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Educational Assortative Mating and Union Stability: A Prospective Analysis Using Belgian Census and Register Data

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Motivation

- People tend to choose romantic partners who are educationally similar to themselves
- Educational heterogamy, and especially hypogamy (woman more educated), is expected to have a negative effect on union stability
 - as a consequence of frustrations and tensions related to the dissimilarity
- Past research often confirmed this expectation
 - BUT inconsistencies remained because of variations in legal, social and economic costs of divorce across time and between and within countries

Motivation

Recent evidence from the US (Schwartz & Han 2014) suggest changing patterns over time

- the stability of marriages between educational equals has increased
- the negative association between hypogamy ($W > M$) and union stability disappeared among marriages formed after 1990

→ Because of the changed gender gap in education?

→ A “diffusion of innovation story”?

Deviant union behavior (such as unions with a higher educated woman) can be seen as an innovation to marriage market constraints (‘not enough highly educated men on the mating market’) --> when such marriages become more common, do they become more accepted and less unstable?

Objectives & research questions

1. To examine the effect of relative education on union stability in Belgium

➤ *How are educational differences between partners related to union stability, net of individual educational effects?*

2. To test the diffusion hypothesis by including educational context factors

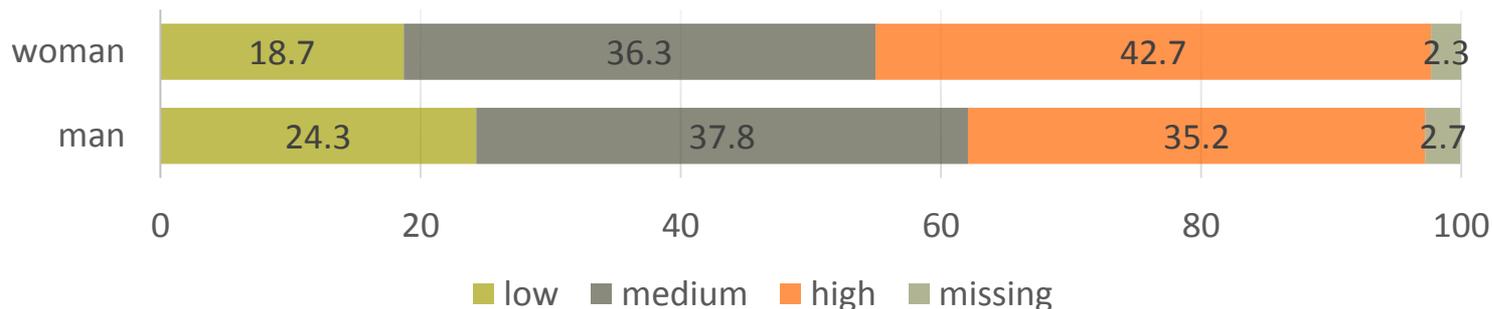
➤ *Does the effect of couples' relative education on union stability depend on the proportion of hypogamous couples ($W > M$) in the neighborhood?*

Data

- Belgian CENSUS 2001 – National Register 2006
 - Covers the whole Belgian population
 - Linkage on the individual level
 - Changes in union status are calculated by comparing the dates and destinations of residential migration of both partners
- Sample selection ($N = 472,945$ couples)
 - Got married between 30/09/1986 and 30/09/2001
 - Female age at marriage between 18 and 49
 - Both man and woman had Belgian nationality of origin in 2001, were not enrolled in school in 2001 and did not emigrate or die between 2001 and 2006

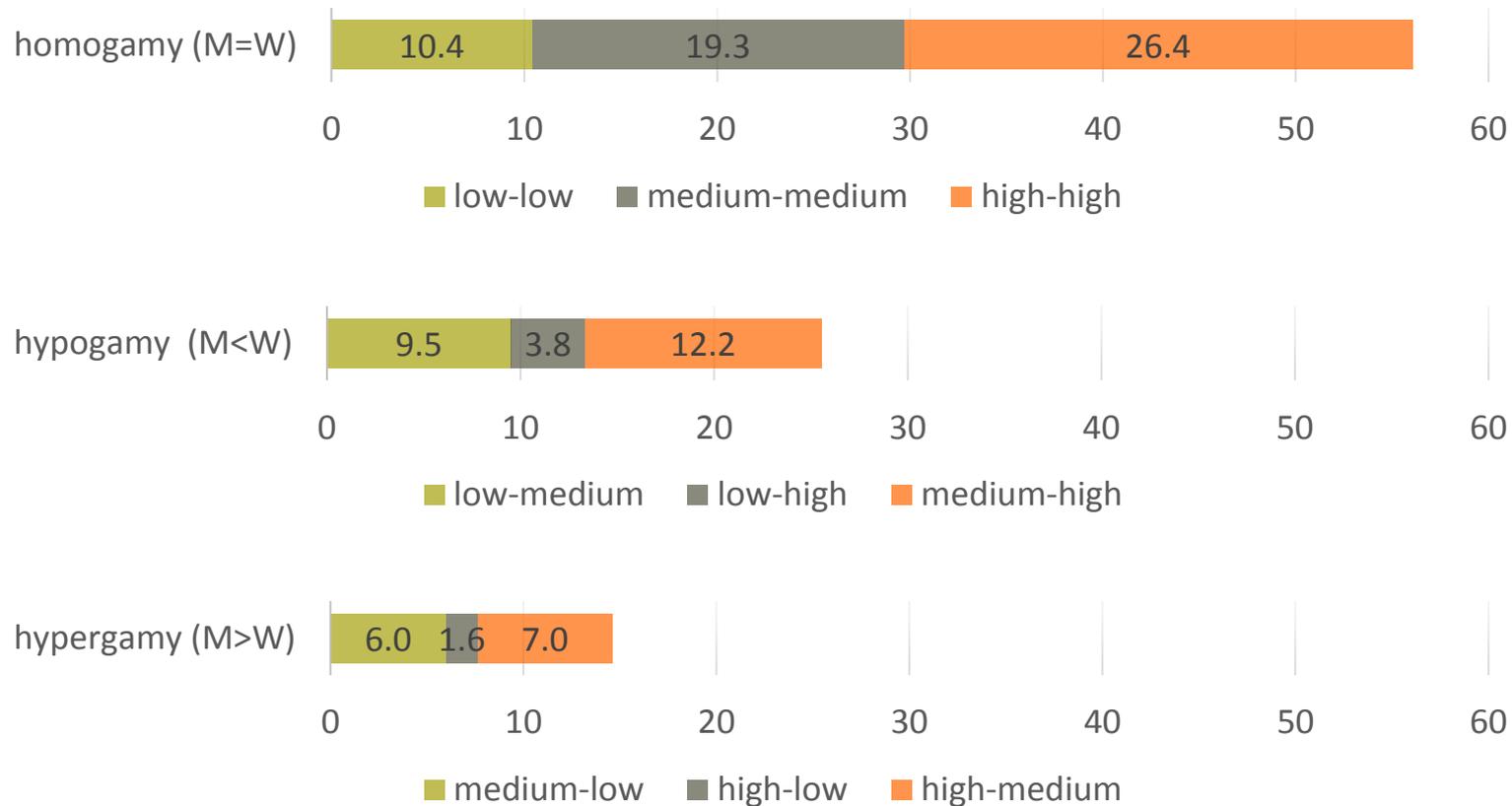
Absolute & relative education

- Operationalization education man and woman in 2001
 - Low = lower secondary education
 - Medium = higher secondary education
 - High = tertiary education
- Distribution of the sample, in %
 - Absolute education



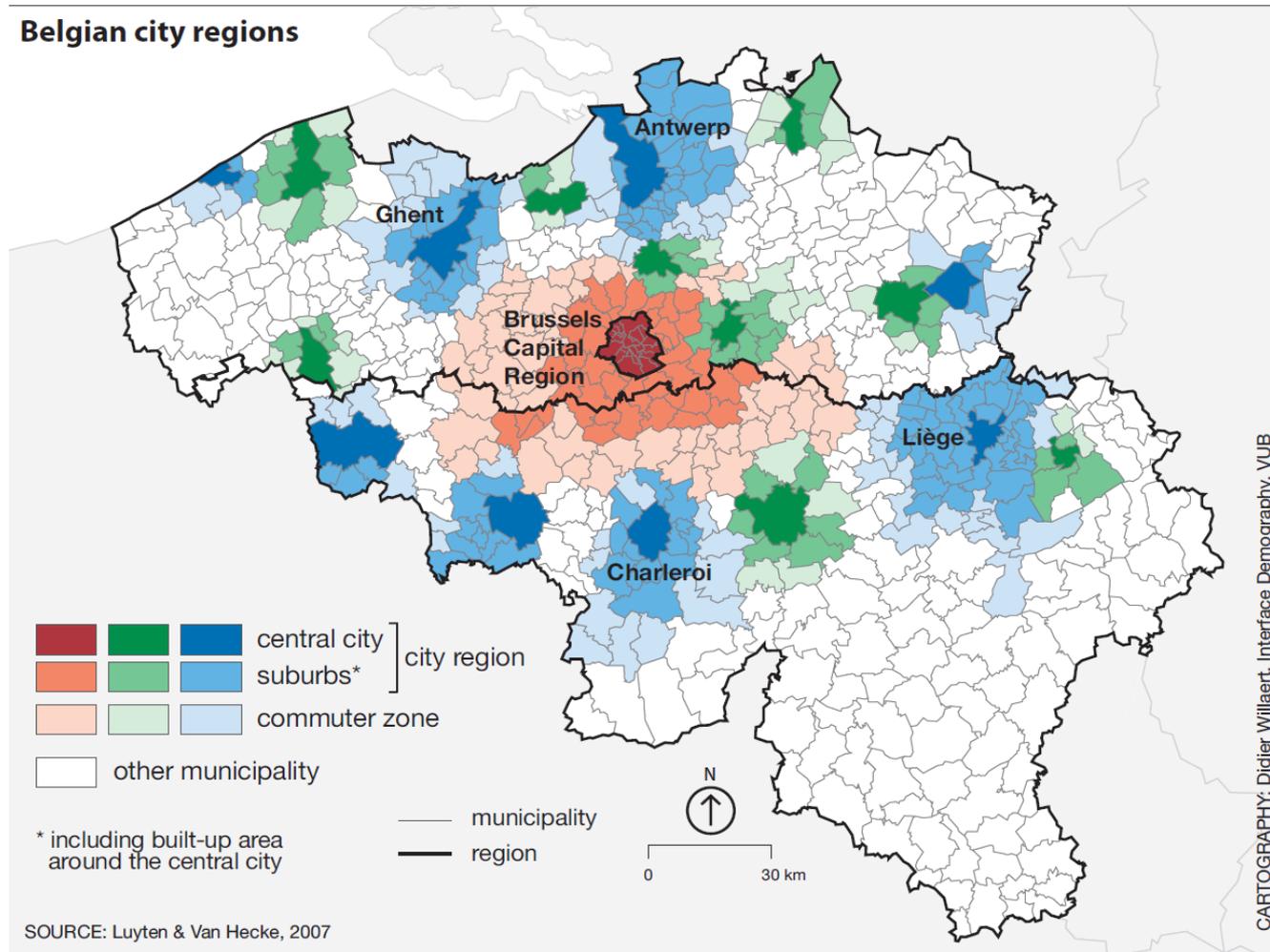
Absolute & relative education

➤ Relative education (Man-Woman)

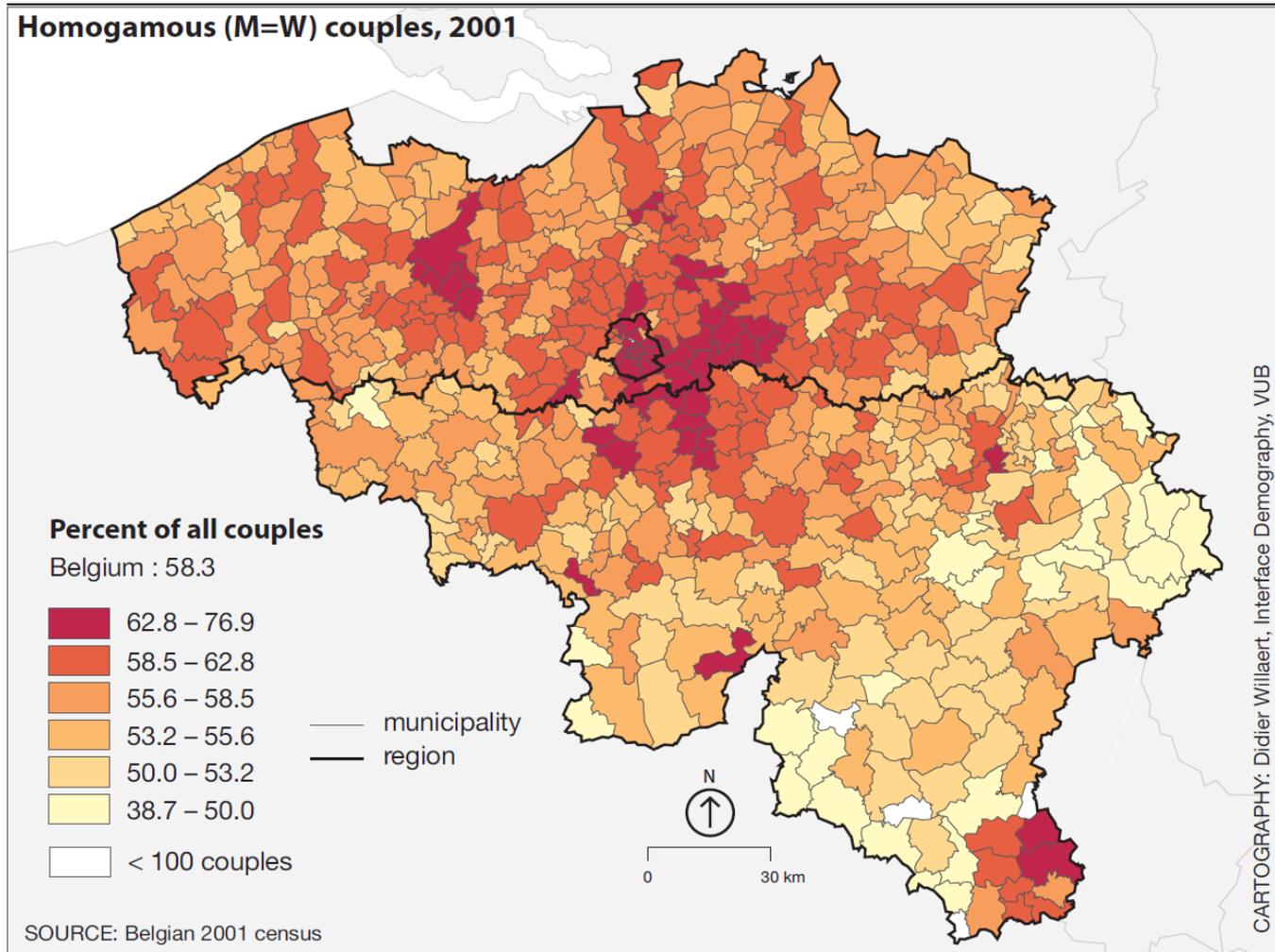


Belgium

Belgian city regions

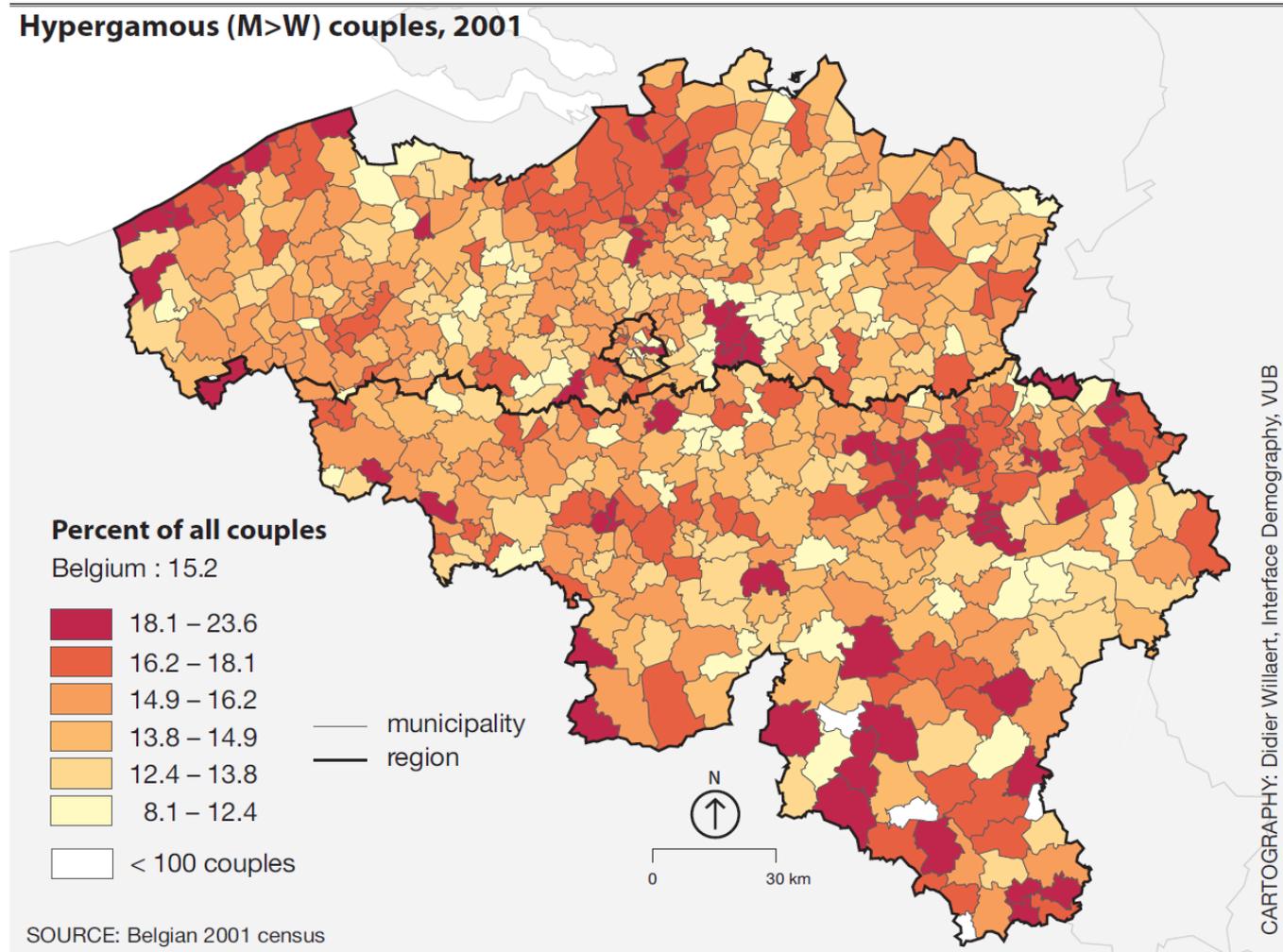


Map 1: % homogamous couples, per municipality

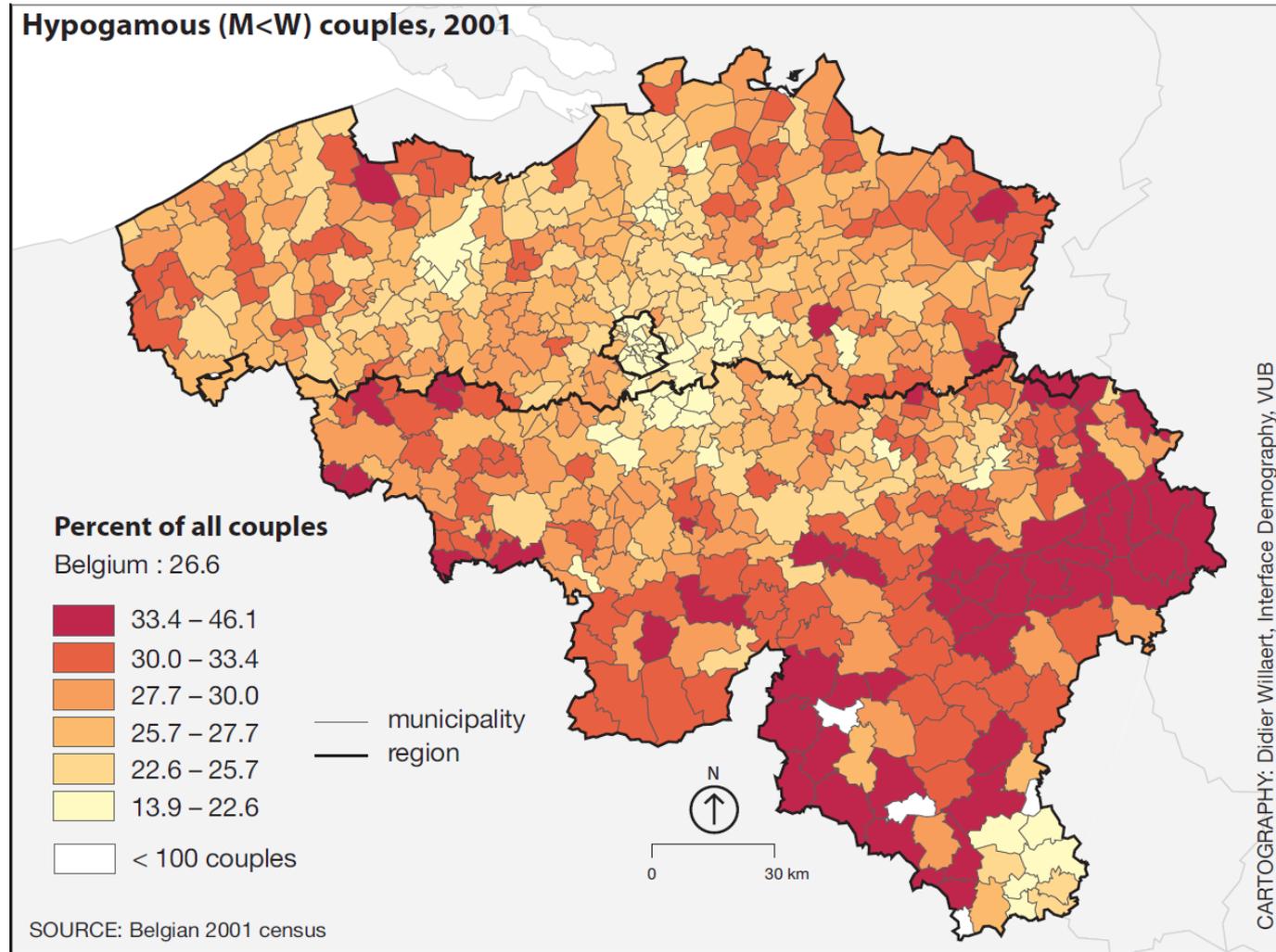


Map 2: % hypergamous couples, per municipality

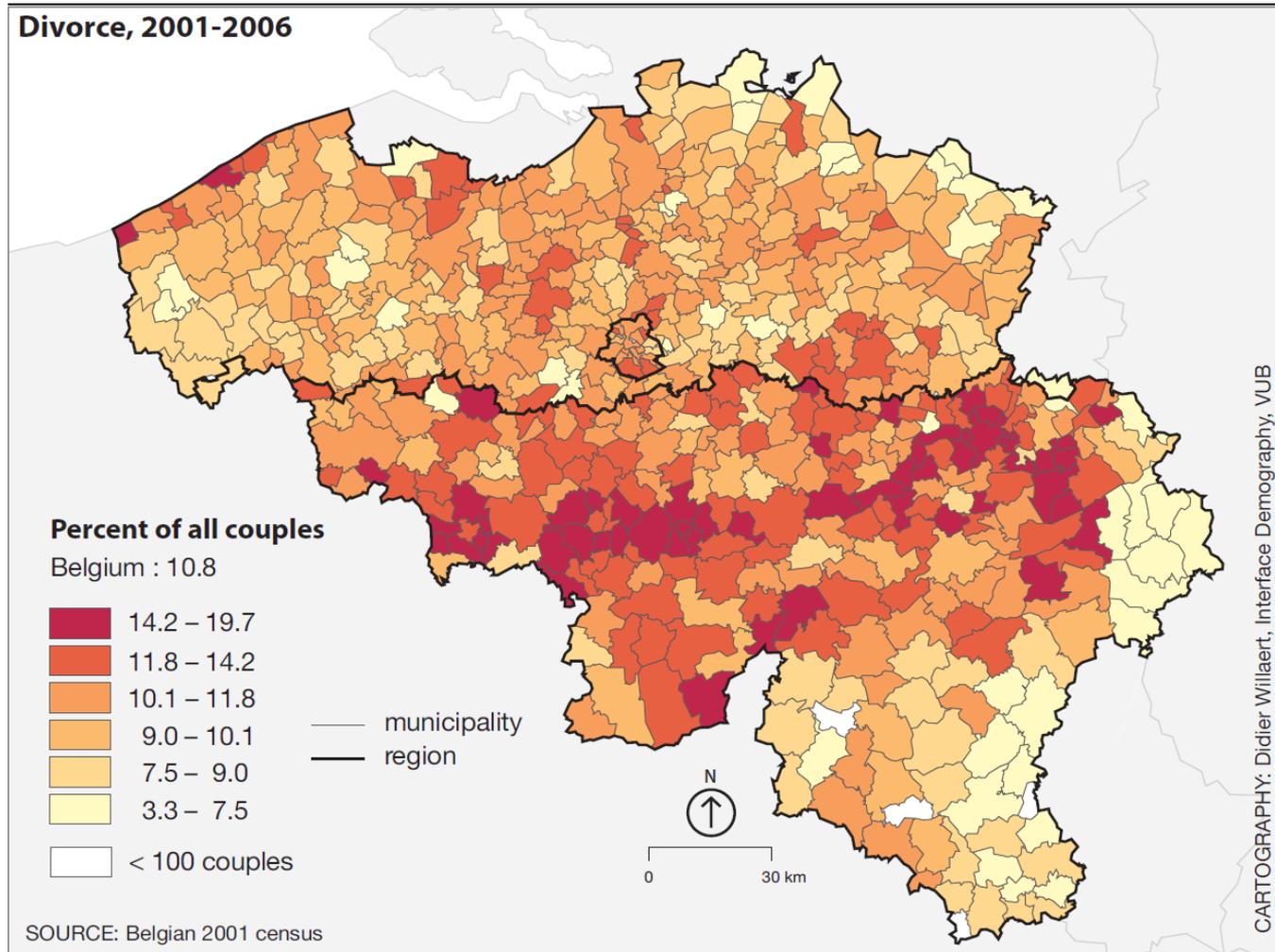
Hypergamous (M>W) couples, 2001



Map 3: % hypogamous couples, per municipality



Map 4: % divorced couples, per municipality



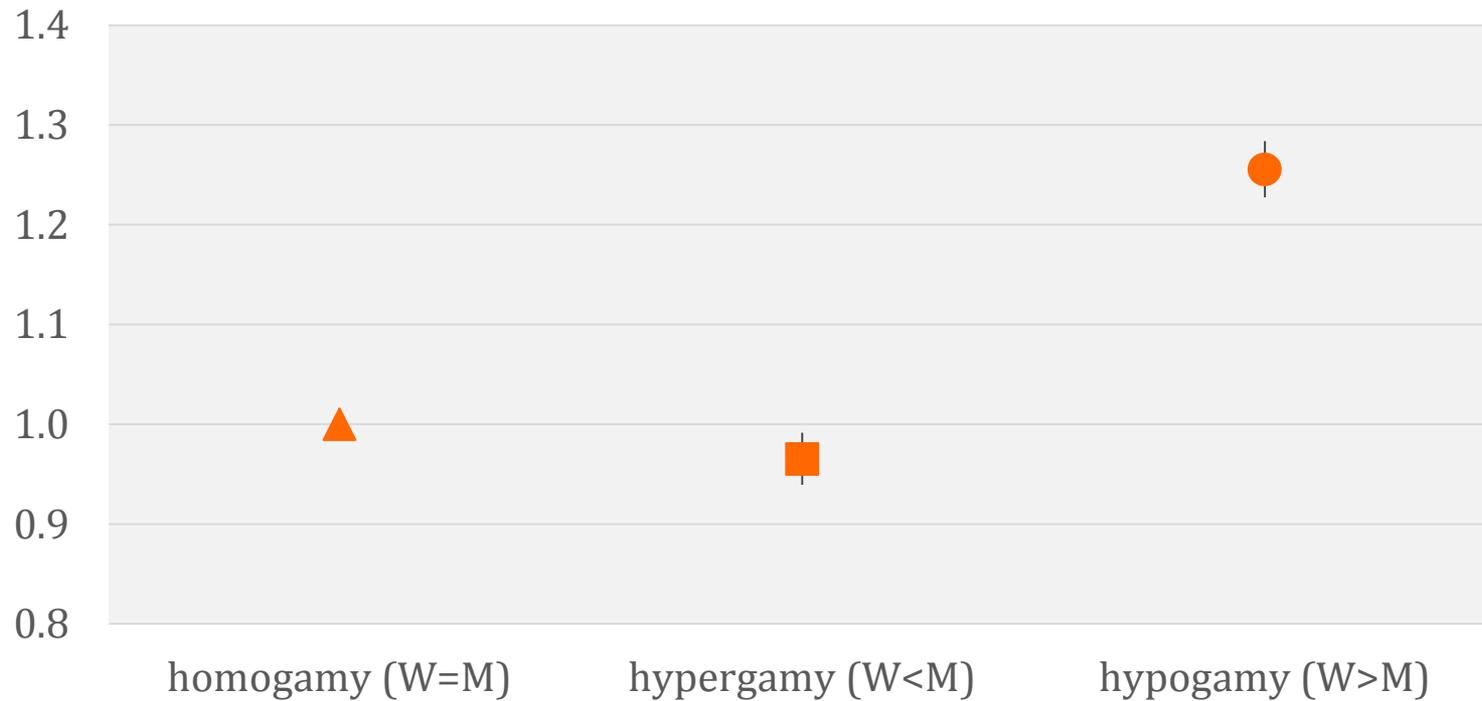
Method

- Piecewise constant multilevel hazard model
 - Event = marital household dissolution between 2001 and 2006
 - Time = marriage duration
 - Left truncated data, entry in 2001
 - Control for a municipality-level random residual
- Control covariates
 - Age = female age at marriage, relative age
 - Children = parity and age youngest child (TV)
 - Occupational status = male occupational-related income, relative occupational-related income (2001)
 - Marital residence = ownership, comfort level (2001)
 - Place of residence = region, degree of urbanization (2001)

Results

Hazard ratios of relative education*

(95% confidence interval)



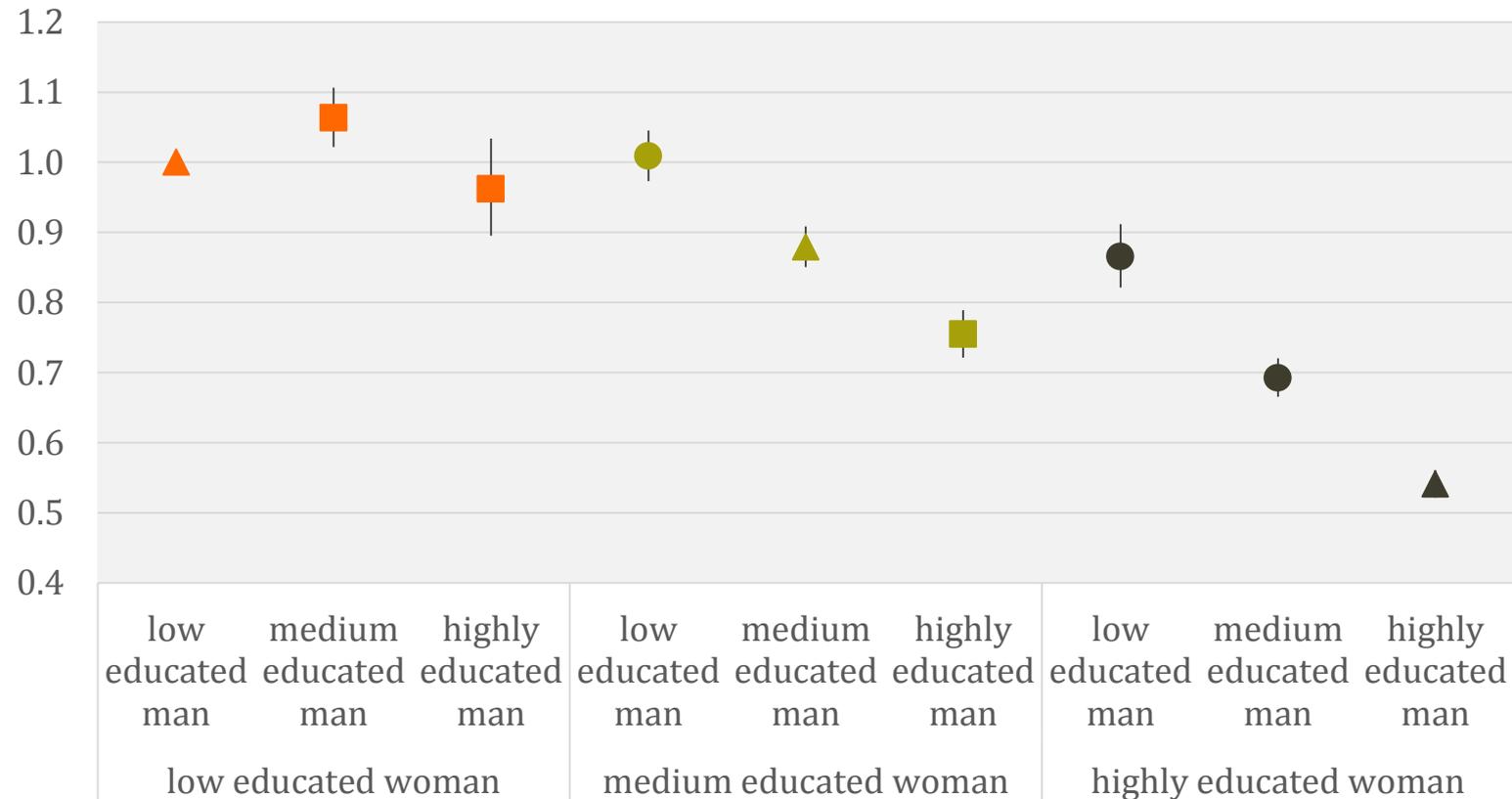
*Controlled for female education and controls

Results

- ▲ = homogamy (W=M)
- = hypergamy (W<M)
- = hypogamy (W>M)

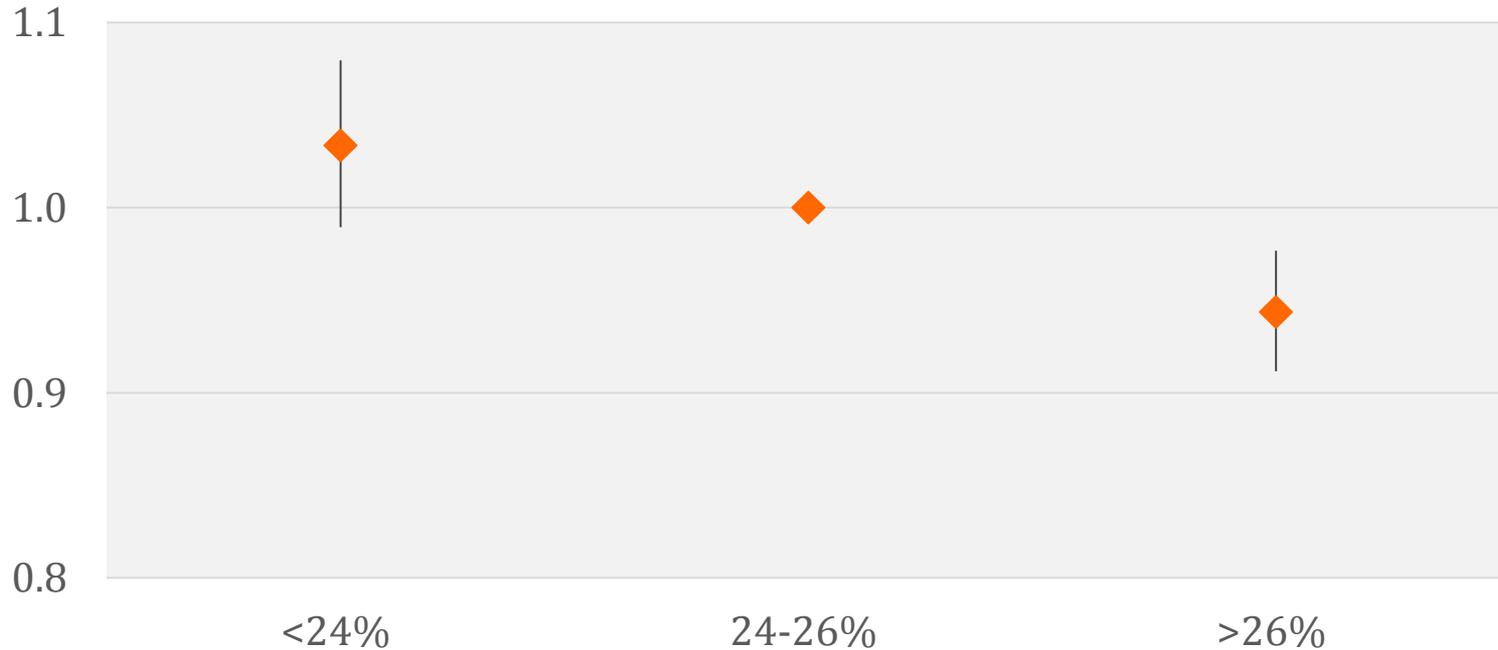
Hazard ratios of female education*male education

(95% confidence interval)



Results

Hazard ratios for % hypogamous couples in municipality* (95% confidence interval)



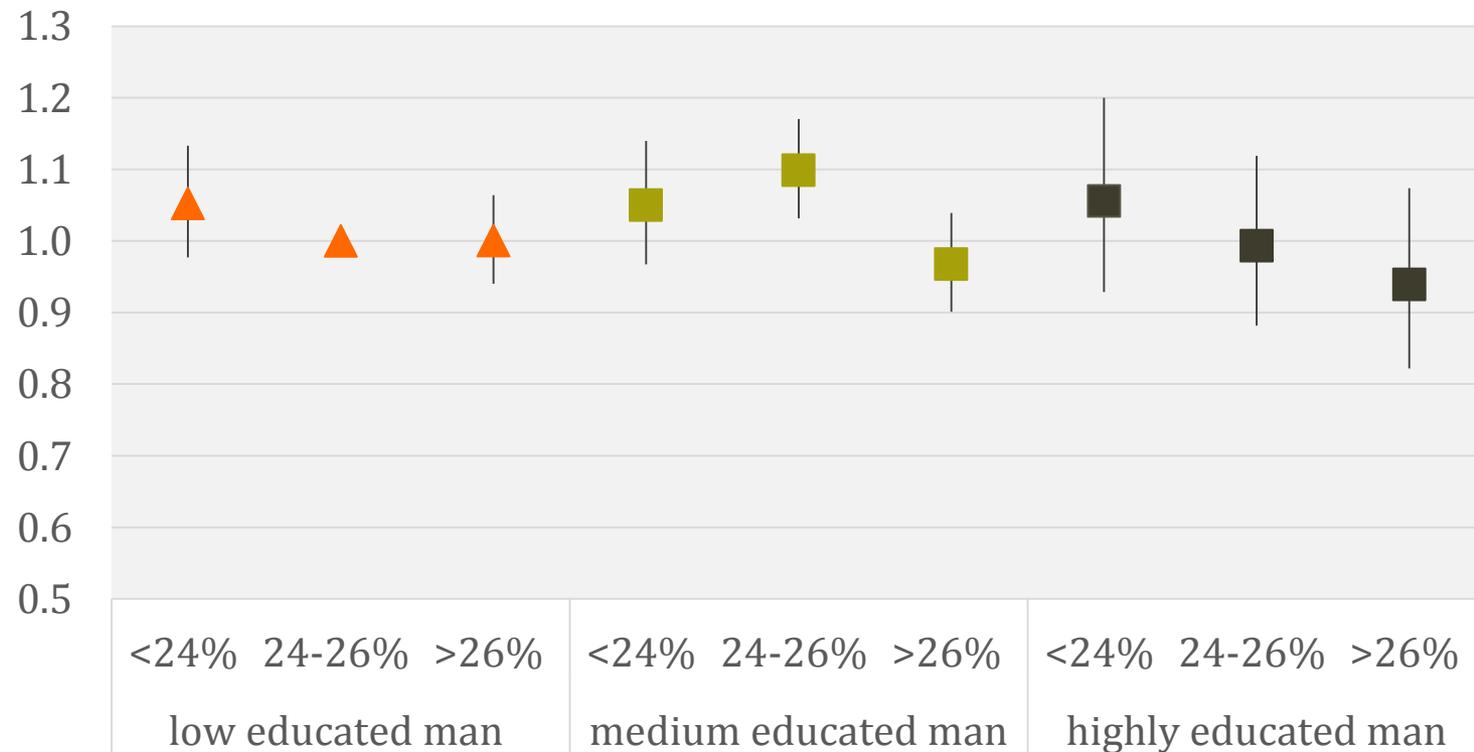
*Categorization of % hypogamous couples is based on tertiles

Results

- ▲ = homogamy (W=M)
- = hypergamy (W<M)
- = hypogamy (W>M)

Hazard ratios of male education*% hypogamous couples for couples with a low educated woman

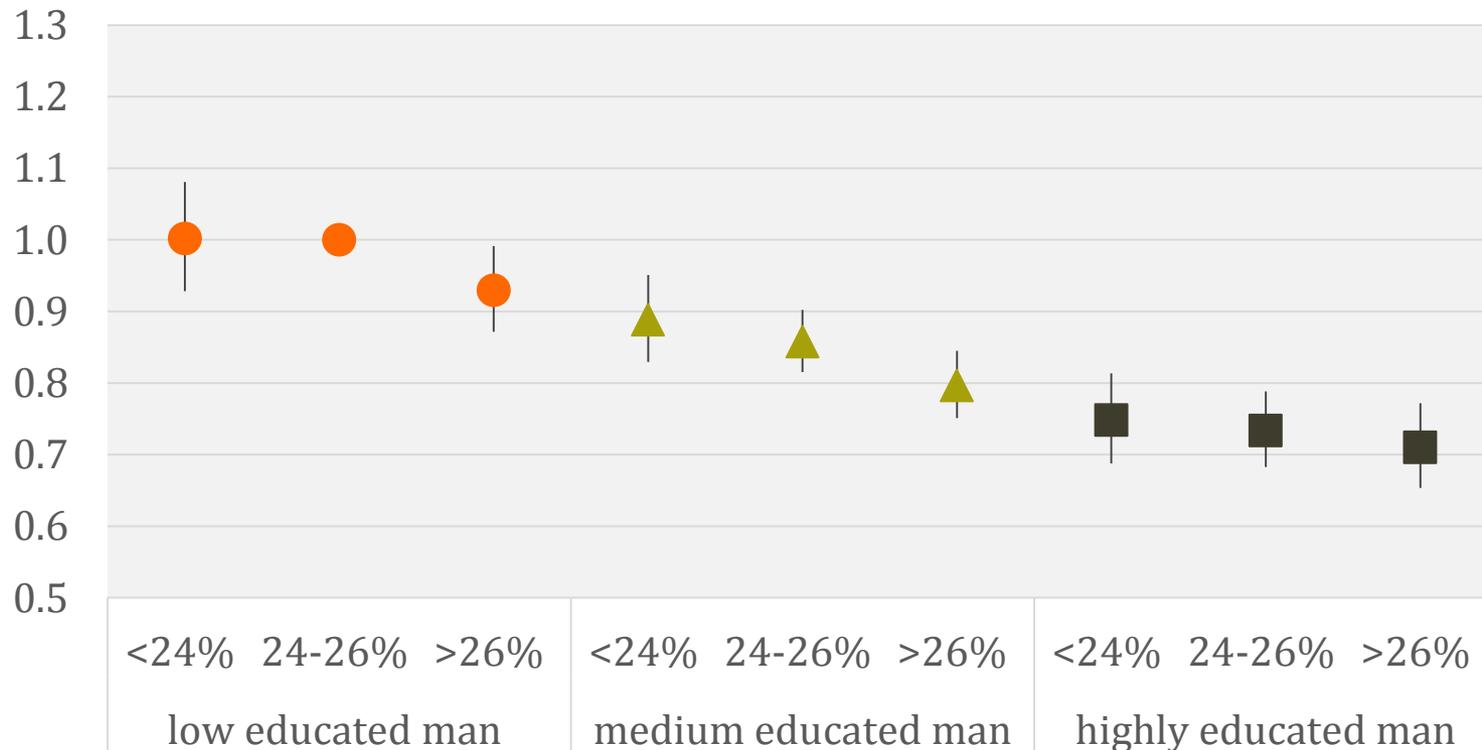
(95% confidence interval)



Results

- ▲ = homogamy (W=M)
- = hypergamy (W<M)
- = hypogamy (W>M)

Hazard ratios of male education*% hypogamous couples for couples with a medium educated woman
(95% confidence interval)

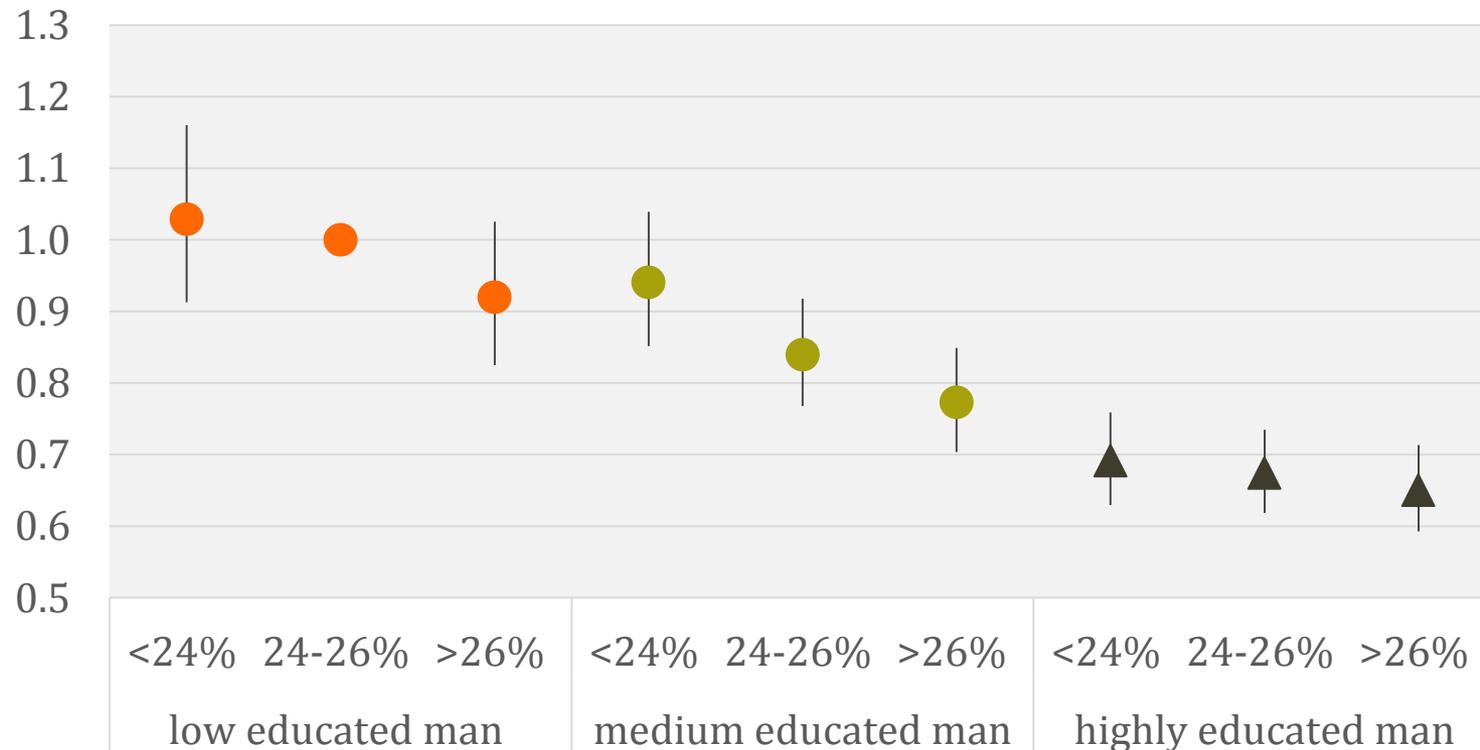


Results

- ▲ = homogamy (W=M)
- = hypergamy (W<M)
- = hypogamy (W>M)

Hazard ratios of male education*% hypogamous couples for couples with a highly educated woman

(95% confidence interval)



Preliminary conclusion

- Simple homogamy-heterogamy distinctions cover more complex results
- The highest divorce risks were found among couples in which the woman is low educated and the man is medium educated, the lowest divorce risks were found among couples in which both man and woman are highly educated
- Couples in which the woman is medium educated have a higher divorce risk if the man is highly educated (hypergamy) and a lower divorce risk if the man is low educated (hypogamy) than with a man who has a similar educational level (homogamy)
- Living in a municipality with 'more than average' hypogamous couples lowers the risk of divorce, especially of hypogamously married couples

Future prospects

- We are in the process of adding unmarried cohabitations: We will determine dates of union formation (start of cohabitation) of couples in 2001 by their residential movements between 1991 and 2001
- We will create place-varying covariates: If a couple moves during the time at risk, we can adapt the values on the context variable (% hypogamous couples) and the place of residence variables (region and degree of urbanization) to those measured for their destination
- We will consider other context covariates
- We will estimate similar analyses with the linked data of CENSUS 1991 and National Register 1996

Thank you for your attention!

Suggestions and remarks are very welcome

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