

Author's Accepted Manuscript

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www.elsevier.com/locate/ssmph

PII: S2352-8273(17)30251-3
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2018.01.001>
Reference: SSMPH229

To appear in: *SSM - Population Health*

Received date: 9 August 2017
Revised date: 1 December 2017
Accepted date: 16 January 2018

Cite this article as: Karen van Hedel, Pekka Martikainen, Heta Moustgaard and Mikko Myrskylä, Cohabitation and mental health: Is cohabiting as good for your mental health as marriage?, *SSM - Population Health*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2018.01.001>

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Cohabitation and mental health: Is cohabiting as good for your mental health as marriage?

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Abstract

Marriage is positively associated with better mental health. While research on the mental health of cohabiting individuals has increased in recent years, it has yielded mixed results thus far. Our aim is to assess whether the mental health of cohabiting individuals is comparable to that of married or to that of single individuals using longitudinal data on prescribed psychotropic medication. We used panel data from an 11% random sample of the population residing in Finland for the years 1995 to 2007, with annual measurements of all covariates. Ordinary least squares (OLS) and individual fixed effect (FE) models were applied to disentangle the relation between cohabitation and purchases of prescribed psychotropic medication, while controlling for relevant time-varying factors, such as age, education, economic activity and number of children. We focused on men and women aged 25 to 39 years in 1995. Descriptive results and the OLS model indicate that the likelihood of purchasing psychotropic medication was lowest for married individuals, higher for cohabiting individuals, and highest for single individuals. After controlling for time-varying covariates, the difference in likelihood of purchasing psychotropic medication between cohabiting and married men and women disappeared. Further controlling for unobserved confounders by applying an individual FE model did not change this non-significant difference between cohabiting and married individuals. The difference between single and cohabiting individuals decreased in the FE models. Similar results were found for

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