Divorce and Women’s Risk of Health Insurance Loss
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Research Questions
(1) Does divorce increase women’s risk of health insurance loss?
(2) What is the temporal pattern of insurance loss and recovery, relative to time of divorce?
(3) What factors moderate the risk of insurance loss after divorce?

Methods
- Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP): 2004 Panel allows construction of 4-year-long monthly calendar of marital status and health insurance transitions.
- Sample contains women in the panel sample, between 23-54 yrs old who are observed to be married at some point in the panel. The final sample contains 21,241 women, 61% (52%) of whom are observed to divorce during the panel.
-Study focuses on divorce rather than both separation and divorce because most separations reported on surveys are informal rather than legal and thus involve no legal change in eligibility for dependent coverage.

Descriptive Results
- Number of women who file for divorce in any given year.
- Number of women who file for divorce and subsequently lose insurance.

Multivariate Results
- Offspring log models used to control for time invariant individual characteristics which may confound the relationship between divorce and insurance loss. Models are weighted and standard errors account for clustering in the data.

Conclusion
- Divorce jeopardizes health insurance coverage for non-certiﬁed women in the United States, particularly private health insurance coverage. Results may underestimate the true risk of insurance loss, as some women may choose not to divorce if they anticipate a loss of income and/or health insurance as a consequence.
- After divorce, some women recover health insurance coverage. However, recovery is not complete, with divorced women continuing to experience a lower probability of attaining health insurance coverage compared to their married peers.
- Women insured as dependents under husbands’ job-based insurance plans prior to divorce face the greatest threat of insurance loss after divorce. The decline in coverage is particularly sharp for this group, and there is little evidence of recovery.
- Women’s full-time employment prior to divorce differs between insured and uninsured groups. Those who have full-time employment are more likely to lose insurance coverage, implying a role for labor market activity in the economic consequences of divorce.

The risk of insurance loss after divorce may compound previously documented consequences of divorce, making women and their children at heightened risk for long-lasting ﬁnancial and health problems.
- The study documents a fracture in the U.S. health insurance system. This ﬁnding is consistent with previous studies of marital dissolution which find that those who divorce are likely to lose access to employer-sponsored health insurance.

References

Acknowledgments
This project was supported by the National Poverty Center (NPC) using funds received from the U.S. Census Bureau, with additional support from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HP3O321010902). The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of the NPC or any agency of the Federal government.