

Prevalence and Patterns of Marital Dissolution in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is little scholarly research on the prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution in Nigeria. This study utilised secondary data obtained from 2006 Nigeria population census to describe the prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution, indicated by divorce and separation, across regions, states, sex, and age groups. The crude rate of marital dissolution in Nigeria was 11 per 1000 population. Among ever married population, crude rate of marital dissolution was 29.5 per 1000. Marital dissolution was highest in the South-south and North-east regions and least in the South-east region. More females were divorced or separated than males. Age-specific marital dissolution rates ranged from 24 to 132 per 1000 ever married females, and 15 to 24 for males; the higher rates were among younger persons aged 10-24 years. The prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution in Nigeria suggests the need to discourage early marriage, and to strengthen social and religious values that discourage marital dissolution through public programmes, moral and religious persuasions.

Keywords: marital dissolution, divorce, separation, marriage, Nigeria

Introduction

The family has been undergoing significant changes in its structure and organisation in most countries of the world. Prominent among the diverse changes is increase in the number of persons who opt for divorce and mutual or legal separation as alternatives to conflictual marriage. For instance, the proportion of adult population in England and Wales who are divorced increased from 1.3 per cent in 1971 to 9.3 per cent in 2010; the proportion divorced increased with age, at age 53, 17.6 per cent were divorced (Office for National Statistics, 2011). In the USA, the percentage of persons aged 18 and over who were divorced increased from 8.3 per cent in 1990 to 10.4 per cent in 2010. Among males and females, crude divorce rates increased from 7.2 and 9.3 per cents in 1990 to 9.0 and 11.7 per cents, respectively, in 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2012).

These alternatives to marriage which were taught to be a Western lifestyle are gradually becoming commonplace in sub-Saharan African countries.

Bongaarts, Frank & Lesthaeghe (1984) observed three decades ago that divorce is the major cause of marital dissolution in sub-Saharan Africa. They found that the proportion of first marriages ending in divorce ranged from 7 per cent for very short marriage durations (0-4 years) to about 20 per cent for the longest duration (30 years and over). More contemporary studies in sub-Saharan Africa suggest rising trend of marital disruption through divorce and separation. In rural Malawi, life table probabilities of divorce ranged from 40 to 65 percent (Reniers, 2003). Takyi (2001) documented that after 30 years of marriage, 35 per cent of women's marriage in Ghana, 38 per cent in Togo, and 29 per cent in Mauritania are disrupted by divorce. The population and housing census in Ghana showed that in 2010 divorce and separation rates among ever married persons were 58.6 and 32.2 per 1000, respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010).

Although divorce and separation in its actual prevalence is not well documented in Nigeria, previous studies indicate that high rates of divorce have been part of nuptiality culture of many parts of Nigeria (Solivetti, 1994). However, high rate of remarriage, and stigma associated with marital separation conceal the actual prevalence. Based on divorce cases recorded by area courts and demographic field work in the Niger valley of Sokoto state in northern Nigeria, a traditional agricultural community, Solivetti (1994) found that divorce rate per 1000 population in 1979 ranged from 11.0 to 19.9; higher than the prevailing rates in some European countries at the time. In the southern part of Nigeria, among the Yako, Forde (1941) reported that 30 percent of married women divorced. Lloyd (1968) also observed rates of divorce per 100 extant marriages of between 3.4 per cent and 4.5 per cent among the Yoruba of southwest Nigeria. Although divorce in Nigeria is usually attributed to influx of western ideals and lifestyle through education, urbanisation and women empowerment, that rates in the northern Hausa community exceeded prevailing rates in some Europe countries at the time indicates that modern lifestyle is contributing more to women's resistance to patriarchal traditions that enforce remarriage than to the incidence of divorce.

Sociologists, demographers and other family scholars explain marital dissolution through divorce or separation from diverse theoretical perspectives. Dominant perspectives include the social exchange theory (Levinger, 1976), and economic model based on Becker's theory of marriage (Becker, Landes & Michael, 1977). These two perspectives emphasis rational choice to remain married based on expected utility from marriage and the alternative of divorce or separation. Other theoretical perspective associate marital instability to increasing female autonomy occasioned by modernisation (Goode, 1993). Empirical studies in sub-Saharan Africa attribute the rising rates of divorce and separation in the region, among other factors, to modernisation, urbanisation, early marriage, matrilineal descent and infertility (Arnaldo, 2004; Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007; Tilson & Larsen, 2000). The aim of this paper is not to explain factors associated with levels of divorce and separation, but to describe levels of divorce and separation in Nigeria by region, sex and age.

Previous studies on marital disruption in Nigeria paid attention to effects of marital dissolution on children's educational performance (Wilcox, Lippman, Whitney & Cid, 2009; Yara & Tunde-Yara, 2010), determinants (Adegoke, 2010; Maciver & Dimkpa, 2012), but little is known about the actual prevalence and patterns through scholarly investigation. This paper, therefore, used data from 2006 Nigeria population census to describe prevalence, patterns and differentials in marital dissolution, indicated by divorce and separation, across age groups, regions, states and gender. Divorce and separation are consequential for family structure; and have diverse implications for adult and children's wellbeing (Amato, 2000; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007; Opara, 2014). Therefore, prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution provide useful information on changes in population composition by marital status, living arrangements of adults and children, and for programmes and policies on family. The results of this study also serve as basis for estimating future trend of divorce in the country, and for further empirical studies.

Data and Methods

Secondary data obtained from 2006 Nigeria population census were used to describe prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution. Description of prevalence of divorce and separation was presented using crude and specific rates. Rates were calculated per 1000 population. Exposure to divorce was estimated using rates of divorce and separation per 1000 ever married persons aged 10-85. Patterns were described by age, gender, and region. Results were presented in tables and charts. Nigeria has six geo-political zones, which are also called regions, namely; North-central, North-east, North-west, South-east, South-south and South-west. These regions are made up of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

Definitions of divorce and separation in this study followed National Population Commission's (NPC) definitions in the 2006 census. Divorced referred to persons who were married, but their last marriages have been terminated by legal, customary or religious procedures, and have not remarried. Separated were persons who were separated from current marriages by judicial, religious or customary laws or by mutual agreement. Marital dissolution is used in this paper to refer to both divorce and separation. Although separation does not always result in divorce, it is a usual precursor to divorce.

Ethical considerations

This study was based on analysis of publicly available census record. Identifiers for all participants were removed.

Results

Regional Differentials in Marital Dissolution

Crude marital dissolution rate (CMDR) in Nigeria was 11.0 per 1000, divorce rate (CDR) was 5.0, and separation rate (CSR) was 6.0 per 1000 population (Fig 1). This suggests that five out of every one thousand Nigerians are divorced, and six separated. Rate of separation was higher than divorce for the country and all the regions and states (See Appendix 1). South-south, North-east and South-west regions had the highest rates of marital dissolution; and South-east region the lowest (Fig 1). South-east region also had the lowest rates of divorce and separation. High divorce rates were in the North-east, South-south and North-west; and separation was highest also in South-south, followed by South-west and North-east. Bayelsa and Cross River states had the highest rates of marital dissolution in the country. The least rates were in Niger and Kwara states.

Marital Dissolution Rate - Nigeria 2006

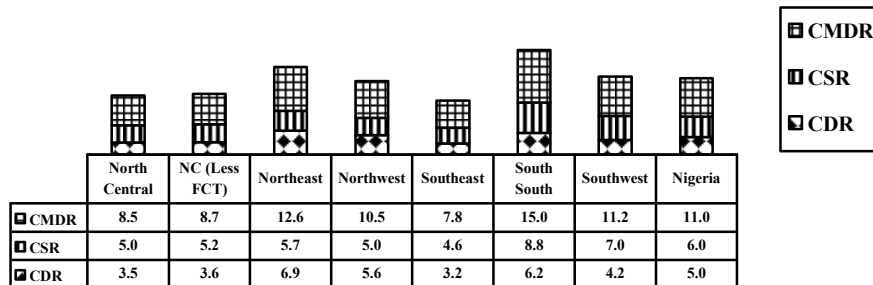


Figure 1: Marital Dissolution rate by region

Note: NC – North Central; CDR = Crude divorce rate; CSR = Crude separation rate; CMDR = Crude marital dissolution rate. Source: 2006 Nigeria population census

Age and Sex Differentials

Prevalence of divorce and separation varies by age. This fact is usually concealed by the crude rate which is directly influenced by the age-sex composition of the entire population. Therefore, we computed age-specific divorce, separation and marital dissolution rates for the entire Nigerian population aged 10 and above (Table 1). These specific rates give valuable information on the patterns of marital dissolution in the country.

Table 1: Age-specific Marital Dissolution Rate – Nigeria 2006

Age	ASDR	ASSR	ASMDR
10-14	3.4	4.7	8.1
15-19	4.5	4.5	9.1
20-24	5.9	6.1	12.0
25-29	6.9	8.2	15.0
30-34	8.6	11.0	19.6
35-39	8.7	11.4	20.1
40-44	10.3	12.2	22.5
45-49	10.0	12.3	22.3
50-54	11.5	13.6	25.0
55-59	10.7	13.5	24.3
60-64	13.1	15.3	28.5
65-69	11.7	14.5	26.2
70-74	13.4	15.8	29.2
75-79	11.6	14.2	25.8
80-84	13.9	16.9	30.8
85+	12.7	16.1	28.8
All 10-85+	7.2	8.6	15.8

Source: 2006 Population and Housing Census of Nigeria

Note: ASDR – age-specific divorce rate; ASSR – age-specific separation rate; ASMDR- age-specific marital dissolution rate

Table 1 indicates that the rates of divorce, separation and marital dissolution tend to increase with age. The highest rates were among persons aged 40 and above. It is likely people become more confident to negotiate and accept marital dissolution with age. Also, persons aged 70 and above are likely to have misreported their current marital status. The age pattern was similar for males and females (result not shown). Fig 2 shows that prevalence of marital dissolution was higher for females in Nigeria than for males; this is primarily explained by the fact that men are more likely to remarry after marital dissolution than women. These rates were based on the total population (both ever married and never married).

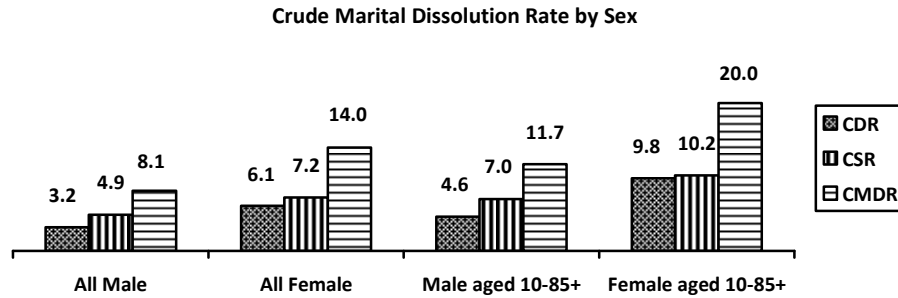


Figure 2: Crude Marital dissolution rate by sex

Regional Differentials - Ever Married Population

This section shows prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution among only ever married population age 10 years and over. Proportion of ever married Nigerians, aged 10 and above whose marriages had been dissolved gives an indication of proportion of Nigerians exposed to the risk of marital dissolution. Crude divorce rate among ever married persons aged 10-85 in Nigeria was 13.4, separation was 16.1 and marital dissolution 29.5 per 1000 (Fig. 3). This suggests that about 3 per cent of marriages in Nigeria are dissolved through divorce or separation. It is evident from the results of this study that there are large variations in marital dissolution across the regions and states. The highest dissolution rate was in South-south region, and least rate was in the South-east region. High divorce rates are found in the North-east, South-South and North-west whereas the least prevalence was in the South-east. The South-south, South-west and North-east regions showed high rates in separation.

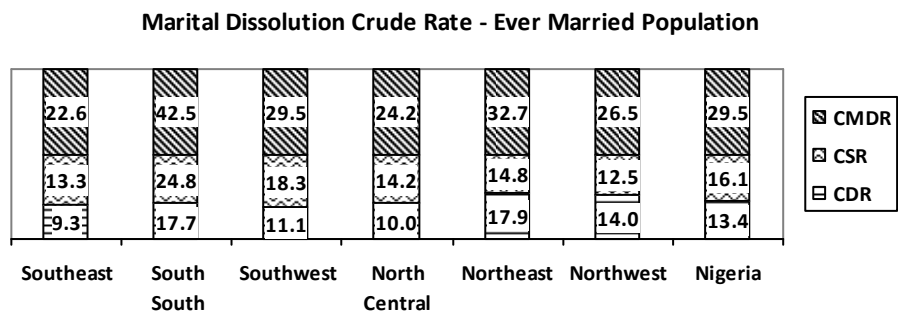


Figure 3: Rate of marital dissolution by region

This result is comparable to the crude rates presented earlier for the total population. Highest crude marital dissolution rates per 1000 ever married persons were in Cross River (62), Bayelsa (60), Adamawa (43), and Delta (43); the least rates were in Niger (16), and Kwara (20) states (Appendix 2). The pattern of highest rates in Cross River and Bayelsa was consistent in CDR and

CSR. Across all the regions and states, marital dissolution through separation was more than divorce.

Age/Sex Differentials – Ever Married Population

In general marriages were found to be more stable in the middle ages than in the earlier and older ages. Marital dissolution was most prevalent in younger ages 10-14 for females and 10-24 for males. Lower rates for females were among those aged 20-49 years. Unlike females, younger males aged 10-34 years had higher rate of marital dissolution than older men. About 13 per cent of marriages contracted for or by women aged 10-14 and 4 per cent for those aged 15-19 years dissolved through divorce or separation. The percentage for teenage males ranged from 15 to 24 per cent. This pattern implicates early marriage as a risk factor for marital dissolution for both males and females. Age/sex disaggregation for females showed prevalence above the national average in all age groups except within the low rate category, 20-49 years (See appendix 3 and 4 for details).

Between ages 10-29 years, more males dissolved their unions than females, but from ages 30 and over, more females reported marriages that were dissolved. The gender gap is more obvious in Muslim dominated states (result not shown). For instance, in Adamawa state, the ratio for divorce was three women to one man (76 per cent of divorced persons in that state were women). More women than men, from age 30 and over, indicate higher likelihood of remarriage among men than women. In most ethnic groups in Nigeria, divorced, separated and widowed men attract larger pool of eligible marriage partners than older women of similar marital status.

Age/Sex Marital Dissolution Rate - Ever Married Population

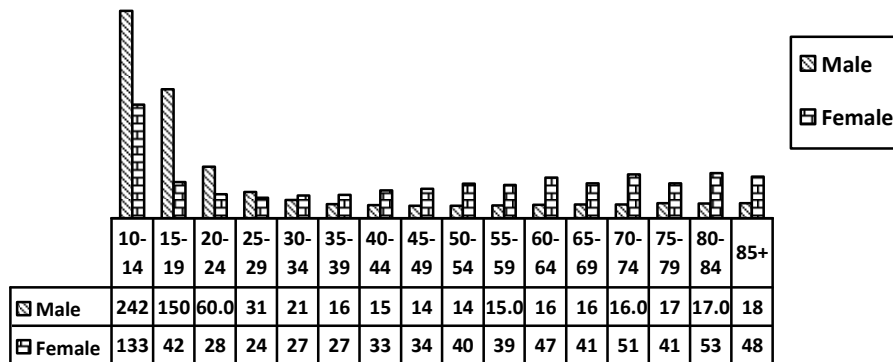


Figure 4: Age specific marital dissolution rate by sex

Discussion

This study aimed to describe the prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution in Nigeria, the variations by region, age and sex. There was considerable variation across the regions, states, sex and age groups. Marital dissolution was highest in the South-south and North-east regions, and lowest rates were in the South-east. Evidence from past studies suggests that demographic, social and religious factors may account for the variation across the regions. For instance, bride wealth is higher among the Igbos (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994) than in the South-south states (Otite, 2006). A study in Malawi showed that divorce rates are higher in places where bride wealth is low (Reniers, 2003). This difference perhaps contributed to the highest rates of marital dissolution in South-south region. The culture of early marriage, polygyny, ease of divorce among Muslims, and lower education for women may have accounted for the high rates of marital dissolution in the Northern regions, particularly the North-east (Izugbara & Ezech, 2010; Mashhour, 2005; Solivetti, 1994). The North-east and North-west have large Muslim population and marriage is early among them; female median age at first marriage in these regions is 16.4 and 15.4 years, respectively, for women ages 20-49 (NPC & ICF International, 2014), an indication that a large number of marriages take place in the early teenage age.

The pattern of delayed marriage among women of Igbo origin, the ethnic group in the South-east region, may have played a part in curbing the rate of divorce and separation in the region. Women in the South-east enter into marriage later than their counterparts in other southern regions (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2000). This submission is supported by the 2013 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey which recorded the median age at first marriage in the South-east as 22.7 for women ages 25-49 (NPC & ICF International, 2014). Women who marry earlier tend to experience higher rate of marital instability (Hervish & Feldman-Jacobs, 2011; Tilson & Larsen, 2000). Also, marital dissolution through divorce or separation and polygyny is discouraged among the Igbos, although extra-marital relationship is prevalent (Smith, 2007). Although modern marriages emphasise self-selection and couples as primary actors in the union, Igbo marriages are still embedded in networks of extended family structures (Smith, 2007). A woman is said to be married to her husband's kinsmen, so, ties to extended family and community strongly influence resolutions of marital disputes. For reasons of social and religious acceptability among one's peers, extended family and religion, couples tend to be committed to staying married (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998; Smith, 2005, 2007). In addition, the south-east region has predominantly Catholic adherents, and marriage dissolution through divorce is hardly approved in the Church.

Although this study was merely descriptive, regional variation in rates of divorce and separation may be an indication that more children in the South-south and North-east regions are raised in one-parent households; it may also suggests lowest rates of remarriage. Single parenting, particularly single motherhood, has implications for the wellbeing of women and children (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007;

McLanahan, 2004). Many non custodial fathers provide little or no financial support for children after marital dissolution (Dearden *et al.*, 2013), and because of gender gap in high-wage employment, single mothers tend to encounter many financial constraints raising children alone (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994).

The pattern of lower rates in middle ages and higher rates in older ages is similar to the pattern in the USA and England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2011; US Census Bureau, 2012). This indicates that although marital dissolution rates in Nigeria were low compared to other countries, there are indications that the period rates will continue to rise. For instance, younger ever married persons aged 10-24 had higher marital dissolution rates than older persons suggesting that marital dissolution may increasingly becoming accepted as a life choice. Separation rates were higher than divorce in all regions and states; this indicates that if the process of obtaining divorce were easier, and the stigma associated with it declines; divorce rate in Nigeria would be higher than the rates found in the present study

Conclusion and Recommendations

Divorce and separation rates measured with census data provide only period measures; life course estimation using complete marital histories will give a more complete view of the prevalence of marital dissolution in Nigeria. Crude marital dissolution rate among ever married population in Nigeria was about 30 per 1000, but age-specific marital dissolution rates ranged from 24 to 132 per 1000 ever married females, and 15 to 24 for males; the higher rates were among younger persons aged 10-24 years. There is, therefore, the need to discourage early marriage, and strengthen social and religious values in the country that discourage marital dissolution, through public programmes, moral and religious persuasions.

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Appendix 1: Crude Marital Dissolution Rates by State and Region – Total population

State	CDR	CSR	CMDR
Abia	3.4	4.6	7.9
Anambra	3.3	4.6	7.9
Ebonyi	2.9	4.8	7.7
Enugu	3.2	4.6	7.8
Imo	3.1	4.5	7.6
Southeast	3.2	4.6	7.8
Akwa Ibom	4.6	6.6	11.1
Bayelsa	9.2	12.8	22.0
CRS	9.1	13.0	22.0
Delta	6.4	9.0	15.4
Edo	4.8	7.0	11.8
Rivers	5.8	7.6	13.4
South-south	6.2	8.8	15.0
Ogun	5.4	10.2	15.5
Ondo	5.2	7.1	10.0
Osun	2.9	4.4	7.3
Oyo	3.3	6.5	9.8
Ekiti	4.5	5.6	10.1
Lagos	4.4	7.1	11.5
Southwest	4.2	7.0	11.2
Benue	3.7	8.1	11.8
Kogi	4.3	5.7	9.9
Kwara	2.5	4.4	6.9
Nasarawa	3.5	4.0	7.5
Niger	2.9	3.0	6.0
Plateau	4.2	4.7	8.9
FCT Abuja	3.0	2.9	5.9
North-central	3.5	5.0	8.5
North-central (less FCT)	3.6	5.2	8.7
Taraba	5.5	6.6	12.0
Yobe	7.3	5.8	13.1
Adamawa	8.5	7.7	16.1
Bauchi	5.2	3.8	9.0
Borno	9.2	6.7	15.9

State	CDR	CSR	CMDR
Northeast	6.9	5.7	12.6
Jigawa	6.9	6.4	13.3
Kaduna	3.5	4.0	7.6
Kano	6.0	5.7	11.6
Katsina	5.2	4.1	9.4
Kebbi	5.8	3.6	9.4
Sokoto	6.0	4.5	10.5
Zamfara	6.1	6.1	12.2
Northwest	5.6	5.0	10.5
Nigeria	5.0	6.0	11.0

Note: CDR – Crude Divorce Rate; CSR – Crude Separation Rate; CMDR – Crude Marital Dissolution Rate

Appendix 2: Crude Marital Dissolution Rates by State – Ever Married Population

State	CDR	CSR	CMDR
Abia	9.7	13.3	23.0
Anambra	9.5	13.2	22.7
Ebonyi	8.4	13.8	22.3
Enugu	9.3	13.2	22.5
Imo	9.0	13.2	22.2
Southeast	9.3	13.3	22.6
Akwa Ibom	13.2	19.0	32.2
Bayelsa	24.9	34.8	59.7
CRS	25.6	36.6	62.2
Delta	17.8	25.1	42.8
Edo	13.2	19.4	32.6
Rivers	16.8	22.3	39.1
South-south	17.7	24.8	42.5
Benue	10.6	23.3	33.9
Kogi	13.6	17.9	31.5
Kwara	7.2	12.6	19.8
Nasarawa	10.0	11.5	21.5
Niger	7.9	8.0	15.8
FCT Abuja	8.0	7.6	15.6

State	CDR	CSR	CMDR
North-central (less FCT)	10.1	14.7	24.8
Jigawa	16.6	15.4	32.0
Kaduna	9.6	10.9	20.5
Kano	15.5	14.7	30.2
Katsina	13.3	10.5	23.8
Kebbi	14.3	8.9	23.1
Sokoto	14.7	10.9	25.6
Zamfara	14.2	14.2	28.4
Northwest	14.0	12.5	26.5
Ogun	13.3	25.1	38.4
Ondo	14.1	19.3	33.3
Osun	7.9	12.2	20.1
Oyo	8.4	16.7	25.2
Ekiti	13.6	17.2	30.8
Lagos	11.4	18.5	29.9
Southwest	11.1	18.3	29.5
Taraba	15.0	18.1	33.1
Yobe	17.6	14.2	31.8
Adamawa	22.6	20.5	43.1
Bauchi	13.0	9.6	22.6
Borno	14.2	16.8	40.0
Gombe	14.6	11.9	26.5
Northeast	17.9	14.8	32.7
Nigeria	13.4	16.1	29.5

Note: CDR – Crude Divorce Rate; CSR – Crude Separation Rate; CMDR – Crude Marital Dissolution Rate

Appendix 3: Age-specific Marital Dissolution Rates - Ever Married Population (Male)

Age	CDR	CSR	CMDR
10—14	101.0	140.8	241.9
15-19	68.6	81.8	150.4
20-24	24.5	35.5	60.0
25-29	11.4	19.2	30.6
30-34	7.7	13.5	21.3
35-39	6.1	10.3	16.4
40-44	6.2	9.3	15.4

Age	CDR	CSR	CMDR
50-54	5.9	8.5	14.4
55-59	6.0	9.0	15.0
60-64	6.4	9.2	15.6
65-69	6.4	9.8	16.2
70-74	6.4	9.6	16.0
75-79	6.8	10.6	17.4
80-84	6.6	10.4	17.0
85+	6.7	10.9	17.6
All male 10-85+	9.8	14.8	24.6

Appendix 4: Age-specific Marital Dissolution Rates - Ever Married Population (Female)

Age	CDR	CSR	CMDR
10--14	55.4	77.1	132.5
15-19	22.6	19.6	42.2
20-24	15.2	12.9	28.1
25-29	12.1	11.8	23.9
30-34	12.8	13.7	26.5
35-39	12.8	14.4	27.2
40-44	15.8	16.7	32.5
45-49	16.2	18.1	34.2
50-54	19.3	20.9	40.2
55-59	17.9	20.7	38.7
60-64	22.8	24.4	47.2
65-69	19.3	21.5	40.7
70-74	24.9	26.2	51.2
75-79	19.8	21.0	40.8
80-84	25.1	27.4	52.5
85+	22.7	25.6	48.3
All female 10-85+	16.4	17.1	33.4