

The Truth about Divorce after Brain Injury

By Jeff Kreutzer and Jenny Marwitz

Have you heard that divorce rates after brain injury are very high? If you are the spouse of a survivor or a married survivor you may be wondering, how or if your marriage is going to last.

Reports in the media suggest that half of all marriages will end in divorce. Several years ago, a researcher in the United Kingdom reported, “only 42% of couples were able to sustain their relationship longer than five years” after injury. The view among rehabilitation professionals is that marriages are often at risk and divorce rates are high.

Virginia Commonwealth TBI Model System researchers have just completed a study of 120 survivors who were married at the time of their injury. Survivors, who averaged 41 years of age, were asked about their marital status between three and eight years postinjury. The study showed that divorce rates were far lower than expected. Here are some of the researchers’ findings:

- 25% were separated or divorced
- divorce rates for men and women survivors were similar
- there is a greater likelihood of divorce after a more severe injury; for example people who were divorced were in coma three times as long as people who remained married
- people who were older at the time of their injury were far more likely to remain married
- people who were married longer at the time of their injury were far more likely to remain married

You may be wondering how you, as a spouse, can successfully face the many challenges that lie ahead. For more information about marriage and family support programs please contact the authors of this article at the Virginia Commonwealth TBI Model System Program 804 828-3704 or toll free at 1-866-296-6904 (or email jhmarwit@vcu.edu).