

Since U Been Gone, I Can Breathe for the First Time?

The effect of break-ups on pulmonary functioning

Enda Patrick Hargaden

University of Galway

April 1, 2023

Abstract

This paper analyzes the effects of divorce on respiratory health. I empirically evaluate the experiences of Clarkson (2004) using a large survey dataset ($n = 341,024$) from Europe. Lung disease is a leading cause of mortality across the developed world, and the potential for marital dissolution as a treatment avenue is under-explored. My outcome of interest is a medical diagnosis of chronic lung disease. I find that divorce increases the incidence of lung disease by 1.2 percentage points ($p < 0.05$). These results suggest that Clarkson's experience may have been exceptional. For accurate inference I bootstrap standard errors again, and again, and again, and again. This paper would probably be published in many health-related journals.

JEL Codes: J12, I31, K36.

Keywords: Lung capacity, marital dissolution, absolute bangers.

1 Introduction & Data Background

“ Here’s the thing, we started out friends
It was cool, but it was all pretend.

”

Kelly Clarkson

While many people report happiness in their romantic relationships, classic works of art and literature (e.g. Clarkson, 2004) have wrestled with the reality that many relationships can feel deeply suffocating. More recently several others have recreated Clarkson’s original contribution, notably Tokyo Police Club (2011) and a memorable scene in *Pitch Perfect* (2012).¹ These recreations have been principally in the audio-visual realm. To date no-one has yet addressed the question quantitatively.

Exploiting the panel nature of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) data, this paper asks if the departure of a romantic partner affects pulmonary functioning. More specifically, I analyze the effects of divorce and marital dissolution on chronic lung disease.

The analysis was done in Stata, largely re-using do-files I made one weekend during grad school. The software “dropped 40,922 singleton observations”. This is actually a technical issue about repeated observations in panel data models, but the language seemed harsh but fair for a paper about marital dissolution.

2 Empirical Results

The main results of the paper are shown in Table 1. I find that divorce increases the incidence of lung disease by 1.2 percentage points ($p < 0.05$). The results are remarkably robust. Crucially, my analysis controls for potentially confounding cardiovascular variables such as a broken heart. As a robustness check, I also include controls for a new cataract diagnosis (“out of sight / out of mind”) on lung strength. These variable have minimal effect on the parameter of interest.

3 Discussion

The results provide strong evidence that marital dissolution is negatively associated with pulmonary health. In all specifications, the effect of separation on chronic lung disease diagnostics is positive. In particular, the dependent variable is having ever been diagnosed as having chronic lung disease. As all specifications include person fixed effects, the interpretation of the coefficients is that separation increases this probability by about one percentage point.

¹I deny having ever watched this movie.

Table 1: Effect of marital separation on chronic lung disease

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
U Been Gone	1.17** (0.54)	1.16** (0.54)	1.17** (0.54)	1.20** (0.54)
Out of sight/Cataracts		2.24*** (0.19)	2.18*** (0.19)	2.18*** (0.19)
Broken Heart indicator			2.20*** (0.20)	2.19*** (0.20)
Income and Age Controls	No	No	No	Yes
Person FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	341,024	341,024	341,024	341,024

This evidence seems to contradict the findings of Clarkson (2004) and others who stood on the shoulder of that particular giant. We are led to one of two possible conclusions. The first possible conclusion is that Kelly Clarkson is an outstanding individual and her experiences, while valid, cannot be used for broader external validity. The second possible conclusion is that the pharmaceutical industry, possibly in collusion with Big Counselling, may have encourage the release of this song to promote sales of anti-viral medications and therapy sessions. This is an avenue for future research.

References

Börsch-Supan, Axel, “Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE),” *Wave 8*. Release version: 8.0.0, 2022. Data set. DOI: 10.6103/SHARE.w8.800.

Clarkson, Kelly, *Since U Been Gone*, Breakaway (RCA Records), 2004.

Dean, Ester and Skylar Astin, *Since U Been Gone (Cover)*, Pitch Perfect: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack (Universal Music), 2012.

Tokyo Police Club, *Since U Been Gone (Cover)*, Ten Songs, Ten Years, Ten Days (Dine Alone Records), 2011.