

Does more working women result in more single men?

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Abstract

The following report is going to discuss whether the relationship in the title exists. The theoretical approach suggests that both possibilities can happen due to the simple assumptions of the economic theories used in this research. Evidence shows a clear trend for a positive relationship between women's working hours and the number of single men. However, the trend weakens over the time, possibly due to stabilisation of women's wages more recently.

1. Introduction

In traditional societies, the man is the leader of the family while the woman is in charge of housework and child care. Nowadays, this view has changed with the involvement of women in work traditionally associated with men (Hunt, J, 2004). The change partly contributed to (or, was a result of) changes in social structure and family. Sometimes families hinder individual career paths so some people do not intend to get married. Economics has analysed marriage and the family using concepts and tools originally used to analyse the economy (Pollak, 2002).

Marital activities can have many causes: emotional, psychological or even financial factors. However, some aspects of marriage can be described by economics (Wallace, 2011). Can the explanation of the most complex issue really be found in the teachings of economic theory? We explore the issue using the theory of comparative advantage and some empirical data.

2. Theoretical approach

The theory of comparative advantage has been employed to help answer the question. In general, comparative advantage suggests that each party should focus on producing the good in which they have the lower opportunity cost relative to some other party. The theory of comparative advantage will be used to examine whether the demand for marriage increases or decreases when more women enter the labour force.

Often, mutual consent to marry confirms that both parties have made a beneficial trade. The benefit of trade can be said to result from using comparative advantage theory. From the traditional view, men are considered to be better at work (they can earn more money) and women seem to be better at housework or child-care. So specialisation is utilised by women

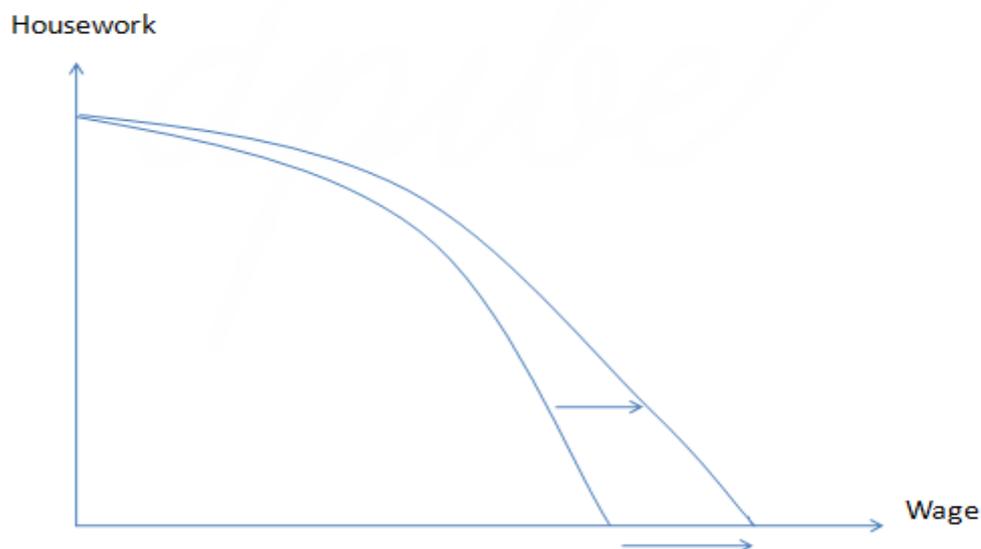
giving up paid-work (or they work less) to stay at home while men work more to support the whole family. However, trends today suggest the opposite.

2.1. The production possibility frontier

As the demand for female labour increases, women's wages increase. As their wages increase, the opportunity costs of producing household goods (childcare, etc) increases. Therefore women may lose some of their comparative advantage from trading through marriage.

Figure 1: Women's PPF curve

Women PPF Curve



The above graph shows that as the wage for women increases, the Production Possibility Frontier shifts to the right. The shift indicates that women have to give up more when they engage in a marriage (assuming that they specialise in housework). From this simple perspective, marriage demand falls when the wages of women increase, the increase of which causes an increase in the participation of women in the labour force.

2.2. The adjustments to the Linder hypothesis

Comparative advantage indicates that as the opportunity cost of men and women become similar, there is little reason to trade. However, the Linder hypothesis states that countries with similar opportunity cost may still gain from trading with each other. The neoclassical model states that developed countries do not trade among themselves because they will not gain much. However, in reality, trade between two developed countries does happen. The adjustments of differentiated capital-intensive goods, preferences and economies of scale can help explain the above issue. Before a marriage, men and women today are considered to be “developed countries” because they both have very similar opportunity cost (due to similar salaries).

There are several reasons for men and women to still get involved in a marriage. For example, according to Lin (2008), men and women think, speak and decide differently; so that the qualities and characteristics of men and women have a clear distinction which can reflect differently in the work results. Messing, K (1998, p.24) states that “men are physically stronger and more stable mentally while women are more fragile sex”. Thus, in a life of marriage, there are many tasks enough for men and women to choose what they are good at and avoid what they are not. That is to say, both are still able to specialise in different aspects of work in the home; e.g. women, the cooking, and men, the repairing.

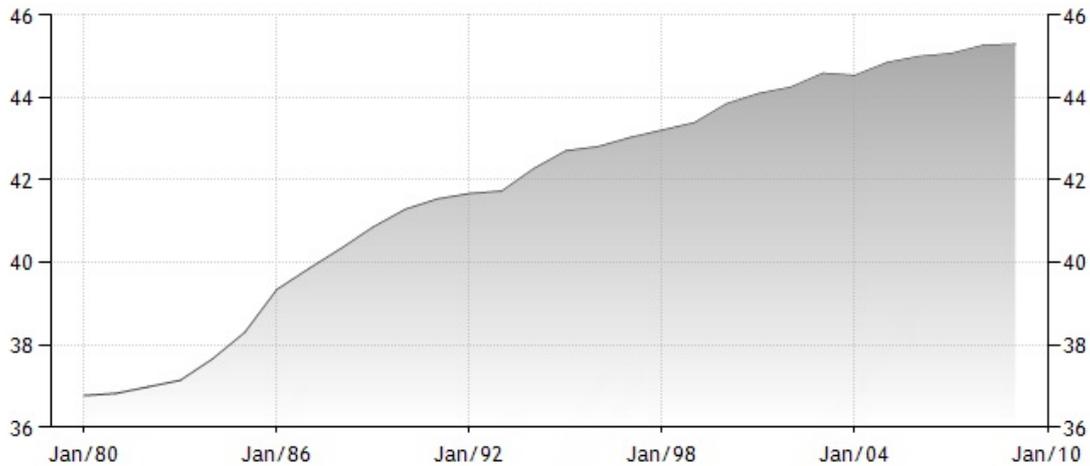
Finally, the economies of scale offers another reason for men and women get married (trade). Economies of scale suggest that the more products are created, average cost falls. It will cost less if men and women just focus on doing one thing at a time. As a single woman, she cooks

for herself every day; if she cook for another one (which is her partner), its costs much less to add another serve in an existing meal comparing to cook two separate meals. In the mean time, men can do extra work or have a good rest to work more effectively tomorrow to earn more than singles' situation.

In short, theoretical approach also produces two opposite suggestion to the issue of whether single men are more due to the increase in working hours of women. The empirical data will be examined to justify the issue.

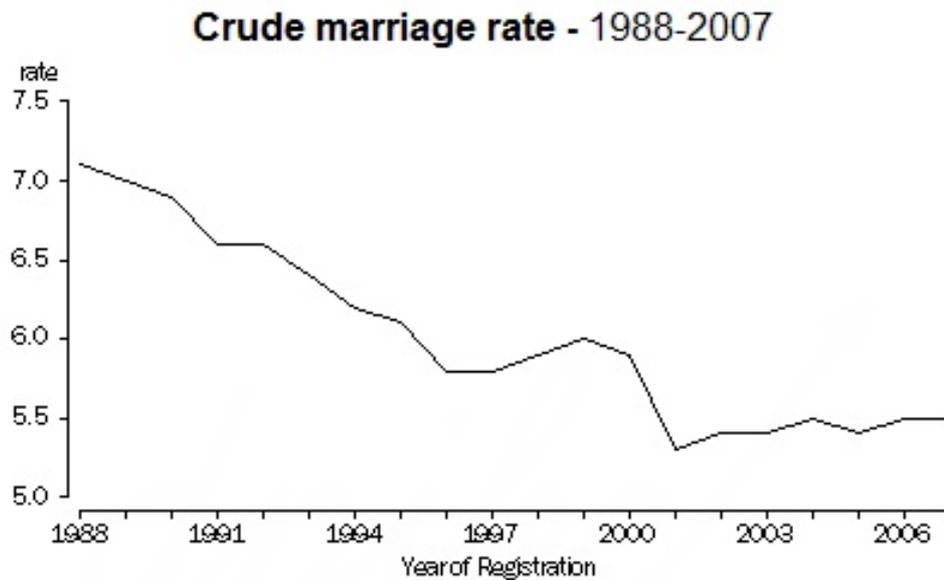
3. Analysis

Research has been conducted about the workforce, marriage rate and the median age of marriage using Australian data. The time interval of this research is set from late 1980s to 2010 (about 25 years). The reason behind this is that 25 year period is sufficient to conclude a major trend in any provided data. Besides, it can help avoid any seasonal or short-term trends which may mislead the result of this research. In awareness of "de facto" law of Australia, in order to put a constraint for the research, this report only focuses on the "marriage" status but not "in relationship" status.

Figure 2: *Changes in the percentage of female workers in Australia*

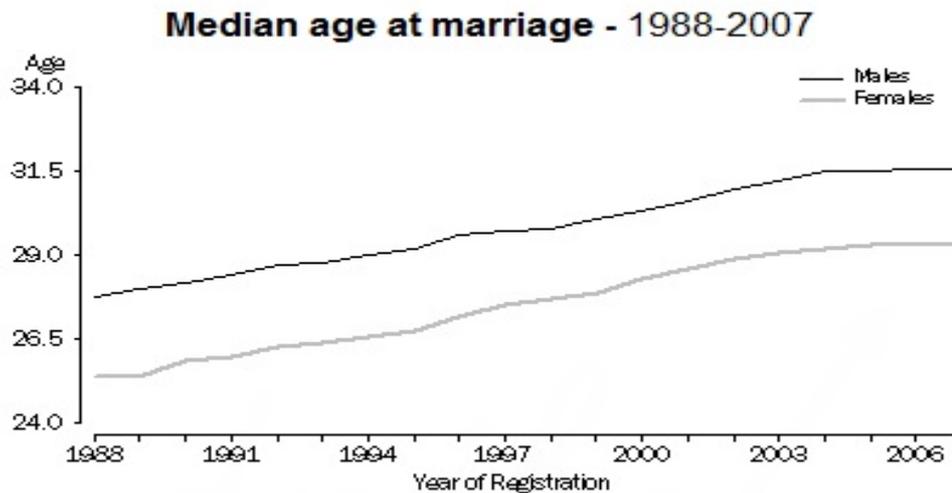
Female (% of total labour force) in Australia, Trading Economics

There was a huge increase in the level of female workers in the Australian workforce. It started at around 37% in 1980 and rose radically up to 45% in 2010. This means women have been taking over a huge proportion in the workforce and promoting the balance between male and female workers in the society. Women have been encouraged to participate more in the many areas which used to be men-only or men-dominant. Especially, more women are becoming leaders or managers in many companies and organisations. Hence, with more responsibility put on women, they are spending more time and efforts with their career than they used to 30 years ago.

Figure 3: Crude marriage rate, 1988-2007

Australian Bureau of Statistics

In the meantime, according to the diagram above, the marriage rate fell gradually from 7.2% in 1988 down to 5.8% in 1997; it rose slightly in 1998, then drop sharply down to 5.3% in 2001; after that the marriage rate fluctuated around 5.5%. Even though there was a minor growth in years 1998-1999, it may due to the seasonal effects or unexpected volatility of the data; the overall trend of marriage is considered to decrease during the period from 1988 to 2007.

Figure 4: Median marriage rate, 1988-2007

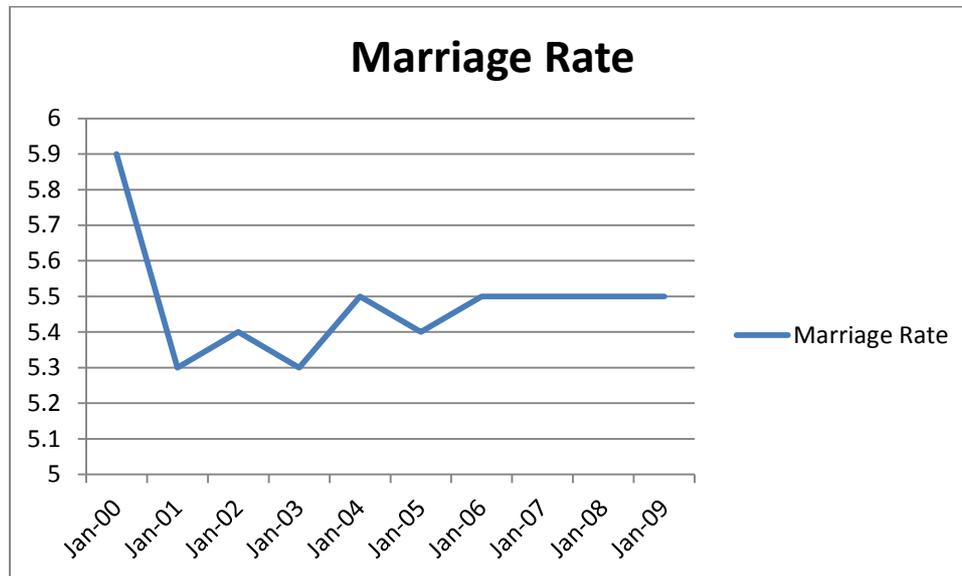
Australian Bureau of Statistics

The median age at marriage of both men and women grew steadily over the time. 30 years ago, most men got married around age 28; and nowadays, they tend to get married in older age (around 31.5 years old). In women's part, the same movement was noticed, since most of them get married at age 29 in the recent period, comparing to the median of 25 years old in the past. This means both men and women tend to spend longer years being single and they do not want to get married early like before.

In consideration of all information collected above, while women were participating more in the social work and spending more time for their career, the level of marriage were falling and the age at marriage of both genders were growing accordingly. There is a significant relationship which is that as more women work the number of single men increases.

However, another aspect should be taken in to account before concluding the issue. That is how this issue has affected in the recent 5 years' time.

Figure 5: Crude marriage rate, 2000-2009



Australian Bureau of Statistics

In the recent 5 years' time, the marriage rate has remained stable at 5.5% and the median age at marriage for man and women has also stayed at approximately 31.5 and 29.3 years old respectively. Therefore, there was a significantly negative relationship between the duration at work of women and the level of single men in the past; however, the effect has become less likely in the recent period. The most likely explanation for this is that the proportion of females in the workforce has stabilised (45% in 2010); hence, the demand for female workers has also stabilised, which then means that the opportunity cost of marriage has not been increasing.

4. Limitations

This research has been conducted but there are still some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the “long hour working - women” and “single men” rates are only based within Australia area. Observing from only one particular country cannot give us the whole picture of the world. This trend can be different in other countries.

Secondly, more single men are not resulted only by the increase of long hour working - women but by many other factors. The reasons can be listed: different culture, lifestyle, regions and even law. Western culture is distinctive from eastern culture. For example, the divorce rate in western countries is higher than eastern countries, which can lead to more single (divorced) men. Also by law, in some countries (especially in the Middle East), the government allows polygamy, so if one man gets married to 3 wives, there will be 2 single men

Thirdly, this research is primarily focussed on an economic perspective. Stress can be a significant example of more single men. Moreover, the acceptance of third gender (gay, lesbian, bisexual) has rapidly changed the marriage rate (between a man and a woman), which ends up in more single men. Peer pressure may also be another reason for single men. If a man’s friends and his parents are all single (divorced, celibate...), he is likely to be influenced by the thought of being single.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, our collected data has shown a relationship between women working hours and the level of single men in the past. However, the effect has become less likely in the recent period most likely due to the stabilising of women’s wages. There are some other factors that can be counted as the reason of more single men, such as: different culture, lifestyle, stress, the presence of third gender and even peer pressure. These are not considered