We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.

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Marriage risk of cancer research fellows

Research fellows aiming to obtain a PhD or MD/PhD degree face many hazards at work, including exposure to toxic substances and harassment by reviewers of their papers. However, few data exist on the sociocultural risk factors encountered at work—eg, their risk of marriage.

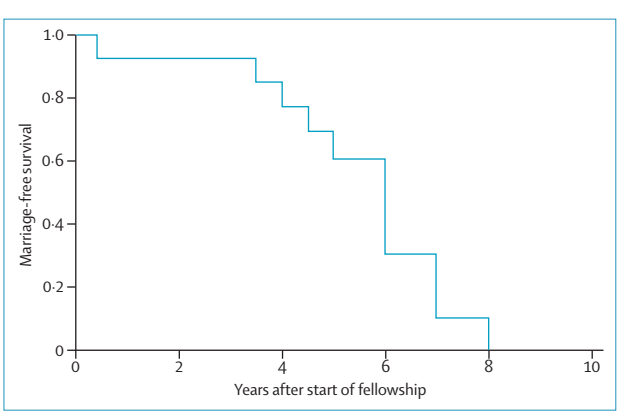

Figure: **Marriage-free survival**
Individuals with a bachelor status were censored at the time of analysis.

Therefore, between 1993 and 2008, we entered all our 13 research fellows (12 men, one woman; median age 29 years [range 26–32] at study entry; median length of stay in the laboratory 36 months [18–42]) into this prospective, observational, happily-matched-pair cohort analysis. The primary study endpoint was the date of marriage of a research fellow recorded by the respective Swiss Departments of Administrative Affairs and Marital Matters. We took great care not to influence the partner choice of our fellows. Quality-of-life assessment was deemed to be superfluous given the happy faces of study participants recorded when they reached the trial endpoint.

11 of 13 participants (85%) got married by the 17-year cutoff (figure)—ie, when this report was prepared by one of us (MFF) during a Swiss railway journey to attend a study participant's wedding. Two research fellows are still at risk, but we are confident (unpublished data) that they, too, will eventually reach the endpoint. No toxic effects were recorded, which is remarkable for an oncology trial.

Young academics embarking on a research fellowship in experimental oncology run an excessive risk of ending up in marriage before or shortly after having obtained their MD or PhD degree. The Swiss Federal Office for Statistics indicates that, in our population, the overall risk of living in a married state is 44·5%, and the age-adjusted risk (with respect to our fellow population) is only 38·6%.[1] We therefore felt that, by Kitchen's criteria on statistical proof of the bloody obvious,[2] our results were so clear-cut as to obviate the need for any significance tests. Clandestine data collection ensured that participants were not influenced by us when undertaking steps to shape their social structures and emotional networks. Any cohort study design can be criticised for bias, but a randomised intervention trial would have led to protocol violations whenever love's labour's lost, and might have ruined the fun of finding a suitable partner.

Our landmark findings indicate that research fellows must be fully informed of this potential hazard when making up their mind as to whether or not to embark on an academic degree in experimental cancer research.

Both authors claim equal rights on first and senior authorships. We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.

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