Housing and divorce in Russia, 1992-2013

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The potential relationship between housing and divorce is poorly understood. Housing conditions can contribute to marital stress and precipitate divorce in several ways. Inadequate space, the presence of in-laws, and poor quality housing conditions can interfere with intimacy and lead to tensions between partners. Unequal property rights between spouses – for example, when one partner's in-laws own the home or apartment and the other partner completely lacks ownership except through the marriage – can also lead to tensions. But it is possible that this form of intra-couple inequality can compel the partner to endure marital stress so as not to lose housing altogether.

We examine these possible connections between housing and divorce empirically using brand new survey data from Russia. The Survey of Housing Experiences in Russia (SHER) collected housing histories from January 1992 through the present, marital and fertility histories, and information about labor market activity, education, and health of 1000 respondents now aged 35-54 currently living in Russian cities with at least 500,000 residents. Data collection took place in November-December 2013. The data contain rich information on the respondent's housing conditions, including property rights, quantity of housing, quality of housing, and the presence of others in the dwelling.

Using the SHER data we will construct time-varying measures of housing conditions that we will use in event history models predicting divorce. The SHER data support an unusually detailed set of time-varying measures of housing conditions, including the number of rooms per resident, the availability for the respondent and his/her partner of a separate bedroom, the presence of a range of housing amenities, and the division of property rights among the partner, his/her spouse, and other co-resident relatives. In addition, we can incorporate controls for the age, education level, profession, and employment status of the respondent and his/her partner throughout the period in our dynamic models. We deliberately chose the age window for our sample in order to compare the housing experiences of cohorts who reached adulthood in the late Soviet period with those who did so during the post-Soviet transition, so that will be another dimension we examine. Finally, because we know the region where each dwelling in the respondent's housing history is located we will also incorporate time-varying measures of regional economic conditions in our models.

Russia is an especially useful case for studying the links between housing conditions and divorce for several reasons. First, housing privatization in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse in early 1992 distributed housing property rights in a "quasi-experimental" fashion: housing in the Soviet system was allocated on the basis of queues, not on the basis of wealth or income (Zavisca 2012). Thus, homeownership and housing quality and quantity were distributed in a manner exogenous to key unobservable variables that confound studies of the relationship between housing and marital outcomes in market contexts. After the Soviet collapse, there was a major lull in new housing construction and housing markets have not developed due to persistent credit constraints: thus, many Russian couples are forced to live with in-laws for extensive

periods of time, and their main hope for obtaining independent housing for themselves and (possibly) their children is through inheritance. This tendency means that the many couples, particularly young ones, implicit property rights are asymmetrical, in the sense that one partner can expect to inherit housing and often already has an ownership stake through his/her parents or other relatives while the other partner has no claim on any housing at all, and thus faces a situation of dependency for housing. Moreover, Russia has had a high divorce rate many decades and by most account divorce rates increased during the post-Soviet era. Thus, Russia's housing regime provides us with considerable variation in our key dependent and independent variables of interest.

Preliminary findings

Our respondents reported on 855 marriages that were extant at some point during the January 1992-November/December 2013 observation window (either already existing at the outset of observation or initiated during the observation period). Of these 259 ended in divorce. The results of an initial discrete-time survival model predicting divorce are presented in table 1 below. Key initial findings regarding the relationship between housing and divorce are as follows:

- "Housing autonomy" – that is, residence independent of parents, in-laws, and others outside the respondent's own nuclear family (respondent, partner, and their children) – is associated with *lower* risk of divorce. Although housing autonomy is the norm in Western countries, it is less common in Russia (Zavisca 2012). In our data 43% of the marriage-years reported on by respondents lack autonomy.

- Asymmetric ownership of the home – where one partner owns the dwelling and the other has no formal ownership rights – is associated with elevated divorce risk, while co-ownership by both partners is associated with lower divorce risk relative to partnerships where neither partner has formal ownership rights to the dwelling.

- The greater the number of the rooms in the dwelling, the lower the probability of divorce.

These findings indicate that aspects of housing quality (autonomy), tenure (intra-household differences in property rights), and quantity (number of rooms) are all significantly associated with divorce in Russia. Thus, they confirm the importance of taking into account housing conditions as potential proximate factors that drive divorce decisions. However, our initial models indicate that other aspects of housing such as the physical qualities (problems with dampness and cold, kitchen size, availability of hot water, a separate bedroom for the couple, and the presence of weatherized windows) are not statistically related to the probability of divorce.

In addition, several control variables have noteworthy associations with divorce risks in Russia:

- The effect of marriage duration is highly significant and curvilinear: marriages become more stable with each year of duration up to a duration of about 10 years, after which the probability of divorce increases with each year.

- Divorce is less common in marriages of two partners with university degrees than among those where at least one partner has less than university education.

- Moscow residents divorce at lower rates than residents in other localities, which could also reflect the tightness of the housing market in Moscow.

- Having children is associated with lower divorce risk.

- Divorce risks peak for Russians at age 36.

Next steps and conclusion

We will refine these initial results by incorporating measures of regional labor market characteristics and demographic tendencies, considering variation by gender in the effects of labor market activity and ownership rights, including measures of the respondent's and partners' occupation, controlling for relationship history (cohabitation prior to marriage), and testing fuller specifications of respondent and partner ages and educations. Our discussion of the findings will relate the Russian case to the broader literature on the factors precipitating divorce (see e.g. Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010), with particular attention to the ways that housing characteristics and residential mobility relate to divorce risks (e.g. Boyle et al. 2008). Although a handful of studies have analyzed divorce in contemporary Russia (Stack and Bankowski 1994; Jasilioniene 2007; Muszynska 2008; Muszynska and Kulu 2008), we are not familiar with any that have explicitly examined the role that housing characteristics play.

References

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Table 1. Discrete time survival model for divorce in Russia, 1991-2013, SHER data

Variable	B		RSE
Housing variables:			
Housing autonomy	-.310	**	.149
Ownership (neither partner owns)			
Asymetric ownership	.438	**	.185
Both owners	-.460	*	.240
Number of rooms in dwelling	-.182	**	.084
Other partnership measures:			
Marriage duration (years)	.164	***	.045
Marriage duration squared	-.008	***	.002
Both partners university graduates	-.388	**	.191
Locality (not a provincial capital)			
Moscow	-.417	*	.249
St. Petersburg	-.092		.297
Other (provincial) capital	.025		.162
Respondent characteristics			
Age of respondent (-18)	-.204	***	.047
Age (-18) squared	.005	***	.001
R unemployed	.614		.431
R not in labor force	-.471		.423
Number of children	-.339	***	.094
R ethnic Russian	.055		.233
Partner labor force attachment (works/worked regularly)			
Partner works irregularly	.472	***	.180
Partner never worked	.748	***	.251
Constant	-2.274	***	.561

Note: analysis sample consists of respondents married at the start of the year; dependent variable is scored 1 if the respondent reports a divorce during the course of the year; model includes fixed year effects; standard errors are estimated accounting for clustering of observations within respondent.

Number of spells:	10257
Number of respondents:	754
Log-pseudolikelihood	-923.5
Pseudo-R squared	.085