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- Articles
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## When Harry left Sally: A New Estimate of Marital Disruption in the U.S., 1860 - 1948

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### Abstract

Divorce rate is a poor indicator of marital instability because many marital disruptions never become divorces. This paper provides the first estimate of the rate of marital disruption in the U.S. in 1860 - 1948. Marital disruption rate was similar to divorce rate after the Civil War but the two rates wildly diverged in the early 20th century. In 1900 - 1930, the disruption rate was as much as double the divorce rate, implying that perhaps half of all disruptions never reached the court. In the long run, the cohort rate of marital disruption increased from about 10% in the mid-1860s to about 30% in the 1940s.

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