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## New York Divorce and Family Law Blog

### [Divorce Risk Higher When Wife Gets Sick](#)

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A recent study found that women who were told they had a serious illness were seven times as likely to become separated or divorced as men with similar health problems.



[Tara Parker-Pope](#) reports in the [Well Blog](#) that:

When the man became ill, only 3 percent experienced the end of a marriage. But among women, about 21 percent ended up separated or divorced. Among couples who split up, divorce occurred, on average, about six months after the diagnosis, although there was wide variability in the timing.

It seems that men run away when health issues arise affecting their spouse, whereas women “hunker down” and deal with the issues. This finding is even more pronounced when the pre-diagnosis “health of the marriage” is considered.

If couples are happy before the diagnosis, it appears that men are more likely to abandon wives who become seriously ill. If couples are already troubled before a partner becomes ill, the

finding suggests that women in unhappy marriages are less likely to proceed with a divorce if their husbands become ill.

The study made no conclusion as to the reason for this phenomenon. A possible explanation could fall along the traditional or stereotypical roles of men and women in a marriage. Wives are typically the nurturers and caregivers in the relationship, whereas husbands are not. However, this theory fails to explain why men abandon an otherwise happy relationship after the diagnosis of a serious illness.