I didn't go out during my marriage I did have a brief period of going out every other weekend with her because you get out of the social habit don't you!"
P052DW: 27: 86

"I could basically go out as much as I wanted and I did go out quite a lot!"
P007DM: 32: 44

Participants without young children and those who did not have full custody of their children talked about having more time available and having the freedom to socialise as a single person. For example, one divorced man said:

"Once you're single you know, you can, you can risk, there's a freedom there that you can do what you like when you like really. You can go out and, and you don't have to worry about the babysitter." P007DM 32: 44

Similarly, P020 commented:

"I then socialised more with people at work properly, I recovered some of the lost friendships that I'd had and sort of given up with people. And it went on from there."
P020DM: 38: 52

There was evidence in the interviews that divorce can allow for longer-term increases in social engagement. Some participants, especially women, increased as a result of deliberately seeking out adult company in the absence of a spouse. They described taking on new hobbies as a way of extending their social network and increasing opportunities for social engagement.

"I've sought out other people for company to do things with." P026SW: 44: 45

"I think also, being on my own made me realise that I had to do something otherwise I was going to get very, very sorry for myself, so I had to keep busy. You do feel low and a friend said, 'oh come and sing because it makes you feel good' so I started to sing!" P053DW: 60: 67

"I came across [support group] and I went away for New Year, in New Year 2007, and it was the best thing I ever did. Absolutely brilliant. I've made so many friends, and it's finally, from there, that my social life's a bit out of control (laughter) at the moment! I can't fit everything in! There's a huge social element to it, and then it's the support as well I think." P045DW: 42: 45

Another interview participant described how she felt more outgoing after her separation and had become more confident in social settings:

"I suppose I've been just more outgoing, I'd got very withdrawn when I was up in [city of marital home], um, I was gradually shutting down. I could feel it in my head." P032SW: 33: 35

There was a definite sense in the interviews that engaging in new formal and informal activities provided a sense of wellbeing and allowed participants to pursue new interests and develop their skills.

"They've [hobbies] become more important recently because I've felt that I needed to do something different, because of the separation and things have changed and so they are a new source of friendships, and something that I wanted to do for a long time but I hadn't." P026SW: 44: 45

When asked to compare their social life now to when they were married, participants tended to describe being more socially active and in some interviews, expressed being more satisfied with their social life compared to when they were in their married relationship. This outlook of the divorced participants contrasts with that of the widowed participants in this study. For example:

"I think I meet more people now, socially. I go out more, because I've got the time. I'm busier socially, so it's all good really." P053DW: 60: 67

"Well since my husband left actually, I've got an incredibly active social life, I've got some amazing friends and although most of them are married with children, I still tend to go out for meals and drinks with them, go away for weekends." P049SW: 35: 37

Overall, the findings demonstrate that divorce has an important impact on social engagement. Further, the specific impact of divorce varies according to the additional responsibilities people have to manage, including the care of young children. For some, divorce allows fresh opportunities for social engagement and presents people with the time and freedom to increase levels of social engagement with existing friends and involve themselves in formal social activities, including hobby clubs and support groups. On the

other hand, those with younger children may be more restricted in the opportunities to socialise with family and friends away from the children and their home.

9.5 Age

Patterns of social engagement may vary by age. For example, existing research demonstrates that, although older adults may be more likely to experience a smaller social network compared to younger adults due to network shrinkage, increasing age may be positively associated with the frequency of formal and informal social engagement (Cornwell et al., 2008). In another study, Droogleever Fortuijn et al. (2006) found that younger adults display a greater diversity in patterns of social engagement compared to older adults. They suggest that social engagement is high between the ages of 50 and 70, and then begins to decrease and activities become more focused on the home and local environment. Droogleever Fortuijn et al. found that both income and health were important indicators for engagement involvement.

In this study, older adults with good levels of physical health described an active social life with involvements in a range of formal and informal social activities. Physical health limitations or no access to suitable transportation had a considerable negative impact on levels of social engagement. Across marital status groups, younger participants were more restricted by additional responsibilities, including jobs and younger children, and were, therefore, less likely to engage in formal social activities compared to older adults. However, the findings suggest that younger adults may have greater access to informal social engagement as a consequence of a wider social network.

9.6 Conclusions

Marital status change has important consequences for the nature and frequency of social engagement. Similar to the changes in exchange of social support (Chapter 8), cohabitation and marriage provides access to a wider network of social contacts but the cohabiting and married generally look to their spouse for social engagement and are less likely to engage in formal social activities. In addition, entry into cohabiting or married relationship was associated with a shift to more couple- or family- orientated patterns of social engagement. Quite the reverse, the widowed and divorced lose the spouse as a key provider of social engagement and are forced to look to existing members of the wider

social network and new social relationships, as well as acquaintances, for social engagement. There was evidence that widowhood and divorce allow people to engage in new formal social activities and have more informal social contact with family and friends. However, importantly, social engagement could be limited by practical and financial circumstances, including physical health, geographic location, additional responsibilities, and finances.

Taken together, the findings from the qualitative study highlight that marital status transitions prompt changes in the structure of the social network, exchange of social support and social engagement. The next challenge is to better understand why these changes in social participation occur. Chapter 10 explores the impact of marital status transitions on identity and considers the relationship between identity and social participation post-transition.

Chapter 10

The impact of marital status change on identity

10.1 Introduction

Marital status transitions have important consequences for social participation, in terms of the construction of the social network (Chapter 7), the exchange of social support within the social network (Chapter 8) and patterns of social engagement (Chapter 9). Identity can be viewed as being embedded in the social network, and social participation has an important influence on an individual's sense of self (Cotten, 1999). Thus, marital status transitions are likely to have an important impact on identity. Although the interviews did not focus on identity change following marital status transition, identity emerged as a leading theme in the interviews. Changes in identity were, in part, related to changes in the social participation described in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. This chapter provides a review of relevant identity literature and then explores the impact of marital status transitions on identity.

In essence, identities are answers to the question "Who am I?" (Allport, 1961). Identity is informed by people's social position within a social structure. The social network provides context for the meanings and expectations associated with people's role and responsibilities and serves as a source of validation of identity, reminding people of their beliefs, values and their abilities (Cotten, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Thus, disruption to the social network (Chapter 7), exchange of social support (Chapter 8), and social engagement (Chapter 9) may, therefore, have a negative impact on both a person's identity. Researchers have outlined two distinct components of identity relating to private (or personal/individual) identities and collective (or social/public) identities (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Trafimow, Triandis & Goto, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Private identity refers to individual aspects of identity, including attributes that are unique to the self, beliefs and values, and abilities and skills (e.g. 'I am honest'). Brewer and Gardner (2004: p67) describe the private identity as "those aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the self from all others" (p67). The collective identity incorporates "those aspects of the self-concept that reflect assimilation to others or significant social groups" (Brewer & Gardner, 2004: p67) and includes social roles and relationships (e.g. 'I am a husband') (Marcus & Cross, 1990). According to Deaux (1993), private and collective identities are related to each other, such that private identities may provide the content and meanings of collective identities.

Borrowing from theories of symbolic interaction, which consider how external social structures influence internal processes (see also Blumer, 1969), Lopata (1973a: p47) suggested that identities are formulated in a “complicated process of social interaction which involves symbolic definitions of the self, the other, and the situation”. Identity change may, therefore, be understood as changes in the meaning of the self including changes in what it means to be who one is as a member of a group, who one is in a role, or who one is as a person (Burke, 2006).

Transitional periods throughout the life course continuously require people to adapt or change to new life experiences. Significant life events, such as marital status transitions, allow individuals to acquire new information about the self and may cause identity change through the challenge to basic values and disruption to social relationships and established roles (Shaefer & Moos, 2001). Stressful life events have been found to predict increases in identity exploration and changes in identity over time (Anthis, 2002). Since collective identities are constructed through social interaction, the nature of identity reconstruction following life events depends on the roles a person plays and the way other people treat them in different contexts (Burr, 1995). While life events may allow for personal growth (Showers & Ryff, 1996), even when a transition is perceived to be for the best it may be associated with considerable stress and potential for identity change (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston & Bower, 1987; Showers & Ryff, 1996).

There is some evidence to suggest that marriage may provide a strong positive sense of identity and self-worth. For example, a classic study by Berger and Kellner (1970) demonstrated that entering a married relationship requires reconstruction of identity and this is achieved by both reconstructing past identities and defining a new relationship identity. Burke (2006) suggested that the practice of performing everyday activities with a spouse changes the way one thinks about oneself, as does possessing the identity of ‘spouse’. Over time, identity may become rooted both in the married relationship itself and to the spouse (Lopata, 1973a). Writing on why marriage may have such an influence on identity for women, Lopata (1973a) explained that married women are expected to be “oriented primarily toward family welfare” (p408) and stated that the role of wife and mother are the “basic and the only really important ones for adult women” (p408). The role of women in society has changed dramatically since Lopata’s study was published. A more recent study by Pals (1999) proposed that marriage is an identity investment that is experienced differently by different women. She outlined four prototypes of identity in

marriage to reflect the different ways women invested and evaluated their identities in the context of marriage: anchored, defined, restricted and confused. Women who felt their identity was 'anchored' in their marriage were able to integrate different elements of their identity and maintain a sense of individuality. 'Defined' women described their lives as being immersed in the married relationship and family life and felt aspects of their own identity were secondary to the marriage. Women whose identities were 'restricted' by marriage were frustrated by the limitations the married relationship placed on them. Finally, women who felt 'confused' within their marriage described a lack of self-confidence and a sense of competence which were not being improved by the marriage. While Pals' study focuses on women, these prototypes may also have some relevance for men and might help researchers understand better the impact of a transition into a married relationship on identity. Few studies to date have considered the impact of cohabitation on identity. Macklin (1972) found that unmarried university age students described a loss of identity following entry into a cohabiting relationship. Cohabitation as a precursor or alternative to marriage is common in contemporary society and the literature on becoming married may also be relevant to the impact of a transition into a cohabiting relationship.

The influence of the married relationship on identity has consequences for the loss of a spouse through widowhood or divorce. Transitions out of marriage may challenge an individual's identity, precipitating people to take on new roles and responsibilities. The loss of a romantic relationship has been found to cause a change in identity, with an overall shift from 'we' to 'I' (DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; DiGiulio, 1992; Slotter, Gardner & Finkel, 2010). Thoits (1991) suggests that undesirable events in an important identity domain are appraised as major losses and as highly threatening. In contrast, stressful events in less important domains are appraised as less challenging. In line with this, research suggests that the greater the impact of entering a romantic relationship on identity and the greater the significance of the former spouse in defining identity is, the more detrimental the impact of widowhood or divorce (DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis & Kunak, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1988).

Widowhood involves the loss of a married relationship. Lopata's body of research (e.g. 1979; 1996) has made an important contribution to the understanding of the experience of widowhood in contemporary society and her research (1973b; 2000) has demonstrated a loss of identity in widowhood, where the surviving spouse must relinquish

the status as a married person and assume the identity of widow or widower. Further, a widow must assume responsibility for all tasks that her husband might have been solely responsible for before (Lopata, 1986; Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Thus, researchers have argued that widowhood provides an opportunity for the widowed to learn new skills (Lopata, 1979; van den Hoonaard, 2001). Parkes and Weiss (1983) describe a widow's need to establish a new autonomous identity that is focused on the single self rather than as part of a couple. More recently, Bennett (2010) and van den Hoonaard (1997; 2001) have found that widowhood forces women to reconstruct their identities. Bennett (2010) describes the often difficult process of reconstructing the sense of self following bereavement to create an augmented identity as a wife and widow. As in other areas of widowhood research, the literature has a focus on widows, reflecting demographic trends and few studies have considered the impact of becoming a widower on identity. However, widowed men also lose their role as spouse upon spousal bereavement (Bennett, 2007; van den Hoonaard, 2010), and for older widowed men, this is usually in addition to the negative consequences of the previous loss of their role as employee through retirement (Berardo, 1970). van den Hoonaard's (2010) book 'By Himself' presents findings of research interviews with widowers in Canada and the U.S. and considers the importance of men maintaining a masculine identity in the face of widowhood, so to distance themselves from any negative connotations of being a widower. Even less research has investigated the influence of age at widowhood on identity reconstruction. DiGiulio (1992) suggested that the young widow may have only recently experienced identity change upon marriage, and then has to adjust to a new role as a widow. Regardless of gender or age, identity transformation plays a major role in the bereavement process (Neimeyer, 2005). Widowhood may involve greater role clarity and social acceptability compared to divorce and this may facilitate higher levels of social support from the social network (Kitson, Lopata, Holmes & Meyering, 1980). However, often the recently widowed not only deal with the loss of a spouse, but also with the potential loss of social relationships as a consequence of their new status as a widow or widower (Ferraro, 1984; van den Hoonaard, 1994). Research has suggested that widowhood may allow for personal growth, greater autonomy, and increased sense of control (DiGiulio, 1989; Fry, 1998; Thomas, DiGiulio & Sheehan, 1988). For example, van den Hoonaard (2001) described the ways in which North American widows developed their identity through taking on new tasks and reorganising relationships with people. Further, the widowed may choose to realign their social networks and alter their social activities in response to their new identity (Lamme et

al., 1996). Dating or expressing interest in dating might also allow the widowed to develop their identity (DiGiulio, 1989).

Divorce is also associated with changes in identity (Gregson & Ceynar 2009; Haber, 1990; Rahav & Baum, 2002; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Divorce may cause changes in personal values, choices, social relationships and social roles, which in turn lead to changes in identity (Diedrick, 1991). Unlike in widowhood, the decision to divorce involves a process of uncoupling identities that often precedes marital dissolution (DeGarmo & Kitson, 2001; Kitson, 1992). By its nature, divorce may cause people to view themselves, at least temporarily, as failures (Kim & McKenry, 2002) and Kohen (1981, cited in Gregson & Ceynar, 2009) found that recently divorced women described themselves as feeling like 'nonpeople', reflecting the undefined role of the divorced person (Hermann, 1977) and perhaps also the societal disapproval associated with divorce. The divorce process forces people to build a new life (Gregson & Ceynar 2009; Radford et al., 1997) and Rahav and Baum (2002) argue that the role ambiguity that comes with divorce both precipitates a change in identity and makes change possible. Gregson and Ceynar (2009) conducted qualitative interviews with North American divorced women. They found that women made adjustments to themselves following divorce that reflected their need to feel and look different from their married selves in a process of internal and external identity transformation that involved rediscovering and reclaiming an identity that had been lost. This included altering their physical appearance, modifying their surroundings, and managing the artefacts of their marriages. Shihi (1979) proposed that divorce can be viewed as an opportunity for self development. Divorced women have been found to report an increased sense of competence, autonomy, independence and self esteem following transition (Baum, Rahav & Sharon, 2005; Bisagni & Eckenrode, 1995; Brown & Manela, 1978; Diedrick, 1991; Dreman & Aldor, 1994; Rahav & Baum, 2002). The impact of divorce on identity may vary by gender. For example, Lund (1990) suggested that divorce has a greater impact on identity for women because in carrying out their role as wife or mother in the married relationship women often lose any sense of their individual identity and, therefore, are forced to redefine themselves upon divorce. Similarly, Diedrick (1991) argued that men are less likely to make positive adjustments to divorce in terms of roles and skills. Rahav and Baum (2002) considered the personal and social factors that facilitate changes in identity and found significant positive correlations between positive changes in identity and educational level, age of youngest child, subjective economic situation, being in work and time since divorce. Compared to becoming widowed, divorce has been found

to be less distressing and have fewer disruptive consequences for identity (DeGarmo & Kitson, 2001).

Identity emerged as a salient theme within the interviews in this study. The interview did not focus on identity change but participants were prompted in the interview to consider any changes in how they saw themselves following their marital status transition. Other prompts included how confident a person they think they are, and whether this had changed with their change in marital status. Participants described a process of identity reconstruction following marital status change, particularly those who experienced a transition out of marriage. Interviews addressed changes in identity in both the private and the collective self (Trafimow et al., 1991) and the findings suggest that age at marital status transition is an important factor, with 'on-time' transitions generally associated with fewer negative changes in identity. The sections that follow explore the nature of identity change for each marital status group. In this chapter, the cohabiting and married groups are addressed separately as there were clear differences in their experience of identity change on transition. Quotes from the interviews are used to highlight the participants' experiences.

10.2 Cohabiting

10.2.1 Collective identity Chapters 7, 8 and 9 revealed that the cohabiting participants in this study typically maintained a more independent social network and were less reliant on their spouse for social support and social engagement compared to the married participants. In line with this, cohabiting participants were more likely to maintain an individual identity and held a social role within their social network that was largely independent from the cohabiting relationship. Identity reconstruction in the cohabiting group was associated with relationship duration and those participants who had been in a relationship for a longer period of time did describe holding a 'couple identity' with their spouse in their social network.

"I suppose we're seen as a couple, like, our friends would invite us together and not one not the other." P016CM: 22: 24

Identifying as a spouse facilitated changes in how several of the cohabiting participants presented themselves to others. For example, when asked to consider any changes she had noticed in how she saw herself following entry into a cohabiting relationship, P035,

commented on subtle changes that had occurred, including how she dressed and acted in social environments.

"I don't feel like I've changed, but I suppose I have because I don't go out on the pull, so I guess when I'm at the pub I give off different vibes and dress differently, do you know what I mean?" P035CW: 28: 32

There was an acknowledgement among the participants that they had to take up new supportive responsibilities to their spouse as part of their new social role. P035 said that she was immediately aware of the additional day to day tasks she had to complete. She explained:

"I guess what I did notice was the fact I had more dishes to do (laughter) you know what it's like! More washing, more tidying, but he does stuff, but not as much as I do! So I noticed that side of things, but I didn't really change my social habits."
P035CW: 28: 32

Interestingly, in this group of cohabiting participants domestic tasks were typically shared and there was little evidence of gender-specific tasks. This contrasted to the responsibilities older married and widowed participants described during their married relationship. P015 described the shared approach to domestic tasks that existed in her relationship.

"He can cook for me half the time and I'll cook for him half the time. The agreement is, he does all the hoovering and I do all the bathroom!" P015CW

"Yeah, it does tend to be a joint effort." P018CW

10.2.2 Private identity A small number of cohabiting participants described their identity as becoming grounded in their relationship. This was more typical of women, and of cohabiting participants who were older at transition or who had been cohabiting for longer. For example, P069, a cohabiting man who had lived with his girlfriend for 5 years, said:

"Your identity kind of changes a bit, I'm still me, but I'm still part of a larger organisation, which is us, there is me and us and me is part of us, and it's not the same thing." P069CM: 33: 38

Being in a cohabiting relationship may play a role in self development, as evidenced in the following quote from P004:

"I was quite sort of defensive and erm, yeah, he just opened me up and you know he's probably one of two people that knows me the best." P004CW: 25: 28

Following on from this, several participants noted that they felt more confident and had a greater sense of self-worth as a result of their relationship with their spouse (Harter, 1999).

"The relationship is the catalyst for me to feel comfortable and to feel engaged." P036CM: 36: 38

"I feel more myself, and I can be myself whereas I think if you're single you, you know, there's kind of a risk of, you know, trying to be someone you're not to fit with whatever, whereas now I feel that I can be quite comfortable." P029CW: 24: 26

Overall, although transition into a cohabiting relationship led to changes in the private identity for some participants, in terms of confidence and self-development, cohabitation did not appear to have a considerable impact on collective identity, in terms of social role and responsibilities. This may be because the social networks of cohabiting participants were generally more independent compared to the married, and cohabiting relationships may not involve the same strength of commitment or pooling of resources compared to a married relationship (Horwitz & White, 1998; Rindfuss & Vanden-Heuvel, 1990). This may also be on account of the relatively small cohabiting sample in this study ($N=9$). Though the sample of men was small in the cohabiting group, the interviews did suggest that being in a cohabiting relationship had a greater positive impact on the private self for women compared to men. Further, Clark et al. (2008) noted higher levels of psychological wellbeing in cohabiters who plan to marry and Brown and Booth (1996) suggested that cohabiters who do not intend to get married may experience lower relationship quality compared to the married. Together with previous research, the findings from this study suggest that the extent and nature of identity reconstruction for cohabiters may vary depending on intention to marry and relationship duration.

10.3 Married

10.3.1 Collective identity In contrast to the cohabiting group, most married participants described more salient changes in their sense of collective identity following transition. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 explore the changes in the social participation following a transition to married status and reveal an increased involvement with the spouse's social

network, increased frequency of social interaction with other couples, and changes in the exchange of support with members of the social network. In line with these changes in social participation, the change to married status is associated with a change in social role. Being married became an important social role and participants talked about their new 'shared identity' within their social network and noted that they were now recognised as one half of a couple, rather than as a separate individual (Berger & Kellner, 1970; Lopata, 1996).

"The emphasis changes, the dynamic changes, and you do start being seen as a couple." P063MW: 34: 55

"I like it. It's, kind of sort of almost like a status symbol. What I said before about the stability, I think it helps in lots of ways, how people view you as a person."
P037MM: 33: 53

Some married participants demonstrated a resistance to the merged 'married couple' collective identity that was formed for them following marriage. They expressed a desire for people to acknowledge them as individuals with their own independent identity.

"It's a little bit difficult because I think before people just see me as a individual you know they recognise who I was, who I am, now although some people still do that the majority its always '[P039] and E [wife]', '[P039] and E* [wife]', '[P039] and E* [wife]'. It's not just [P039]. It would be nice if people would recognise we are two identities not just one."* P039MM: 31: 32

In line with this, several interviews involved a dialogue about the decision not to change their surname. These women felt strongly that their maiden name was important for their sense of identity. For example, P019 commented:

"I didn't want to become part, taken by that family, taking their name was part of that, I kept my own identity, and I was always part of my family and not their family." P019MW: 42: 55

Those participants who experienced marital status change at an older age were more likely to have developed an independent identity as a single person. Thus, being older at first marriage dictated an even greater change in collective identity. On the other hand, some participants, particularly women, described finding it difficult to identify as an older unmarried person within their social network and noted the relief connected to their new social role as a married person. Married aged 42, P064 described feeling more confident and comfortable around other people in her social role as a married woman, compared to being an older unmarried woman.

"You were this thirty-two or thirty-five year old woman as people said and see living at home with your mum you know how sad is that? And even close friends they didn't know how to slot you in. // I've just felt a bit more confident and maybe it's been a chip on my shoulder rather than anything to do with them [people who she felt judged her as an unmarried woman] but (...) I just feel more comfortable and as I say grounded and as you can say this is my husband now. I don't know I just feel more at ease and comfortable with people." P064MW: 42: 45

She went on to say:

"Being Mrs. P in that partnership, and even before being married, people would be 'oh alright yeah I can see where you are now' and the same for having moved out from home. I feel as if it was just easier socially (laughter)." P064MW: 42: 45*

P063 was 34 when she first married and explained that the transition to being married and the associated changes in responsibilities were more challenging because she was an older woman. She also commented on the influence her age at marriage had on redefining her social role with friends and family. She felt that she was perceived differently after getting married and wondered if other people did not know their own role in her new married life.

She said:

"I was established as a person in my own right, at 34, yeah, I was established!" P063MW: 34: 55

The experiences of P064 and P063 provide an insight into the important role of age at marriage on post-transition identity change. Identifying as a spouse and assuming the role of a married person in their social network meant that some participants modified their physical appearance and social manner. For example, P058 talked about the influence being married had on how she portrayed herself to other people.

"You're not available anymore for instance, you know what's appropriate, you understand your role. You understand that you're married." P058MW: 33: 38

Another interview described a change in how she dressed in order to look more respectable for her husband.

"I feel like I have to try and look physically a bit more respectable sometimes I feel like a rag bag, erm, (laughter) because I have to be a bit more respectful for R [husband] and a bit smarter (laughter)." P067MW: 53: 58*

This new social role of being a husband or wife was also enacted through the responsibilities the participants had to assume as a spouse. Chapter 8 explored the

changes in the exchange of social support upon marital status transition and demonstrated that the married take on a supportive role for their spouse. In their role as a husband or wife, most participants felt that they became at least partially responsible for their spouse's wellbeing and that it was their responsibility as a spouse to offer functional support, including providing emotional, informational and instrumental support and social companionship. P013 admitted that adjusting to her social role as a wife and taking on the associated responsibilities was difficult at times, saying:

"When you get married, all of a sudden you've got washing to do, you've got to tidy up in case your mess is impinging on someone else, or theirs on you, you've got to think about eating at the same time." P013MW: 27: 50

For P019, who married aged 42 and whose husband worked away from home for long periods of time, considered the impact that being married had on her identity and noted there was little difference compared to being single and her social network and daily lifestyle had remained relatively unchanged. She explained:

"I think that is probably a part because we're not together all the time therefore what does being married mean?" P019MW: 42: 55

The transition to becoming a parent led to further identity reconstruction for married participants and was associated with changes in the participants' social role and their daily responsibilities, particularly for women. Parenthood also instigated changes in the social network and the exchange of social support (see Chapters 8 and 9) which facilitated changes in their collective identities. P043, a married woman said:

"Things became more about me as a mum." P043MW: 29: 35

P008's wife had a demanding career. P008 described reduced social participation after becoming a parent and, in addition to his professional identity, saw his main role as being a parent to his children.

"I think then there's a definite change in that [socialising] when children arrived, because (...) the first twelve years I was always the babysitter at night and I very seldom went out and mixed with other adults." P008MM: 25: 48

10.3.2 Private identity Married participants described their private identity as becoming intertwined with their life as a couple. They spoke about becoming *"half of one person"* (P023MW: 22: 54), or having *"become one person"* (P025MM: 26: 57) through

getting married to their spouse. One married man described feeling “*more of a unit*” (P017MM: 36: 37) with his wife after getting married compared to being in a cohabiting relationship with his now wife. P023 said:

“It’s not the piece of paper that makes the difference, just the mental (...) the fact that you are in every way, (...) attached to each other. Legally binding as well as, you do consider, I mean, I do consider myself as being one half of a relationship.”

P023MW: 22: 54

Alongside this, married participants conveyed a sense of feeling whole or becoming complete as a consequence of being married. For example, P014 said his marriage provided “*a very, very close sense of belonging*” (P014MM: 25: 64). P002 described how she had “*found herself*” upon getting married:

“I feel, erm, I’ve found myself since I’ve been married. Whereas before I was sort of floundering, I didn’t know really what I wanted to do or, you know, I was floating basically I think, now I’ve got an anchor.” P002MW: 46: 52

Married participants expressed changes in their personal attributes following marital status transition and there was evidence that the married relationship, as well as their new social role and associated responsibilities, provided a foundation for self-development. Over the interviews, participants described feeling “*more mature being married*” (P017MM: 36: 37), being “*more confident since becoming married.*” (P002MW: 46: 52), and feeling “*more rounded*” (P064MW: 42: 45). P041 talked about the positive influence his marriage continued to have on his private identity and described the personal growth he was experiencing through his married relationship.

“Being married to E [wife] is moulding the person that I am and who I’m becoming, its helping me fulfil dreams and ambitions and goals, its, forget the church for a moment, its giving me a deeper meaning of love, it’s given me, erm a sense of achievement and a sense of encouragement.”* P041MM: 38: 45

In another interview, P059, a married woman expressed having a greater sense of direction owing to her married relationship.

“It’s difficult because in the past I have a lot of things I wanted for myself but now, I don’t know, I have fewer things. Now I know what I want exactly, but before I didn’t know.” P059MW: 17: 19

On the other hand, for some participants there was a sense of identity conflict between the collective self and the private self following marriage. For example, one married woman acknowledged that her new, fused identity as a couple and responsibilities to her husband meant making changes to her own private identity. She explained:

"When you do get married, you do have to, not lose a bit of yourself but you do have to change, and I don't mean change who you are, but you do have to become less selfish." P013MW: 27: 50

Several others expressed a loss of a sense of self, or a loss of freedom upon getting married. P061, a married woman, commented on the internal conflict between feeling happy to be in the position to get married, but aware of the loss of her independence upon transition. She said:

"I can't think of a more wonderful thing for someone to ask you to do [to marry them]. One of the best moments, ultimate moments of my life. But then there was also a feeling of loss of independence, being married, because you know, I don't know what you call it but, there's that kind of "oh", I don't know what it is, it was a fleeting moment." P061MW: 39: 51

Still for P040, a married woman, her identity post-transition became grounded in her married relationship and in her role as a wife and mother. She admitted that she had lost a sense of her own private identity over the duration of her marriage.

"When you meet somebody, I think anyway, you become 'M's girlfriend', unless, so you lend yourself a bit more to that role. Then obviously as its progressed getting married, a mother, (...) sort of things start to, you lose bits, and you become more involved in the other roles that you have, I started to get a bit resentful of (...) being at home with the children, sounds awful when you put it like that, I resent being at home with the kids because I obviously wanted the kids, we planned to have children, and (...) but you do sort of forget the person that you were."* P040MW: 25: 30

Another participant, P008, described being deeply unhappy in his married relationship. He experienced a conflict between his collective identity as a spouse and his private identity as an unhappy man knowing his marriage was, as he described it, "failing".

"I'm kind of a dependable married man with children who's been faithful to his relationship and so there's that side of it. But it's (...) in other sense it's quite oppressive when you feel your marriage is failing and is breaking down, possibly irretrievably." P008MM: 25: 48

Overall, transition into a married relationship was associated with identity reconstruction and participants described experiencing an identity shift from 'I' to 'we' (Burke, 2006). Pals' (1999) distinction between the four different identity prototypes in marriage was useful to understand the process of identity reconstruction for married participants. For some, identity was anchored in the married relationship yet they maintained a range of interests and social relationships outside of the married relationship. For others, being a spouse defined their identity and their experience of social participation, in terms of their social network and the exchange of social support, was centred round their role as a married person. Within this group, a smaller number expressed a conflict between their private and collective identities. Only P008MM fitted to Pals' fourth prototype of being confused within the marriage. There was some evidence that age at marriage was important for identity where participants who experienced marital status change at an older age experienced greater level of identity reconstruction upon transition. However, likewise, there was evidence that some women were sure of their own private identity in later life and, therefore, the transition to becoming married did not have a significant effect on identity.

10.4 Widowed

10.4.1 Collective identity According to Shapiro (2001), the loss of a spouse unsettles the foundation of the "interpersonally created and maintained self, disrupting relationship systems of affect regulation, attachment, identity, and social role" (p301). As revealed in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 of this thesis, widowhood leads to changes in social participation and the widowed participants experienced disruption to social network and to the availability of social support (Lopata, 1996; van den Hoonaard, 2010). Widowhood has the potential to lead to identity reconstruction through these changes in social participation (Shaeffer & Moos, 2001). In line with previous research findings, the widowed participants in this study described experiencing a change in identity following the death of a spouse (Bennett, 2010; DiGiulio, 1992; van den Hoonaard, 1997).

The interviews provided evidence of a loss of the socially constructed self upon widowhood. As the cohabiting and married participants had viewed their identity within their relationships, many of the widowed participants reported feeling as though a large part of their identity had died with their spouse (Lopata, 1973a; 1973b). When describing

their married relationship, many referred to themselves as a unit and they described how their friends would refer to them in this way as well. Participants indicated that the death of their spouse transformed their collective identity, specifically of no longer belonging to a couple and the change in identity from 'we' to 'I'. The widowed participants were very aware of their new social role as a widow or widower. P010 described it as being *"like a badge"* (P010WM: 42: 45). In the interview, he made it clear that being a widower was important to his sense of identity, but explained the difficulty he had trying to make people aware of it.

"It's like a really important part of my identity, my status as a widower. So you want people to know, but you don't normally tell people because it's really awkward, you don't know how to bring it up." P010WM: 42: 45

P024 recollected having to say her marital status at a language class and talked about the panic she had felt because she had to say she was a widow. No doubt this was made more difficult having to say it in French!

"It took me ages to find the French word for widow (laughter) I couldn't find it you know. Everybody's saying "I'm married" or whatever, and I had to say that I was a widow. So, it built up to quite a big thing, saying where I lived blah blah blah, and it came to, I was hot and sweaty by the time it came to me and I had to say what my marital status was, and it came back to me and I said it, and I think I said it incorrectly and she had to correct it." P024WW: 49: 53

P024 also said that confirming her new marital status on official documents was a challenge. Over time, she incorporated being a widow into her identity and admits in the interview that she would rather be widowed than divorced because it was evidence that she had enjoyed a successful marriage.

"I didn't want to tick the widowed box, it quite upset me for a long time. And now actually quite pleased that I can do that and not tick the divorced box." P024WW: 49: 53

Younger widowed participants struggled to identify with the status of widow or widower and recognised that their experience was less common compared to being widowed in later life. P010, aged 42 at widowhood, said simply:

"I was aware really early on that it [status as a younger widower] was a kind of rare one in a way." P010WM: 42: 45

Similarly, P048 considered the role of age in her experience of identity change upon widowhood.

"I guess as I get older, you know, it will happen to more and more people, 'come normal, but in my mid forties it was completely abnormal and I did feel, I know that sometimes I could overhear people say, that's, that's [P048WW] and her husband died or she lost her husband, or, and that's how other people saw me." P048WW: 44: 51

P050 noted in the interview that after only nine months of marriage before being widowed she had had very little time to grow into her social role as a wife. She did not know what it meant to be a widow and remembered telling people *"I wish there was a sort of manual that you could follow as to what exactly is it to be a widow"*. She explained:

"I mean in a way I really do, I really do associate with it ['widow' status] but I think we have to sort of reclaim it to mean, that people need to recognise that it can mean somebody like me because of what people's impressions are, they just don't associate with young people, it's sort of got the association of a very elderly woman that's had a long marriage and that was err, yeah, that now lives alone but possibly, probably has a family and you know, that type of thing err, I do describe myself as a widow, I mean I do use the word err, I'm never quite sure whether I do that well or not, do you know what I mean?" P050WW: 31: 33

P050's experience demonstrates another difference for those widowed young, who experience two important identity transformations, to a wife or husband and then to a widow or widower, within a relatively short period. They are less likely to have a widowed peer group and may, therefore, experience a more pronounced loss of identity as a consequence of no longer identifying with the people in their social network.

Widowed participants acknowledged that they had to reconstruct their identity in the face of widowhood and reorganise their social network and lifestyle according to their new social role. As in Bennett's (2010) research, this transformation was dramatic for some, and for others occurred gradually over a longer period of time. One widow said *"I've just had to totally rethink my life"* (P072WW: 66: 70). This quote from P001 highlighted the demand on the widowed participants' to reformulate their identities and lifestyles in order to accommodate for their new social role as a widow or widower.

"She died and I realised that I'd have to rebuild my life on a completely new basis, on the basis that I was a widower." P001WM: 63: 72

Similarly, P071 noted that her sense of self was permanently changed but she was determined to rebuild her life without her husband.

"I'll never be the same person but I've begun to erm get my pieces together again and get a life. It's not going to be a life like I had." P071WW: 68: 69

However, the difficult process of adjusting to the social role of widow or widower was compounded by the fact that the participants' social network was typically made up of other couples during their married relationship (van den Hoonaard, 2001). Chapter 7 described the social network disruption experienced by the widowed participants. As in van den Hoonaard's (2001) research with North-American widows, most participants noticed that interacting with other couples became more difficult and that their new social role required more effort on the part of their friends. The following quotes demonstrated the challenges the participants faced as a consequence of their new identity as a widow or widower, particularly in terms of their social relationships with other couples.

"If you meet people as a couple your mixing with other couples and everybody has the same sort of status, so everybody fits in, but once one of those couples loses their partner they become a loose cannon, their the odd one they don't have that partner, your no longer even numbers you've got this loose one that's trying to tag onto somebody else, you know cause you don't want to go on your own."

P060WM: 52: 73

"Well you've no longer got a partner and everybody else has got a partner so you're the odd one out." P051WW: 78: 80

P048 described having social dinners regularly cancelled by a friend and felt that the situation had arisen because she no longer had a coupled identity in her social network.

She explained:

"She said 'I had a really bad cold and erm I couldn't cancel the previous night because it was a couple'. It is easier to cancel one person than two but I guess I didn't have the same status as part of a couple, as a single person, I was easier, you know, just don't have the same, one doesn't count as much as two, and it was easier to lose me than, um, lose a couple." P048WW: 44: 51

Insightfully, P071 considered the causal pathway for these changes in her collective identity and wondered if in fact the changes resulted from other people thinking differently of her, as in the above quotes, or rather from changes in how she perceived herself. She said:

"I truthfully don't know I don't know whether I think people think of me different or I think of myself different." P071WW: 68: 69

Alongside changes in social role, participants described important changes in responsibilities (Lopata, 1973a). First, participants experienced the loss of the important role of being a support provider for their spouse.

"It's just this awful loss, this awful gap in your life. This person in your life that you loved is just not there." P011WW: 49: 59

Second, widowhood removed the main support provider for the participants and they were forced to assume new responsibilities. P033 said simply:

"I suppose it was knowin' I had to do everything for myself, they'd be no one in the kitchen to shout 'make us a cup of tea while you're out there love!'." P033WM: 55: 66

Similarly, P042 discussed the challenge of having to learn new domestic tasks and the sheer volume of his day to day responsibilities.

"Domestic engineering, you had to learn (...) I mean I could cook before, but I had to do it all" P042WM: 55: 59

Widowed participants with children were forced to assume multiple roles in parenthood. This was particularly significant for those who had young children still living in the home.

"I'm now a single parent. That's hard work physically; it's really hard work physically. Erm, but the biggest way in which it's hardest is the sense of responsibility and I know that hit me really early on." P010WM: 42: 45

"It was just that huge 'everything is at my door now', do you know what I mean. Everything to do with them [children] is just my responsibility." P056WW: 24: 37

For P077WW, the changes in her responsibilities and routine were the most salient elements of her identity change in widowhood. Before her husband's death she had a high-powered job and described herself as a "career woman". She held a strong sense of self and had an active social life both with and independent from her husband. The division of household responsibilities was shared evenly between her and her husband. The adjustment to widowhood for P077 was to the change in her lifestyle and she describes having been in "survival mode" since her husband's death. At the time of the interview, she felt that she was finally starting to think about her future and consider who she could become. She explained:

"The death of T [husband] it's more the alteration of my life style so probably the fact that I'm not working, you know, you're a single mum really, well, youngish single mum to two children and not necessarily through paid work. It's almost like now I suppose having been in what I call survival mode for three years I'm starting to think about that I want to do and what I want, do I want to go, I have thought about what I want to do maybe just more for interest more than necessarily as a definite career path."* P077WW: 37: 40

10.4.2 Private identity Widowed participants described the loss of their private identity following widowhood. Their private identity had been anchored in their married relationship and when widowed they described feeling empty or feeling only half a person. P048 reflected back and said *"I didn't know who I was anymore"*. She continued on to say:

"He helped me define me, and without him there, erm, I wasn't really exposed or vulnerable it was just I didn't know, I didn't know who I was anymore (crying)."
P048WW: 44: 51

One man compared the loss of his wife to *"having an amputation"*. Explaining his loss, he said:

"A whole piece of me has gone, ceased to exist and it was quite suddenly and that is something all bereaving people have to come to terms with if they have had a good close relationship for a long time and as I said we'd been married for 47 years and known each other for over 50 years really." P075WM: 72: 79

This loss of private identity had a negative impact, at least in the short term, on the participants' sense of confidence, which in turn had consequences for social participation.

One man said simply:

"I think I am less confident, just generally in life I'm less confident. // It's changed me. I'm less kind of up and sociable, than I used to be." P010WM: 42: 45

Participants spoke of losing confidence in their appearance, their skills and abilities, and in their physical health. For one widowed woman, the sudden death of her husband had caused her to worry about her own health and restricted her from performing the social and leisure activities she enjoyed. She explained:

"I love swimming, I'd love to go, 'cos now I've got a bit more, I'd go to [leisure centre], go swimming. I can't be bothered. Cos I'm frightened that when I get there I'll collapse or do something. I've lost a lot of my confidence." P070WW: 61: 63

P011, a widowed woman, explained that changes in the private identity were not obvious to other people. This suggests that the identity work that takes place following widowhood, particularly in terms of the private identity, is personal and often goes unnoticed by family and friends.

"To me it's very personal to me in how I am really, but to the outside world I don't think it's a feature really." P011WW: 49: 59

Family and friends may not notice the private changes experienced following widowhood, at least in part, because the widowed deliberately conceal their emotions from their social network and put on a *"good mask"* (P057WW: 52: 57). P055WW explained:

"You see, everyone's so pleased that I'm so happy. But I'm not. I don't tell them that. They think 'cos you're out being busy, you're happy. You're not." P055WW: 52: 65

On the other hand, two widows, who were both widowed in mid-life, felt that their private identities remained relatively unchanged and did not describe any changes in self-confidence. They understood this to be a consequence of having a strong sense of self outside of the married relationship and collective identities that were independent to the marriage. This finding supports earlier research that suggests that the impact of widowhood on identity varies depending on the significance of the married relationship in defining identity (DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996; Lewandowski et al., 2006; Lopata, 1973a; Rosenblatt, 1988).

"Still think I'm me, 'cause I, although we were a couple we were quite you know, quite strong characters you know erm, so you know I think people would always say '[P057] and P [husband]' but I think they would split us, we weren't like a double act or anything so you know."* P057WW: 52: 57

"This very much depends on the individual, you've maybe retained, certainly I have, is retained a sense of yourself not kind of merged into this homogenous relationship with your husband so you've got more sense of your identity and self, so that perhaps makes losing that person slightly easier. I don't sort of feel lost without him, I don't feel like I'm nothing without him or anything like that, because I think I've still got a strong identity you know, my own interests and my own character and my own friends if that's what you mean." P077WW: 37: 40

Still for others, the interviews highlighted a conflict between collective and private identities. Privately, they maintained their identity as a wife to their husband but were aware of their new identity in their social network and society in general as a widow or widower. Bennett (2010) talked about an augmented identity in widowhood where widows view their identity as both a widow and a wife. There was some evidence of this in the interviews in this study.

"I still believe I'm married now, it just doesn't feel like it because he's not here anymore, if that makes sense." P077WW: 37: 40

"I don't feel as if I'm a widow. [Okay, what do you mean by that?] I still think of myself as 'Mrs. E', married."* P070WW: 61: 63

In line with this, the symbolic meaning of the wedding ring and the dilemma of wearing or not wearing their ring posed a challenge for some of the widowed participants. The wedding ring was viewed as part of their private identity as a spouse but they expressed

confusion as to whether their new social role as a widow or widower permitted them to wear it. P070 said:

"I wouldn't dream of taking it [wedding ring] off. It's mine. It's part of me."
P070WW: 61: 63

Earlier research suggests that widowhood may allow for personal growth and greater autonomy (Bennett, 2010; Fry, 1998). The interviews provided evidence that widowhood can provide opportunities for self-development. For some, widowhood gave them the opportunity to rediscover their own identity away from the married relationship. P056 felt she was only just learning her own identity. She explained:

"I've never been an adult and just been me, do you know what I mean. I feel that, although I'm stuck with the kids now, I'm only just finding out who me is."
P056WW: 24: 37

Similarly, P060 commented that he had made compromises for his wife during his marriage and he was now able to take up social activities and incorporate them into his 'new' identity.

"I just do my own thing for my own pleasure which I never did when I was married, I did it before I was married, err I stopped doing it for the twenty-three years I was married and I started again when, when I became single again." P060WM: 52: 73

Participants noted positive changes in their personal attributes. For example, some participants commented on how much more empathic and tuned in to other people's emotions they felt. Others said they felt more independent or that they were stronger because of their loss.

"Sort of seeing myself as quite empty [initially], it's definitely still there but not as pronounced and part of that I think is that, is now seeing myself as stronger."
P050WW: 31: 33

"I think I've become a much better friend. You talking about, "have you changed?" Well, I think I'm a much more empathetic person." P010WM: 42: 45

"I would probably still see myself as incomplete but perhaps a bit more independent as well." P050WW: 31: 33

It was common for the participants to express this new confidence and independence by describing the new skills they had acquired or challenges they had overcome. For example, P072 was interviewed at the time of the North-West region's digital television switchover.

With great satisfaction, she told the interviewer that she had successfully managed to get her television set 'digital ready' herself. She had also learnt to drive again since her husband's death and spoke of becoming more knowledgeable in general.

"Now I've just done all the tele things you know, today, you know switching over, if J [husband] had been here, I wouldn't have done that. Although having said that J* was absolutely hopeless at recording stuff, he was absolutely useless at it, erm, so I've had to, I'm more knowledgeable and when I drive, I think to myself if J* could only see me now." P072WW: 66: 70*

Positive changes in private identities also had a positive influence on social participation, including the formation of new social relationships and adoption of new social activities (Chapters 7, 8 and 9). This allowed them to develop new friendships, which in turn contributed to their sense of identity.

"I deliberately, well I went out for walks, and things like that and so I deliberately joined lots of groups and it's worked out for me." P055WW: 52: 65

A number of the widowed participants had formed new romantic relationships. These new relationships helped to develop their new identity in widowhood and were an important source of personal growth (Bennett 2007; Davidson, 2001). However, P050, a young widow aged 33 at interview, described the internal challenge of forming a new romantic relationship as a widow and trying to making sense of split-social roles in her identity as a wife to her dead husband as well as being a girlfriend in her new romantic relationship. She said:

"I'm a widow and I've got this relationship still through that to R [husband] but at the same time, I'm a girlfriend to someone." P050WW: 31: 33*

Religion emerged as an important sub-theme in the widowed interviews and there was evidence that religious faith formed part of the private identity for some participants. During the interview, these participants described the impact that widowhood had on their faith and on their relationship with God. For P050, widowhood strengthened her faith. She described it as *"one of the most significant periods of spiritual development"* and she said she felt *"closer to God than [she'd] ever done before"*. For others, the loss of their spouse challenged their religious faith and thus challenged their private identity. Loss of religious faith also had the potential to impact on social participation and collective identity through the associated loss of membership in church-related social groups.

"My faith was always rather fragile and since my wife died it's died too I'm afraid. I don't go to church now." P001WM: 63: 72

In summary, widowed men and women experienced change in both private and collective aspects of identity. The participants' experience of identity change provided support for previous findings that the more important the spouse and married relationship were to one's sense of identity, the greater the sense of loss. Identity reconstruction occurred over time as the widowed adjusted to the loss of their spouse and assumed new roles and responsibilities. Being younger at transition appeared to have greater consequences for changes in responsibilities and lifestyle, but those widowed at an older age were less likely to have an independent identity from their spouse and describe greater loss of identity upon widowhood. Both older and younger widows showed evidence of personal growth after widowhood. This was facilitated through adjustment to being widowed over time, adopting new hobbies, creating new friendships, and forming new romantic relationships.

10.5 Divorce

10.5.1 Collective identity The interviews revealed that the transition out of marriage through divorce was associated with psychological and behavioural changes that had an impact on the participants' sense of self (Gregson & Ceynar, 2009; Rahav & Baum, 2002). Research suggests that a person's social network is important for maintaining a sense of self (Cotten, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Thus, identity change following divorce may be explained by changes in the way the participants were viewed by others. Participants had often established a collective identity as being part of a couple during their married relationship and the transition to divorced status was associated with changes in their social role to being an individual, rather than a spouse who is part of a couple relationship. Chapter 7 explored the impact of divorce on the social network and identified both involuntary and voluntary changes in social relationships post-transition. For example P034 describes the loss of social relationships with other married couples (see page 103). Involuntary changes in the social network highlighted to the divorced participants' their collective identity and new social role as a divorced person. Participants were surprised at how much being a spouse had defined their identity within their social network. They felt

that their social role as a divorced person affected how people viewed them and that they were “pigeon holed” (P047SW: 39: 42) as a divorced person. As one woman summed it up:

“People do look at you differently. Not as in physically look at you but they think differently of you like you know, if I’ve got friends that are going out as couples, they’re not going to invite me because I don’t have anyone to go with, which is I suppose simple things like that.” P047SW: 39: 42

P053 admitted she was angry at being divorced and felt it was an undesirable “tag”.

“I was angry because I was angry I suppose at being divorced. I wasn’t very happy with that tag.” P053DW: 60: 67

Circumstances of divorce may demand a change in geographical location and those participants who relocated following divorce discussed having to form a new social role in a new community. For example, P028 re-located following her divorce and experienced major changes in her social relationships, environmental surroundings and her professional role, leading to important changes in her collective identity as an individual. She explained:

“I gave up my whole life, everything changed about my life when that broke up. I changed locations, jobs, all my friends, I lost all my friends, or you know, I thought I had done. My whole lifestyle changed.” P028DW: 29: 50

Divorce also allowed the participants to reconstruct their collective identity through social participation and developing new skills (Shihi, 1979). Financial independence gave the participants greater freedom to maintain and build upon levels of social participation. Social participation was important for participants’ sense of identity and voluntary changes to the social network, usually withdrawing from social relationships that were introduced by the spouse, allowed the divorced to re-establish themselves as a single person with valued family and friends, as in this quote from P047:

“Just cut myself off from a lot of people because I didn’t really want to see them or have anything to do with them because it just became too painful and all that kind of thing.” P047SW: 39: 42

Similar to previous research, participants conveyed a sense of having a new direction to their lives, with new social relationships and new interests (Gregson & Ceynar, 2009). Divorced participants created new lifestyles to give meaning to their lives as a single person. For example, P053 expressed her new sense of identity in terms of becoming more

positive in her outlook and in terms of the changes in her lifestyle, having adopted new interests and developed new friendships.

"I am me! Almost developed a new identity, you know. Well, with all the new interests I've got, and friends. I've resolved to have a very positive outlook on life. I didn't feel like that when I was married. In fact I felt quite miserable latterly, but now I have actually resolved to keep positive. Try and, my cup is half full!"

P053DW: 60: 67

Professional identity was also important for the participants and work provided a stable collective identity following divorce. P049 asserted that she felt happier and more confident with her professional identity.

"I am happier in who I am, and I feel like I'm on the right way, you know, on the right journey, and certainly, professionally I'm a lot happier, which is quite interesting, a lot more confident professionally than I ever was with my ex husband." P049SW: 35: 37

Many participants described having a greater sense of autonomy and independence in the social roles post-transition. For example, P026 said:

"My whole concept of myself has changed since the separation because as I say, now, considering being by myself rather than being a wife." P026SW: 44: 45

She continued on to describe how her changing social role and responsibilities after her separation had allowed her to develop her sense of competence in new skills. For 20 years of married life, she had never managed household finances. Following her divorce she has discovered who she is and what she is capable of.

"Practical things like previously I'd dealt with all the children and the food, and my husband had dealt with finance. I'd never dealt with finance, and then suddenly having to deal with all the bills that are to do with the house, like telephone, and gas and electric. Changing everything to my own name." P026SW: 44: 45

P045 expressed a sense of satisfaction in what she had accomplished since her divorce and how, over time, she had come to feel proud in her social role as a single mother to her young daughter.

"First of all I felt like I was the first person in the world that was single, but now I'm actually very proud of it. Erm, you know, because you get people like 'oof single parent' and I'll say yes, I'm a single parent and I manage all by myself. I keep the roof over our heads, I put food in the cupboards, I go to work, I pay the bills."

P045DW: 42: 45

In another interview, P053 talked about altering their physical appearance after divorce and paying closer attention to her self-presentation. For her, divorce had a positive impact on how she presented herself:

"It made me glam up again, which is good. It made me look at my wardrobe and think, that doesn't look sexy more!" P053DW: 60: 67

From the interviews there was a sense that, rather than losing their identity, divorce and the new social roles that were formed actually gave participants an opportunity to re-discover their identity prior to marriage (Gregson & Ceynar, 2009). It allowed them to re-establish or strengthen relationships with family and close friends and pursue their passions and interests. When the divorced participants discussed their new identity and social role and considered their current lifestyle and future plans, most saw divorce as a positive event. Even those participants who had not initiated the divorce proceedings felt that divorce had been *"the best thing in the long run"* (P045DW: 42: 45), despite perhaps having been unaware of, or opposed to it prior to marital dissolution. At least for the participants in this study, there was no sense of longer-term identity conflict unlike in cohabitation, marriage and widowhood.

Participants experienced important changes in the exchange of social support, specifically in the loss of support from their spouse, and identity change emerged as a product of the new responsibilities the participants assumed in their social role as a divorcee. Their support responsibilities to their spouse ended and they became solely responsible for daily household decisions and routine activities. This was particularly evident in the interviews with divorced parents who took on the role of 'single parent'. Having younger children was associated with a higher number of practical demands for the participants and less time available for themselves. For example, P021 said:

"You've still got to get up tomorrow and be a mum unfortunately, and just being more responsible really." P021DW: 29: 37

P047 expanded on this to reveal how her role as a single parent restricts the opportunities she has to redevelop her own identity and participate in social activities.

"I don't do a lot, I've got to admit, because when you're a single parent and you're working, and you've got kids, and they do a lot of things then my main focus is them." P047SW: 39: 42

There was some evidence in this study that divorce had a greater impact on identity for women, and particularly for divorced mothers. As Lund (1990) suggested, several of the divorced mothers had lost their sense of self through their roles as wife and mother and experienced greater difficulty re-formulating their identity post-transition because of the practical demands placed upon them following divorce.

10.5.2 Private identity Participants described having lost at least part of their own personal sense of identity upon divorce through the loss of their spouse. For example, P032 described herself as a *“loose limb”* (P032SW: 33: 35) as a single person. P026 noted that she was no longer *“half of a partnership”* and noted that this changed how she viewed her current and future lifestyles. She said:

“I suppose I feel differently about myself. I’m no longer one half of a partnership. My future as I viewed it has completely changed so I’m having to kind of reposition myself within my life and decide where I’m going, rather than where we’re going.”
P026SW: 44: 45

Unlike in widowhood, divorce involves the separation of two surviving spouses from the same married relationship, with one or sometimes both members of the marriage initiating divorce proceedings. This meant that there was greater variability between the experiences of identity loss in the interviews compared to in widowhood. Hopper (2001; p129) said, *“marriage is valued both as an institution and as a personal accomplishment, and it is a relationship that is supposed to last forever. Divorce violates the profound value we attach to marriage, and it represents a personal failure for both spouses.”* In line with this, three participants described viewing themselves as a failure or feeling ashamed following divorce (Kim & McKenry, 2002).

“From a personal point of view in the beginning I had no confidence, no self esteem, I felt totally and utterly worthless” P047SW: 39: 42

“Failure, as I said, so far as looking at myself is concerned. I don’t like myself very much.” P009SM: 24: 57

In another interview, P053 talked about how she felt after her divorce and her words provide an insight into the role of the timing of divorce on how the participants viewed themselves. She felt that experiencing divorce at aged 60 after twenty-seven years of marriage had a greater stigma attached to it and that it raised more questions from family and friends.

“I felt, for me, I felt ashamed, yeah. That I was, at this time of my life, divorced.”
P053DW: 60: 67

Participants also described losing confidence in themselves immediately after divorce. This was particularly the case for those participants who were initially opposed to their divorce or where the decision to divorce was made after finding out about their spouses' infidelity. For example, P045's husband had an extra-marital affair and she felt that this had a negative impact on her confidence in her skills and her appearance. She described not wanting to socialise in the immediate period that followed marital dissolution. She said:

"I didn't like myself, erm, and I think a lot of it related to him having an affair."
P045DW: 42: 45

P046 discussed the loss of confidence he experienced when his wife initiated divorce proceedings:

"The person rejected was me, me as me, not anything else, me as a person and that's hard to come to terms with. I promise you, that is a toughie to come to terms with it. You being rejected because of you." P046DM: 45: 64

Divorce often followed an extended period of marital dissatisfaction and many participants were aware of their marital problems for a long time prior to divorce. For these participants, identity loss and associated loss of confidence appeared before the actual divorce (DeGarmo & Kitson, 2001; Kitson, 1990), as expressed by P026:

"Things are made harder because I suppose the last probably five years of the marriage you subconsciously know things aren't going right and you don't know why and so, there are, you know, within a relationship you start, probably separating emotionally and so I suppose you (...) the way you view yourself (...) if you view yourself in terms of what kind of wife you are, if your reference to yourself is within your partnership and something's going wrong with your partnership, I suppose your self-esteem probably starts going down, and you feel and view yourself differently." P026SW: 44: 45

On the one side divorced participants discussed the loss of private identity as a spouse and the associated changes in confidence following divorce. On the other side, they also described a positive process of identity transformation following transition (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Tedeschi, Park & Calhoun, 1998). Positive changes in identity emerged as participants began to re-evaluate themselves after divorce and gain a greater sense of agency. For example, P034 reflected back to her married relationship and felt that she had compromised her identity and had "lost her way".

"I think I always thought of myself as quite autonomous but I think when I was married I did lose my way a bit in that, I found being married a struggle I think. I felt like I'd lost my identity a bit with it." P034DW: 30: 33

P049 noted that she had forgotten who she was during her marriage and described the time after her separation as a time of “*re-establishing who I am*” (P049WW: 35: 37). Likewise, P079 talked about the new freedom he had to pursue his own interests, reconnect with his family and friends, and engage with new activities without feeling restricted.

“I was comfortable in, it was comfortable convenience, in that we had a house, we had a very small social circle and I felt like that was my lot when in fact what was going on internally was that I had interests and you know, I enjoyed music, I enjoyed going to gigs and I wanted to do all the things, I wanted to get fit, I had an interest in reading and learning more things and trying to further my career in some way, be good at what I did, and all of that stuff that was going on internally has come out and I’m learning new things and I’m pursuing interests I’m interested in.” P079DM: 30: 33

As in P079’s experience, the positive changes in private identity post-transition facilitated positive changes in social participation, including the formation of new friendships and the pursuit of new hobbies. For many participants, one of the most important changes that emerged over time following divorce was in feeling more confident in their new identity. This was particularly the case for those participants who had initiated divorce proceedings and those who felt their marriage had been unsatisfactory. P062 felt her divorce had made her “*a better person*” (P062DW: 24: 31). Other participants described having more confidence, feeling more outgoing, being more relaxed, feeling more youthful and having a greater sense of strength.

“I am more confident. I think I’m more sure of myself now. It’s been if anything a positive experience on a whole, although every day that goes by I wish that it [marriage and divorce] didn’t happen, but I feel better for where I am now.” P079DM: 30: 33

“I’m more myself again now, stronger.” P032SW: 33: 35

“When we were together, in terms of how I see myself, I was very down on myself and I feel, I’m starting to feel much better about myself now, over the past say six months.” P078SM: 40: 42

In summary, the interviews demonstrated a breadth and variety in the experience of identity reconstruction following divorce but revealed that, overall, divorce is associated with a positive change in identity. Over the interviews, participants expressed experiencing an initial loss of identity and associated changes in confidence (Kohen, 1981, cited in Gregson & Ceynar, 2009). Over time, they described being able to rebuild their identity and

regain a greater sense of individual autonomy and self-confidence through revaluing their lifestyles (Dreman & Aldor, 1994; Gregson & Ceynar 2009). Divorce provided an opportunity for men and women to rediscover themselves and may be viewed as a period of self-development. Circumstances surrounding the divorce were important for initial changes in private identity and the experience of divorce may vary by age, gender and financial status. Further, since identity emerged as being closely related to social relationships, identity change upon divorce may also vary by social participation where those with well-formed, supportive social networks experience less negative identity disruption.

10.6 Contextual factors

10.6.1 Age Identity reconstruction may vary by contextual factors including age and gender (Diedrick, 1991; DiGiulio, 1992; Rahav & Baum, 2002). In general, those participants who experienced the transition into a cohabiting or married relationship at a younger age described greater identity disruption, which was related to greater changes in their responsibilities and to social participation compared to older participants. Cohabiting and married participants who were older at transition described a more stable sense of identity at transition, on account of having established collective identities that were separate from their marital status in their social networks and in their professional roles. Older participants appeared to be more grateful of their collective identity as a spouse and some expressed a relief at becoming part of a couple. Widowhood is a life event typically associated with later life. Younger participants were less prepared for their role as a widowed person and often experienced greater disruption to their collective identity in terms of practical responsibilities, especially those with young children, and with adjusting to their status as widow or widower in their social network without a peer group. On the other hand, older widowed men and women lost their spouse after a longer period of marriage. One could argue that for older widowed participants' identity would be more anchored in the married relationship and they would experience a greater sense of loss of self upon widowhood. However, the sense of loss following spousal bereavement was great irrespective of age. Rather, it was the individual circumstances that dictated the nature of identity change following widowhood, including the impact of widowhood on the social network and exchange of support, the extent to which a person's identity was grounded in the married relationship, the practical demands of having young children, and

the financial independence to reconstruct identity through social participation. In terms of divorce, being younger was associated with a shorter marital duration and therefore generally less identity disruption upon divorce. As in widowhood, individual circumstances influenced how and the extent to which the participants experienced identity change following divorce. Fewer involuntary changes in the social network and exchange of support, being less reliant on the married relationship for one's sense of identity, having fewer practical demands and greater financial independence were all associated with less identity disruption upon divorce. Younger divorced participants and those without young children in the home were also more likely to describe a desire to re-partner following divorce.

10.6.2 Gender Overall, men had less to say in the interviews about identity reconstruction in the face of marital status change compared to women. That is not to say that men did not experience identity reconstruction to the same extent as women, only that they did not report them. Further, the interview schedule did not focus on identity and the questions did not explicitly ask about identity reconstruction. In Chapters 8 and 9, women emerged as being the relationship specialists and had an important role in maintaining the social networks for the married couple. This chapter also demonstrated that marriage provided a greater collective identity for men compared to women and women were more likely to describe their collective identity as being anchored in their social relationships as well as in their marriage. This could lead to greater identity disruption for men following widowhood and divorce. However, the data revealed the opposite pattern where women were more likely to describe a loss of private and collective identity following transition out of marriage. This may be, in part, because widowed and divorced women are viewed more negatively compared to men by their social networks and considered a threat to married women. Further, if women view their identity within their marriage and their social relationships and experience losses in both aspects of their collective identity then it is perhaps not surprising that they experience greater disruption upon marital status transition. On the other hand, women found it easier to reconstruct their identities following marital status change and were more likely to describe developing new social relationships and adopting new interests post-transition. These conclusions are drawn with caution as this emerging pattern could also be explained by men being less likely to discuss identity in the interviews.

10.7 Conclusions

Cohabitation, marriage, widowhood and divorce have been noted as life events likely to trigger the reconstruction of a person's identity (Bennett, 2010; Burke, 2006; Macklin, 1972; Rahav & Baum, 2002). This study provides evidence that marital status change, particularly transitions out of marriage, are associated with important changes in identity for both men and women. Participants discussed changes to both their private and collective identities. Specifically, following entry into a cohabiting or married relationship people experience a personal and social change in identity from 'I' to 'we'. This is associated with generally positive changes in private and collective identities, including increased confidence, new roles and responsibilities and changes in social participation. In contrast, the change to widowed or divorced status is associated with a change from 'we' to 'I' and forces people to re-evaluate their private and collective identities. The widowed and divorced may experience a sense of not knowing who they are to themselves; to their social network; and to society in general post-transition. Widowed people also describe the loss of both their private and collective identities upon spousal bereavement. Identifying as a widow or widower, personally as well as socially, is recognised as a challenge but as the widowed adjust to their new marital status, transformations in the collective identity may prompt changes in the private identity. For example, in this study, the widowed adopted new interests, made voluntary changes to their social network and developed new social, and for some, romantic relationships. In turn, these changes to the collective identity developed their sense of confidence and independence in their private identities. Although the widowed participants described being able to rebuild their identity post-transition there was a sense that their private identity, at least in part, remained anchored in their role as wife. The findings suggest that the divorced experience the loss of collective identity but, in general, experience positive changes to their personal identities over time. As in widowhood, as the divorced adjust to being single, increased confidence and autonomy in their private identities encourages them to make changes to their collective identities through new hobbies, restructuring the social network, developing new friendships and romantic relationships.

PART FOUR

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 11

The impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing and social participation: Synthesis of research findings

11.1 Introduction

This thesis set out to explore and understand the impact of marital status transitions on psychological wellbeing and social participation, viewed here as a multi-dimensional construct incorporating the exchange of formal and informal social support and social engagement with members of the social network (Utz et al., 2002). A central objective of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of the influence that age has on the psychological and social outcomes of a change in marital status. Although extensive research has been carried out on marital status differences in psychological health (e.g. Wade & Pevalin, 2004), previous studies have not considered the contribution of social participation in detail. Adopting a unique combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, this thesis is able to address its initial aims. First, quantitative studies consider longitudinal patterns of psychological health for men and women who experience a change in marital status compared to those who remain married, and investigate the contribution of social support to the relationship between marital status and psychological health. Next, qualitative studies sought to explore the impact of marital status change on social participation, in terms of the construction of the social network and the exchange of social support. The qualitative interviews also reveal important changes in collective and private identities following marriage status change and suggest that identity change can be viewed as both a cause and a consequence of changes in social participation. Together, the results from these studies confirm that a change in marital status has important consequences for both psychological health and social participation. Further, the findings suggest that changes in both identity and social participation may mediate the relationship between marital status and psychological health. This chapter discusses the main findings of this thesis in view of the initial research aims, integrating previous research.

11.2 Marital status and psychological health

One aim of this thesis was to understand the impact of marital status transition on psychological wellbeing. Using a quantitative approach, Chapter 3 makes use of secondary data from the BHPS which allowed access to nationally representative, longitudinal data to

measure the impact of marital status change on psychological health. Using nine annual time points of BHPS data, this longitudinal study was able to investigate the patterns of psychological health before and after marital status transition. Consistent with previous research, Chapter 3 demonstrates that the widowed and divorced report significantly lower levels of psychological health compared to the married and shows that transitions out of marriage have a negative impact on psychological wellbeing (Gove et al., 1983; Lee et al., 1991; Marks, 1996; Richards et al., 1997; Umberson et al., 1992; Waite, 1995). The results also reveal that the impact of divorce may occur prior to transition, with evidence of increased levels of psychological distress in the years preceding divorce as well as lowered levels of psychological wellbeing in the years immediately after divorce (Booth & Amato, 1991). However, this pattern of change is not present in the widowed respondents, and the profiles of the continuously widowed and continuously divorced are similar to the continuously married. This confirms previous findings that the impact of widowhood is at transition and the negative impact of becoming widowed on psychological health recovers over time (Lopata, 1996; Lund et al., 1993; Stroebe et al., 1993; Wilcox et al., 2003). In contrast to existing research (French & Williams, 2007; Marks & Lambert, 1998), the transition into a married relationship provides no significant benefits to psychological health.

Chapter 4's cross-sectional questionnaire study further supports the significant association between marital status and psychological health. In this study, the widowed and divorced report significantly lower levels of psychological health compared to the married (Booth & Amato, 1991; Hewitt et al., 2010; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Simon, 2002; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Unfortunately, this study was unable to control for time since transition, which may go some way to explaining the disparity of this study's results to those for the continuously widowed and continuously divorced in Chapter 3. However, taken together, although the findings do not provide a decisive timeframe for the impact of widowhood or divorce, they do highlight that transitions out of marriage have negative consequences for psychological health. Moreover, Chapter 4's study considers partnership status in addition to marital status categories, including cohabiting and LAT relationships. In contrast to earlier research (Brown et al., 2005; Kim & McKenry, 2002; Stack & Eshleman, 1998), no significant differences emerge between the married and either the cohabiting or LAT respondents. This suggests that the health benefits of marriage may also be available to those in other types of relationship. The reason for the differences between these and earlier findings are not clear, but they may reflect changing demographic trends,

including the increasing trend for people to postpone marriage, or cohabitation as a precursor or alternative to marriage (Liu & Umberson, 2008; Summerfield & Babb, 2004; Wilson, 2009). Alternatively, a possible explanation for this result may be the lack of adequate controls in this analysis for other variables such as marital quality, marital duration or beliefs about marriage. Chapter 4's results also present a picture of additional factors that are important for psychological wellbeing. First, people's use of coping strategies, as measured by Brief COPE (Carver, 1997), explain a significant amount of variance in psychological wellbeing, where the use of active coping strategies is positively correlated with psychological health (Felsten, 1998; Folkman, 1997; Zautra et al., 1995) while negative coping strategies are associated with lower levels of psychological health (Billings & Moos, 1981; Carver et al., 1989; Felsten, 1998). Second, the higher the number of hassles experienced, as measured by SRLE (Kohn & Macdonald, 1992), the lower the level of psychological health (Kanner et al., 1981; Serido et al., 2004; Ungar & Florian, 2004).

A second aim of this thesis was to better understand the association between marital status and psychological wellbeing. Social support has been previously recognised as an important predictor of psychological health where the presence of supportive social relationships and better access to social support is associated with better levels of psychological health (Cohen & Wills, 1985; House et al., 1988; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Thoits, 1995; Umberson et al., 1996; Ungar & Florian, 2004). Chapters 4 and 5 consider the extent to which social support might explain marital status differences in psychological health. In line with existing research, multiple regression (Chapter 4) reveals that perceived social support is positively associated with psychological health and is the most significant contributor to psychological wellbeing variables. Further, in Chapter 5's analyses perceived social support emerges as a significant mediator between marital status and psychological wellbeing for the widowed, divorced and never married. According to the findings in this thesis, the never married show generally similar levels of psychological health compared to the married, but report significantly lower levels of social support. Being never married has a significant indirect effect on psychological wellbeing where never married adults report poorer psychological health compared to the married through lower levels of perceived social support.

Existing findings on gender are mixed, but previous research proposes that women have generally lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to men (Fox, 1980) and

that the relationship between marital status and psychological health might vary by gender (St John & Montgomery, 2009; Williams & Umberson, 2004). As expected, the findings show that women generally report poorer psychological health, regardless of marital status, and have a less stable profile of psychological wellbeing compared to men over time (Chapter 3). Interestingly, no gender difference emerges at point of transition for the recently divorced. That men and women report similar levels of psychological health at divorce when women typically have lower levels of psychological health demonstrates that the immediate impact of divorce may be worse for men compared to women. One possible explanation could be the greater loss of social ties and associated social support for men following divorce compared to women (Pinquart, 2003). Gender did not emerge as a significant predictor of psychological health in Chapter 4 but this may be attributable to smaller numbers of men compared to women in the sample.

11.3 Marital status and social participation

Marriage provides a fundamental basis for support and the married typically enjoy higher levels of social support compared to other marital status groups (Milardo & Duck, 2000; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Waldron et al., 1996) and previous research has noted the importance of personal and social resources for marital status differences in psychological health (Bookwala & Fekete, 2009; Soons & Liefbroer, 2008). The quantitative questionnaire study in Chapters 4 and 5 reveals marital status differences in perceived social support, as measured by the MOS-SSS, and highlights social support as a significant mediator in the relationship between marital status and psychological health. More specifically, on the basis of this study, the widowed, divorced and never married experience significantly lower levels of perceived social support compared to the married, which has a negative indirect effect on psychological wellbeing in these groups. Interestingly, the remarried, who will have previously experienced a transition out of marriage, continue to report lower levels of social support compared to the married, but this difference is non-significant here.

Given the importance of social support for psychological wellbeing (Chapters 4 and 5), a central objective for the qualitative study was to build a more detailed picture of marital status differences in social support and explore the impact of marital status change on social participation. Previous research in this area has tended to make use of a quantitative approach and has therefore been limited to quantifiable elements of social support or social network density (e.g. Kalmijn & Broese van Groenou, 2005; Kaunonen et

al., 1999; Terhell et al., 2007). Instead, this study adopted an in-depth qualitative interview method and was able to generate information rich data that allowed for a deeper understanding of the social changes associated with a marital status transition. Four central and related themes emerge from the interview data including changes in the structure of the social network (Chapter 7); changes in the exchange of social support (Chapter 8); changes in social engagement (Chapter 9); and changes in identity (Chapter 10). Overall, changes in the structure of the social network following marital status transition have implications for the exchange of social support for participants, and changes in identity emerge as both a cause and consequence of changes in social participation.

This thesis is effective at showing the impact of marital status change on social networks and social support. Transitions into cohabiting or married relationships allow for a widening of the social network and associated gains in social support through the spouse. Moreover, the cohabiting and married are more likely to look to their spouse for most of their support needs and describe a shift to a more family and couples centred pattern of social engagement post-transition. Generally, these transitions are viewed as positive and cohabiters and the married are satisfied with the levels of social support available to them. In contrast, transitions out of marriage significantly reshape the social environment, leading to a degree of atrophy of the social network and a loss of social support. The support needs of the widowed and divorced appear to be greater compared to the married, yet transitions out of marriage are typically associated with a loss of both kin and friend ties and an associated withdrawal of support. This is particularly evident where social relationships are introduced and maintained primarily by the spouse. Divorced interview participants report the lowest levels of social support and are more likely to describe feeling socially isolated as a consequence of their divorce, especially in the immediate period around transition. Importantly, both widowhood and divorce allow people to reconstruct the social network and develop new supportive relationships, and the younger widowed and divorced express a greater interest in forming new romantic relationships. However, for the widowed, the support from their spouse was not easily replaced. Mirroring the quantitative findings, the results of the qualitative study illustrate the importance of social support for men and women, regardless of marital status. However, while the cohabiting and married are generally satisfied with the social support available to them, the widowed and divorced are more likely to describe negative patterns of change over time in the exchange of social support with members of their social

network. Across marital status groups, women hold more supportive relationships and receive higher levels of social support from members of their social network compared to men. Together, these findings present a new body of evidence that helps researchers understand the social implications of marital status transitions, including the impact that they have on relationships with family and friends; how they affect the availability of emotional, informational and instrumental support and social companionship; and their effect on social engagement.

The qualitative study also demonstrates a process of identity change following marital status transition, particularly for those experiencing a transition out of marriage (Bennett, 2010; Burke, 2006; Macklin, 1972; Rahav & Baum, 2002). Participants describe changes in both their private and collective identities as they assume their new marital status and its associated role and responsibilities. Cohabitation and marriage is associated with generally positive changes in identity and a shift from 'I' to 'we'. Widowhood and divorce, on the other hand, involves the loss of a spouse and a social and personal change from 'we' to 'I', prompting an active and challenging process of identity reconstruction. Important widowhood and divorce may also allow for personal growth (Acock & Demo, 1994; Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Riessmann, 1990). The findings suggest that identity has an important role in the influence of marital status on social participation and general happiness, particularly for the widowed and divorced (DeGarmo & Kitson, 2001; Umberson & Williams, 1993; Utz et al., 2002; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). One possibility is that widowhood and divorce not only involves the loss of the spouse, but also changes the structure of the social network as a consequence of a new 'single' identity, isolating people from the contexts in which they were embedded when married. A different pathway may be that the widowed and divorced actively respond to their new marital status by rebuilding their social networks to compensate for the loss of the spouse. Thus, changes in social identity may lead to involuntary changes in social participation. In contrast changes in the private identity appear to dictate changes in who people want to surround themselves with following a change in marital status, with some evidence of marital status homogeneity (Kalmijn & Vermunt, 2007; McPherson et al., 2001). This unexpected theme provides a new perspective for researchers in the field. Together, the qualitative findings confirm that marital status change has an important impact on social participation and that the support exchanged with members of the social network was seen to change over time, particularly for those experiencing a transition out of marriage.

11.4 Theoretical perspective

The results of the studies in this thesis each provide a report of how marital status transitions, particularly those transitions out of marriage, have an important impact on both psychological wellbeing and social participation. Based on the findings within this thesis, the widowed and divorced report significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the married and transitions out of marriage have a negative impact on psychological wellbeing (Gove et al., 1983; Lee et al., 1991; Marks, 1996; Richards et al., 1997; Strohschein et al., 2005; Umberson et al., 1992; Waite, 1995). Further, the negative impact of divorce on psychological health occurs prior to transition and continues in the year following marital dissolution before recovering over time (Booth & Amato, 1991; Gardner & Oswald, 2006). Entering a married relationship, on the other hand, has no significant benefits to psychological health and in contrast to earlier research (Brown et al., 2005; Stack & Eshleman, 1998), those who have never married or are in cohabiting or LAT relationships attain similar levels of psychological health to the continuously married. Importantly, the results suggest negative effects of being never-married are higher for older individuals (Barrett, 1999; Mastekaasa, 1995). This thesis also shows that there are marital status differences in social participation, and that those in a relationship enjoy higher levels of social support from members of their social network compared to the widowed, divorced and never married (Brown, 2000; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Waldron et al., 1996; Ward & Leigh, 1993). Moreover, the findings of this thesis reveal that not only is social support positively related to psychological health (House et al., 1988; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001; Thoits, 1995), but also that social support acts as a mediator in the relationship between marital status and psychological wellbeing for the widowed, divorced and never married. Thus, marital status may exert an influence on psychological health through an intermediary factor of social support. In this way, the cohabiting and LAT groups may enjoy similar levels of psychological health to the married on account of the better levels of social support afforded by being in a relationship (Dush & Amato, 2005; Ross, 1995; Soons & Liefbroer, 2008). Further work using a larger, more representative sample is required to establish this. Qualitative results in this thesis support the quantitative findings, demonstrating marital status differences in social support and revealing that a change in marital status has a strong impact on social participation, particularly for those experiencing a transition out of marriage. More specifically, transitions into cohabiting or married relationships are associated with generally positive changes in the exchange of social support while widowhood and divorce have negative

consequences for social support and the construction of the social network (Bidart & Lavenu, 2005; Glaser et al., 2006; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993; Terhell et al., 2007; Utz et al., 2002). Marital status change, particularly widowhood and divorce, have an important impact on both social and private identities. Widowhood and divorce force men and women to reconstruct their identity and this process of identity change emerges as both a cause and consequence of changes in social participation.

While the association between marital status and psychological wellbeing is well supported in the literature (Diener et al., 2000; Horwitz et al., 1996; Marks & Lambert, 1998; Simon, 2002; Strohschein et al., 2005; Wade & Pevalin, 2004; Waite & Gallagher, 2000), this thesis expands on the empirical knowledge of factors that contribute to psychological health and presents perceived social support as an important resource that varies by marital status and mediates the relationship between marital status and psychological health. Several explanations have been suggested for the association between marital status and psychological health. These theories are not mutually exclusive, and it is now generally accepted that a combination of selective and causal factors may be responsible for marital status differences in health (Horwitz et al., 1996; Umberson & Williams, 1999). First, marital selection theory (e.g. Stutzer & Frey, 2006) asserts that health status precedes marital status where better levels of health in the married results from the selection of healthier individuals into marriage, and less healthy individuals out of marriage. A test for marital selection requires longitudinal data, like the BHPS panel survey data used in Chapter 3. In Chapter 3's study there is some evidence that the psychological wellbeing of the divorced is lower compared to the married even four years prior to transition. However, this analysis was concerned with differences in the profile of psychological wellbeing between marital status groups and did not specifically test whether psychological health at the start of the survey predicted divorce. Future work to address this question might involve the use of different methods of statistical analysis (e.g. survival analysis) with adequate control for potential confounding variables. Due to the nature of the study methodology and the use of cross-sectional data in Chapters 4 and 5, this thesis cannot conclusively evaluate the presence of a selection effect or identify whether the emerging pattern was simply a consequence a marital discord prior to divorce. Nevertheless, evidence in this thesis suggests that there are other social and psychological factors which account for at least some of the psychological health differences between the married and divorced, including number of daily hassles and perceived social support.

Second is marital protection theory (e.g. Waite, 1995), which proposes the married enjoy better levels of health compared to the unmarried as a consequence of the social and economic benefits of the married relationship. There is some evidence to support a theory of marital protection in this thesis. For example, in Chapters 3 and 4 the married have significantly higher levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the widowed and divorced. Equally, in the qualitative study, married participants describe receiving more social support and being generally happier compared to other groups. However, this explanation is called into question when considering the quantitative findings for the never married, cohabiting and LAT groups, who are not married and yet attain similar levels of psychological health to those in a married relationship.

Next, according to the crisis hypothesis (e.g. Booth & Amato, 1991), the experience of transitioning out of a marriage is a stressful life event that leads to temporary changes in psychological wellbeing. The psychological health profiles over time for both the recently widowed and recently divorced groups in Chapter 3 support this explanation and indicate that psychological health can improve over time. However, Chapter 4 found that the continuously widowed and divorced have significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared to the married. Admittedly, there was no control for time since transition in this study, but the qualitative interview findings also suggest that the negative impact of widowhood and divorce persists over time.

Alternatively, social causation theory (e.g. Pearlin & Johnson, 1977) proposes that the lower levels of health in the widowed and divorced groups can be explained through the negative impact of the transition out of marriage and the associated changes in social and economic resources. In line with this explanation, Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that the lower levels of psychological wellbeing in the widowed and divorced groups is related to a higher number of daily hassles and a lower level of perceived social support. Moreover, the results in this thesis show that widowhood and divorce influence psychological wellbeing indirectly through perceived social support. Essentially, the quantitative findings highlight that the comparatively lower levels of psychological health in the widowed and divorced may be explained by their lower levels of social support which was presumably lost upon transition out of marriage. These findings are supported in the qualitative study where the widowed and divorced participants describe the considerable *loss* of social support following the loss of their spouse. Participants experience a loss of emotional, informational, and instrumental support and social

companionship, and are forced to reconstruct both their collective and private identities. Many of the challenges faced following transition, particularly for the widowed, are a consequence of the loss of spousal support and the ensuing loss of wider social relationships. Overall, the findings in this thesis suggest that marital status influences psychological health and provide strong evidence for the social causation model. Specifically, social participation has an important role in the association between marital status and psychological health and it is the *loss* of social support in widowhood and divorce, as well as the associated changes in identity, including the *loss* of social status, that creates the evident marital status differences in psychological wellbeing.

11.5 Age and timing of marital status transitions

A central aim of this thesis was to consider the influence of age and, specifically, the timing of marital status transitions on their impact on psychological wellbeing and social participation. Applying a life course perspective (e.g. Neugarten, 1976), marital status transitions that occur within the socially 'normative' timetable cause less disruption and require less adjustment compared to those that occur 'off-time'. There is some evidence in the existing literature that the timing of marital status transitions may affect the relative impact of marital status change, where off-time transitions have more negative consequences for psychological health (Ensel & Lin, 2000; Kitson, 2000; Lopata, 1996; Scannell-Desch, 2003; Wang & Amato, 2000; Williams & Umberson, 2004). There is also some indication that the timing of marital status transitions has an impact on social relationships, particularly in widowhood (Chiriboga & Catron, 1991; Lopata, 1979; Lund et al., 1990).

The findings in this thesis suggest that the relationship of age on both psychological wellbeing and social participation is complex. In the quantitative studies, psychological wellbeing in general is positively related to age where older adults report better levels of psychological health. Moreover, the widowed and divorced also show different profiles of psychological wellbeing over time by age (Chapter 3) and age related differences in psychological wellbeing are found for the widowed and never married groups (Chapter 4). Essentially, being a younger widow or widower significantly predicts lower levels of psychological health (Lopata, 1996), and older never married people have lower levels of

life satisfaction compared to the younger never married (Barrett, 1999; Mastekaasa, 1995; Ward, 1979).

The qualitative study (Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10) provides an in-depth investigation into the influence of age and allows consideration for the context of each participant's experiences. Cohabitation and marriage at any age typically have positive implications for social participation and general happiness. The timing of a transition into a cohabiting or married relationship does not appear to be particularly influential on people's experiences, although, for those who married later, there is some indication that the adjustment to being married is more difficult as a consequence of having established a longer-term identity as an individual on their own although those who marry later express a greater sense of relief at no longer being unmarried. Equally, younger people may experience considerable identity disruption as a result of greater changes in their role and responsibilities and social participation compared to older participants.

In contrast, the transition out of marriage through widowhood has negative consequences for social participation and general happiness, regardless of age. Moreover, there are clear differences in the nature of the challenges faced by younger and older widowed participants. This is consistent with previous research which suggests that the challenges of being widowed in later life may differ from those in earlier life (Bennett, 1996; 1997; Lopata, 1979; 1996; Thuen et al., 1997; Zisook et al., 1994). Principally, younger widows and widowers are less prepared for their role as a widowed person and are less likely to have a widowed peer group for support. Further, the current findings suggest that the younger widowed often have additional responsibilities to children and ageing parents and usually have a full-time job to sustain. Together, these responsibilities may restrict social engagement with existing members of the social network and limit opportunities to engage in new activities to form new social relationships and are likely to cause significant disruption to private and collective identities. On the other hand, older widows and widowers may have smaller social networks prior to spousal bereavement, as a consequence of peer illness or death and they are generally more reliant on the spouse as the main source of social support and sense of private and collective identity. In addition, those widowed at an older age are more likely to be limited by physical health complaints and less economic power compared to their younger counterparts. Importantly, in this study some of the widowed adults were drawn from bereavement

support groups and, therefore, their experiences may not reflect the experiences of other widowed adults.

The experience of divorce, at any age, is associated with substantial changes in social participation and the divorced may be at greater risk of social isolation compared to the widowed. Unlike in widowhood, age at divorce played a smaller role in the experiences of marital dissolution. Younger age at divorce is usually associated with a shorter marital duration and, therefore, a less established social identity as a couple. As a consequence, younger divorcees generally experience less disruption to social participation and identity compared to older divorcees with a longer marital duration. Consistent with previous research, there is some evidence that the negative effects of divorce may be greatest for those with young children in the home (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006). However, the experience of divorce appears to be more closely related to the level of reliance on the former spouse for social support and identity and the circumstances of the divorce process itself including, but not limited to, a person's initiator status, changes in finances, and changes in residency.

In summary, the findings suggest that the experience of marital status transitions may vary across the life course as a consequence of the social and physical circumstances that relate to growing older. These individual circumstances dictate the construction of the social network and the exchange of social support with members of the social network, but also have an important impact on the nature of identity change following marital status transition. Based on the findings in this study, the timing of spousal bereavement has clear implications on the experience of widowhood. In contrast, age at transition had a much smaller influence on the experience of cohabitation, marriage and divorce. However, caution is applied here since the age range in these groups was not as extreme as the widowed group. Future research should consider a wider range of ages in these groups to fully determine the influence of timing on the relative impact of these marital status transitions.

11.6 Implications

This thesis makes an important contribution to literature in the area of marital status, social support, and psychological wellbeing. This thesis has particular strengths in showing

how marital status transitions impact psychological health and social participation.

Specifically, the research highlights the following points:

- Marital status change has an impact on psychological wellbeing and has consequences for social participation and identity, particularly for the widowed and divorced.
- Perceived social support is central to psychological wellbeing and mediates the relationship between marital status and psychological health.
- Older never married people have lower levels of psychological health compared to the younger never married. Further, social support is an important resource that protects against poor psychological health for the never married.
- Age at marital status transition, particularly age at widowhood, has an important impact on psychological health and social participation. Older and younger widowed face unique challenges: the younger widowed are less likely to have a widowed peer group and face a greater number and wider range of practical responsibilities which demand their time; and the older widowed are at greater risk of social isolation and face physical and economic challenges associated with increasing age.
- A change in marital status prompts a process of identity reconstruction. Transitions out of marriage have a considerable negative impact on social and personal aspects of identity but may also allow for personal growth. Identity appears to have a bi-directional relationship with social participation. First, exerting an influence on how people construct their social network. Second, identity may impact on the nature of social support exchanged and patterns of social engagement within the social network
- Changes in the structure of the social network, exchange of social support, social engagement and sense of identity should all be taken into account when considering marital status differences in health.

Considered together, the findings of this thesis have important implications for researchers and practitioners and make recommendations for all those that come into contact with the recently widowed and divorced. The sections that follow consider separately the

implications for researchers, practitioners and family and friends of the widowed and divorced.

11.6.1 Recommendations for future research The findings discussed here suggest a number of possible directions for future research. First, this thesis demonstrates the need for more research on the influence of context on the impact of marital status transitions. For example, age at transition is particularly important for the experience of widowhood. This thesis has highlighted some of the challenges that are unique to the younger widowed, but the current literature offers very little understanding about the influence of the timing of spousal bereavement. Future research should continue to explore age related differences in the psychological and social impact of a change in marital status with larger samples and over a wider range of ages and socio-demographic groups in order to more fully understand the impact of off-time marital status transitions. Gender should also be viewed as an important factor that influences the impact of marital status transitions. Based on the findings in this thesis, men have smaller social networks and receive less social support compared to women. Future research might consider why these gender differences in social participation exist. In addition, the findings reveal that the negative impact of divorce on psychological health may be higher for men. More work will need to be done to determine why men's psychological wellbeing, which is usually higher than women's, suffers to such an extent following divorce. The focus of this thesis has been on heterosexual relationships. Research on same-sex relationships has been neglected and it would be interesting to consider the current research questions within these groups.

Second, the qualitative research in this thesis demonstrates the important impact of marital status change for social participation. In the future, it would be of benefit to quantitatively assess the level or quality and the source of social support and consider how this changes over time following marital status transition. Future research might also consider the longitudinal relationship between psychological wellbeing and social participation in the face of marital status change.

Third, this thesis did not directly investigate the experience of identity, but it naturally emerged from the qualitative study, adding value to this research. The issue of collective and private identity change following marital status transition is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research. The findings in this thesis suggest that identity is associated with social participation, and that social participation is positively related to psychological health. Thus, further research is needed to better

understand the inter-relationships between marital status, psychological health, social participation, and identity. Future research might also consider the impact of multiple marital status transitions on identity, as well as psychological wellbeing and social participation.

Finally, based on the findings of this thesis, Figure 11.1 presents a theoretical model of how marital status transitions may influence psychological health and social participation. The pathways represent possible associations between variables.

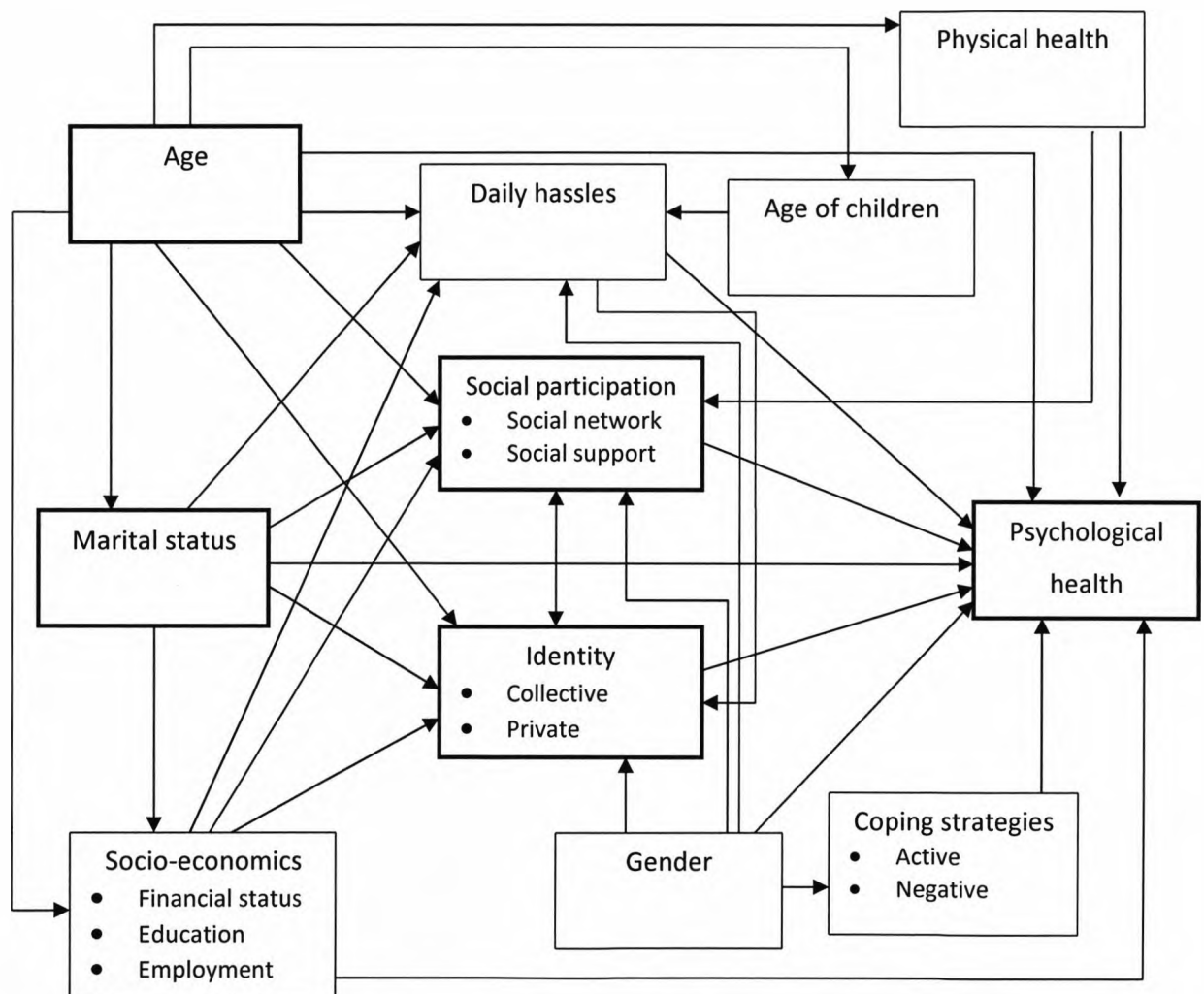


Figure 11.1 Theoretical model of marital status differences in psychological health

According to this model:

- Marital status is directly related to psychological health but also exerts an influence on: social participation; collective and private identity; number and nature of daily hassles; and socio-economic circumstances.

- Social participation is related to identity whereby the construction of the social network, exchange of social support and nature of social activities shape an individual's sense of identity. Equally, in the other direction, one's sense of identity may influence the construction of the social network, exchange of social support and nature of social activities.
- Gender predicts psychological wellbeing and may also exert an influence on: social participation; identity; daily hassles; and use of coping strategies.
- Age is predicted to have a direct relationship on psychological wellbeing, as evidenced in Chapters 3 and 4, but age may also have an indirect relationship on psychological wellbeing through its relationship with more proximal variables including: social participation; collective and private identity; physical health; the number and nature of daily hassles; age of any children; and socio-economic circumstances.

11.6.2 Recommendations for practitioners The findings in this thesis advance the understanding of the experience of marital status change. For practitioners, this thesis adds to the existing evidence that widowhood and divorce are associated with lowered psychological health and considerable social disruption. Moreover, the findings in this thesis suggest that social support may play a more important role in sustaining psychological health than previous research has identified. Sustained, or increased, levels of social support and social engagement may protect against the negative outcomes of widowhood and divorce on psychological health. The results emphasise the importance of gaining a clear understanding of the structural and functional qualities of a person's social network in order to more accurately identify an individual's support needs. Practitioners should take account of people's marital status, relationship status and living status and recognise the differential impact of these statuses. Further, the findings reveal that a number of widowed and divorced people benefit from access to support groups and settings where they can share their experiences with people who have gone through a similar event. Efforts should be made by community based health and support services, including social workers, charity and voluntary bereavement and divorce services to ensure that the recently widowed and divorced have adequate access to support. For example, Figure 11.2 outlines the potential role of GP services as 'gatekeepers' for support services. The internet emerged as an increasingly important communication tool for the participants in the qualitative study. The internet may be a useful mode of communicating

information to those who have experienced a transition out of marriage, including information about local support groups, counselling services and social clubs.

This thesis reveals age related differences in the experience of widowhood and practitioners could draw on this finding and aim to provide age-relevant support to the recently widowed. The findings also demonstrate the need for a greater acknowledgement of age related differences in support needs regardless of marital status, and highlight the importance of ensuring that older adults, particularly those living alone and especially men, have a good level of access to social support and opportunities for social engagement. For example, there is evidence in this thesis that people benefit from membership in activity clubs and practitioners, including general practitioner (GP) services and other health professionals, could offer advice on joining similar groups. Further, charity organisations such as AgeUK could create greater awareness of older adults living alone following widowhood or divorce through media campaigns. Gender emerges as another important, contextual factor that practitioners should take into consideration when working with the recently widowed and divorced. Men may have smaller social networks and are less likely to describe supportive exchanges with friends and family, and divorced men in particular report increased psychological distress post-transition. There is evidence in this thesis that socio-economic status impacts psychological health, particularly for the recently divorced, and it is likely that socio-economic circumstances affect social participation and identity. Practitioners should, therefore, take into consideration an individual's socio-economic circumstances when providing support to the recently widowed and divorced.

The GP is often the first point of contact with medical or support services for the recently widowed, and in some cases for the recently divorced. GPs themselves can be valuable sources of support, but GP services could also function as a 'gatekeeper' to support services. GPs could routinely provide information to patients about available support services, including community support groups and charity organisations such as AgeUK and Cruse Bereavement Care. GP practices and link workers could also help to ensure patients receive the practical as well as emotional support that they need and aim to reduce social isolation by signposting patients to suitable secondary services, like community clubs and advisory centres. Where appropriate, GP services could also make referrals to mental health services to ensure that the recently widowed and divorced receive adequate support.

Figure 11.2 Example of GP services as 'gatekeepers'

11.6.3 Recommendations for families and friends of the widowed and divorced

This thesis also has practical applications for the family and friends of people who experience a change in marital status. The findings demonstrate the importance of settings where the widowed and divorced may share their experiences, either within the context of a support group, as described above, or with an individual who understands what they are going through. This suggests that informal support from family members and friends who have similar experiences may help the adjustment to widowhood or divorce. In addition, since social networks act as an important personal coping resource, efforts should be made to teach families and friends the importance of maintaining, or even enlarging, existing social networks of the recently widowed and divorced and of ensuring that adequate support is available. Changes in the structural and functional aspects of the social network as well as changes in the way the individual is viewed by family and friends (i.e. as a 'widow(er)' or 'divorcee') can trigger changes in collective and private identities. The findings highlight the value of good levels of communication between the individual and members of the social network about the nature and level of support required in order to minimise the negative social and psychological consequences of widowhood and divorce.

11.7 Limitations of the thesis

While this research has fulfilled its aims, the findings are limited by several issues acknowledged through the body of thesis. In this section, attention is drawn to the main limitations of this thesis. Firstly, Chapter 3's study made use of secondary panel survey data from the BHPS and although the advantages of secondary data analysis may outweigh the disadvantages, there are limitations to this method (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985). For example, this study was restricted to those measures of psychological wellbeing available within the survey. There may also be issues with the quality of the data and the ways in which the data were collected which the researcher had no control over. Nevertheless, previous studies have successfully made use of BHPS data to address the relationship between psychological wellbeing and marital status (Gardner & Oswald, 2006; Wade & Pevalin, 2004). Chapter 4 and 5's study used a cross-sectional design and employed opportunity sampling. While this allowed for an investigation into the effect of marital status, age and perceived social support on psychological wellbeing, it did not allow for conclusions about causality. It is also unlikely that the sample, which was largely taken from the internet questionnaire, was representative of the general population. A

longitudinal design here would have offered a better overview of the effects of social support on psychological wellbeing for different marital status groups over time. Another major drawback of this study was the way age at marital status transition was collected in the participant questionnaire. This resulted in a high volume of missing data and age at marital status transition could not be considered in the analysis. Further, while all the questionnaire measures used in this thesis had good reliability and validity, the quantitative findings may be limited by evident biasing problems with self-report measures like those used in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. On reflection, having gained an understanding of the relationship between psychological wellbeing and social support, it would be useful to use longitudinal BHPS survey data including information on both age at marital status transition and social support networks to develop this study. In doing so, it would also be possible to include a larger, more representative sample. Additionally, the inclusion of other variables, such as specific sources of social support, marital duration and marital quality would have benefited the quantitative studies.

This research takes a qualitative perspective using semi-structured interviews to capture people's experiences of marital status change. The qualitative research allows consideration of associated factors that were absent in the quantitative studies. Still, the qualitative findings must be viewed in light of the methodological limitations. For example, as with other qualitative approaches, the results may be vulnerable to researcher subjectivity. In this study, the researcher aimed to minimise the influence of subjectivity by employing theoretical sampling, maintaining an open disposition at all times, and engaging in a careful process of constant comparison. Another limitation in the qualitative study is that the sample was probably not representative of the wider population. Firstly, by its nature, this study may have been subject to a self-selection bias where those who were more socially active and had better levels of psychological wellbeing were more likely to agree to be interviewed. Certain demographic groups were also under-represented in the sample, including ethnic minority groups. It is likely that the experience of marriage, widowhood and divorce would be different for different ethnic groups as a result of diverse views of marriage, family values, and community adhesiveness. This is something that could be addressed in future research studies. In addition, the qualitative study is influenced by the geographical limitations of its recruitment, and future research could pay more attention to differences between rural and urban environments. These study limitations may have had consequences for the themes covered in the research. The qualitative findings may be further limited by the qualities of the interviewer and the

questions asked within the interview itself. Nevertheless, it was felt that a good rapport was achieved with all participants and it was felt that the interview schedule worked well in terms of achieving in depth discussions. In addition, although this study was concerned with the experience of a change in marital status, the inclusion of a never married control group would have facilitated stronger comparisons between groups.

11.8 Final conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the psychological and social impact of a change in marital status and to evaluate the role of age and the timing of marital status transitions. The findings make a clear theoretical and methodological contribution to research on marital status and add to the limited body of research focusing on the influence of age and the timing of marital status transitions. The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings: First, marital status transitions have important consequences for psychological health and social participation. Second, age is an important factor in influencing psychological wellbeing and social participation and that the influence of age on the timing of marital status transitions is closely associated to the social and physical circumstances of increasing age, particularly for the widowed. Third, both the personal and social processes of identity reconstruction following marital status change affect social participation, and perhaps both directly and indirectly affect psychological wellbeing, post-transition. The issue of identity change is an intriguing one which should be explored in further research. Overall, the combination of research methods used reveals the complexity of the experience of marital status change and highlights the importance of considering processes of identity change and their impact on social participation. Finally, these findings have important implications for provision of support services. Developing strategies to improve the level of perceived social support available to avoid negative impacts on psychological wellbeing will depend on a more complete understanding of the specific elements of social participation and identity that play a role in psychological wellbeing. Overall, this thesis concludes that marital status transitions, particularly widowhood and divorce, have an important impact on psychological wellbeing and have consequences for both social participation and identity. Further, life course stage, rather than age per se, influences the experience of marital status change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

List of abbreviations

BHPS	British Household Panel Survey
CD	Continuously divorced (Chapter 3)
CES-D	Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977)
CM	Continuously married (Chapter 3)
COPE	Coping Orientation of Problem Experience (Carver et al., 1989)
CW	Continuously widowed (Chapter 3)
GHQ12	12-item General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978)
LAT	Living Apart Together
MOS-SSS	Medical Outcomes Social Support Survey (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991)
NM	Never married (Chapter 3)
ONS	Office for National Statistics
RD	Recently divorced (Chapter 3)
RM	Recently married (Chapter 3)
RW	Recently widowed (Chapter 3)
SRLE	Survey of Recent Life Experiences (Kohn & Macdonald, 1992)
SWLS	Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)

Appendix 2

Ethics form: Quantitative studies



<i>Office Use Only</i>
Reference Number:
Date Received:

COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH ETHICS

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS, HUMAN DATA, OR HUMAN MATERIAL**

This application form is to be used by researchers seeking approval from the University Committee on Research Ethics or from an approved School Research Ethics Committee.

Applications to the University Research Ethics Sub-Committees, with the specified attachments, should be emailed to ethics@liv.ac.uk. Applications to an approved School Committee should be submitted to their local address, available at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/researchethics/deptcommittees.htm>.

This form must be completed by following the guidance notes, accessible at www.liv.ac.uk/researchethics. Incomplete forms will be returned to the applicant.

SECTION A - IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

A1) Title of the research

The associations between psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health and the influences of age, gender and marital status in later life

A2) Principal Investigator OR Supervisor (please check as appropriate)

Title:	Dr	Staff number:	
Forename/Initials:	K M	Surname:	Bennett
Post:	Senior Lecturer	Department:	Psychology
Telephone:	0151 794 1410	E-mail:	kmb@liv.ac.uk

A3) Co-applicants (including student investigators)

Title and Name	Post	Department/ School/Institution if not UoL	Phone	Email
Laura Soulsby	Postgraduate			ps0u3129@liverpool.ac.uk
Louise Anders	Postgraduate			sou031@liverpool.ac.uk
Emma Keane	Postgraduate			ekeane@hotmail.com
Elizabeth Evans	Undergraduate		07871301180	ps0u60bc@student.liverpool.ac.uk

Declaration of the:

Principal Investigator **OR** **Supervisor and Student Investigator**
(please check as appropriate)

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki and the University's good practice guidelines on the proper conduct of research, together with the codes of practice laid down by any relevant professional or learned society.
- If the research is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study plan, the terms of the full application of which the REC has given a favourable opinion, and any conditions set out by the REC in giving its favourable opinion.
- I undertake to seek an ethical opinion from the REC before implementing substantial amendments to the study plan or to the terms of the full application of which the REC has given a favourable opinion.
- I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the research at all times.
- If there are any serious adverse events, I understand that I am responsible for immediately stopping the research and alerting the Research Ethics Committee within 24 hours of the occurrence, via ethics@liv.ac.uk.
- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the University and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.
- I understand that the information contained in this application, any supporting documentation and all correspondence with the Research Ethics Committee relating to the application, will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts. The information may be disclosed in response to requests made under the Acts except where statutory exemptions apply.
- I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the study, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them.
- For Supervisors: I understand my responsibilities as supervisor, and will ensure, to the best of my abilities, that the student investigator abides by the University's research ethics code at all times.
- For the Student Investigator: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of safety, ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my supervisor and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times.

Signature of Principal Investigator **or** **Supervisor** :

Date: (31/01/2008)

Print Name:Kate M Bennett

Signature of Student Investigator:

Date: (dd/mm/yyyy)

Print Name:

SECTION B - PROJECT DETAILS

B1) Proposed study dates and duration

Start date:	1.4.2008	End date:	31.3.2013
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B2) Give a full summary of the purpose, design and methodology of the planned research.

This study series will examine the relationships between psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health and the ways in which marital status, gender and age influence these relationships. These complex multivariate relationships need detailed investigation. It is thought that levels of psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health vary with age, marital status and gender. Various aspects of psychological wellbeing will be studied: life satisfaction; social engagement and participation, coping. Similarly various aspects of social support will be investigated: emotional; instrumental; esteem; affectionate; formal and informal. The nature of social networks will be studied including the number of members in a network; the relationships of members of a network; the emotional and geographical closeness of the network. Physical health will be assessed using measures of health problems; functional limitations; service use; and subjective health. Levels of customary activity will also be assessed.

Specific research areas which will be addressed are:

- i. the relationship between psychological wellbeing and physical health
- ii. the relationship between psychological wellbeing and social support
- iii. the relationship between social support and physical health
- iv. the relationship between physical activity and psychological wellbeing
- v. the relationship between physical activity and physical health
- vi. the relationship between physical activity and social support
- vii. the effects of marital status, gender and age on the above

The design will be a quantitative questionnaire study. Participants will be given a short series of questionnaires (the range of questionnaires to be used is attached). The numbers of participants will vary from between 50 and 150. Participants will be recruited from a variety of sources including organisations run for or by older adults, divorcees, single people, social clubs, trade unions, religious organisations. The PI has a great number of contacts for organisations who have participated in research with the PI. Data will be analysed using univariate and multivariate statistical techniques.

B3) List any research assistants, sub-contractors or other staff not named above who will be involved in the research and detail their involvement.

None

B4) List below all research sites, and their Lead Investigators, to be included in this study.

Research Site	Individual Responsible	Position and contact details
University of Liverpool	Kate M Bennett	Senior Lecturer ext 41410
Places as yet unknown	Kate M Bennett	Senior Lecturer ext 41410

B5) Are the results of the study to be disseminated in the public domain?

YES NO

> *If not, why not?*

B6) Give details of the funding of the research, including funding organisation(s), amount applied for or secured, duration, and UOL reference

Funding Body	Amount	Duration	UoL Reference
None			

- B7) Give details of any interests, commercial or otherwise, you or your co-applicants have in the funding body.

None

SECTION C - EXPEDITED REVIEW

C1)

a) Will the study involve recruitment of participants outside the UK?	No
b) Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children, people with learning or communication disabilities, people in custody, people engaged in illegal activities such as drug-taking, your own students in an educational capacity) (Note: this does not include secondary data authorised for release by the data collector for research purposes.)	No
c) Will the study require obtaining consent from a "research participant advocate" (for definition see guidance notes) in lieu of participants who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. for research involving children or, people with learning or communication disabilities)	No
d) Will it be necessary for participants, whose consent to participate in the study will be required, to take part without their knowledge at the time? (e.g. covert observation using photography or video recording)	No
e) Does the study involve deliberately misleading the participants?	No
f) Will the study require discussion of sensitive topics that may cause distress or embarrassment to the participant or potential risk of disclosure to the researcher of criminal activity or child protection issues? (e.g. sexual activity, criminal activity)	No
g) Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	No
h) Will samples (e.g. blood, DNA, tissue) be obtained from participants?	No
i) Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?	No
j) Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No
k) Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No
l) Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No

C2)

a) Will the study seek written, informed consent?	Yes
b) Will participants be informed that their participation is voluntary?	Yes
c) Will participants be informed that they are free to withdraw at any time?	Yes
d) Will participants be informed of aspects relevant to their continued participation in the study?	Yes
e) Will participants' data remain confidential?	Yes
f) Will participants be debriefed?	Yes

If you have answered 'no' to all items in SECTION C1 and 'yes' to all questions in SECTION C2 the application will be processed through expedited review.

If you have answered "Yes" to one or more questions in Section C1, or "No" to one or more questions in Section C2, but wish to apply for expedited review, please make the case below. See research ethics website for an example "case for expedited review".

C3) Case for Expedited Review – To be used if asking for expedited review despite answering YES to questions in C1 or NO to answers in C2.

SECTION D - PARTICIPANT DETAILS

D1) How many participants will be recruited?

Depending on the individual research question and sub-project, participant numbers will range from 50 to approximately 150 - all those who volunteer will be interviewed if they meet inclusion criteria.

D2) How was the number of participants decided upon?

In published studies participant numbers range from 50 to 150.

D3)

a) Describe how potential participants in the study will be identified, approached and recruited.

The PI has contact with a wide-range of organisations in the Merseyside area including social services, trade unions, religious organisations, Age Concern, luncheon clubs. In addition, any organisations where the target group might go will be approached. This type of recruitment has worked very well in the past. Members of the research team will approach appropriate organisations by phone, letter or in person. If wishes, the team will give a presentation to the organisation.

b) Inclusion criteria:

50 years and over. Able to give written informed consent. Meeting the marital status, age or gender criteria appropriate for the sub-project. Proficient English speakers.

c) Exclusion criteria:

Under 50. Physically or mentally too frail to participate. Not proficient in English.

d) Are any specific groups to be excluded from this study? If so please list them and explain why:

No

e) Give details for cases and controls separately if appropriate:

N/A

f) Give details of any advertisements:

None at present. The committee will be informed if posters are to be used.

D4) State the numbers of participants from any of the following groups and justify their inclusion

Children under 16 years of age:	0
Adults with learning disabilities:	0
Adults with dementia:	0
Prisoners:	0
Young Offenders:	0
Adults who are unable to consent for themselves:	0
Healthy Volunteers:	up to 150 (individual study between 50 and 150)
Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes, students of the PI or Co-applicants:	It is not intended that participants will be recruited from care homes. However, if that is the case an amendment to the current ethics application will be made.
Other vulnerable groups (please list):	None

D5)

- a) Describe the arrangements for gaining informed consent from the research participants.**

Interested parties will receive and information sheet. If participants express a willingness to participate they will be told they can withdraw at any time before, during or indeed after the study. They will be given the consent form to read and then sign, one cope will be retained by them and the other kept by the interviewer.

- b) If participants are to be recruited from any of the potentially vulnerable groups listed above, give details of extra steps taken to assure their protection, including arrangements to obtain consent from a legal, political or other appropriate representative in addition to the consent of the participant (e.g. HM Prison Service for research with young offenders, Head Teachers for research with children etc.).**

N/A

- c) If participants might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English, describe the arrangements for those participants (e.g. translation, use of interpreters etc.)**

Participants will be proficient in English

- d) **Where informed consent is not to be obtained (including the deception of participants) please explain why.**

N/A

- D6) **What is the potential for benefit to research participants, if any?**

There is no intended benefit of participation in this study.

- D7) **State any fees, reimbursements for time and inconvenience, or other forms of compensation that individual research participants may receive. Include direct payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other benefits of taking part in the research?**

None

SECTION E - RISKS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

- E1) **Describe in detail the potential physical or psychological adverse effects, risks or hazards (minimal, moderate, high or severe) of involvement in the research for research participants.**

It is very doubtful that this experiment (survey etc.) will lead to any physical or psychological adverse effects, risks or hazards for the participants (i.e. predicted adverse effects are minimal). However, although it is not anticipated that adverse effects will occur, if they do, the study will be halted immediately and the problems will be reported to the sub-committee within 24 hours of their occurrence through the Research Governance Officer (ethics@liverpool.ac.uk).

- E2) **Explain how the potential benefits of the research outweigh any risks to the participants.**

Understanding the social, psychological and health effects of marital status and marital status transitions is essential if society is to provide effective and appropriate support for adults in terms of formal and informal care, health and welfare provision. The people who are the experts in the effects of marital status are the people themselves. Without their experiences it is very difficult to understand what improvements society can make to the lives of people.

- E3) **Describe in detail the potential adverse effects, risks or hazards (minimal, moderate, high or severe) of involvement in the research for the researchers.**

It is very doubtful that this experiment (survey etc.) will lead to any physical or psychological adverse effects, risks or hazards for the researchers (i.e. predicted adverse effects are minimal). However, although it is not anticipated that adverse effects will occur, if they do, the study will be halted immediately and the problems will be reported to the sub-committee within 24 hours of

their occurrence through the Research Governance Officer (ethics@liverpool.ac.uk). The researcher will be aware of all fire and health and safety regulations in the building and the University Security Control number. The researcher will be alone with the participants during the study, but to ensure the researchers safety a 3rd party will be aware of his/her whereabouts and s/he will have a mobile telephone.

- E4) Will individual or group interviews/questionnaires discuss any topics or issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could take place during the study (e.g. during interviews/group discussions, or use of screening tests for drugs)?**

YES NO

➤ *If Yes, give details of procedures in place to deal with these issues.*

It is unlikely that participants will find that the questionnaires deal with events that participants may find upsetting or sensitive. However, participants will be informed about which events are to be discussed and assured that if they find any of the content of the questionnaires disturbing they may withdraw.

- E5) Describe the measures in place in the event of any unexpected outcomes or adverse events to participants arising from their involvement in the project**

Although it is not anticipated that adverse effects will occur, if they do, the study will be halted immediately and the problems will be reported to the sub-committee within 24 hours of their occurrence through the Research Governance Officer (ethics@liverpool.ac.uk). Also the researcher will be aware of all fire and health and safety regulations in the building (s) and the University Security Control number (if in University building).

- E6) Explain how the conduct of the project will be monitored to ensure that it conforms with the study plan and relevant University policies and guidance.**

There will be regular supervision between the PI and the research team. If the PI is working alone, she will seek an advisory group to monitor progress and procedures.

SECTION F - DATA ACCESS AND STORAGE

F1) Where the research involves any of the following activities at any stage (including identification of potential research participants), state what measures have been put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data (e.g. encryption or other anonymisation procedures will be used)

Electronic transfer of data by magnetic or optical media, e-mail or computer networks	These will be kept securely and erased after data transfer.
Sharing of data with other organisations	None
Export of data outside the European Union	None
Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers	In general none. If they are to be kept they will be kept securely and separately from other data.
Publication of direct quotations from respondents	None
Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals	None
Use of audio/visual recording devices	There will be audio recording of interviews. They will be transcribed promptly. Audio-tapes will be stored separately from transcripts in a locked filing cabinet.
Storage of personal data on any of the following:	
Manual files	Questionnaires will be kept securely by the researchers and once inputted on to the computer they will be kept securely by the PI. They will be anonymous.
Home or other personal computers	This data will be anonymous
University computers	This data will be anonymous
Private company computers	None
Laptop computers	This data will be anonymous

F2) Who will have control of and act as the custodian for the data generated by the study?

The PI - K M Bennett

F3) Who will have access to the data generated by the study?

Only the research team and if necessary UG project markers and external examiners 15 years

F4) For how long will data from the study be stored?

15 years

SECTION G - CHECKLIST OF ENCLOSURES

Study Plan / Protocol	Yes
Recruitment advertisement	Yes
Participant information sheet	Yes
Participant Consent form	Yes
Research Participant Advocate Consent form	Yes
Evidence of external approvals	Yes
Questionnaires on sensitive topics	Yes
Interview schedule	Yes
Debriefing material	Yes
Other (please specify)	Yes

Copy of ethics amendment email:

From: Kate Bennett [<mailto:K.M.Bennett@liverpool.ac.uk>]

Sent: 05 February 2009 16:14

To: Rowland, Caroline

Cc: Bennett, Kate; Soulsby, Laura

Subject: PSYC07080135: The associations between psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health and the influences of age, gender and marital status in later life

Dear Caroline

It's just occurred (because Cardiff asked for confirmation of ethical approval before they circulated the questionnaire) to me that I haven't notified you of an addition to the way we recruit to the above study, and that we should apply for an amendment. Laura now has the questionnaire set up on the web (<http://www.ponte-carlo.co.uk/laurasurvey.html>). She has set it up so that she gets an email with consent which then comes separately from the questionnaire into her mail box, so the questionnaires remain anonymous. She also has a separate email which comes to her if people are interested in taking part in the interview study (PSYC07080133) which is again independent of the questionnaire. So I need to request an amendment in PSYC07080135 for mode of delivery, and PSYC07080133 for method of recruitment.

Let me know if there are any problems with this

Thanks

Kate

Appendix 3

Ethics form: Qualitative studies



<i>Office Use Only</i>
Reference Number:
Date Received:

COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH ETHICS

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS, HUMAN DATA, OR HUMAN MATERIAL**

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This form must be completed by following the guidance notes, accessible at www.liv.ac.uk/researchethics. Incomplete forms will be returned to the applicant.

SECTION A - IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

A1) Title of the research

A Qualitative study of the Psychological, Social and Physical Health Impacts of Marital Status and Gender in Later Life

A2) Principal Investigator OR Supervisor (please check as appropriate)

Title:	Dr	Staff number:	
Forename/Initials:	K M	Surname:	Bennett
Post:	Senior Lecturer	Department:	Psychology
Telephone:	0151 794 1410	E-mail:	kmb@liv.ac.uk

A3) Co-applicants (including student investigators)

Title and Name	Post	Department/ School/Institution if not UoL	Phone	Email
Laura Soulsby	Postgraduate		00447973924773	ps0u3129@liverpool.ac.uk
Louise Anders	Postgraduate		07813530281.	sou031@liverpool.ac.uk
Emma Keane	Postgraduate		07834 776436	ekeane@hotmail.com
Carol McKee	Undergraduate		07906 754 367	C.Mckee@student.liverpool.ac.uk
Suzanna McKenzie_	Undergraduate		07905407444	ps0u609e@student.liverpool.ac.uk

Smith				
Francesca Woods	Undergraduate		07828111419	F.F.Woods@student.liverpool.ac.uk
Jayne Pattinson	Undergraduate		07739177796	ps0u60f5@student.liverpool.ac.uk
Kerry Gibbons	Undergraduate		07906597372	K.S.Gibbons@student.liverpool.ac.uk
Elizabeth Evans	Undergraduate		07871301180	ps0u60bc@student.liverpool.ac.uk

Declaration of the:

Principal Investigator **OR** **Supervisor and Student Investigator**
(please check as appropriate)

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief, and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by the ethical principles underlying the Declaration of Helsinki and the University's good practice guidelines on the proper conduct of research, together with the codes of practice laid down by any relevant professional or learned society.
- If the research is approved, I undertake to adhere to the study plan, the terms of the full application of which the REC has given a favourable opinion, and any conditions set out by the REC in giving its favourable opinion.
- I undertake to seek an ethical opinion from the REC before implementing substantial amendments to the study plan or to the terms of the full application of which the REC has given a favourable opinion.
- I understand that I am responsible for monitoring the research at all times.
- If there are any serious adverse events, I understand that I am responsible for immediately stopping the research and alerting the Research Ethics Committee within 24 hours of the occurrence, via ethics@liv.ac.uk.
- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes if required in future.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application will be held by the University and that this will be managed according to the principles established in the Data Protection Act.
- I understand that the information contained in this application, any supporting documentation and all correspondence with the Research Ethics Committee relating to the application, will be subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Acts. The information may be disclosed in response to requests made under the Acts except where statutory exemptions apply.
- I understand that all conditions apply to any co-applicants and researchers involved in the study, and that it is my responsibility to ensure that they abide by them.
- For Supervisors: I understand my responsibilities as supervisor, and will ensure, to the best of my abilities, that the student investigator abides by the University's research ethics code at all times.
- For the Student Investigator: I understand my responsibilities to work within a set of safety, ethical and other guidelines as agreed in advance with my supervisor and understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and any other applicable code of ethics at all times.

Signature of Principal Investigator or Supervisor :

Date: (31/01/2008)

Print Name: Kate M Bennett

Signature of Student Investigator:

Date: (dd/mm/yyyy)

Print Name:

SECTION B - PROJECT DETAILS

B1) Proposed study dates and duration

Start date:	1.4.2008	End date:	31.3.2013
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B2) Give a full summary of the purpose, design and methodology of the planned research.

This study will examine the relationships between marital status, transitions in marital status, gender and age and the individual and collective impacts on psychological wellbeing, quality of life and physical health. It is recognised that marital status has an impact on psychological health (Cotten, 1999) and on physical health (Bennett, 2006). However, there is a great deal which is not well understood about the precise relationships between marital status and health, in its widest form. It is also known that there are gender differences in both physical health and psychological wellbeing between men and women. In general, women report poorer physical and psychological health than men, and yet men die earlier. It is also likely, as a consequence in part at least because of a maintaining masculine identity, that men may under-report both physical and mental health problems (Bennett, 2007). Further, there are likely to be age effects. For example, it is thought that being widowed off-time presents different problems for widowed people than when it occurs at an on-time. Health and mental health also change over the course of the life-span. As marital status patterns change and as the population ages, there are likely to be new challenges in understanding the inter-relationships between health and marital status. Although many relationships can be modelled quantitatively, there is a great deal to be learnt through in-depth qualitative studies which explore the subjective and lived experience of marital status, and especially marital status transitions. This study aims to investigate the experiences of those who experience marital status transitions and those who maintain marital status stability in relationship to a range of psychological, social and physical health variables.

Specific research areas which will be addresses are:

- i. the psychological, social and health effects of the transition into and out of marriage
- ii. the impact of the timing of those transitions
- iii. the effects of never-married status on psychological, social and health outcomes
- iv. the effects of divorce on psychological, social and health outcomes
- v. the effects of entry into marriage, remarriage and cohabitation on psychological, social and health outcomes
- vi. the changes in social networks and social support as a consequence of changes in marital status
- vii. gender and age effects of marital status on psychological, social and health outcomes
- viii. the interrelationship between marital status, transition and physical and social activity

The design will be a qualitative interview study. Participants will be interviewed in depth about their experiences of marital status, stability and change in relationship to social, psychological and health outcomes and predisposing factors. Examples of typical interview schedules are

attached. The numbers of participants interviewed for each research question will vary from between 5 (in undergraduate research projects) to approximately 90 in postgraduate or PI led studies. Participants will be recruited from a variety of sources including organisations run for or by older adults, divorcees, single people, social clubs, trade unions, religious organisations. The PI has a great number of contacts for organisations who have participated in research with the PI. Data will be analysed using grounded theory based on the method used by Bennett and Vidal-Hall (2000). Whilst answers to the specific research questions can be obtained in this way, the advantage of this technique is that theory development can take place, which will be tested in later studies. In addition to the qualitative interview, participants will also complete structured measures of psychological wellbeing, physical health, social participation, social networks, social support and physical activity.

B3) List any research assistants, sub-contractors or other staff not named above who will be involved in the research and detail their involvement.

None

B4) List below all research sites, and their Lead Investigators, to be included in this study.

Research Site	Individual Responsible	Position and contact details
University of Liverpool	Kate M Bennett	Senior Lecturer ext 41410
Places as yet unknown	Kate M Bennett	Senior Lecturer ext 41410

B5) Are the results of the study to be disseminated in the public domain?

YES NO

➤ If not, why not?

B6) Give details of the funding of the research, including funding organisation(s), amount applied for or secured, duration, and UOL reference

Funding Body	Amount	Duration	UoL Reference
None			

B7) Give details of any interests, commercial or otherwise, you or your co-applicants have in the funding body.

None

SECTION C - EXPEDITED REVIEW

C1)

a) Will the study involve recruitment of participants outside the UK?	No
b) Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children, people with learning or communication disabilities, people in custody, people engaged in illegal activities such as drug-taking, your own students in an educational capacity) (Note: this does not include secondary data authorised for release by the data collector for research purposes.)	No
c) Will the study require obtaining consent from a "research participant advocate" (for definition see guidance notes) in lieu of participants who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g. for research involving children or, people with learning or communication disabilities)	No

d) Will it be necessary for participants, whose consent to participate in the study will be required, to take part without their knowledge at the time? (e.g. covert observation using photography or video recording)	No
e) Does the study involve deliberately misleading the participants?	No
f) Will the study require discussion of sensitive topics that may cause distress or embarrassment to the participant or potential risk of disclosure to the researcher of criminal activity or child protection issues? (e.g. sexual activity, criminal activity)	Yes
g) Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	No
h) Will samples (e.g. blood, DNA, tissue) be obtained from participants?	No
i) Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study?	No
j) Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	No
k) Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No
l) Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?	No

C2)

a) Will the study seek written, informed consent?	Yes
b) Will participants be informed that their participation is voluntary?	Yes
c) Will participants be informed that they are free to withdraw at any time?	Yes
d) Will participants be informed of aspects relevant to their continued participation in the study?	Yes
e) Will participants' data remain confidential?	Yes
f) Will participants be debriefed?	Yes

If you have answered 'no' to all items in SECTION C1 and 'yes' to all questions in SECTION C2 the application will be processed through expedited review.

If you have answered "Yes" to one or more questions in Section C1, or "No" to one or more questions in Section C2, but wish to apply for expedited review, please make the case below. See research ethics website for an example "case for expedited review".

C3) Case for Expedited Review – *To be used if asking for expedited review despite answering YES to questions in C1 or NO to answers in C2.*

The interviews may involve the discussion of sensitive information. Many of the issues which are relevant to the study of marital status transitions could be considered sensitive. However, these are issues which are important to be studied and which can be discussed openly with researchers who are themselves tactful and sensitive. The PI has conducted, and supervised, many studies which have addressed sensitive issues. Participants are always made aware both in the information sheet and at the beginning of the interview that sensitive issues may arise and that they can withdraw from the study at any point, and recording can cease or be temporarily paused at the request of the participant. In general, participants do not volunteer for these types of study if they are not prepared to discuss issues which may be sensitive. Indeed, for many participants it is the opportunity to discuss such issues with an independent researchers which draws them to participate.

A mention must also be made of the fact that these interviews may be to a certain degree distressing. However, again the distress caused is no greater than that experienced in the course of normal life. Transitions out of marriage are by their nature distressing. But again, participants are made aware of this, and of the opportunity to withdraw or pause at any stage.

A variety of safeguards are put in place to meet the needs of participants should they be required. The PI has experience of dealing with unexpected outcomes. Participants are never left in a distressed state and interviews are designed to end on general advice given by the participant to ensure a positive end to the interview. Participants are also always welcome to contact the researchers at later stages to give additional information, seek advice, or just for a chat.

SECTION D - PARTICIPANT DETAILS

D1) How many participants will be recruited?

Depending on the individual research question and sub-project, participant numbers will range from 5 to approximately 90 - all those who volunteer will be interviewed if they meet inclusion criteria.

D2) How was the number of participants decided upon?

In published studies participant numbers range from 15 to 100. In undergraduate projects it is possible to gain interesting results, which can lead to theory development, with 5, and for individual case-studies 1. This type of research is time consuming with respect to data collection, transcription and analysis, and therefore, in undergraduate projects, numbers may be small.

D3) a) Describe how potential participants in the study will be identified, approached and recruited.

The PI has contact with a wide-range of organisations in the Merseyside area including social services, trade unions, religious organisations, Age Concern, luncheon clubs. In addition, any organisations where the target group might go will be approached. This type of recruitment has worked very well in the past. Members of the research team will approach appropriate organisations by phone, letter or in person. If wishes, the team will give a presentation to the organisation. Interested parties will receive an information sheet and an expression of interest form along with a pre-paid envelope which they can return. They will then be contacted and the study explained again and if the prospective participant wishes to participate a mutually convenient time for interview will be made at a place most convenient for the participant. They will also be asked if they have friends, family or associates who might also be interested in participating. They will be given the information sheet and expression of interest form to pass on.

b) Inclusion criteria:

18 years and over. Able to give written informed consent. Meeting the marital status, age or gender criteria appropriate for the sub-project. Proficient English speakers.

c) Exclusion criteria:

Under 18. Physically or mentally too frail to participate. Too recently widowed (< 3 months). Not proficient in English.

d) Are any specific groups to be excluded from this study? If so please list them and explain why:

No

e) Give details for cases and controls separately if appropriate:

N/A

f) Give details of any advertisements:

An example of a recruitment poster is attached. These will be designed specifically for each sub-project.

D4) State the numbers of participants from any of the following groups and justify their inclusion

Children under 16 years of age:	0
Adults with learning disabilities:	0
Adults with dementia:	0
Prisoners:	0
Young Offenders:	0
Adults who are unable to consent for themselves:	0
Healthy Volunteers:	up to 150 (individual study between 5 and 90)
Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator, e.g. those in care homes, students of the PI or Co-applicants:	It is not intended that participants will be recruited from care homes. However, if that is the case an amendment to the current ethics application will be made.
Other vulnerable groups (please list):	None

D5)

- a) **Describe the arrangements for gaining informed consent from the research participants.**

Interested parties will receive and information sheet and an expression of interest form along with a pre-paid envelope which they can return. Before an interview commences, details of the project will be given to participants both orally and in writing. The process of written informed consent will be explained. Participants will be told they can withdraw at any time before, during or indeed after the interview. They will be given the consent form to read and then sign, one copy will be retained by them and the other kept by the interviewer.

- b) **If participants are to be recruited from any of the potentially vulnerable groups listed above, give details of extra steps taken to assure their protection, including arrangements to obtain consent from a legal, political or other appropriate representative in addition to the consent of the participant (e.g. HM Prison Service for research with young offenders, Head Teachers for research with children etc.).**

N/A

- c) **If participants might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English, describe the arrangements for those participants (e.g. translation, use of interpreters etc.)**

Participants will be proficient in English

- d) **Where informed consent is not to be obtained (including the deception of participants) please explain why.**

N/A

- D6) **What is the potential for benefit to research participants, if any?**

There is no intended benefit of participation in this study. However, the PI has found that many participants are glad to have taken part. For some people it is the only opportunity they have to talk frankly and openly about how they feel. They are also pleased to be doing something to help others in the same situation.

- D7) **State any fees, reimbursements for time and inconvenience, or other forms of compensation that individual research participants may receive. Include direct payments, reimbursement of expenses or any other benefits of taking part in the research?**

Travelling expenses will be reimbursed.

SECTION E - RISKS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

- E1) Describe in detail the potential physical or psychological adverse effects, risks or hazards (minimal, moderate, high or severe) of involvement in the research for research participants.**

There are unlikely to be any adverse physical effects of participation. There may be some adverse psychological effects of taking part. However, it is anticipated that these will be no greater than the participant meets during their every day life. Previous experience of the PI suggests that participants do not experience any long-lasting effects.

- E2) Explain how the potential benefits of the research outweigh any risks to the participants.**

Understanding the social, psychological and health effects of marital status and marital status transitions is essential if society is to provide effective and appropriate support for adults in terms of formal and informal care, health and welfare provision. The people who are the experts in the effects of marital status are the people themselves. Without their experiences it is very difficult to understand what improvements society can make to the lives of people.

- E3) Describe in detail the potential adverse effects, risks or hazards (minimal, moderate, high or severe) of involvement in the research for the researchers.**

This research carries some minimal risk to the researchers. Discussion of sensitive and emotive issues are difficult. It is important that researchers are not over burdened. Interviewers will conduct no more than two interviews a day and five interviews a week. The PI, or other member of the research team will be available for debriefing at the end of each interviewing day. If the PI is working alone she will put in place appropriate debriefing opportunities. The interviewer will always keep a mobile phone with them, and the place, time and expected duration of the interview will be kept in a diary.

- E4) Will individual or group interviews/questionnaires discuss any topics or issues that might be sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting, or is it possible that criminal or other disclosures requiring action could take place during the study (e.g. during interviews/group discussions, or use of screening tests for drugs)?**

YES NO

➤ *If Yes, give details of procedures in place to deal with these issues.*

These have been discussed above.

- E5) Describe the measures in place in the event of any unexpected outcomes or adverse events to participants arising from their involvement in the project**

The research team has a list of appropriate organisations which can be contacted wither by the participant or by the research team if requested by the participant. The project team will be available after the interview by phone, or if necessary in person, to speak to the participant.

- E6) Explain how the conduct of the project will be monitored to ensure that it conforms with the study plan and relevant University policies and guidance.**

There will be regular supervision between the PI and the research team. If the PI is working alone, she will seek an advisory group to monitor progress and procedures.

SECTION F - DATA ACCESS AND STORAGE

- F1) Where the research involves any of the following activities at any stage (including identification of potential research participants), state what measures have been put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data (e.g. encryption or other anonymisation procedures will be used)**

Electronic transfer of data by magnetic or optical media, e-mail or computer networks	Audio tapes (see below). Back-up of interviews will also be kept on CD but this data will be anonymised. Any data transferred by email (interview transcripts) will be anonymised.
Sharing of data with other organisations	None
Export of data outside the European Union	None
Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers	These will be kept separately from the interview tapes and transcriptions. They will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The diary with interview details will be kept in a locked room and destroyed when the study has been completed.
Publication of direct quotations from respondents	These will be anonymised and all identifying features changed. Participants will be informed that they may be quoted and can opt out if they wish.
Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals	None
Use of audio/visual recording devices	There will be audio recording of interviews.

	They will be transcribed promptly. Audio-tapes will be stored separately from transcripts in a locked filing cabinet.
Storage of personal data on any of the following:	
Manual files	Transcripts will be paper based and text based but will be anonymised.
Home or other personal computers	N/A
University computers	All data stored on this will be anonymised.
Private company computers	N/A
Laptop computers	The PI has a University laptop. All data stored on this will be anonymised.

F2) Who will have control of and act as the custodian for the data generated by the study?

K M Bennett

F3) Who will have access to the data generated by the study?

Members of the research team

F4) For how long will data from the study be stored?

15 years

SECTION G - CHECKLIST OF ENCLOSURES

Study Plan / Protocol	No
Recruitment advertisement	Yes
Participant information sheet	Yes
Participant Consent form	Yes
Research Participant Advocate Consent form	N/A
Evidence of external approvals	N/A
Questionnaires on sensitive topics	Yes
Interview schedule	Yes
Debriefing material	N/A
Other (please specify)	N/A

Appendix 4

Copy of participant questionnaire

Information Sheet

The associations between psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health and the influences of age, gender and marital status

You are being invited to participate in a research study organised by Laura Soulsby, a PhD student at the University of Liverpool. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, relatives and GP if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. Thank you for reading this.

This study will examine the relationships between psychological wellbeing and social support, and the additional influences of age, gender and marital status. These complex relationships need detailed investigation. It is thought that levels of psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health vary with age, marital status and gender. Various aspects of psychological wellbeing will be studied: life satisfaction; participation; and coping. Similarly various aspects of social support will be investigated: emotional; practical; affectionate; formal and informal.

The design will be a questionnaire study. You will be given a short series of questionnaires. The questionnaires will take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

You have been invited to take part in this study because you live within the Merseyside area. The approach we take is 'we are the novices and you are the expert'. Your experiences are of great importance to us. You do not have to take part. Participation is entirely voluntary and you can decide to withdraw from the research at any time. The data will be kept securely with the researcher, Laura Soulsby and her supervisor Dr. Kate Bennett, for fifteen years unless you request them to be destroyed earlier.

It is intended that the data from the questionnaires will be used to write articles, reports and be presented at conferences. It is also likely that the research will be of interest to those who make policy and those who work in health and welfare services. You can request any of the materials produced from the study.

There is no intended benefit for you in taking part in this study. However, you will be helping other people in similar situations.

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know using the contact details provided below and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 (ethics@liv.ac.uk). When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

If you have any further questions please contact:

Laura Soulsby

Email L.K.Soulsby@liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone 0151 794 1437

Or Dr. Kate Bennett

Email kmb@liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone 0151 794 1410

Postal address:

School of Psychology

University of Liverpool

Eleanor Rathbone Building

Bedford Street South

Liverpool L69 7ZA

YOUR COPY
Please keep this for
your information



UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The associations between psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health and the influences of age, gender and marital status

Researcher: Laura Kate Soulsby

Please
initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.

3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name	Date	Signature
Researcher	Date	Signature

The contact details of researchers are:

Laura Soulsby Email: L.K.Soulsby@liverpool.ac.uk Telephone: 0151 794 1437

Dr. Kate Bennett Email: kmb@liverpool.ac.uk Telephone: 0151 794 1410



This investigation is part of ongoing research at the University of Liverpool. We will also be conducting private interviews with men and women in Merseyside to find out more about their experiences of marital relationships. If you feel you may be interested in further involvement with this research project please complete the contact details section below and we will provide you with more information.

Name

Marital Status

Address (for receiving study information)

.....

.....

.....

Contact telephone number(s).....

E-mail address.....

Questionnaire

Please respond to each of the questions below.

Gender:

Male Female

Age: _____ years

Ethnic Origin: _____

Employment:

Are you in paid work? Yes No

Social Class:

Professional Managerial Technical

Skilled non-manual Skilled manual Armed Forces

Marital Status:

Married Widowed Divorced

Separated Cohabiting Single

In relationship but living apart Other _____ (please provide detail)

How many times have you been married?

Children:

Do you have any children? Yes No

If Yes: How many?

Age Child 1 _____ years

Age Child 2 _____ years

Age Child 3 _____ years

Age Child 4 _____ years

Marital History:

Please provide a brief summary of your marital history in the space below. An example response is provided.

EXAMPLE I was married in 1950 but after a ten-year marriage I was separated in 1960 and divorced in 1961. I remarried that same year after a short period of cohabitation with my second husband/wife. In 1972 I was widowed and I have not remarried.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

A. Instructions: We want to know how your health has been in general over the last few weeks. Please read the questions below and each of the four possible answers. Please respond to each of the questions below by marking an 'X' in the response box that best applies to you.

1. Have you recently been able to concentrate on what you're doing?

Better than usual []

Same as usual []

Less than usual []

Much less than usual []

2. Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?

Not at all []

No more than usual []

Rather more than usual []

Much more than usual []

3. Have you recently felt you were playing a useful part in things?

More so than usual []

Same as usual []

Less so than usual []

Much less than usual []

4. Have you recently felt capable of making decisions about things?

More so than usual []

Same as usual []

Less so than usual []

Much less than usual []

5. Have you recently felt constantly under strain?

Not at all []

No more than usual []

Rather more than usual []

Much more than usual []

6. Have you recently felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?

Not at all []

No more than usual []

Rather more than usual []

Much more than usual []

7. Have you recently been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?

More so than usual []

Same as usual []

Less so than usual []

Much less than usual []

8. Have you recently been able to face up to your problems?

More so than usual []

Same as usual []

Less so than usual []

Much less than usual []

9. Have you recently been feeling unhappy and depressed?

Not at all []

No more than usual []

Rather more than usual []

Much more than usual []

10. Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself?

Not at all []

No more than usual []

Rather more than usual []

Much more than usual []

11. Have you recently been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?

Not at all []

No more than usual []

Rather more than usual []

Much more than usual []

12. Have you recently been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered

More so than usual []

Same as usual []

Less so than usual []

Much less than usual []

B. Instructions: Below is a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved. Please tell us how often you have felt this way during the past week by marking the most appropriate response with an 'X'.

	Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)	Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)	Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)	Most or all of the time (5-7 days)
1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.				
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.				
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.				
4. I felt I was just as good as other people				
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.				
6. I felt depressed.				
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.				
8. I felt hopeful about the future				
9. I thought my life had been a failure				
10. I felt fearful				
11. My sleep was restless				
12. I was happy				
13. I talked less than usual				
14. I felt lonely				
15. People were unfriendly				
16. I enjoyed life				
17. I had crying spells				
18. I felt sad				
19. I felt that people dislike me				
20. I could not get "going."				

C. Instructions: People sometimes look to others for companionship, assistance, or other types of support. How often is each of the following kinds of support available to you if you need it? Please circle one number on each line.

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
Emotional/informational support					
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to give you information to help you understand a situation	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to give you good advice about a crisis	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems	1	2	3	4	5
Someone whose advice you really want	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to share your most private worries and fears with	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to turn to for suggestions about how to deal with a personal problem	1	2	3	4	5
Someone who understands your problems	1	2	3	4	5
Tangible support					
Someone to help you if you were confined to bed	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to take you to the doctor if you needed it	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to prepare your meals if you were unable to do it yourself	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to help with daily chores if you were sick	1	2	3	4	5
Affectionate support					
Someone who shows you love and affection	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to love and make you feel wanted	1	2	3	4	5
Someone who hugs you	1	2	3	4	5
Positive social interaction					
Someone to have a good time with	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to get together with for relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
Someone to do something enjoyable with	1	2	3	4	5
Additional item					
Someone to do things with to help you get your mind off things	1	2	3	4	5

D. Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the box to the right of the statement.

7 – Strongly agree

6 – Agree

5 – Slightly agree

4 – Neither agree nor disagree

3 – Slightly disagree

2 - Disagree

1 – Strongly disagree

1. In most ways, my life is close to ideal.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am satisfied with my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.	<input type="checkbox"/>

E. Instructions: We are interested in how people respond when they confront difficult or stressful events in their lives. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. This questionnaire asks you to indicate what you generally do and feel, when *you* experience stressful events. Obviously, different events bring out somewhat different responses, but think about what you *usually* do when you are under a lot of stress. Then respond to each of the following items by blackening one number on your answer sheet for each, using the response choices listed just below. Please try to respond to each item *separately in your mind from each other item*. Choose your answers thoughtfully, and make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can. Please answer *every* item. Indicate what YOU usually do when YOU experience a stressful event by circling the most appropriate response for you.

1	2	3	4
I usually <u>don't</u> do this <u>at all</u>	I usually do this <u>a little bit</u>	I usually do this <u>a medium amount</u>	I usually do this <u>a lot</u>

1. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	1	2	3	4
2. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	1	2	3	4
3. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive	1	2	3	4
4. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.	1	2	3	4
5. I've been making jokes about it.	1	2	3	4
6. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.	1	2	3	4
7. I've been getting emotional support from others	1	2	3	4
8. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.	1	2	3	4
9. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things	1	2	3	4
10. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real	1	2	3	4
11. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.	1	2	3	4
12. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.	1	2	3	4
13. I've been giving up trying to deal with it.	1	2	3	4
14. I've been criticizing myself	1	2	3	4
15. I've been learning to live with it.	1	2	3	4
16. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.	1	2	3	4
17. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.	1	2	3	4
18. I've been looking for something good in what is happening	1	2	3	4
19. I've been making fun of the situation	1	2	3	4
20. I've been praying or meditating.	1	2	3	4
21. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.	1	2	3	4
22. I've been getting help and advice from other people.	1	2	3	4
23. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.	1	2	3	4
24. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened	1	2	3	4
25. I've been expressing my negative feelings.	1	2	3	4
26. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.	1	2	3	4
27. I've been giving up the attempt to cope	1	2	3	4
28. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.	1	2	3	4

26. Finding your work too demanding
27. Conflicts with friend(s)
28. Trying to secure loans
29. Getting "ripped off" or cheated in the purchase of goods
30. Unwanted interruptions of your work
31. Social isolation
32. Being ignored
33. Dissatisfaction with your physical appearance
34. Unsatisfactory housing conditions
35. Finding work uninteresting
36. Failing to get money you expected
37. Gossip about someone you care about
38. Dissatisfaction with your physical fitness
39. Gossip about yourself
40. Difficulty dealing with modern technology (e.g. computers)
41. Hard work to look after and maintain home

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please now use the **postage paid** envelope to return the completed survey to us at The University of Liverpool.

Your contribution to this research is greatly appreciated.

Researcher contact details:

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Would You Like to Take Part in a Research Study?

We are looking to talk to men and women about how their marital status has influenced their identity, social relationships, independence and personal wellbeing.

If you are...

- Cohabiting
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

... we would like to talk to you!

We can arrange to meet at a time and place of your choice, such as at your local club, the university or even your home.

We hope that this research may allow for us to make recommendations to policy makers and those who work in health and welfare services.

Please let us know if you are interested in taking part or would like more information.

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Appendix 6

Additional interview participant information

Participant Identifier Code	Gender	Marital status	Age at Interview	Age at Transition	Marital duration
P001	M	Widowed	72	63	32 years
P002	F	Married	52	46	6 years (+2 cohab)
P003	F	Married/ temporarily separated ⁸	37	26	11 years
P004	F	Cohabiting	28	25	-
P005	F	Married	48	24	24 years
P006	F	Married	41	38	3 years (+6 cohab)
P007	M	Separated/ Cohabiting	44	32	10 years
P008	M	Married	48	25	23 years
P009	M	Separated	57	24	14 years (approx.)
P010	M	Widowed	45	42	9 years (+11 cohab)
P011	F	Widowed	59	49	20 years
P012	F	Married	35	32	3.5 years (+9m cohab)
P013	F	Married	50	27	24 years
P014	M	Married	64	25	40 years
P015	F	Cohabiting	23	23	-
P016	M	Cohabiting	24	22	-
P017	M	Married	37	36	1 year (+4 years cohab)
P018	F	Cohabiting	27	25	-
P019	F	Married	55	42	14 years
P020	M	Divorced	52	38	8 years
P021	F	Divorced	37	29	2 years (approx.)
P022	F	Divorced/ Remarried	44	29	7 years
P023	F	Married	54	22	32 years
P024	F	Widowed	53	49	9 years
P025	M	Married	57	26	31 years
P026	F	Separated	45	44	20 years
P027	F	Married	41	31	10 years
P028	F	Divorced	50	29	7 years
P029	F	Cohabiting	26	24	-
P030	M	Cohabiting	46	35	-
P031	F	Married	56	19	37 years
P032	F	Separated (divorcing)	35	33	3 years (+1 year cohab.)
P033	M	Widowed	66	55	33 years
P034	F	Separated (divorcing)	33	30	3 years (+3 years cohab.)
P035	F	Cohabiting	32	28	-
P036	M	Cohabiting	38	36	-
P037	M	Married	53	33	20 years
P038	F	Married	33	31	2 years
P039	M	Married	32	31	1 year
P040	F	Married	30	25	5 years
P041	M	Married	45	38	8 years
P042	M	Widowed	59	55	30 years (approx.)
P043	F	Married	35	29	6 years

⁸ P003 was self-defined married at interview but was interviewed on the experiences of her marital separation.

P044	F	Widowed/ remarried/ divorced/ remarried/ divorced	53	21	2 years; 6 years (on/off); <1 year
P045	F	Divorced	45	42	7 years (+2 years cohab.)
P046	M	Divorced/ remarried	64	45	21 years
P047	F	Divorced	42	39	18 years (approx.)
P048	F	Widowed	51	44	6 years (not legally married)
P049	F	Divorced	37	35	5 years
P050	F	Widowed	33	31	<1 year (9 months)
P051	F	Widowed	80	78	51 years
P052	F	Divorced/ remarried/ widowed	86	27	6 years; 13 years (approx.)
P053	F	Divorced	67	60	27 years
P054	F	Divorced	40	38	Unclear from data
P055	F	Widowed	65	52	30 years
P056	F	Widowed	37	24	5 years
P057	F	Widowed	57	52	25 years
P058	F	Married	38	33	5 years
P059	F	Married	19	17	2 years
P060	M	Widowed	73	52	23 years
P061	F	Married	51	39	12 years
P062	F	Divorced	31	24	7 years
P063	F	Married	55	34	21 years
P064	F	Married	45	42	3 years
P065	F	Married	38	35	3 years
P066	M	Married	41	33	8 years
P067	F	Married	58	53	5 years
P068	M	Widowed	78	78	54 years
P069	M	Cohabiting	38	33	-
P070	F	Widowed	63	61	Unclear from data
P071	F	Widowed	69	68	Unclear from data
P072	F	Widowed	70	66	45 years
P073	F	Widowed	79	75	54 years
P074	M	Married	63	26	35 years
P075	M	Widowed	79	72	47 years
P076	F	Widowed	73	40	19 years
P077	F	Widowed	40	37	3 years (+4 years cohab.)
P078	M	Separated	42	40	15 years (approx.)
P079	M	Divorced	33	30	4 years
P080	M	Separated	77	63	unclear
P081	F	Widowed	68	68	47 years
P082	M	Married	24	23	2 years

Appendix 7

Copy of interview information sheet and participant consent form

Information Sheet

The influences of marital status, age and gender on psychological wellbeing and social relationships.

You are being invited to participate in a research study organised by Laura Soulsby, a PhD student at the University of Liverpool. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask us if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, relatives and GP if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. Thank you for reading this.

This study will examine the relationships between psychological wellbeing and social support and look at the additional influences of age, gender and marital status. We are looking to talk to people about how their marital status has influenced their relationships, social interaction and personal wellbeing. The approach we take is 'we are the novices and you are the expert'. Your experiences are of great importance to us.

The study will involve private interviews with a University of Liverpool researcher where you will be invited to talk about social and familial relationships, social interaction, social support and wellbeing, all in relation to your marital status. The interview will last for about an hour and can be at a time and place of your choice, such as at your local club, the university or even your home.

You do not have to take part. Participation is entirely voluntary. You can decide to withdraw at any time, or pause during the interview, and you can withdraw after the study if you wish. The material gathered over the course of the interview will remain both confidential and anonymous, and you will have full access to any results and conclusions upon completion of the research project.

There is no intended benefit for you in taking part in this study. However, you will be helping other people in similar situations. We hope that this research may allow for us to

make recommendations to other people in the same situation as well as to those who work in health and welfare services.

This study has received ethical approval. If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting [Dr Kate M Bennett on 0151 794 1410] and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Governance Officer on 0151 794 8290 (ethics@liv.ac.uk). When contacting the Research Governance Officer, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

If you are interested in taking part or would like more information, please contact:

Laura Soulsby

Email L.K.Soulsby@liverpool.ac.uk

Telephone 0151 794 1437

Or Dr. Kate Bennett

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Eleanor Rathbone Building

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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The associations between psychological wellbeing, social support and physical health and the influences of age, gender and marital status

Researcher: Laura Kate Soulsby

Please
initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.

3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant Name

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 8

Interview script

Key

➤ Main area of interest

- Main interview question used to navigate interview direction
 - Prompts used to encourage participants to speak more about their experiences

➤ Part One: Factual questions

If I could start with some factual questions.

- How old are you
- Could you tell me more about your marital status?
 - If cohabiting:
 - How long have you been living with your partner?
 - How long were you together before you moved in together?
 - And would getting married be part of your future plans?
 - If married:
 - How many years have you been married for?
 - So how old were you when you were married?
 - If widowed:
 - If I could ask how long since you lost your husband/wife?
 - And how long had you been married before that?
 - If separated or divorced:
 - If I could ask how long ago you became divorced?
 - And how long had you been married before that?
 - If remarried (as appropriate above plus...):
 - Could you tell me a little more about your earlier marriage (s), when were you first married?
 - And how long were you married for?
- Do you have any children?
 - How many?
 - How old?
 - Do they live at home/ live local?

➤ **Part Two: About you**

I'd like to move on to get to know a little more about you and how you enjoy spending your time.

- Can you tell me about hobbies you've got?
 - Do you have much time to enjoy them?
- What kind of things do you do just for yourself?
 - *How important are they to you?*
- Can you tell me about hobbies you've got?
- Who do you spend most of your time with?
- How many nights a week have you got things that you do on your own, away from your partner/ husband/wife?
- Does your partner/ husband/wife go and see his/her friends alone?
- How does (*_marital status change*) life affect how and how often you socialise outside of the house?

➤ **Part Three: Social network**

I'd like to learn more about any relationships you might have with your family and friends.

I'd like to try something a bit different with you now. If you're happy to, I'd like you to think about the people you had contact with in a typical week before you (*_ marital status change*). Could we draw it as a spider diagram, writing down all the people you would've seen or heard from during a typical week.

- I'm really interested to hear more about these people who were in your life. If we could talk about who they were to you at the time; how often you might have met with them, and what you may have done when you met.
- *Okay, now I'd like you to think about the people who you have contact with now in a typical week, after you (*_marital status change*). So think about last week, the people that you saw or heard from.*
- Has anything changed over time / with becoming (*_marital status change*)? If so, what?
- Could you tell me a little more about your family?
- Can you tell me a little more about your friendships?
- Do you feel a sense of community where you live?
- Did you develop any new friendships through your partner?
- Do you have friends that you share as a couple?

- What is your relationship like with (members of family)?
 - Are they live local to you?
 - What sort of support or help do they give you?
 - How do you have fun together?
 - How often might you see them?
 - How long have you know them?
 - How do you have fun together?
 - How often might you see them?
 - What sort of support or help do you give each other?
 - Has anything changed in your relationship over time? (general prompts)
- Are there other people who are important to you, perhaps who you see less frequently? (not drawn into diagram)
 - What are the main changes you've noticed in your social network over time?

➤ **Part Four: Social support**

(I know we've touched on this already, but) I'd like to find out a bit more about the support you have available to you and the support you give to others.

- Who are the people that will listen to you when you need to talk?
- Who would you turn to for advice about how to deal with a personal problem?
- If you fell ill, would there be someone to help you? For example to take you to the doctors, prepare meals or help with chores?
- Who in your life shows you love and make you feel wanted?
- Do you have someone to have a good time with?
 - Who can you get together with for relaxation or do something enjoyable with?
 - What sorts of things do you enjoy doing most?
- What does it mean to you to have good, loyal friends?
 - How do you help each other out?
 - Has this changed at all since (_marital status change)
- Are there times where you have to provide support for other people around you?
- Do you feel like you have all the support you need available to you?

➤ **Part Five: Wellbeing**

- How does being (marital status) affect how you feel day to day?

- What kinds of things really cheer you up, make you feel happy?
- Any other things that you get real pleasure out of?
- Are there things that really annoy you?
- Are you quite confident with other people?
- Would you say you are content with how things are in your life?
 - How much would you say being (marital status) has to do with that?

➤ **Part Six: Concluding questions (if sufficient time)**

As part of my research I'm looking at the influence of gender and of age on people's experience. Do you have any thoughts on this?

- For example, do you think that your experience of (marital status) is different from someone of the opposite sex?
 - How?
- Do you think that your age has influenced your experience?
 - The age you were (marital status change) for example, might it be different for someone older or younger? How?

Is there anything else you want to add that I've not asked you about? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you/ End of interview. Debriefing.

Appendix 9

Example coded transcript (P047SW)

Okay, fantastic. So, if I could start by asking some more factual questions; could you remind me first of how old you are now?

I'm 42

And would it be okay for you to tell me a little bit about your own marital status background, briefly?

Erm, I'm now separated. I've been separated for three years erm (...) that's about it. I was married (*laughter*) well, I'm still married I suppose, erm, we were together for about 20 years roughly

Okay, was that how long you were married for?

No, we were married for sixteen, yes, no, sixteen years, yeah, about, we were together before and then we got married and then we separated just over three years ago.

Were you living with each other for a period of time before you married?

Yeah, we were living together for a period of about eighteen months and we got married, erm, (...) sounds a bit bizarre but part of me thinks we maybe never would have got married but my ex-husband's job at the time he was relocating and to be brutally honest, it was a case of if he moved being still classed as single erm the re-locating thing was nothing, you wouldn't get any relocation expenses, whereas if you were married you got thousands and thousands of pounds. So, I suppose if you've been together, we'd been together for such a long time anyway we thought, well, we'll get married anyway (*laughter*)

So it was a more practical motivation, yeah?

Yeah. Now that I think about it. And to be honest I think yeah, probably was. I mean, we were really, we loved each other and stuff but we did it at the time where we did it because of that.

Comment [CS1]: Convenience

Okay. So I'd like to move on to get to know more about you first. What kind of hobbies or interests have you got yourself?

I've gotta admit, my time is really limited. I've got three boys. And they play a lot of sport, so, I've gotta like, 14, 15, yeah I'd say a 14 hour day, just getting them to school, getting them to football and getting them home. So when people ask me what I do in my spare time I say nothing! Because I don't have any!

Comment [CS2]: Busy
Hobbies / Interests
Children / Responsibilities

Okay! How old are your boys then?

The twins are gonna be 14 and T* [son] he's 10, so, and they all do something.

Active boys!

I don't have a lot of time. I like reading and I love you know, if I've got time I like to do some holistic therapy, and things like that

Comment [CS3]: Busy

Comment [CS4]: Hobbies/ Interests
New hobbies

Oh right. And how long have you been interested in that?

Probably about two and half years. I've gotta admit, I needed to turn my mind to something different and that kinda it did actually help me at the time

So that was quite a deliberate thing then?

It was I've got to admit

And did it work?

Yeah, it does, yeah.

Comment [CS5]: Coping
Hobbies/ Interests

That's really interesting. What kind of things might you do that are just for yourself?

(Laughter) Nothing!

Nothing?

Pff (laughter) when I've got the time, oh, that's really hard, probably nothing, oh that sounds really terrible now! I don't do a lot, I've got to admit, because when you're a single parent and you're working, and you've got kids, and they do a lot of things then my main focus is them. And if I've got time, then I've got to sit and think okay, what do I really really wanna do. And sometimes its really simple, like I'll go and get my hair cut, you know and that's about it.

Comment [CS6]: Children /
Responsibilities
'Single parent'
Busy

Okay. Its just finding time sometimes, isn't it, yeah?

Yeah!

Who do you find you spend most of your time with?

My kids. That would be it, yeah.

Comment [CS7]: Children
Socialising

Okay and are there any nights a week that you get the chance to go away on your own away from home?

No

Is that no, in a typical week, or do you sometimes get that opportunity?

Erm, every now and again the boys will go to their dads. It might be for a night, it might be for a couple of nights, and then, then I'll decide to do something. But historically, erm, sometimes he's like said he'll have 'em and I've arranged to go away for weekends and stuff like that and then right at the last minute he'll say he's not having them so it's got to the point where I don't arrange too much because then, you know, if I

arrange something that I might never get to go, if you see what I mean. So usually, a lot of things are always last minute.

Comment [CS8]: Socialising
Ex/ Former spouse
Challenges

How's that changed since before your separation? What were things like then?

Before I was separated?

Yes.

Yeah, I was, it was different because you've got somebody there, haven't you, you've got somebody there. You know I used to go salsa dancing every week, yeah, and I'd go out maybe once a month with my girl friends maybe go for a meal and a drink, stuff like that but to be honest, now its finding, because I've moved, its finding, probably finding the time, erm, and I mean, I know the boys are a bit older but I couldn't leave them on their own, I would have to get a baby sitter, so there's a cost involved then as well.

Comment [CS9]: Loss/ Support

Comment [CS10]: Transition / hobbies
Socialising

Comment [CS11]: Barriers
Children

Sure. How has the separation affected how you socialise outside of the house?

Oh, seriously, because I just can't do it. You know. Erm, a lot of the time my friends come here, erm, so and that's good but your life's gotta revolve around your children twenty-four seven.

Comment [CS12]: Socialising
Responsibilities

And did you just say that you'd moved as well?

Erm, yeah. Erm, we had to move, we didn't have a choice we had to move, so yeah, the distance is a bit of a problem you know, if I'm going to see people usually I'll say I'll meet you half way, but getting friends to come here that's a lot to ask isn't it really

Comment [CS13]: Barriers
Geographical distance / Relocation

Sure. I mean, how often might you have the opportunity to do that, have friends across?

Pfff, I, pffff (*laughter*) I don't know! Erm, I don't know. To be honest, I couldn't even say. Once every blue moon.

Comment [CS14]: Socialising /
frequency

Okay. So if we could talk a little more about the people that are important to you and the people you have contact with on a more regular basis. And this is where I'd normally do this spider diagram activity I said about earlier. So if I describe what I'd normally do that might make it clear (*spider diagram explained*) So if we thought about now first. If I was to draw the diagram whilst we're talking over the phone, who would be the first person who'd go on this?

That I'd talk to?

This is people that you have contact with in a typical week.

Erm, probably one of my good friends Ma*.

Comment [CS15]: Friends

Okay. How long have you known Ma* [friend]?

20, 23 years (*laughter*)

(laughter) so this goes back quite a long way! And how often do you speak?

Maybe two or three times a week

And that's over the phone?

Yeah.

And then how often do you manage to meet up?

It really depends. Probably once every, at the least once every six months

Okay. And what sort of support relationship is there between you and Ma* [friend] then?

Oh, that's quite hard. I think she's, were like a support for each other, we're just best friends if you see what I mean.

Yes. And has anything changed in that relationship over time?

(...) No.

Okay. So, that's Ma* [friend]. Who else might you have contact with in a typical week? Should I put your boys on this?

Yeah, I suppose you better! They're there every day *(laughter)*

How do you enjoy their company?

Erm, we've got a really close relationship, considering the older two are 14 and in teenage years, we do have a really close relationship. Erm, sometimes I'm a bit, a bit wary that they are very overprotective, not over protective, but very protective of me.

Is that something that's come out over time over the last three years?

Yeah, yeah. And to be honest I think they've gone through things that they shouldn't have gone through if you see what I mean, and I think they do become, I think its a natural thing isn't it, they become protective, and they're all bigger than me anyway! But we've got a really close relationship. We can talk about anything, they can ask me questions and we have quite an open relationship with each other. So in that respect its fantastic, I just think its fab.

Comment [CS16]: Children

And are there any difficulties or adjustments there over the last three years?

I don't know, that's really difficult. There's been a lot of problems trying to keep a relationship between them and their dad , so that's quite hard

Hard for you?

Yeah, and sometimes, they're only children at the end of the day. They do have their moments where they're trying to play one off against the

other. But then I'm quite open with them and tell them they can't do it. I am there mum at the end of the day and they need to know their boundaries. But I think if I'm being brutally honest, at the end of the marriage, I knew (...) it sounds really weird but I'm actually quite a touchy feely person and I wasn't being affectionate you know as I would be towards him. And I think since I've separated I'm a bit of a more, touchy feely show my emotions to my children, if that makes any sense. Yeah. And they've changed because they know they can be just who they wanna be.

Comment [CS17]: Challenges

Mmm. That's interesting. Okay, is there anybody else you might have contact with in a typical week?

Erm, my dad

And is your dad local to you?

No, he lives in Scotland

Ah, so a fair way away!

Yeah!

Comment [CS18]: Finding positives
Transition / Personality

And how often do you speak over the phone?

Once a week.

And how is that relationship, between you and your dad?

Its really weird. Its kind of like he's my dad. I've gotta admit, since my mum died we've become closer because I think, I think it's really bizarre but when you're mums there, when my mum was there I'd speak to her every week and never really talk to him. But yeah, since my mum died, we've become close, we've gone on holiday and stuff like that so we are quite close.

Comment [CS19]: Father
Geographical distance

Comment [CS20]: Mother

Comment [CS21]: Father
Strengthened r'ship

Okay. And again, you know, what's the support or help you get from your dad? Or is it a two way thing?

It probably is. I mean, I know at the end of the day if I ever needed anything I could pick up the phone and say "dad I need help" and he'd give me it. He wouldn't even ask, he'd just be there and to me that means, such a tremendous amount, considering I don't have any family here, knowing I could just pick up the phone saying help me kind of thing, knowing he would do it, that's enough.

Comment [CS22]: Support
Father

At the time of your separation, erm, what support was it that you needed at that time.

What from my dad?

Well, actually more in general.

Oh, that's a tough one! No, I'm trying to think. Because (...) when we separated it was a case of my husband, he wouldn't leave the house, so I was the one that had to leave with the children, to be brutally honest, I

suppose I was quite naive. Because you leave, you're then branded the bad one and yeah, you're the one that left and considering people don't know what's gone on, you're the one that's left. And I was the one that left. So I didn't get a lot of support by anybody because they automatically thought I'd done something wrong "oh, she's left with another man" and I hadn't, but everybody automatically assumed that. So at the end of the day nobody took my side. My family did but they were miles away. My sister came down and helped and all that kind of stuff but at the end of the day the support that, maybe I naively thought I'd get from sort of friends and that, it just wasn't there. Now I'm quite a private person so I didn't tell a lot of people what had been going on anyway, so for a lot of people it was quite a shock that I'd gone.

So who was it that you felt particularly let down by then?

My ex husband for a start, because he, my mother in law and that, she just (...) I've gotta admit, even now she's one nasty lady and I cannot even describe her in any other way. All my sister in law and everything will still not speak to me, but they can be very nasty and very cutting, so I was really, I think that was a shock.

Right, their reaction?

Yeah, erm, I mean. Friends that I'd known for quite some time, they were there, but they're always a bit weary aren't they "should I", "should I not" but the people I would class as close friends were there when I needed them but it was all a bit, I don't know. It was a bit of a grey area I suppose

Had you and your ex-husband shared a group of friends as well?

Yeah, and some of them (...) I never wanted people to take sides because I think you just shouldn't do stuff like that but then what do you do how does it work? Hindsight is a wonderful thing. And some of them would say, "oh [P047] is right" and some would say "no, [ex husband] is right and in the end I thought I can't be doing with it.

So it became difficult?

Yeah, some bits did.

So, what support was it that you say you needed?

(...)

Practical support, if you had to move out of the house?

Yeah, but when I left I didn't take anything. I left with, like, a bag and suitcase. But you know, looking at myself I'm actually a very independent person anyway so I just got on with it. I think because when I was married I had to get on with it anyway. It's ingrained in you isn't it. I just got on with it. So we moved to a rented house and I just refurnished it. I mean, the furniture wasn't anything exciting, but you know, I just refurnished it. and my brother in law came down and helped do stuff and my sister came down. So that was, if I'm being brutally

Comment [CS23]: Other people's reactions

Practical issues
Loyalty/ Blame
Support
Family
Let down/ Friends

Comment [CS24]: Let down in laws / lost relationships

Animosity
Loyalty/ Blame
Shock

Comment [CS25]: Friends / shared friends

Loyalty/ blame

Comment [CS26]: Married relationship

Comment [CS27]: Coping Independent/ personality

Comment [CS28]: Practical issues
Practical support
Family

honest, that was the only support I needed at the time, because anything emotional, I just sort of switched off. I didn't want any emotional support at the time because I think it would have been too painful so I didn't, it was just practical stuff like helping me I don't know, build a wardrobe stuff

Comment [CS29]: Support needs
Numb

Do the 'Ikea' stuff!

Yeah (*laughter*) take me to IKEA, yeah!

You mentioned your sister there. It sounds like she was a good support at the time? Do you still have regular contact with her?

Yeah, she'd go on that yeah.

Okay, I'll put her on. Is she in Scotland as well. So everyone's far away are they?

I know, yes.

Is that a problem for you?

No, because I mean they've always lived there, erm, and I've always lived in England so its not like I've lived near them or anything so its always been the case that she's lived miles away.

Yes, okay. Is there anybody else that you keep in contact with weekly? (recap)

I speak every day, I've got another friend called Me* [friend], and I speak to her, I'd say every day

So daily contact, yeah. What's different about that friendship?

Well I think its because her son and my sons play football together so there's a lot of like social contact. You know, we'll all got to football together, and I work with her, so its that kind of day to day stuff. If I' being honest. And the kids go to school together, so that kind of thing to be honest.

Comment [CS30]: Friend

Okay. Anybody else you keep in touch with weekly?

I've got another friend called C* [friend] and I speak to him probably every day, no I don't, no, maybe two or three times a week.

How long have you known C* [friend] then?

Oh, about five years

And how important is that relationship to you?

Erm, yeah, yeah, its quite important. I think its because he's a man, sounds a bit bizarre, but he's a friend, he's just a friend, I mean he's got a partner and everything but it sounds a bit bizarre but when you need a male perspective on something, I'd ask. Yeah, I don't see him often, but I do talk to him.

Comment [CS31]: Male company

Okay, I'll put C* on there. Is there anybody else that would come on to this?

Who else do I talk to, who else do I talk to. Err, my friend S* [friend]. I talk to her erm, and her sons I've known her for about 15 years.

Okay, so another longer standing friendship. Is she local?

They're about, her, erm, and the Me* I speak to every day are about 15, 16 miles away.

Comment [CS32]: Friend
Geographical distance

So in terms of seeing people on a regular basis, does that tend to be your boys?

Yeah, and my next door neighbours *(laughter)* yeah, that's it! *(laughter)* the mums at school, but that's about it.

Comment [CS33]: Social network

The mums at school, are they friends or

No, you just stand there at the school gate and say hi

Okay. So I've got on here (recap)

Yeah

Yes? Okay, fantastic. Would it be okay to try and reflect back to when you were in your married relationship, and the same idea, so people you'd have had contact with on a regular, week to week basis then?

Yeah. Okay. The boys. I suppose A* my ex husband, erm, who else did I talk to? S* [friend],

This is the same S*[friend], yeah?

Yes.

Has anything changed between you and S*[friend] over the time since you separated?

No to be honest. I think my two longstanding friends that I've got, I mean, I do have other ones but I don't speak to them on a regular basis, nothing's changed. I think its a case of when you've been friends for so long, its a case of. So I spoke to S*[friend], and I spoke to M*[friend], and I spoke to, it wouldn't have been my dad, it would've been my mum. And my sister. Erm, who else did I speak to? Erm, my mother in law, but to be honest It was a very, very strained relationship anyway. But erm, who else? *(laughter)* Cant think now. I suppose my neighbours when I lived there. And there was the joint friends, I don't know now, its quite hard because you kind of put it back of the mind

Comment [CS34]: Transition
Social network

Its a test of memory anyway isn't it? So, there's (recap) does that seem pretty representative?

Comment [CS35]: Coping

Yes!

That's great, thanks for that- I know its been harder doing that over the phone. What sort of changes have you noticed over the time since your separation, before to now?

In what respect?

In terms of the people you have around you

I think (...) I, I mean, there's lots of things that had gone on, and I cut myself off from some of the people. Erm, yeah

Comment [CS36]: Coping
Withdrawal

What had made you do that?

Because when me and my husband split up he found a new partner, and she became really, really nasty. That's why we had to move. But during the time, because we lived in the same town for quite some time. but during that time, for me it really affected me emotionally and everything and I just cut myself off from a lot of people because I didn't really want to see them or have anything to do with them because it just became too painful and all that kind of thing. So a lot of people that I probably would've had connections with or would have seen on a more regular basis I don't see at all now, yeah, I sometimes thing its quite sad, but I don't know, but its just one of these things, you've got to kind of like move on.

Comment [CS37]: Challenges

Comment [CS38]: Wellbeing

Yes. I mean, have you had the opportunity to meet new people?

Since we've moved, I've got to admit, I haven't, the only people I see is my neighbours because I get up in the morning, take kids to school, go to work, some days I can work from home but I've got to stay here glued to the computer so it's not like I can go out and join a gym or anything, so no, I haven't.

Comment [CS39]: Coping
Withdrawal
Lost relationships

With the holistic course, is there a group of people there?

See when I did that I sat, I was doing that in the town I lived before so when I moved I haven't done it, so I haven't actually done it on anybody apart from friends. So to be honest, if I had the time I would push it. so yeah, I haven't had the time.

Comment [CS40]: Social network
Neighbours
Isolated

How long ago was it that you moved again then?

Last October.

So still fairly recently really?

Yeah, yeah.

If we could move on to talk a little more about the idea of support. What kind of support is it that you'd say you needed now as a person?

I think just I don't know, its really difficult. Because I think to be honest I've got to the point now where I just get on with it. To be honest it would be nice to have somebody to say alright, I'll have the kids for the night so its just that kind of thing. Erm, emotional support, erm, I've, I

Comment [CS41]: Hobbies/ interests
Busy

Comment [CS42]: Coping
Adjustment

Comment [CS43]: Responsibilities
Childcare

go, I had to start counselling for that, so that's where I got my support because it was something that I didn't feel I could share, a lot of it, with friends, even my long term friends because I felt it was just too much to put on people. I'd be better off to give to somebody else!

Comment [CS44]: Support needs
Professional support/ Counselling
Friends
Burden

And how is that working out for you?

Yeah, I had to do it. I did it for eight weeks through work, and then I've started doing it via somebody else so that's still in its early stages but if I'm being honest it's been a godsend because I can just say what I've gotta say and that's it done and dusted instead of it just building up inside me. So that was where I get the emotional support. A lot of the time it's practical help, you know like, I came in to a new house and it needs decorating, it needs tiling. I start a job and I can't finish it because I don't have the time and all these kind of things. It's just practical stuff.

Comment [CS45]: Emotional support
Professional support/ Counselling

Comment [CS46]: Support needs

And is that more difficult because there's no one physically there to do that?

Yeah, and I've gotta do it. My bathrooms half tiled, because I've tiled it in bits, and it's finding time to finish it. I've laid the carpet but I've gotta finish it. You know what I mean? I'd just love someone to come in and say "go away for the weekend and we'll get your bathroom done!"

Comment [CS47]: Practical issues
Responsibilities

I only wish I could offer that as an incentive for participation!

Ha! That'd be fab! But that's the kind of thing I need, you know.

Okay. Erm, if I could ask some more specific questions. So, who are the people you've got to listen to you when you need to talk. I know you've mentioned the counselling, but who are those people?

If I wanna sound off I usually call M* [friend], because I've known her for such a long time I can shout and scream whatever. She does it back to me, so it's a two way thing.

I mean, who would you be able to turn to for advice about how to deal with a personal problem for example?

Erm, that's a good question. I think it would depend on what the problem was if I'm being honest. Probably nine times out of ten, it would just be, I would just turn to one of my friends. I might ask my sister but it would really depend on what it was.

Comment [CS48]: Emotional support
Friends

Mmm. Okay. Erm, so in terms of more sort of practical support then, if you were to fall ill would there be somebody there to help you, to take you to the doctors, do your meals, chores things like that.

No.

Okay. is that something you're quite aware of?

Yeah, I am. Because if I'm ill my kids can't get to school because I've gotta drive them there. I mean, no doubt, if I said to my next door neighbour can you take the little one to primary school, but the older

two, they just could get there. They'd have to stay off school until I was better

Comment [CS49]: Practical support
Support needs
Loss

Right. Who in your life makes you feel loved and wanted?

Erm, I think everybody that, because I'm a really private person and I do have this real strong belief that I don't let anybody in my life if they're going to be a negative influence on me. This has happened since I separated I must admit

Ah, okay. So that's been a change?

Yeah it's a real big change for me. If you're not going to benefit me, maybe it's a bit selfish, I'm not to sure, but if you're not going to benefit me in a positive way I'm not going to have you in my life. I just don't want them there, you know. Sometimes you've gotta put up with people, if you work with them, but at least you can walk away from them.

Mmm, but you can chose your friends cant you!

Exactly and I'm quite choosey I have to say. When you look at the spider diagram, I've probably only got about three people, but I'm really choosey. And I think, if you can't show me, not, love or affection or whatever, then there's no point. 'Cos I would show love and affection back, you know what I mean

Comment [CS50]: Friends/ Social N'wk

Comment [CS51]: Outlook
Transition

So perhaps it's a change in your outlook almost?

Yeah. I mean I know when I was married, I suppose you give all your love and affection to your husband and everybody else goes onto a back burner. You know, I don't know if that's right or wrong but I suppose its a personal opinion. Erm, but erm, now I just think if they're not going to be any use to me then no, I don't want them. So everybody that I associate with or I try my damndest because they're a positive influence on me, so yeah they do show love and affection.

Comment [CS52]: Married relationship
Transition

Comment [CS53]: Outlook
Transition

Okay, so they'd all come under that then. Lovely. So I know you've said the opportunities for it are few, but do you have somebody to have a good time with? Who would you get together with for relaxation, or do something enjoyable with if you did have that time available?

When I can, I'll go out with M*[friend]

What sorts of things do you enjoy doing most when you get together?

Well maybe go out for a meal, go for a drink, and then its just sort of, because you can just go out and just have fun then cant you. Every now and again, C*[friend] rolls up because he's a big cinema buff, and I love going to the cinema, so we'll go to the cinema if there's a new movie on. And I can get time away, so I go and watch the cinema. Erm, and that's probably about it (*laughter*).

Comment [CS54]: Socialising
Friends

Okay. What does it mean to you to have good loyal friends?

Oh everything, because I've got no family.

Comment [CS55]: Support
Friends
Family/ Geographical distance

And is that something that's changed at all over the past few years?

Yeah, because I think you can definitely see who your friends are when you go through a bad time, and because I've got no family round me then the only big support if I'm being honest are my friends, that's it.

Comment [CS56]: Friends
Support
Outlook

Do you feel like you've got all the support that you need available to you and if no, what do you wish you had more access to?

Well no, it would be nice, to practical things, you know. It'd be lovely to have somebody, I'm not saying I want a new partner or anything like that because that's a big thing really, isn't it

Has there come a time where you'd feel comfortable with the idea of meeting somebody new?

Erm, probably but I think at this moment in time, you know, I'm just quite happy, yeah, its one of these things, you've got to learn to love yourself before you can love somebody else. So you've gotta go through that first I think before you can kind of move on, but sometimes it would be nice for someone to come round and tidy the house. You know, it's really simple things.

Comment [CS57]: New romantic relationship

And are there times where you have to provide support for people around you?

Yeah, its like anything. Your friends might need support, they might have a problem and I don't mind that. I don't mind at all.

Comment [CS58]: Giving support

Yes, and it seems a silly question given you've got your three boys!

Yeah, but I think when it comes to your children, you never think twice anyway, would you.

I'm sure, yes. Okay, to move on, how does being separated affect how you see yourself?

I think it really does affect you. I think, well, from a personal point of view in the beginning I had no confidence, no self esteem, I felt totally and utterly worthless, because you feel don't you, whatever way you look at it, and I think because people pigeon hole you I just felt like (...) I don't know, the big one, I just felt worthless, absolutely worthless. And regardless of what I did I just couldn't focus on it, I had to leave my work and things because I just couldn't focus on it. so it really did have a probably a bigger emotional affect than everything. but, then you've gotta kinda learn how to get over it. but its taken me to now, I've gotta admit, to look at myself and think yes, maybe I am a bit worth something.

Comment [CS59]: Worthless

Comment [CS60]: Employment
Practical issues

Comment [CS61]: Wellbeing

Comment [CS62]: Identity

So how's it changed to now then?

I think a lot of things have changed. I look at myself differently. I've always been independent, but I can look at things now and think, oh

yeah to be honest that was really good! And people, I mean people do sit and say "I don't know how you do it" you know "I don't know how you work" "I don't know how you get your kids here" and to be honest, part of me thinks, well nor do I! But I do it, I get on with it. erm, so I suppose I've gotta get myself a pat on the back for stuff like that. And my kids are really well adjusted and they didn't have to be, you know, they could've gone off the rails, so for that I stand up and pat myself on the back. And I do, I react to things differently now. I don't, yeah, I just react differently to a lot of situations,

Comment [CS63]: Achievement

What do you mean?

Erm things that would maybe really, really upset me before. I mean, I'll be honest, my ex husband, now I don't even talk to him because I think I', better off not talking to you. Its kinda like, you're not doing me any favours so don't bother coming in it. that kind of attitude (*laughter*) but to me its better because I feel more positive, and the kids see it if your happy ,and that's just my main aim. Just as long as I'm happy then everybody else can go jump! (*Laughter*)

Comment [CS64]: Identity / Outlook
Finding positives

So what kinds of things really do make you feel happy?

Oh, lots of different things. Just when you get up in the morning and think oh this is going to be a good day. Or if somebody sends you a nice email, or a text, or a nice email. It's just really simple things you know. or when the kids get up in the morning they always say "oh hi mum, I love ya" and that's it, it just makes my day! Yeah

Have those days, when you get up in the morning and think oh this is going to be a good day, have they become more frequent over recent years?

Yeah. I get, I'm a bit more positive than I was before and because we don't get any of the harassment that we did before then life's a bit more peaceful, so you don't wake up going oh my god what's going to happen today, what am I going home to, I don't get any of that

Comment [CS65]: Outlook
Finding positives
Transition
Stability

Yes. And we talked a little then about what things cheer you up, on the flip side, are there any things that really annoy you?

Lots of things, probably, but to be honest, I try not to look at them because it really winds me up, and I've not got passed the point, I cant, my emotional state is still really fragile and when things wind me up can really wind me up. Erm, and a lot of it, its just, (...) probably, I mean, my friends and that don't I've gotta admit because they know they're treading a fine line and I'm actually quite up front with them and will say you're really getting on my nerves. Its things like, is it going to affect my children. Like my ex husband if he says he's going to pick them up and he doesn't that really winds me up whereas actually I shouldn't let it wind me up. So I just try and shrug it off.

Comment [CS66]: Coping

Comment [CS67]: Wellbeing
Vulnerable

Are there any other big 'learnings' that you've noticed over the last three years?

Erm, I think I've learnt lots erm, a lot about people to be honest, especially when you think people will be there for you and they're not. I think that was a big shock and people make huge assumptions when they don't have a clue, you know. So that was, that's been a big learning curve for me. And also the fact that, I think, when I look back now erm, I wasn't really person that I wanted to be if you see what I mean, so over the three years it's like actually, you're a better person that you were.

Comment [CS68]: Outlook
Let down/ Other people's reactions

That's really interesting. Would you say you're content with the way things are now?

Yeah, I mean, it could be better (..) you know I could have lots of money in the bank and stuff like that but I haven't. And it does frustrate me thinking I'm a single parent and I'm bring my kids up on my own and you don't get a lot of help. People, I think people think it's gonna be dead easy. The financial helps not there and that really, to be honest, if somebody says what annoys you, that annoys me, because you don't get it. You don't get anything.

Comment [CS69]: Finances
Support needs

So what kind of help would you want there?

I don't know to be honest. Only because there was a program on the TV that said actually, if your single with three kids you're actually better off not working because you get more in benefits that if you work. and it threw me and I thought that can't be right, that can't be right. But I don't get any maintenance or anything. I'm the one that has to cash for my children, and I think that, you know, it used to really annoy me. But then I think there's no point because I can shout and scream and holler but I'm not going to get anything so there's no point in shouting. So I don't, I just get on with it.

Comment [CS70]: Frustrated
Finances
'Single parent'

If you had the opportunity to talk to someone who was going through the same experience as yourself, at an earlier stage

Oh lord! Erm, (...) I don't know. I think to be honest everybody's unique when they go through something like this

Certainly

So you can't say this is going to happen, but you go through every emotion under the sun. You go through anger, grief, hurt and you don't even have a clue when they'll appear. You can one day feel really angry. Next day just want to cry and you've just got to accept that these emotions are going to come and I think you've got to be prepared for people to treat you differently. You know, and I think that's' it. The big thing for me is the emotional side. The practical side, you know. If you're an independent woman anyway you get on a deal with it, and if you're not, you'd have to find someone to do it for you. But the big thing I think is the emotional rollercoaster that you go on.

Comment [CS71]: Wellbeing

Comment [CS72]: Coping
Independent

Comment [CS73]: Practical issues

Yes. You've mentioned a few times the way that people treat you. Was it your experience that people put a stigma towards you?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah I think they do. Even people that you've probably known for such a long time and all of a sudden, oh. And it was only, I remember this really clearly because before me and A* [ex husband] separated one of my friends that I don't have any contact with now, she separated from her husband and she said she found it really difficult because people wouldn't talk to her, and I'm think, well why not? What's wrong with her, and she says because she's now a single woman, and I'd say yeah but you're not going to run off with their husbands are you, but she's like no but they still had this stigma. And I never actually thought much of it until I was in the same boat but people do look at you differently. Not as in physically look at you but they think differently of you like you know, if I've got friends that are going out as couples, they're not going to invite me because I don't have anyone to go with, which is I suppose simple things like that. I mean, it's not so bad now, but I do think people look at you differently.

Comment [CS74]: Couples
Socialising

Comment [CS75]: Timescale

Comment [CS76]: Other people's
reactions
Stigma
Friends

I think that is so interesting, yes. Okay, just to finish us off then, as part of my wider research I'm also interested in gender and age on peoples experience and whether people have any thoughts on it. For example do you think your experience of the separation might be different from a man's experience?

Yeah,

How do you think they'd differ?

I mean men, I sounds bizarre but I think men bare a grudge forever, forever and ever, whereas women, maybe its a bit too pigeon hole, but I do think women, especially when you've got the children and you've got to get on with it, its a case of its done I've got to get on with it, but men, even now A* [ex-husband]'s got this thing of "you did this to me", and I'll say no we did this to each other, but he still has to lay the blame at my door for everything regardless of what it is. He lost his job; "its your fault I lost my job". How do you work that out? So I think they would bare a grudge for such a long time and they do take it (...) is suppose every man is different and every woman is different but I suppose men, they'd keep this in their head for forever and a day whereas women will say okay it's done its dusted I'll just have to crack on.

Comment [CS77]: Gender
Loyalty/ Blame

And how about age then? Do you think age influenced your experience when you separated- the age you were?

I don't know (...) I think if I'd maybe been about 60, I'd maybe, I don't know. No I don't think age has anything to do with it. I think its the circumstances.

What do you mean by that?

I think its why you've separated or anything like that. Why you've come out of that relationship. I wouldn't think it has anything to do with age that has any difference. I think it'd be the circumstances round it. because you can still feel rubbish after one.

Comment [CS78]: Circumstances

I just wonder in terms of different barriers, so say like younger children compared to adult children?

Yeah, quite possibly. I suppose if you separate when your 60 and your kids are 25 or whatever they're gonna sit and think well why have you done it 'cos your old an you should just stick together. So yeah, I can understand you'd have a bit more explaining to do to them haven't you because they're not at that age.

Comment [CS80]: Age, Timing

I guess your biggest thing was the emotional side, from what you've said, and perhaps that's no different for any age

Yeah see I don't think it is, its how you deal with it. Yes I think so.

Okay. Lovely, well that covers everything I wanted to ask you. I don't know if there's anything you wanted to add?

No, no.

Well thank you so much for making the time to speak to me. It's been lovely talking to you.

Appendix 10

Initial theme list

1. Acceptance
2. Achievement
3. Adjustment
4. Adult company
5. Age
6. Age, Children
7. Age, Timing
8. Alcohol
9. Alone
10. Anger
11. Animosity
12. Appreciation of wife
13. Attraction
14. Background Upbringing Past experience
15. Balance
16. Barriers
17. Birthday
18. Brave face
19. Brother
20. Burden
21. Busy
22. Caring
23. Cause
24. Challenges
25. Childcare
26. Children
27. Christmas New Year
28. Church
29. Circumstances
30. Cohort
31. Colleagues
32. Commuting
33. Companionship
34. Company
35. Compromise
36. Concentration
37. Confidence
38. Conflicts
39. Contentment
40. Continued bonds
41. Conversational support
42. Cooking
43. Coordinating
44. Coping
45. Counselling
46. Coupled friends, Couples
47. Culture
48. Custody
49. Dad
50. Daughter
51. Decisions

52. Decreased contact
53. Denial
54. Dependent
55. Determined
56. Dinner parties Entertaining
57. Distraction
58. Domestic tasks
59. Downward comparison
60. Driving
61. Emotional support
62. Employment
63. Empty house
64. Escape
65. Evenings
66. Ex/ Former spouse
67. Faith Religion
68. Family
69. Family life
70. Feeling loved
71. Feeling lucky
72. Female company
73. Female friends
74. Finances
75. Financial support
76. Finding positives
77. Freedom
78. Frequency
79. Fresh start
80. Friends
81. Friends through wife
82. Frustrated
83. Funeral
84. Future plans
85. Gardening
86. Gender
87. Geographical distance
88. Giving support
89. Grandchildren
90. Grandmother Nan
91. Grave
92. Grief
93. Guilt
94. Happier
95. Health
96. His friends
97. Hobbies Interests
98. Holidays
99. Homeless
100. Husband
101. Identification
102. Identity
103. Illness
104. Improvements
105. Independent/ Self sufficient
106. In-laws
107. Internal conflict
108. Internet Technologies

109. Introductions
110. Isolated
111. Jealousy
112. Keeping active
113. Keeping busy
114. LAT
115. Learning / Gaining knowledge
116. Let down
117. Levels of friendship
118. Lonely
119. Loss
120. Lost relationships
121. Loyalty / Blame
122. Maintaining relationships
123. Male company
124. Marital status
125. Married relationship
126. Meal time, Dinner
127. Meaning making
128. Medication
129. Memories
130. Miscarriage
131. Motivation
132. Moving on
133. Mother
134. Needing support
135. Neighbours
136. New dimension
137. New friendships
138. New hobbies
139. New life
140. New romantic relationship
141. New step family
142. Numb
143. Odd one
144. Other people's reactions
145. Outlook
146. Over time
147. Overwhelmed
148. Own friends
149. Own interests
150. Own space, Time to self
151. Ownership of friends
152. Parents
153. Partnership
154. Personality
155. Pets
156. Practical issues
157. Practical support
158. Preparations
159. Pressures
160. Principles
161. Priorities
162. Professional support
163. Proud
164. Purpose, Feeling useful
165. Reassurance

166. Regret
167. Rejection
168. Relief
169. Re-location
170. Remarriage
171. Remembering
172. Reminders
173. Responsibility
174. Restricted
175. Retirement
176. Role
177. Routine
178. Security
179. Seeking new friends
180. Self encouragement
181. Self-image
182. Shared experience
183. Shared friends
184. Shared interests
185. Sharing life
186. Shock
187. Single parent
188. Sister
189. Sleep
190. Social network
191. Social or Interest Club
192. Socialising
193. Son
194. Stability
195. Status
196. Step family
197. Stigma
198. Strengthened relationships
199. Sunday
200. Support
201. Support group
202. Support needs
203. Tactile contact
204. Technology
205. Television
206. Time= valuable
207. Timescale
208. Timing- marital duration
209. Timing- marital quality
210. Timing-media
211. Together
212. Transition
213. Trust
214. Turning point
215. Understanding
216. Unexpected
217. Unfair Feeling cheated
218. Uninformed
219. Upbringing, background
220. Ups and downs
221. Views of marriage
222. Visiting

- 223. Vulnerable
- 224. Wanting to die
- 225. Weekends
- 226. Weight
- 227. Wellbeing
- 228. Widowhood versus divorce
- 229. Wife/ Female Partner
- 230. Withdrawal
- 231. Worthless