Marital breakup is among the most incisive stressors in adult life. While the negative effects of divorce on well-being are well documented in numerous studies, the large interindividual differences in psychological adaptation to this critical life event over time are still not well understood. This is especially the case in divorce after long-term marriage, which have increased significantly in the last decades. According to the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective (Amato, 2000), the process of divorce sets into motion numerous stressful events. Severity and duration of negative outcomes depend on the presence of a variety of moderating factors such as intra- and interpersonal resources. A central but controversially discussed question in this context is whether marital breakup is a crisis to which individuals gradually adapt after a certain time, or if it is rather a chronic stressor with outlasting negative consequences.

Aims and Hypotheses:
The aim of this study is:

- To investigate the role of time passed since marital breakup as a predictor of short and long term psychological adaptation along with sociodemographic and personality variables, social environment, contextual factors of ex-relationship and break-up circumstances.

Based on theoretical insights and the status quo of research, we hypothesize among other that:

- Individuals with a marital breakup happened within the last 24 months show a poorer psychological adaptation than those who experienced it 5 years and longer ago.
- Individuals with a breakup longer than 5 years ago do not differ from the age-matched married control group regarding the indicators of adaptation.
- Time passed since separation is a significant predictor of various indicators of psychological adaptation, namely life satisfaction, depressive symptoms and perceived stress.

Time Heals Some Wounds: Psychological Adjustment after Marital Breakup in Middle Aged Individuals

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### METHODS

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Marital breakup is among the most incisive stressors in adult life. While the negative effects of divorce on wellbeing are well documented in numerous studies, the large interindividual differences in psychological adaptation to this critical life event over time are still not well understood. This is especially the case in divorce after long-term marriage, which have increased significantly in the last decades. According to the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective (Amato, 2000), the process of divorce sets into motion numerous stressful events. Severity and duration of negative outcomes depend on the presence of a variety of moderating factors such as intra- and interpersonal resources. A central but controversially discussed question in this context is whether marital breakup is a crisis to which individuals gradually adapt after a certain time, or if it is rather a chronic stressor with outlasting negative consequences.

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### RESULTS

- **Table 1. Group comparisons between divorced and married individuals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of psychological adaptation</th>
<th>Separation &lt;= 24 months (M, SD)</th>
<th>Separation 25-60 months (G, M)</th>
<th>Married control group (B, M)</th>
<th>T-test (All)</th>
<th>T-test (VPC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depressive symptoms (Range 1-7)</td>
<td>4.58 (2.5)</td>
<td>5.38 (3.3)</td>
<td>5.42 (3.0)</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction (Range 1-7)</td>
<td>4.71 (2.2)</td>
<td>5.62 (2.7)</td>
<td>5.62 (3.1)</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived stress (Range 1-6)</td>
<td>2.34 (0.7)</td>
<td>2.21 (0.5)</td>
<td>2.21 (0.5)</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Table 2. Hierarchical linear regression analyses predicting psychological adaptation to marital breakup**

The study suggests that:

- **Our results support the crisis as well as the chronic state approach. There is indeed a recovery effect. The more time passed since separation, the better the psychological adaptation. However, the difference regarding the indicators of psychological adaptation between the sepa-ra-tion group 5 and more years ago and the married controls is still significant.**
- **Time since separation plays an important role for predicting depressive symptoms, even after controlling for several other variables. However this is not the case for life satisfaction and perceived stress.**
- **Personality variables (especially neuroticism and resilience) are the strongest predictors for the psychological adaptation in the short as well as in the long term.**
- **Whereas being in a new relationship is a significant predictor for the short term adaptation, social support has an important role in the long term.**
- **Variables concerning the ex-relationship are more important for the short term adaptation.**
- **Results will be validated with longitudinal data gathered in the second wave, which will take place in spring 2014.**