

# The hard life of poorly educated women with children after a divorce

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Divorce can be a disruptive event for an individual's life. This is particularly true for women, who are found to experience the negative effects of union dissolution and the relative decline in income for longer.

Moreover, women usually bear the largest part of childcare responsibility even after the dissolution, and their children may suffer the economic consequences of income loss and the lack of parental engagement that could be partly offset by a new cohabitating union. However, the loss of income and their childcare responsibilities hinder the chances of mothers finding a suitable partner. Therefore, understanding the factors that inhibit repartnering could improve the welfare of both women and children.

Nicoletta Balbo, Alessandro Di Nallo, both at the Dondena Centre, Bocconi (Balbo is also in the Department of Social and Political Sciences), and Katya Ivanova (Tilburg University), find that being a parent in the US correlates with a lower probability of repartnering. Additionally, the study reveals that more educated women are less likely to enter new cohabitating unions. Interestingly, the negative effect of motherhood on the ability to repartner seems to affect only women with lower levels of educational attainment.

The paper, published in *Population Studies*, tries to disentangle the role that [socioeconomic conditions](#) and parenthood have on the likelihood of women to form a new co-residential household. By leveraging the American National Survey of Family Growth, the authors had access to various demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as education, cohabitation and marriages, and information about their past such as experiences of parents' divorce during their childhood.

The first finding is that mothers have a harder time transitioning to a subsequent union than non-mothers. This disparity is particularly pronounced among women with lower levels of educational attainment. However, for women who spent more than four years in college, this difference diminishes.

Unfortunately, these results show that those [women](#) who might have the

greatest financial need to form a new [union](#) with a second earner are also the least likely to achieve it, as their [children](#) might deter [potential partners](#) and limit the opportunities to meet new people.

Secondly, a high level of education seems to restrict the availability of possible partners as the pool of individuals with an equal or higher level of educational attainment becomes smaller.

Finally, the interplay between [socioeconomic status](#) and motherhood gives some interesting insights. The authors argue that "higher socio-[economic status](#) might be able to offset the barriers which children pose to repartnering." On one hand, children of highly educated mothers face the greatest economic disadvantages due to their mothers being less likely to repartner compared to less-educated mothers. On the other hand, highly educated mothers encounter relatively fewer obstacles in finding a new partner than their peers with lower educational backgrounds. Consequently, they may possess better resources to navigate the financial implications of divorce.

**More information:** Alessandro Di Nallo et al, Repartnering of women in the United States: The interplay between motherhood and socio-economic status, *Population Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/00324728.2022.2152478](#)

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