

Case Example Secondary Data: Marital Status and Mental Health - US and Japan Comparison

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Overview

- Three examples of cross-national research using secondary data
- Sources of data
- Issues
- Solutions
- Insights
(e.g. what do we learn from each that we couldn't get from single country study)
- Funding?

Marriage and health in mid-life: A U.S.-Japan comparison

- 1) Is marriage associated with better mental and physical health?
- 2) Are the health advantages associated with marriage stronger for men than women?
- 3) Are the health benefits of marriage limited to those in higher-quality marriages?
- 4) To what extent are the health benefits of marriage due to more favorable economic circumstances among married persons?
- 5) How do the patterns documented in questions 1-4 differ in the U.S. and Japan?

Changes in Family Structure and Economic Well-being in Twenty Nations

- 1) Describe socioeconomic differentials (measured primarily by education) in family behaviors and differences across countries
- 2) Evaluate how family transitions and structure are linked to economic well-being and how these relationships differ across countries
- 3) Evaluate the extent to which observed differences across countries may depend on characteristics such as public policies or aggregate economic circumstances

Living Arrangements and the Economic Well-being of Single Mothers: A Cross-national Comparison

- 1) Describe cross-country differences in living arrangements of single mothers (lone parent vs. coresiding with parents/relatives)
- 2) How does the prevalence of poverty among single mothers depend on living arrangements? How do these relationships differ across countries?
- 3) To what extent are differences across countries in poverty among single mothers explained by differences in living arrangements?
- 4) To what extent does the reduction of poverty among single mothers coresiding with parents/relatives reflect additional income? To what extent does it reflect economies of scale? To what extent do these relationships differ across countries?

Sources of Data

- 1) Surveys designed to be explicitly comparable
 - MIDUS and MIDJA
- 2) Surveys that in theory should be comparable
 - GGS and other family surveys
 - 20 different countries
- 3) Carefully harmonized surveys
 - CNEF
 - 5 countries

Issues 1

1) Sampling differences

- National vs. other

2) Differences in composition of samples

- Marital status
- Race (typically limit US to whites Good? Bad?)

3) Differences in the meaning of questions?

- Scales may be different – maybe not such a big problem if interest is in co-variation rather than levels

Issues 2

- 1) Inconsistent content
 - e.g., income, parental SES
- 2) Inconsistent wording of questions
 - e.g., income
- 3) Harmonizing fundamentally different measures
 - e.g., educational attainment
- 4) Major differences in distribution of key measures
 - e.g., “early” childbearing, low/high education

Issues 3

- 1) Differences in definition/categories of key variables
 - e.g., marital status
- 2) Potential differences in the meaning of categories (or w/in category variation)
 - e.g., cohabiting unions
- 3) Policy differences that impact measurement
 - no equivalent of social security income in Australian survey
- 4) Possible unobserved differences that impact the validity of key assumptions
 - what if degree of income sharing within coresidential households is not the same across countries?

Solutions 1

- 1a) Acknowledge sampling frame differences and move on?
- 1b) Limit US analyses to residents of large urban areas?
- 2a) Use non-equivalent measures of marital status?
- 2b) Collapse previously married and never married in U.S.?
- 2c) Limit to whites in the U.S.
- 3) Differences in scale are more problematic if one is interested in levels rather than differentials

Solutions 2

1a) Restrict analytic sample to available countries?

1b) Look for other measures of concept of interest that are consistently available (e.g., self-reported economic well-being)?

2, 3) Recode to produce consistent measures

- Measurement is constrained by information in the least informative survey

4) Use alternative measures of concept of interest

- Early childbearing (multiple thresholds)
- Educational attainment (collapse categories, use non-equivalent measures across countries)

Solutions 3

1a) Acknowledge limitations and move on?

1b, 2) Go back to original data files, merge in additional information, conduct sensitivity analyses

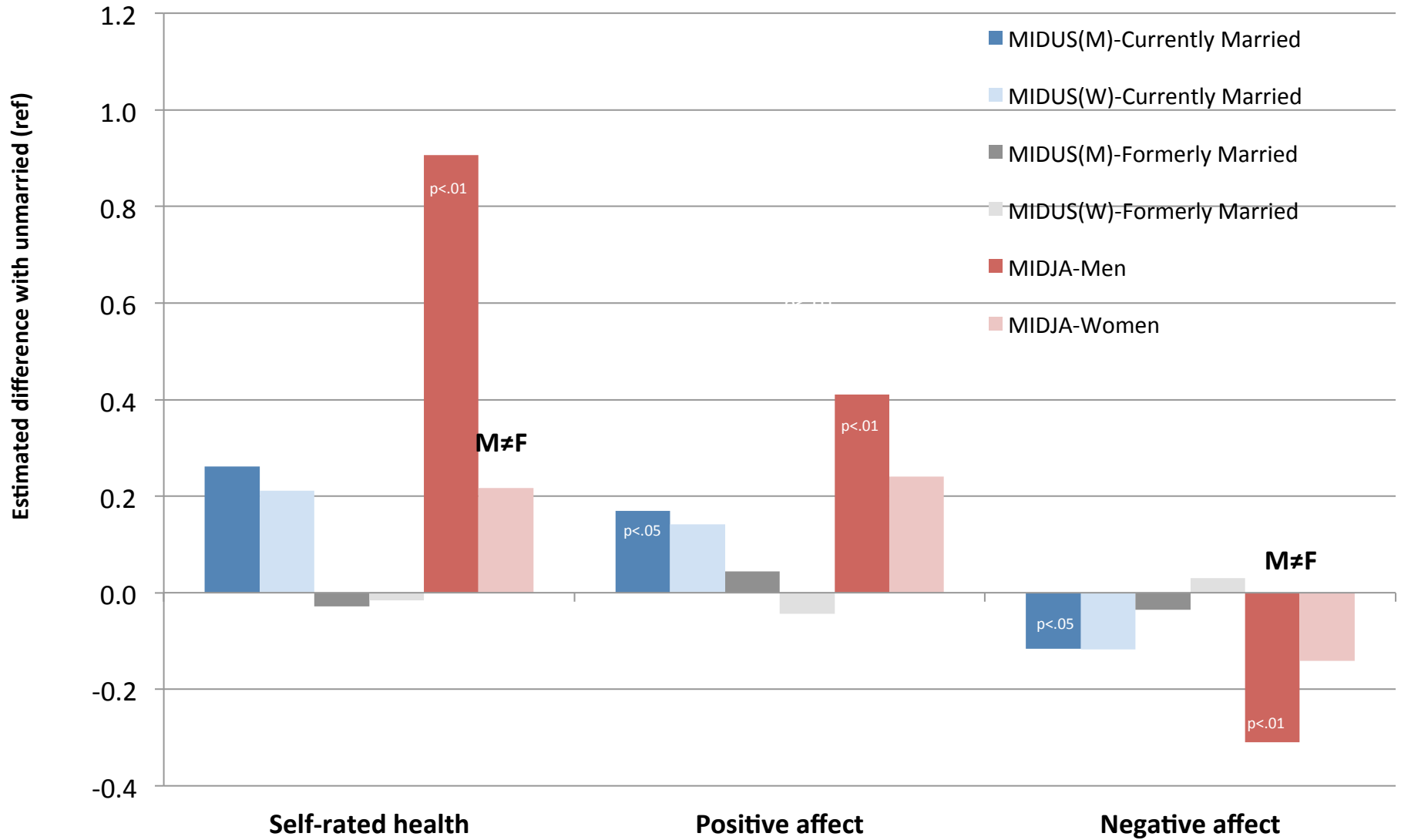
3) Must make assumptions

- we assume 50-50 split of public transfers
- evaluate sensitivity by considering alternative assumptions

4) Acknowledge possibility and move on

- We can't imagine any plausible assumptions in the absence of reliable external information

Insights 1

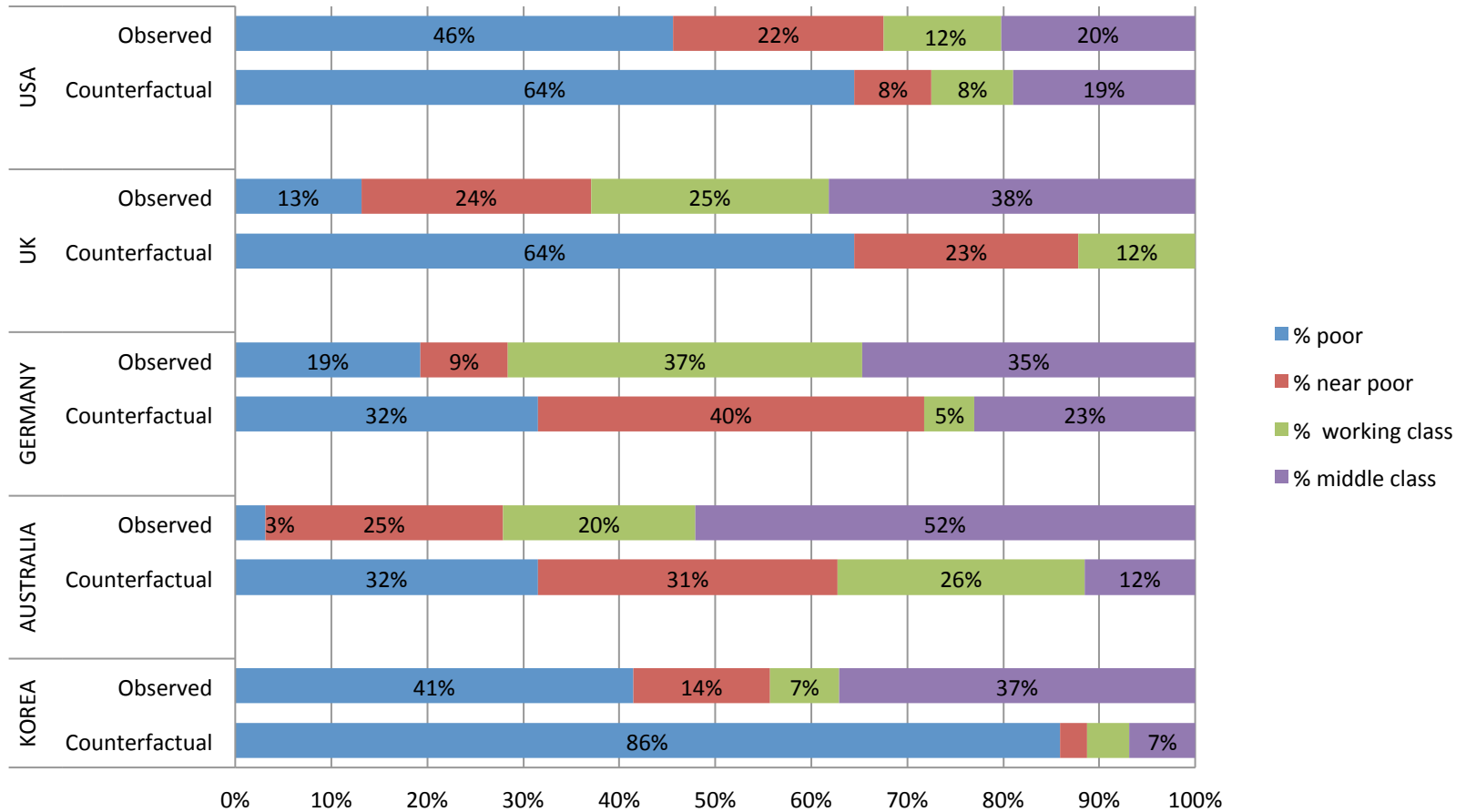


Insights 2

- Growing gap between least educated and more educated across most countries
- Consistent with observations from U.S.
- Consistent with notion of “diverging destinies”
- No consistent patterns across policy contexts

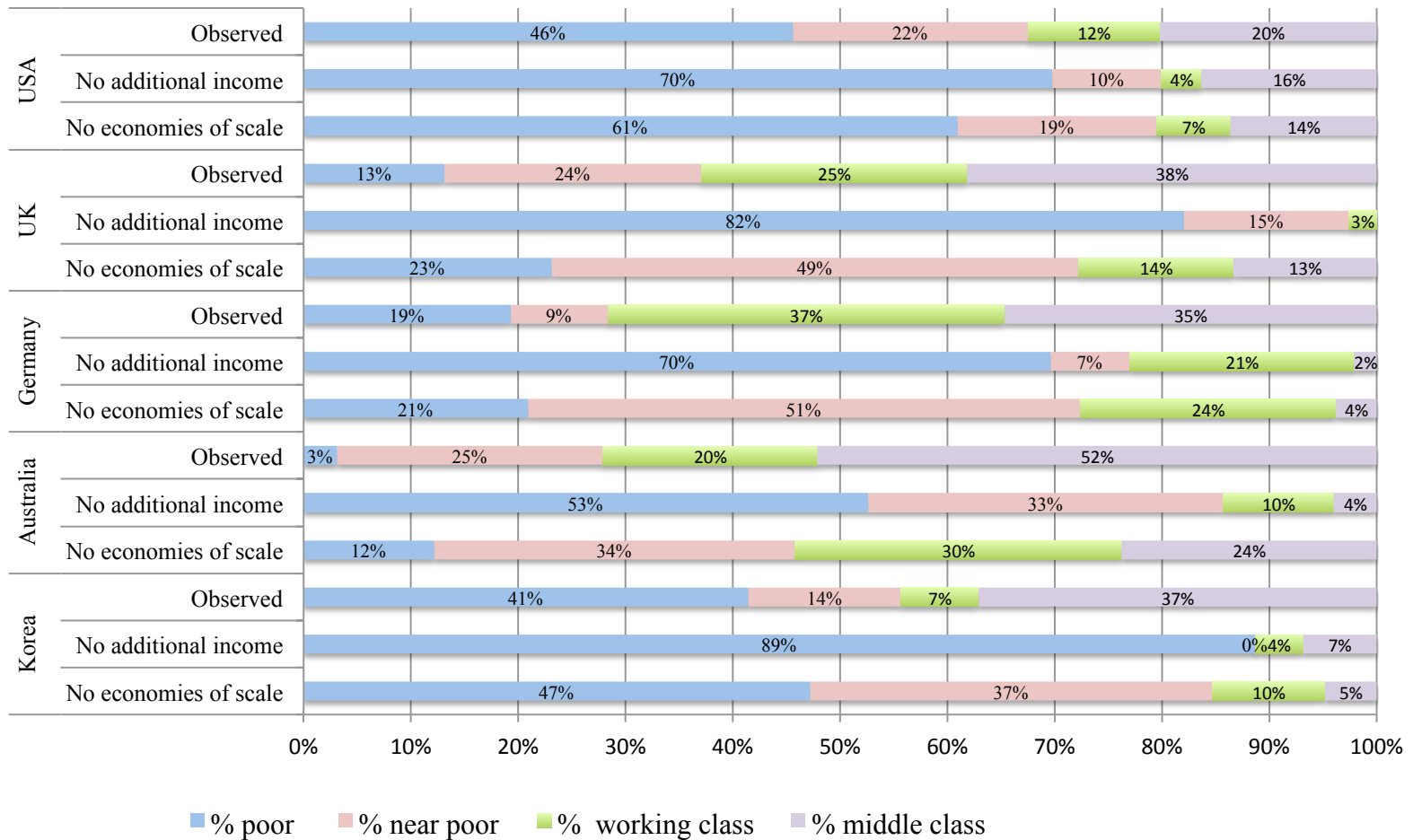
Insights 3

Figure 6: Observed and Counterfactual Income Distributions When Single Mothers Living With Others Are Assumed To Be Lone Mothers



Insights 3

Figure 9: Observed and Counterfactual Income Distributions for Unpartnered Mothers Coresiding with Other Adults, by Country



Funding

- Tremendous lip-service to value of CN research
- Clearly support for data collection
- Secondary analysis is a harder sell
- Difficulty articulating why insights outweigh the many limitations
- Support from NSF