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Wives' Work Hours and Marital Dissolution: Differential Effects across Marital Duration

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I ask: Does the effect of wives' work hours on marital dissolution change across marital duration? Using the first two waves of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), I find only weak evidence that wives' work hours are associated with higher marital dissolution. The effect, however, is more positive and significant among long-term marriages. In addition, this study also tests whether couples' gender ideology and marital interaction explain this differential effect of wives' work hours. The results suggest that couples' gender ideology does not account for this differential effect of wives' work hours. The more positive effect among long-term marriages, however, is reduced to insignificance as soon as a marital interaction measure is introduced into the model. This study contributes to broader research in two ways. Despite the weak effect of wives' work hours on marital dissolution, the buffering effect of marital duration challenges the prior assumption that the effect of wives' work hours is invariant across marital duration. Second, this study suggests that the more positive effect of wives' work hours on marital dissolution among long-term marriages can be attributed to couples' marital interaction in these marriages becoming more important in mediating the effect of wives' work hours. Given these results, this study suggests that future research should consider the buffering effect of marital duration in understanding the determinants of marital dissolution.

KEYWORDS

Work Hours; Marital Dissolution; Marital Interaction; Gender Ideology; Marital Duration

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