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Title

Female Labour Force Participation After Divorce: How Employment Histories Matter

Authors

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Abstract

This article focuses on the labour market decisions of divorced women, surrounding the time of the factual separation. We build on earlier research, but explicitly distinguish between homemakers and unemployed women. Using retrospective data gathered from a sample of 1,251 Flemish women from the Divorce in Flanders project (DiF 2009–2010), we performed anticipation-controlled event-history analysis to estimate the probability of an employment increase around the time of separation. We find that: a) women were twice as likely to increase their employment for a short period of time after the separation, b) there was an increasingly negative relationship between employment intensity at the time of separation and the probability of increasing employment immediately afterwards, and c) observed differences between homemakers and unemployed women were likely due to compositional differences at the time of separation.

Keywords

marital dissolution – female labour supply – employment histories – employment increase - unemployment

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Introduction

Divorce is often a turbulent process for all those involved. Divorced women in particular have been found to experience lower psychological (Kalmijn and Monden 2006; Simon and Marcussen 1999), physical (Lorenz et al. 2006), and particularly economic well-being (Amato 2000; Andreß et al. 2006; Bröckel and Andreß 2015; Smits et al. 2010; Vanderheyden and Mortelmans 2013). On the one hand employment has been found to be a *moderator* of the decline in well-being (Amato 2000), and has usually been studied in relation to the well-attested gender divide (Bianchi et al. 1999; de Regt et al. 2013; 2010; Smock 1994). On the other hand, it is considered a coping strategy (de Regt et al. 2013; 2010), since it provides latent benefits such as status, purpose or social contact (Creed and Macintyre 2001; De Graaf and Kalmijn 2003; Paul and Batinic 2010).

So far, most of the research into this subject has either been on why women change their employment behaviour, or what the effect of employment on different forms of wellbeing is. To the best of our knowledge, save for Van Damme et al. (2009), which found only moderate changes in female employment behaviour after divorce, and (Malcolm and Abdurrahman 2014), which acknowledged difficulties for women working zero hours prior to divorce, no research has been done on which women increase their employment and how successful they are in doing so. This is surprising for two reasons. Firstly, while divorce itself is a process often spanning several years from dissatisfaction with the marriage to legal divorce, there is a clear observable event when one household splits into two, i.e., the moment when a couple stops living together. This formation of a new household entails strong incentives to increase employment. Moreover, it is an event that is observed for men and women at different ages and of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. As prior research has not been able to unequivocally show that there is a pure selection effect where employed women simply have a higher risk of divorce (Schoen et al. 2002), this implies that the moment of separation is a point at which women who were previously not participating make the transition to the labour market. Secondly, "the best predictor of an individual's future risk of unemployment is his past history of unemployment", according to Arulampalam et al. (2001, p. 577). So while divorce might be a strong enough incentive for women with (almost) no previous labour market activity to increase their employment, not all women are likely to be as successful.

Although the research presented here focuses on the questions of who and when, it is nonetheless necessary to explain why one would expect women to increase their employment surrounding divorce. The socioeconomic literature broadly offers two explanations. The *economic necessity hypothesis,* drawn from classic economic theory, suggests that relationship dissolution has a positive effect on female labour

supply simply because it reduces family income (Tamborini et al. 2015; Vanderheyden and Mortelmans 2013) and thus incentivizes women to either enter the labour market or increase their working hours (Becker 1991). This loss of income is aggravated through the loss of economies of scale (Couch et al. 2013).

Sociological theory suggests other, non-pecuniary drivers. The *latent-deprivation* model identifies non-material benefits such as social status, identity, skill development or social contact as utilities that are gained from labour force participation (Jahoda 1982; Paul and Batinic 2010; Stiglbauer and Batinic 2012). Since divorce is negatively related to various indicators of well-being, and employment plays an important role in mitigating this relationship (Amato 2000), labour market participation might well be a rational strategy, not only for its material but also its latent benefits. Indeed, King and Raspin (2004) found that career success was related to an increased subjective well-being among divorced women. Both economic and sociological theory then predict a positive effect of relationship dissolution on the labour market participation of women because it provides substitutes of (non-)pecuniary benefits formerly found in marriage.

With respect to the timing of employment increase, the anticipation hypothesis suggests that women react to a foreseen dissolution by increasing their employment beforehand (Johnson and Skinner 1986; Poortman 2005; Vignoli et al. 2018). Poortman (2005) found only weak support for the anticipation hypothesis in the Netherlands, while Vignoli et al. (2018) only found some traces of anticipation in Italy. For the United States, Sen (2000) concluded that anticipation of divorce by increasing labour supply is significant in the 1944-1954 birth cohort of married women, but no longer in the 1957-1964 cohort. These results do suggest that the probability of an employment increase is greater surrounding divorce, rather than simply after the clear point in time of the event. Additionally, given that both the material and latent incentives are assumed to be strongest, not at the time of the legal divorce, but around the time a couple stops living together, which we will refer to as *separation*, we hypothesize (H_1) that women have a higher probability of increasing their employment for a short period of time surrounding the event of separation.

Although women are theoretically expected to increase employment around the time of separation, not all women are equally likely to do so. First and for all, labour economists have usually described labour supply as a trade-off between consumption and hours of leisure, where the hours of leisure are the complement of hours worked (Borjas 2013). Since it is, at least theoretically, possible to have zero hours of leisure, it is no surprise that the amount of working hours is also capped. Simply put: There is a finite amount of hours in a day. However obvious this statement is, it does have one important implication,

namely that employment cannot be increased indefinitely. The more hours women work already, the less likely they are to increase their employment hours even further. Assuming decreasing marginal gains from further employment increase, we expected this relationship to be non-linear, so that the effect of employment intensity at the time of separation is increasingly negatively associated with the probability of an employment increase. This prediction constitutes our second hypothesis (H_2).

Secondly, there might be differences between two groups of women working zero hours at the time of separation, namely those unemployed and homemakers. In both theory and practice, these two groups are treated as separate. For instance, there is considerable debate on why homemakers are not accounted for when calculating unemployment statistics, which is traditionally equated to the number of unemployed (and actively seeking employment) over the total labour force (i.e., the unemployed + the employed) (Gregg 1994). Furthermore, human capital theory suggests that women who are not participating (homemakers) suffer a larger decrease in human capital as opposed to those who are still in the labour force. One of the explanations is that those who actively seek employment often (are forced to) enrol in training programs, which adds to their human capital (Defillippi and Arthur 1994). However, the extent to which the unemployed actually benefit from training programs has been questioned. Heckman (2000), for instance, found that the returns of government training programs are minimal. Other researchers have shown that the unemployed and inactive are two highly heterogeneous groups, as some of the unemployed are only marginally attached to the labour market, while part of those classified as inactive show a high willingness to work (Centeno and Fernandes 2004).

Standard economic job search theory predicts that escape from unemployment becomes more difficult the longer the unemployment spell (Vishwanath 1989). Empirical research by Van den Berg and Van Ours (1996) has shown that, except for white males, this apparent negative duration dependence is due to unobserved heterogeneity. Those with the highest escape rates leave unemployment more rapidly, so that those with a priori poor probabilities of finding a job remain in unemployment for a long period of time (McFadyen and Thomas 1997).

Since homemakers are by definition assumed not to be looking for a job, we expected this group to be compositionally different from the unemployed. Homemakers are expected enter the labour force roughly at the same time surrounding separation, before *weeding* has taken place. Therefore, those with the highest probability of leaving the state of unemployment, or *escape hazard* (Breen and Honohan 1991), will be able find employment relatively soon. The unemployed, on the other hand, have lower

average future escape hazards at the time of separation, since those with a higher probability of finding employment have already been weeded out. Our final hypotheses are then that homemakers are more likely to increase employment directly after the separation than unemployed women, but that these differences decrease over time (H_3).

The article contributes to the current research in three ways. Firstly, contrary to previous research on gendered differences in (financial) wellbeing after divorce, it provides insights into differences between women, rather than comparing two genders. Since women, and especially single mothers (Misra et al. 2007), have consistently been shown to be worse off than men after divorce, it is important to establish whether and why differences exist among women in order to inform either policy or practices aimed at helping these women. Secondly, we explicitly distinguished between women who were homemakers and those who were unemployed at the time of separation, where previous research has usually pooled the two groups as working zero hours, ignoring possible differences in things like human capital (Malcolm and Abdurrahman 2014; Van Damme et al. 2009). Finally, since our research was restricted to Flemish data, we were able to examine the legal distinction between homemakers and unemployed women with greater detail in order to try and explain the observed differences between the groups. In short, rather than answering why and to what effect women change their employment after divorce, this study looked into the who and when.

Background: The Flemish Context

Belgium is characterized by low marriage rates alongside high divorce rate (de Regt et al. 2013). The divorce rates in Belgium are among the highest in Europe, and certainly higher than in the neighbouring countries. The crude divorce rate in Belgium rose from 0.5 in 1960 to 1.5 in 1980. It reached its peak in 2008 at 3.3 and has remained fairly stable since 2010 at around 2.2 (Eurostat 2015; Mortelmans 2013).

Belgium has usually been categorised as a *corporatist* European welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1990).Unemployment benefits are characteristically related to earnings and until recently consisted of a flat-benefit profile, where generous benefits did not relatively differ between the short-term and long-term unemployed (Kolsrud et al. 2018). People who are not eligible for unemployment benefits can in some cases apply for non-contributory *income support*, a supplementary support system that is not based on contributions made, but is dependent on household income. This amount is typically lower than the minimal amount of unemployment benefits. For instance, in 2017 singles without children were eligible for a minimum income support of just under € 885, while the minimal unemployment benefit for the same

category is just over € 1010. Net minimum wage for full-time employment of singles without children in 2017 was around € 1400[1].

Female labour force participation in Belgium reflects the shift from a male-breadwinner model towards a more dual-earner model (Jansen et al. 2009). Where in 1983 only 44.3% of women were participating on the labour market, this has steadily risen to 61.8% in 2010 (OECD 2011), which is lower than in the neighbouring countries.

Methodology

Data

The analyses were performed on a subsample of the data collected by the *Divorce in Flanders* (DIF) study (Mortelmans et al. 2011). Designed specifically as a means to study causes and consequences of divorce, the data contain information on a myriad of divorce-related issues as well as important background variables. For this purpose, a sample of people first married between 1971 and 2008, with a 2 to 1 overrepresentation of divorced individuals, was drawn from the Belgian National Register. Respondents could not be legally divorced more than once. A sample of 6,470 respondents were interviewed by means of face-to-face Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) between September 2009 and December 2010, which resulted in an overall response rate of 42% (Mortelmans et al. 2011). Of this sample, 3,400 were women, of which 2,452 were divorced. During the interview, respondents were asked to reconstruct their entire labour history up until the time of the interview in detail. A selection of 1,235 unique women for whom reliable histories on labour market participation one year before until three years after the divorce could be reconstructed, was used to perform the empirical analyses of this paper. Women who were separated after 2007 were therefore not included.

The analyses focused on increased employment surrounding divorce. We used the event of separation, the moment at which the couple stopped living together, instead of divorce since we assumed this to be the time around which the incentive to increase employment was highest. For each respondent, a total observation period of 4 years, divided into 16 three-month intervals around separation was constructed. Separation occured at the start of the fifth observation period.

The event of increased employment was constructed by looking at changes in employment with regard to the previous month. The survey provided six categories for employment intensity, measured as hours

worked: zero hours (which consists of homemakers and the unemployed), <25% of full-time employment, 25-50% of full-time, 50-75% of full-time, 75-95% of full-time and more than 95%, which was called full-time employment and corresponds to 38-40 hours per week. Women who were students, retired or permanently ill or disabled at the time of separation were dropped from the sample. Employment increase was then constructed as a dichotomous variable which takes on the value of unity when a respondent transitions from a category of lower employment to one with higher employment intensity and zero otherwise, regardless of the amount with which employment was increased. The data was then collapsed into the same three-month intervals, so that the outcome variable in each observation period indicated whether or not the respondent had increased her employment intensity during those 3 months. This resulted in a maximum of 16,573 person-periods. There were 351 of these event occurrences in our data.

The main indicator variable of interest, namely employment status at the time of separation, was coded as a categorical variable taking on the values of: homemaker, unemployed, <50%, 50-75%, 75-95% and full-time employed[2]. In order to control for the possible problem of anticipation outlined above, the same strategy used by Olivetti and Rotz (2017) and Tamborini et al. (2015) was used. This means that employment status was observed one year prior to the moment of separation. Since the period under observation starts 4 intervals, or one year, before the time of separation, the anticipation-adjusted employment status at the time of separation was then recorded as the status immediately before the first observation period. The setup is visually represented in Figure 1. At *t-5*, 56% of women were working full-time, 9% more than three quarters, 16% between 50 and 75% of fulltime, only 2% were working less than half of full time and 7% and 9% were unemployed and homemakers respectively.

Figure 1 around here

We controlled for individual and group characteristics that are widely agreed to influence the probability of employment. Although respondents age at the same rate, age was nonetheless included as a continuous predictor. Failure to do so would result in the time variable picking up the effect of ageing on employment behaviour, leading to improper estimations of the associations with the event of separation itself. Mean age at the time of separation was 33 years old, with a standard deviation of 6.93 years.

Several other individual controls that have been found in the literature to influence the probability of increasing employment were included. The first was a measure of decreased employment constructed analogously with the outcome variable, but lagged by three months. This covariate was included in order to account for frictional unemployment, which is due to movements inherent to the labour market, for

instance moving from one job to another (Diamond 1981). Overall, 79% of respondents did not increase their employment at any time during the observation period, while 21% did. Secondly, a dichotomous variable for the presence children below the age of 3 living in the household was also included. This indicator was tailored to the Flemish context, where 99% of children aged 3-5 are enrolled in pre-primary school (Eurydice 2009). Of the sample, 76% of the respondents did not have a young child present at any time surrounding the separation. The third individual characteristic was included as a dichotomous indicator of self-reported long-term illness or disability, which 30% of the sample reported having. Self-reported illness was assumed to be negatively associated with the probability of increasing employment. Repartnering, which has been argued to be a possible substitute for increased employment (Vanderheyden and Mortelmans 2013), was also included as a time-varying dummy variable which took on the value of 1 when the respondent was living together with a new partner. During the observation period, 32% of the sample had repartnered.

Finally, group characteristics were partly accounted for by introducing a categorical variable for 4 separation cohorts: 1970-1979 (2%); 1980-1989 (17%); 1990-1999 (42%); 2000-2010 (39%). The variable was assumed to control for some of the societal changes, such as overall female labour force participation as well as the economic climate of the time. An additional 49 respondents were removed due to incomplete information on the control variables, resulting in a selection of 1,186 women, observed during 15,848 person-periods and experiencing 351 events.

The Analytical Strategy

We used a discrete-time hazard model to estimate the hazards of the first employment increase around the moment of separation. Censoring took place at first event occurrence or after four years, whichever came first. In this model, the longitudinal dependent variable takes on the value of unity when an increase in employment is observed. The model assumes a linear underlying latent variable equation:

$$y_{ij}^{*} = \alpha_j(t) + X_{ij}'(t)\beta + \varepsilon_{ij} \qquad (1)$$

$$y_{ij} = 1 \; if \; y_{ij}^{*} > 0 \; and = 0 \; otherwise$$

Where $y*$ is the unobserved individual propensity to increase employment. The observed decision to increase employment for each individual at each observed point in time is represented by y_{ij}. Time is included as t dummy variables indicating each observed three-month period. This nonparametric specification choice of modelling for time allows for a flexible shape of the baseline hazard, rather than imposing certain functional restrictions. The propensity to increase employment is functionally dependent

on a vector of individual and group characteristics *X(t)*, including time constant as well as time variant characteristics. Finally, ε_{ij} captures individual heterogeneity in the underlying latent variable equation and is assumed uncorrelated with the explanatory variables.

As for the formal model, we computed the hazard of increasing employment for each three-month period as a conditional probability that an individual *i,* who is included in the risk set, will increase employment at time *t*, given that she did not do so in any earlier time period *j*. As shown in (2), this probability is conditional on the individual still being in the risk set, as well as the covariates from the latent propensity function:

$$q(t_{ij}) = \Pr[t_i = j \mid t_i \geq j, X] \qquad (2)$$

Several link functions are available for the estimation of this formal model, but we opted for a parsimonious logit specification.

$$\text{logit q}(t_j) = \ln\left[\frac{\Pr(T=t \mid T\geq t)}{1-\Pr(T=t \mid T\geq t)}\right] = \delta_j(t) + x'\varphi \qquad (3)$$

In equation (3), the logit of the baseline hazard is represented by δ_j and the logit of the effect of the covariates by the vector $x'\varphi$. A proportional odds model with a nonlinear relationship between the hazard and the predictors is obtained by taking the inverse logistic transformation of both sides (i.e., $e^{\delta j(t)+\ x'\varphi}$). Under the assumption of a linear latent propensity function, maximum likelihood estimation yields consistent estimates for δ and φ.

From these models, we calculated mean and standard deviations of marginal effects of our main independent variable. These were used to simulate marginal effects for the entire sample. Finally, linear regression of these simulations on a quadratic structure of employment intensity was performed.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Figure 2 shows the composition of each observation period with respect to the activity status prior to separation. As time goes on, it shows out of which categories most women drop, either due to an employment increase, or because of falling out of the sample due to retirement, disability, military service, etc. The graph shows that there was relatively little dropout from the category of the fulltime employed women. Conversely, the homemakers showed the highest relative amount of people dropping out. At the end of the observation period, they only made up 3.18% of the sample.

Figure 2 around here

Further insight into the probability of an employment increase is provided by Figure 3, which shows how increased employment was distributed across the different covariates. Only 8% of those employed full-time prior to the separation, increased their employment during the entire observation period. For all part-time employment categories, the ratio was around 50/50. Conversely, 65% of those who were unemployed and 77% of those who were homemakers increased their employment.

Figure 3 around here

The middle educated were slightly more likely to increase employment (32%) than the lower and higher educated (both 27%). Those with a young child present anywhere during the observation period increased employment more often (32%) than those without young children (24%). There was no real difference between women who experienced a decrease in employment surrounding the time of separation and those who did not, with around 30% of both groups increasing their employment. Larger differences were observed for those who repartnered, of whom only 12% increase employment, as opposed to 38% of those who did not repartner. Those with self-reported long-term disability showed a lower percentage of women increasing (25%) than those without disabilities (32%). Finally, the percentage of women increasing employment grew larger with the separation cohorts, ranging from 15% in the 1970-1979 cohort to 40% in the post-2000 cohort.

Turning to the timing of employment increase, Figure 4 shows the observed hazards of an employment increase during each of the observation intervals. The observed probability of an employment increase was highest immediately after the separation at t_0. At this point in time, women had an overall probability of increasing employment of 6.65%, as opposed to approximately 2% on average anywhere else during the observation period.

Figure 4 around here

Multivariate Results

In order to analyse women's employment behaviour surrounding divorce in relationship to their employment histories, three initial discrete-time hazard models were estimated. The first model contained only a non-parametric specification of time, with t_0 being the three-month interval immediately

following the moment the couple factually separated. Subsequently, two more models were estimated. Model 2 included individual and group characteristics that have been found in the literature to influence employment hazards. The third model included the employment status observed one year prior to the moment of separation, and just before the observation period under consideration, i.e., at *t-5*.

Model fit statistics presented in Table 1 show that the separate models performed significantly better than a null model. Wald chi-square tests were performed on the additional variables in the model and all rejected the null hypothesis that the estimated parameters were jointly zero. Furthermore, information criteria (AIC and BIC) indicate the models performed better as they became more complex. Likelihood-ratio-tests for nested models also indicated that each more complex model had significantly more explanatory power than its predecessor. Pseudo R-square values showed that model fit increased considerably by adding information on employment histories in Model 3.

Table 1 around here

Table 2 shows the regression results from all three models. In each one, the hazard of increasing employment was found to be significantly higher during the three-month-period immediately following factual separation (*t0*). The odds of increasing, rather than not increasing employment during this period was found to be between 1.85 times higher (= 1/0.540) in *t+4* of Model 3 and 6.99 times higher (= 1/0.143) in *t+7* of Model 1. Including additional covariates did not have a substantial influence on the parameter estimates for time. This confirmed our first hypothesis (H_1) that women's probability of increasing employment is higher for a short period of time surrounding divorce.

Parameter estimates from Model 3 showed that women who were working full-time prior to the factual separation had a 15 times lower odds (= 1/0.066) of increasing their employment during the observation period than do women who were unemployed. Both the 50-75% and 75-95% of part-time employment-categories had approximately 2 times lower odds of increasing employment. Working less than 50% of full-time employment was associated with 2.5 times lower odds of employment increase. There was no overall significant difference between homemakers and unemployed women.

Table 2 around here

Marginal effects based on a separate model (results not shown), for which the reference category of the activity prior to separation-variable was changed to full-time, showed that at *t0*, women who were previously homemakers had a mean 17.19 (*SE=2.32*) percentage point higher probability of increasing their employment than those who were previously full time employed. Linear regression of simulated marginal effects at *t0* for all respondents on a quadratic specification of employment intensity prior to separation were then performed. Employment intensity was approximated by percentages of full time employment. Unemployed women and homemakers were pooled at 0%. This resulted in an increasingly negative association, in line with our second hypothesis (H_2). Figure 5 shows the estimated marginal effects of activity status prior to separation with 95% confidence intervals as well as the fitted regression line from these simulations.

Figure 5 around here

The final part of the analysis focussed on the changes in differences between those women who were unemployed prior to separation and homemakers. One additional discrete-time hazard model (Table A1 in appendix), which included interactions between prior activity status and time was estimated on the subsample of those 192 women (1618 person-periods) who worked zero hours prior to the separation. The likelihood ratio of this model was -430, with a chi-squared value of 78.55 (df=40; $p < 0.001$). Due to zero events occurring, no probabilities could be estimated for homemakers at *t-4* and *t+6*.

Figure 6 around here

Predicted probabilities of employment increase that were calculated from this model are presented in Figure 6. The difference between homemakers was found to be significant at times *t0*, *t+3, and t+5.* For these observation points, homemakers were found to have an approximate higher probability of increasing employment of respectively 11.38, 9.36 and 16.78 percentage points. Estimated probabilities became very alike after *t+6*. With the exception of the difference at *t+5*, these results confirmed our third hypothesis (H_3).

In summary, the results showed that divorced women had a significantly higher probability of increasing employment immediately after the couple's factual separation. At time *t0*, the average odds of increasing employment were between 1.85 and 6.99 times higher than in any other three month period before or

after separation. Furthermore, this increased probability was found to be increasingly negatively associated with women's employment intensity prior to separation. Finally, those women who were homemakers were found to have a higher probability of increasing employment at times *t0*, *t+3, and t+5,* but these probabilities are very similar from *t+7* onwards.

Discussion

The moment during the process of divorce when one household splits in two is theoretically considered to be a strong incentive for women to either increase their employment or find other ways of coping with the loss of financial and non-pecuniary benefits from the relationship's dissolution (de Regt et al. 2013). Previous studies have failed to find either significant or strong changes in women's employment after divorce (Malcolm and Abdurrahman 2014; Van Damme et al. 2009). One possible explanation is that the incentive to increase employment is only present for a short period of time. Secondly, future employment has been found to be strongly related to past employment behaviour (Arulampalam 2001; Arulampalam et al. 2001). Considering decreasing marginal gains from employment, this relationship is possibly nonlinear, which implies that the act of increasing employment might be relevant regardless of the magnitude of the increase. Finally, the heterogeneity in employment behaviour prior to the separation of these women potentially needs to be taken into account with more detail. More specifically, considering that there is much debate on the similarity of women who are unemployed and those who are homemakers (Centeno and Fernandes 2004; Gregg 1994), they might have a different probability of successfully increasing their employment.

In our analysis of the employment behaviour of divorced Flemish women, we found that the probability of increasing employment was approximately between 2 and 7 times higher during the three month period immediately following the factual separation, than in any other three-month period surrounding that event. We have controlled for a set of characteristics that are considered to be related to the probability of an employment increase in general, such as returning to work after taking care of new-borns or young children, or increases resulting from frictional unemployment, for instance when there is a short period of time when moving from one job to another. We also controlled for living with a new partner as a competing coping strategy and for societal changes over separation cohorts. Our findings are consistent with the theory that both pecuniary (Becker 1991; Couch et al. 2013) and latent (Paul and Batinic 2010; Stiglbauer and Batinic 2012) incentives are highest at this point in time.

Our results contrast with those of Van Damme et al. (2009) who found that women only slightly increase employment after divorce. As indicated by the descriptive statistics, this might be due to differences due to employment histories. Although we observed an employment increase on only 351 occasions, or in 2.2% of the person-periods, around 65% of women who were previously unemployed and more than 75% of those who were homemakers increased their employment at some point during the observation period. Taking into account that employment behaviour in the future is related to employment in the past, we found that there is a nonlinear association between the probability of increasing employment during these three months and previous employment intensity, which was measured one year prior to the factual separation in order to control for possible anticipatory behaviour (Olivetti and Rotz 2017; Poortman 2005; Tamborini et al. 2015; Vignoli et al. 2018). The probability that women who were working zero hours before, increase their employment immediately after the separation was approximately 7 percentage points higher than those who were working part-time and 17 percentage points higher than those who worked full-time prior to separation. That any employment increase was observed for women already working full-time is surprising even if it was only 2%. It is possible that the division into three-month time periods was still too broad to adequately capture frictional unemployment resulting from women changing jobs.

The estimate of the marginal effect for women who were previously employed less than half full-time employment, seen in Figure 5, was markedly lower than the regression line. This can be attributed to the fact that this category contained only 24 women, or 2% of the sample. Since the simulations that were made in order to perform this regression were done based on employment status prior to separation, the total weight of this group of women in the results was also small. This explains why the regression line fits the other categories a lot better, but also why we are not confidently making any specific claims about this small group of women.

Finally, although we found no differences in the probability of increased employment for women who were previously homemakers and those who were previously unemployed during the observation period as a whole, we did find that for homemakers, this probability was significantly higher immediately after the separation, 9 months after the separation and again at 15 months after the separation. This second surge in probability at $t+5$, which can be distinctly perceived in Figure 6, seems surprising. It has already been noted that no events occur at $t+6$ for homemakers. We therefore argue that, considering the declining trend of observed events in the previous time periods, the notable rise in the probability of employment increase was due to either heaping or plain coincidence. As such, the convergence of the

probability of increased employment between these two groups of women becomes even stronger. This lends credence to our claim that a weeding effect takes place, since the group of homemakers and unemployed women are compositionally different at the time of the separation.

These results are in line with previous research on the duration dependence of unemployment (Van den Berg and Van Ours 1996; Vishwanath 1989), and indicate that the average probability of leaving their state of non-employment is higher for those who were homemakers before the separation than for those who were unemployed. In order to clarify this statement, assume that all women who at the time of separation are either homemakers or unemployed, try to increase their employment immediately after the household splits in two. Since homemakers were, by definition, not actively involved on the labour market, there are those in this group who have a high probability of finding employment due to either employability characteristics such as educational attainment, or due to a higher willingness to work, lowering their threshold for accepting a job. Contrary to these women, those who are unemployed do not enter the job search market at the same time. Therefore, a number of women with the same strong labour market characteristics would have already left unemployment soon after they became unemployed, lowering the average escape hazards of the group of unemployed women at the time of separation. As highly employable or willing homemakers find jobs following the separation, the characteristics and escape hazards of these two groups start to resemble each other more closely, which explains the convergence observed in Figure 6. However, further research into the composition of these groups of women is warranted in order to study these claims.

There are several limitations to our study. First and for all, due to the specific Flemish context, our results are unlikely to be generalizable across societies. For instance, the differences found between homemakers and unemployed women were possibly due to the lower amount of income support homemakers are eligible for as opposed to the minimal amount of unemployment benefits. The greater tension between these amounts and the minimum wage might explain why homemakers were more likely to increase employment.

Secondly, although we controlled for several relevant confounders, we are not able to make causal claims due to possible endogeneity issues. Omitted variable bias is certainly possible. Female employment has been found to be related to such things as formal and informal childcare support (Apps et al. 2016; Connelly 1992; Del Boca 2015), the presence of children with special needs (DeRigne and Porterfield 2017) and other micro- and macro-level factors such as non-wage income and transportation costs. Since we

were not able to control for these associations, a different research strategy is needed in order to assert any causal relationship. One characteristic that was notably missing from our analyses is that of personal income. The data did not contain information on income around the time of divorce, only at the time of the interview. Although it seems indispensable that this is accounted for, some scholars have made compelling arguments against the inclusion of both income and employment when trying to get precise estimates of either (Angrist and Pischke 2008). In short, personal income is very strongly related to employment intensity, so much that there is a genuine possibility of collinearity, resulting in biased estimates. Since our aim with this study was to uncover differences between employment status prior to employment, regardless of whether these differences are due to *economic necessity* (Tamborini et al. 2015) or *latent deprivation* (Jahoda 1982; Paul and Batinic 2010), the exclusion of information on personal income might be less problematic than one would intuitively expect.

Aside from contributing to the overall understanding of female employment behaviour in relationship to divorce, our findings allow us to formulate some preliminary suggestions for policies and practices that are designed to help these women, particularly in Flanders where divorce rates are high and female labour force participation is relatively low. On the one hand, they inform policy makers who are concerned with an active labour market. Since the incentive to increase employment is apparently highest surrounding the time of factual separation, career guidance that targets these women could prove to be effective in activating more women. In so far as poverty risks for single women, particularly single mothers (Bernardi and Mortelmans 2017), are related to low employment, these practices would help to alleviate the negative financial consequences of divorce. On the other hand, the knowledge that many of these women increase their employment immediately after the factual separation might also mean that financial or other stress rushes them into the labour market. This could possibly lead to them accepting less favourable employment, which in the long term could hinder their recovery. Furthermore, targeted support measures often interact with each other in unexpected ways. Benefits specifically targeted at lone parents, for instance, have been found to lead to lower housing benefits, effectively undercutting the intended support (Bernardi and Mortelmans 2018). Our suggestion is therefore to adopt universal support policies aimed at poverty reduction and active labour markets, but to increasing effectiveness by targeting practices concerned with activation of the non-employed, specifically at times when the incentives to increase employment are highest.

Conclusion

By analysing the employment behaviour of Flemish divorced women, we have shown that, contrary to what has been suggested by previous research, women were up to seven times more likely to increase their employment immediately after the breaking of one household in two. Especially women who were previously homemakers or unemployed were likely to increase employment at this time. Although homemakers had a higher probability of entering the labour market than unemployed women immediately after a separation, the difference disappeared over time and was likely due to dissimilarities in labour market characteristics between the two groups. Even though our results suggest that targeting these women might improve their success on the labour market, more research into the specific employment outcomes of these different groups of women as well as the long-term effect on financial and subjective wellbeing is necessary. It is essential to more accurately understand the needs during this often turbulent time, as women are known to suffer most in terms of financial as well as emotional wellbeing after divorce, especially when children are involved.

Notes

1. Data available from: http://www.armoedebestrijding.be/cijfers_minimum_uitkeringen.htm
2. The categories <25% and 25-50% were collapsed due to low frequency counts in the former category.

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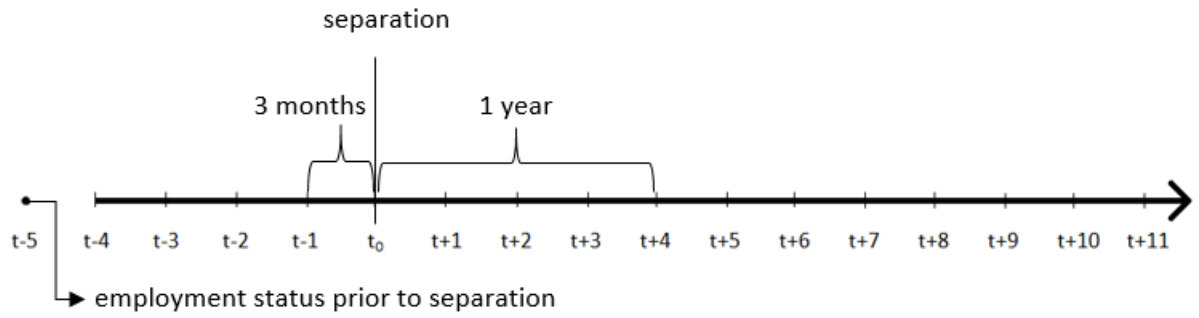
Tables and Figures

Figure 1

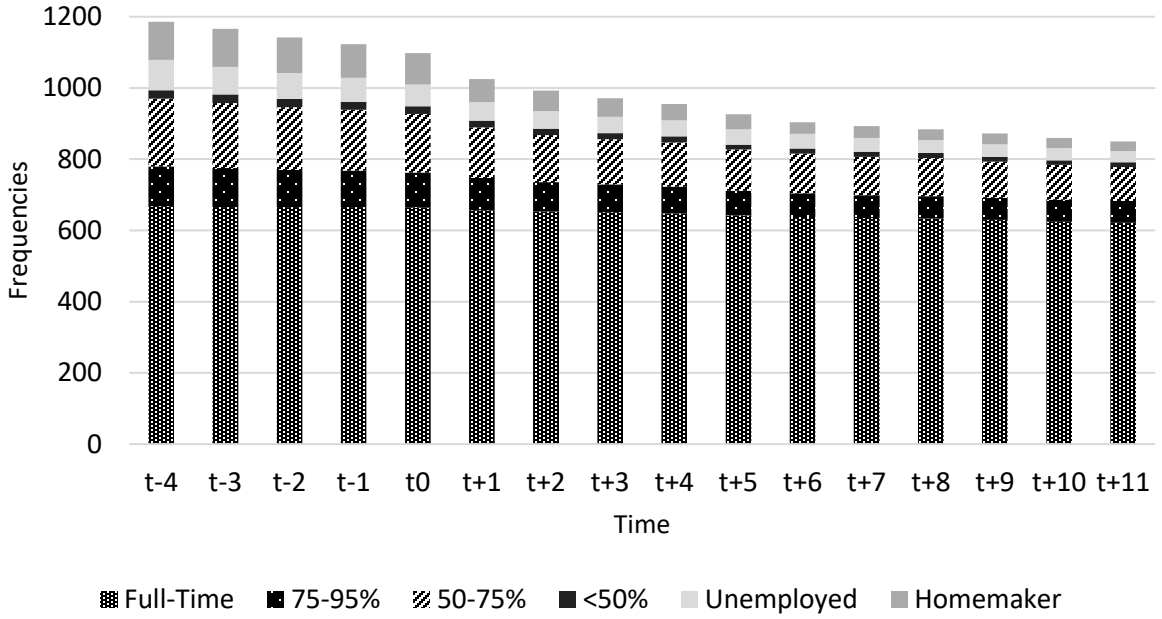
Research design for the study of the probability of women's employment increase surrounding divorce.



Note. Separation indicates the time at which a married couple stopped living together. It usually occurs prior to the legal divorce itself. The observation period started at t-4 (one year prior to separation) and ended after t+11 (three years after separation)

Figure 2

Composition of the sample at each observation period, divided by activity status one year prior to separation.



Note. One observation period equals three months. Factual separation occurred at t0. The activity status prior to separation was recorded at t-5. At t-4, N=1186. At t+11, N=850.

Figure 3

Percentage of women in the sample who increased their employment, subdivided by individual and group characteristics. (N= 1,186)

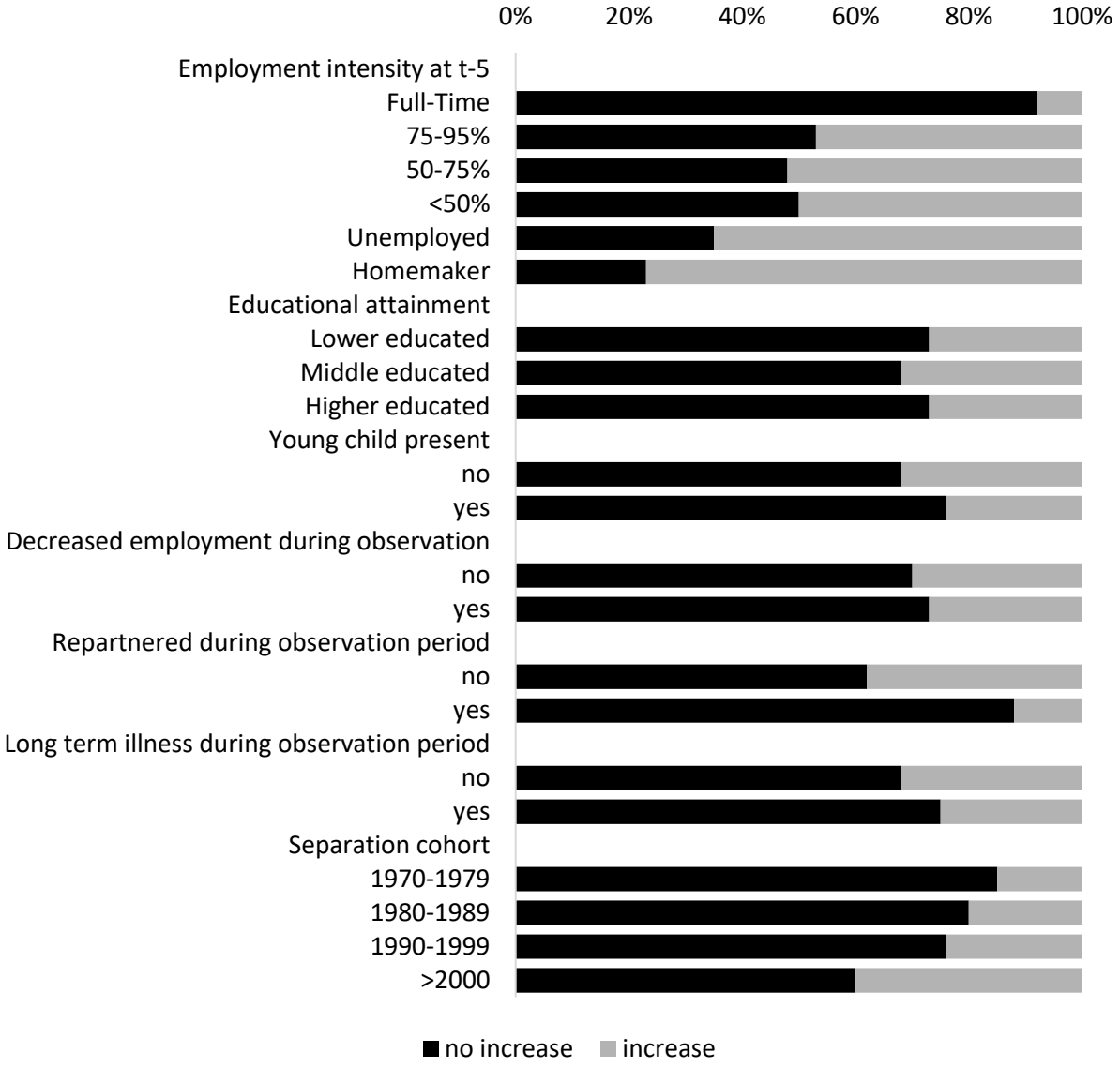
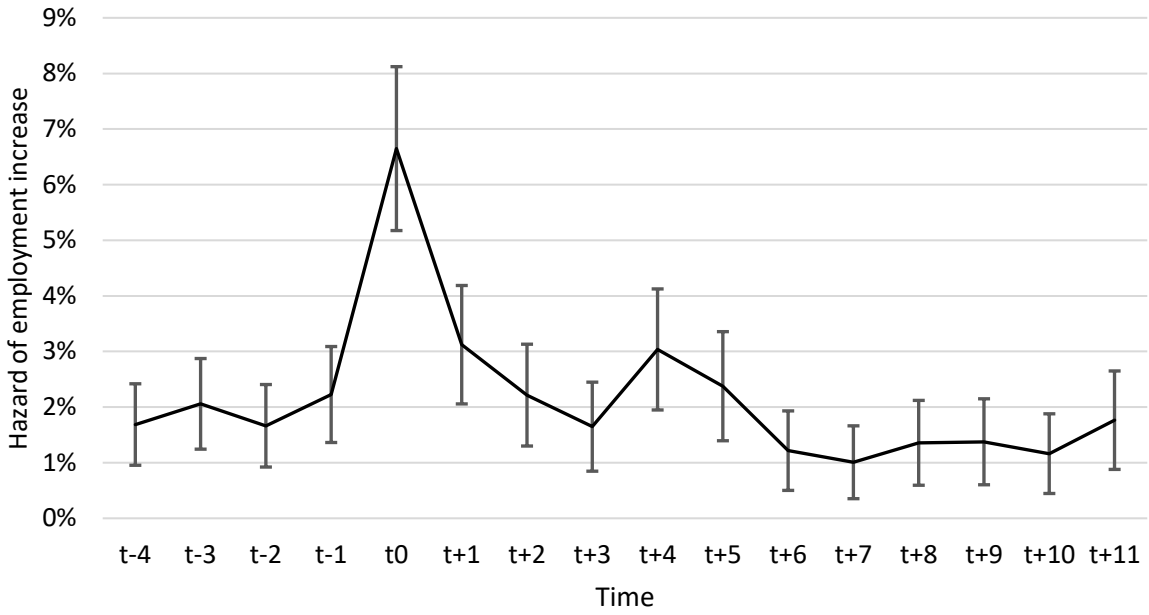


Figure 4

Observed hazards of women's employment increase surrounding the time of factual separation. (N= 1,186)



Note. Time was measured as three month intervals. Separation occurred at t0. Confidence bounds indicate a 95% confidence interval.

Table 1

Summary statistics and goodness-of-fit indicators for three discrete-time hazard models of increased employment of divorced women surrounding the time of a married couple's factual separation.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
N	1,186	1,186	1,186
Person-periods	15,848	15,848	15,848
number of events	351	351	351
Log Likelihood	-1633.34	-1548.9882	-1373.693
Model chi-square (df)	102.11 (15)***	270.82 (26)***	621.41 (31)***
Pseudo R2	0.0303	0.0804	0.1845
AIC	3298.683	3151.976	2811.386
BIC	3421.415	3359.088	3056.852
Wald test Chi-square (df)	114.99 (15) ***	137.49 (11)***	257.57 (5)***
Nested LR-test	-	168.71 (11)***	350.59 (5)***

*Note. Model 1 included only discrete time. Model 2 additionally controlled for age, education, presence of young children, repartnering, illness or disability, recent decrease of employment and separation cohort. Model 3 also included activity before separation. Nested LR-test tests difference in likelihood ratio with the previous model. Wald tests test the null hypothesis that the additionally estimated parameters are all 0. *p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001*

Table 2

Odds ratios from discrete-time hazard models predicting the probability of a woman's employment increase surrounding a married couple's factual separation

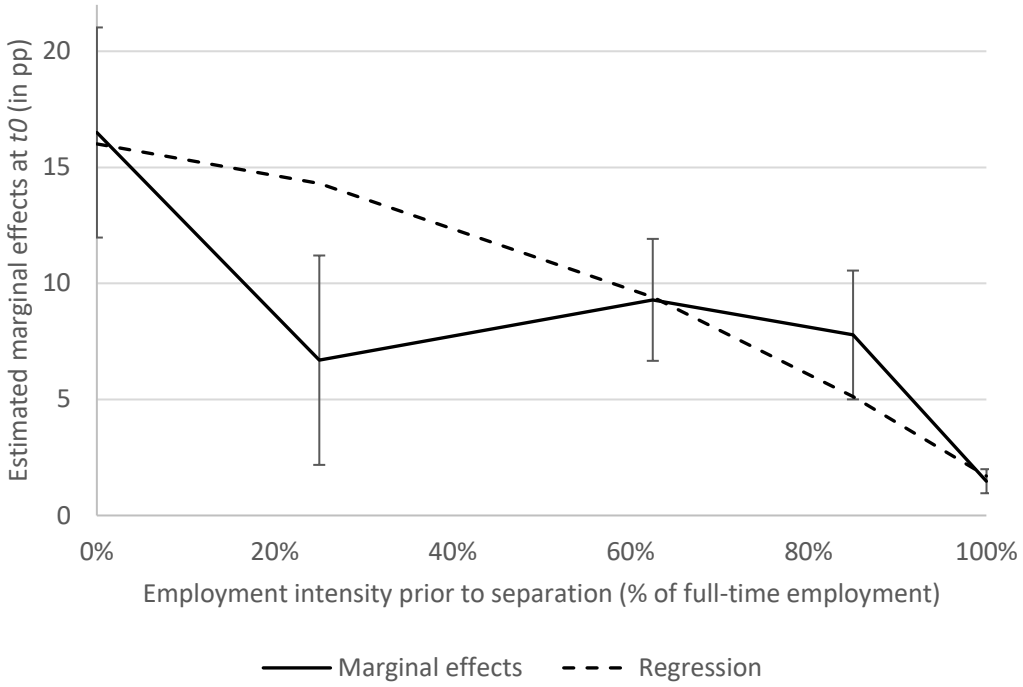
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Time in three month intervals			
t-4	0.241***	0.229***	0.185***
t-3	0.295***	0.280***	0.231***
t-2	0.238***	0.227***	0.194***
t-1	0.320***	0.305***	0.272***
t0 (ref.)	-	-	-
t+1	0.452***	0.454***	0.473***
t+2	0.318***	0.325***	0.356***
t+3	0.235***	0.244***	0.277***
t+4	0.440***	0.460***	0.540**
t+5	0.342***	0.364***	0.445**
t+6	0.173***	0.183***	0.236***
t+7	0.143***	0.151***	0.194***
t+8	0.193***	0.205***	0.276***
t+9	0.196***	0.209***	0.288***
t+10	0.165***	0.178***	0.248***
t+11	0.252***	0.273***	0.390**
Age centered		1.178*	1.124
Age centered squared		0.998*	0.998
Educational attainment			
Lower (ISCED 0-2) (ref.)		-	-
Middle (ISCED 3-4)		1.167	1.179
Higher (ISCED 5-6)		0.86	0.97
Young child present		1.242	1.248
Living with new partner		0.248***	0.337***
Illness or disability		0.710**	0.652**
Lagged decreased employment		1.786	3.576***
Separation Cohort			
1970-1979		0.391	0.448
1980-1989		0.492***	0.441***
1990-1999		0.536***	0.544***
>2000 (ref.)		-	-
Activity prior to separation			
Full-Time			0.066***
75-95%			0.466***
50-75%			0.555**
<50%			0.404**
Unemployed (ref.)			-
Homemaker			1.091
Constant	0.071***	0.006***	0.057*

Note. Age (squared), young child present, Living with new partner, illness or disability and lagged decreased employment were time-varying covariates. Lagged decreased employment was lagged one period (three months). Age was centred around the mean age of 33 years old.

** p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001*

Figure 5

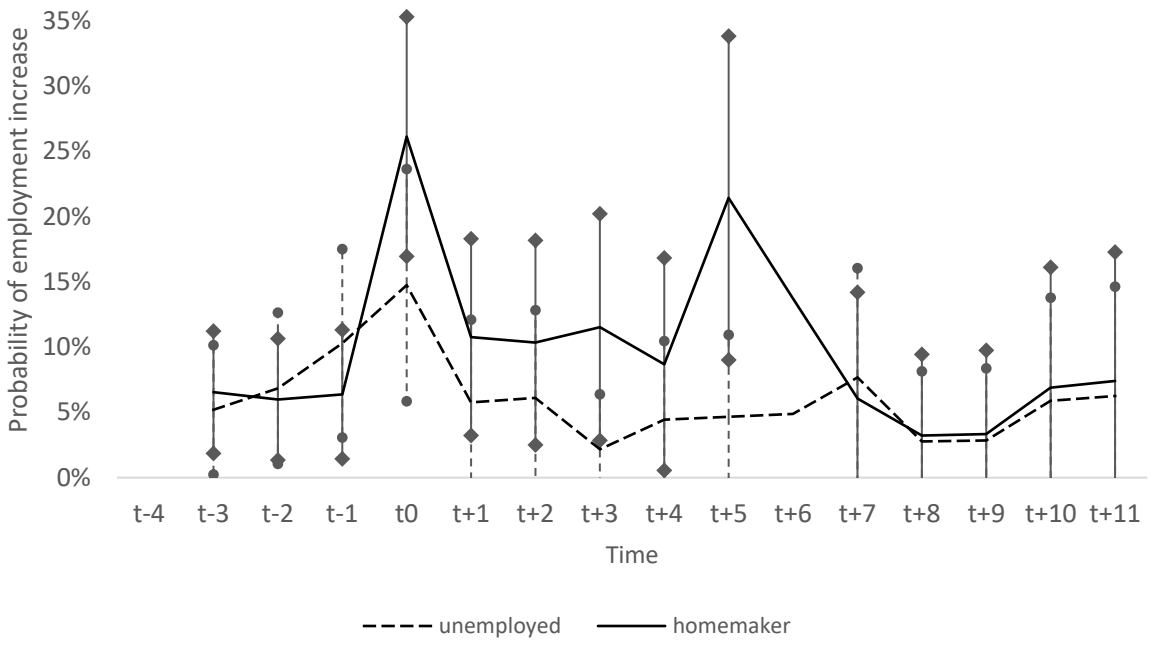
Estimated marginal effects with 95% confidence bounds of employment intensity of divorced women prior to separation on the probability of an employment increase immediately after separation.



Note. For employment intensity, homemakers and unemployed women were pooled at working 0% of full-time. Other categories of employment activity were approximated as follows: <50% = 25%; 50-75% = 62.5%; 75-95% = 85%; full-time = 100%. Marginal effects depict a percentage point (pp) difference in the probability of an employment increase at t0.

Figure 6

Estimated probabilities of divorced women's increase in employment around the time of separation, subdivided by homemakers and unemployed women prior to separation.



Notes. Time was measured in 3-month intervals. A couple's factual separation occurred at t0.

Appendix

Table A1

Odds ratios from discrete-time hazard model predicting the probability of a woman's employment increase surrounding a married couple's factual separation

Variables		Model 4		
Time in three month intervals			Time*Unemployed	
	t-4	0.503	t-4	(empty)
	t-3	0.175***	t-3	1.404
	t-2	0.162***	t-2	2.365
	t-1	0.179***	t-1	3.478
	t0 (ref.)	-	t0 (ref.)	-
	t+1	0.354*	t+1	0.989
	t+2	0.340*	t+2	1.126
	t+3	0.4	t+3	0.329
	t+4	0.298*	t+4	0.943
	t+5	0.913	t+5	0.338
	t+6	0.334	t+6	(empty)
	t+7	0.212*	t+7	2.624
	t+8	0.109*	t+8	1.791
	t+9	0.115*	t+9	1.788
	t+10	0.261	t+10	1.741
	t+11	0.288	t+11	1.72
Age centered		0.94		
Age centered squared		1.001		
Educational attainment				
	Lower (ISCED 0-2) (ref.)	-		
	Middle (ISCED 3-4)	1.194		
	Higher (ISCED 5-6)	0.916		
Young child present		1.227		
Living with new partner		0.346***		
Illness or disability		0.882		
Lagged decreased employment		5.53		
Separation Cohort				
	1970-1979	0.639		
	1980-1989	0.439**		
	1990-1999	0.556*		
	>2000 (ref.)	-		
Activity prior to separation				
	Unemployed	0.509		
	Homemaker (ref.)	-		
Constant		1.078		

Notes. Estimations from subsample of women who were previously unemployed/homemakers (N=192)
** p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001*