



# Re-Partnering and Single Mothers' Mental Health and Life Satisfaction Trajectories

Philipp Dierker<sup>1</sup> Mine Kühn<sup>1</sup> Mikko Myrskylä<sup>1 2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research

<sup>2</sup>University of Helsinki

# Motivation



# Motivation

- ▶ Single mothers are considered a highly vulnerable group in terms of mental health and life satisfaction (Avison et al., 2007; Burstrom et al., 2010; Hughes and Waite, 2009; Kühn, 2018).

# Motivation

- ▶ Single mothers are considered a highly vulnerable group in terms of mental health and life satisfaction (Avison et al., 2007; Burstrom et al., 2010; Hughes and Waite, 2009; Kühn, 2018).
- ▶ Re-partnering could offset mental health and life satisfaction disadvantages of single mothers caused by financial deprivation (Amato, 2000; Cooper et al., 2009) and the lack of social resources (Avison et al., 2007; Crosier et al., 2007).

# Motivation

- ▶ Single mothers are considered a highly vulnerable group in terms of mental health and life satisfaction (Avison et al., 2007; Burstrom et al., 2010; Hughes and Waite, 2009; Kühn, 2018).
- ▶ Re-partnering could offset mental health and life satisfaction disadvantages of single mothers caused by financial deprivation (Amato, 2000; Cooper et al., 2009) and the lack of social resources (Avison et al., 2007; Crosier et al., 2007).
- ▶ Effects of re-partnering could depend on welfare state and family policies of the national context (Recksiedler and Bernardi, 2019).

# Research questions



# Research questions



- ▶ **What are the effects of re-partnering on single mothers' mental health and life satisfaction?**

# Research questions

- ▶ **What are the effects of re-partnering on single mothers' mental health and life satisfaction?**
- ▶ **How do these effects arise?**

# Research questions

- ▶ **What are the effects of re-partnering on single mothers' mental health and life satisfaction?**
- ▶ **How do these effects arise?**
- ▶ **Are there differences in the effects between national contexts of Germany and the UK?**

# Previous research on re-partnering and health

## Positive relationship

Demo and Acock (1996), Evans and Kelley (2004), Glenn (1981), Gloor et al. (2021), Hughes and Waite (2009), Lin et al. (2019), Noda et al. (2009), and H. Weingarten (1980)

## Negative relationship

Hiyoshi et al. (2015)

## No relationship

Ganong and Coleman (1991) and Spanier and Furstenberg (1982)

## Positive effects only for specific groups

Langlais et al. (2016), Li et al. (2021), Recksiedler and Bernardi (2019), and H. R. Weingarten (1985)



# Previous research on re-partnering and health

## Positive relationship

Demo and Acock (1996), **Evans and Kelley (2004)**, Glenn (1981), **Gloor et al. (2021)**, Hughes and Waite (2009), **Lin et al. (2019)**, **Noda et al. (2009)**, H. Weingarten (1980)

## Negative relationship

Hiyoshi et al. (2015)

## No relationship

Ganong and Coleman (1991), Spanier and Furstenberg (1982)

## Positive effects only for specific groups

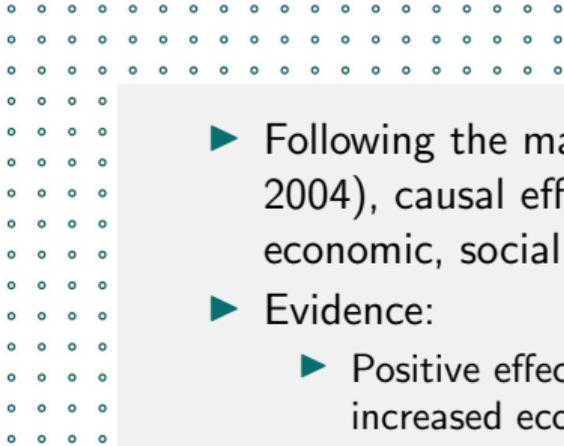
**Langlais et al. (2016)**, Li et al. (2021), Recksiedler and Bernardi (2019), H. R. Weingarten (1985)

# Social selection



- ▶ Following marriage selection hypothesis (Carr and Springer, 2010), healthier people are more likely to re-partner.
- ▶ Evidence:
  - ▶ Pevalin and Ermisch (2004) found positive social selection only for re-partnering after cohabiting union but not after a marriage.
  - ▶ Recksiedler and Bernardi (2019) interpreted results as indicating selection mechanisms into re-partnering of single mothers, but without modeling trajectories longitudinally.

# Causation – resource model



- ▶ Following the marital resource model (Williams and Umberson, 2004), causal effects of re-partnering on health are due to additional economic, social and emotional resources in the household.
- ▶ Evidence:
  - ▶ Positive effects of re-partnering on life satisfaction explained through increased economic security (Dziak et al., 2010).
  - ▶ Shared childcare responsibilities significantly reduce parenting stress (Cooper et al., 2009).
  - ▶ Single mothers benefit from emotional warmth and sexual intimacy of a romantic relationship (Ivanova et al., 2013).



# Causation – crisis model



- ▶ Resource drain due to residential move (Cooper et al., 2009) or instable relationships (Recksiedler and Bernardi, 2019).
- ▶ Negative re-partnering effect caused by emerging role conflicts between mother, new partner, and children (Lansford et al., 2001; Wiel et al., 2020).

# Contextual differences I



- ▶ Welfare state context and family policies can shape stability of re-partnering relationships (Perelli-Harris and Lyons-Amos, 2015; Pevalin and Ermisch, 2004)
- ▶ In countries with more welfare state support for single mothers, pressure to re-partner might be less strong (Pollmann-Schult, 2018)



# Contextual differences II



- ▶ Germany's state family benefits are higher than in UK; maternity leave policies are more generous in Germany; length of maternity leave and paid parental home is almost twice in Germany compared to UK (OECD, 2021)



# Data



## SOEP

1984–2020 (37 waves)

## UKHLS/BHPS

BHPS → 1991–2009 (18 waves)

UKHLS → 2010–2020 (11 waves)

## Two-sample approach

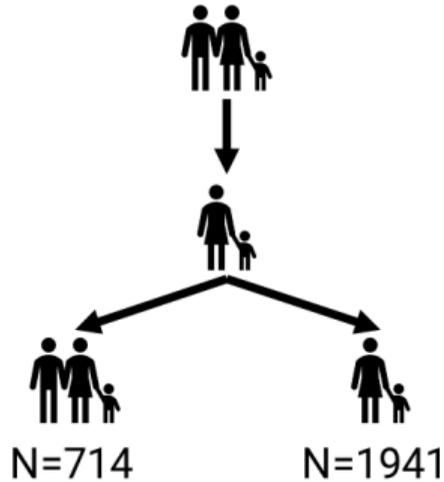
- ▶ Between sample: observations of single mothers' entry into single motherhood and subsequent re-partnering transitions
- ▶ Within sample: observations of single mothers' re-partnering transitions



# Samples



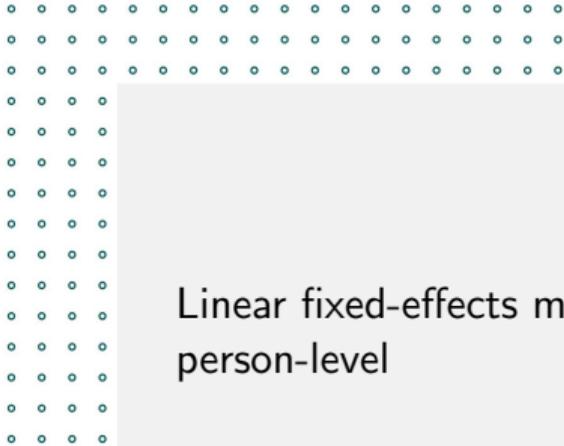
## Between sample



## Within sample



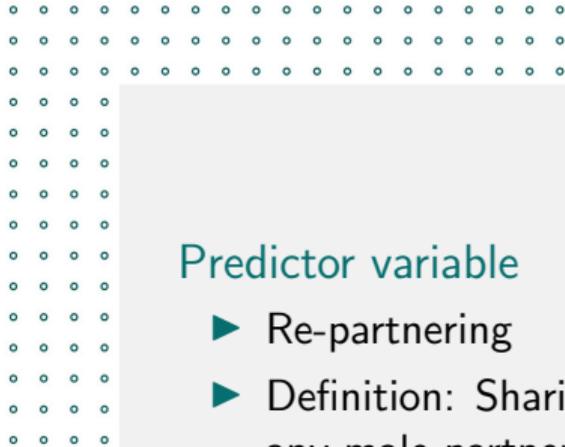
# Method



Linear fixed-effects models with standard errors clustered at the person-level



# Key measures I



## Predictor variable

- ▶ Re-partnering
- ▶ Definition: Sharing household with a male partner after living without any male partner with at least one underage child



# Key measures II



## Outcome variable

- ▶ Life satisfaction
- ▶ Mental health (SF-12)
  - ▶ Vitality
  - ▶ Social functioning
  - ▶ Role-emotional
  - ▶ Mental health



# Key measures III



## Control variables

- ▶ Age
- ▶ Wave
- ▶ Age of youngest child

→ all categorical

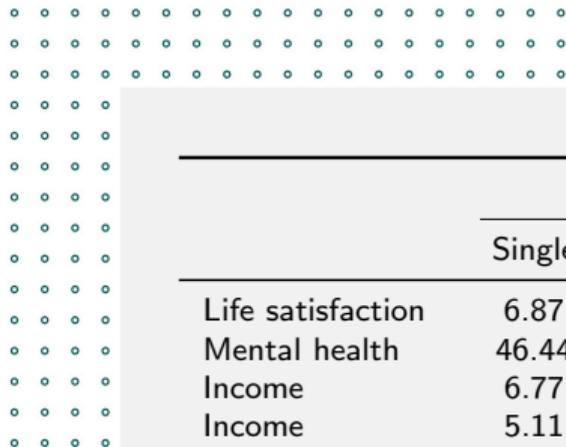
# Key measures IV



## Mediator variables

- ▶ Resource model
  - ▶ Financial resources: Log equivalent net household income (month); satisfaction with household income
  - ▶ Social resources: Hours of housework
- ▶ Crisis model
  - ▶ Residential move
  - ▶ New children of partner (not common children)

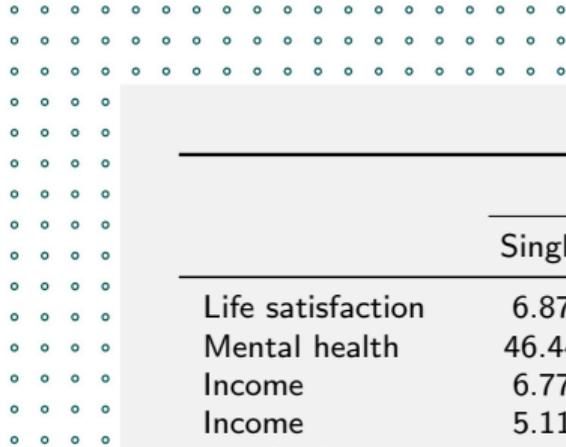
# Descriptive results



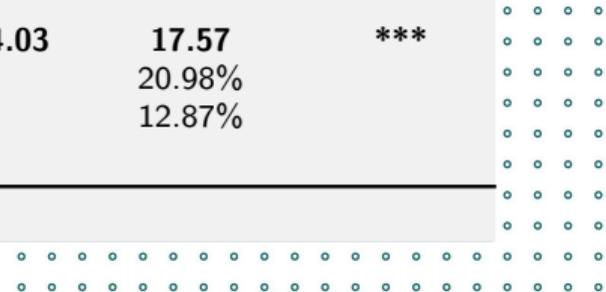
	SOEP			UKHLS/BHPS		
	Single	Re-partnered	Difference	Single	Re-partnered	Difference
Life satisfaction	6.87	7.19	***	6.66	6.84	-
Mental health	46.44	47.95	*	46.69	46.45	-
Income	6.77	7.13	***	6.24	6.84	***
Income satisfaction	5.11	6.10	***	4.91	5.46	***
Housework hours	2.44	2.70	***	14.03	17.57	***
Residential move		30.80%			20.98%	
New children in HH		5.51%			12.87%	



# Descriptive results



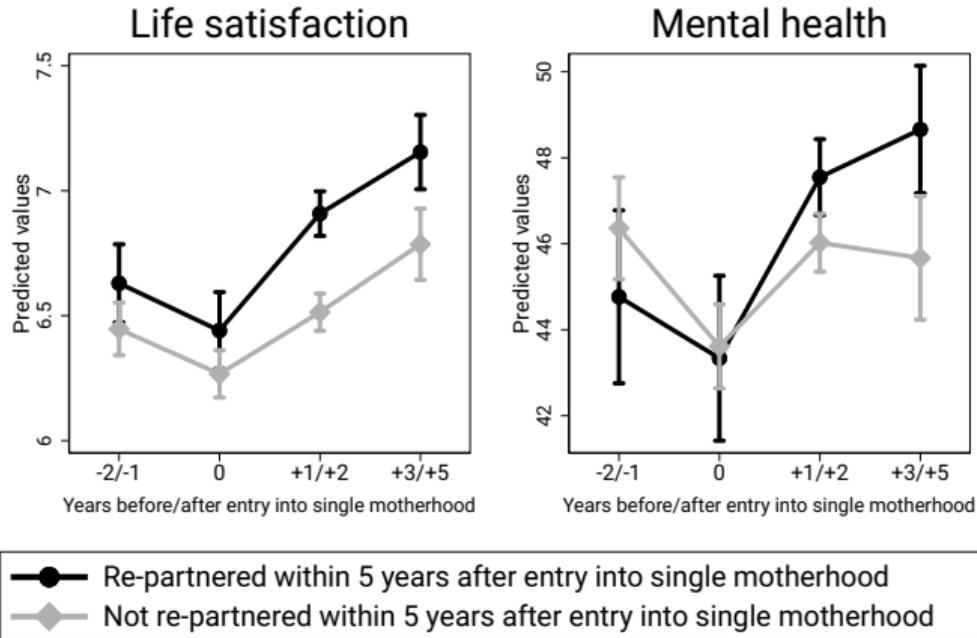
	SOEP			UKHLS/BHPS		
	Single	Re-partnered	Difference	Single	Re-partnered	Difference
Life satisfaction	6.87	7.19	***	6.66	6.84	-
Mental health	46.44	47.95	*	46.69	46.45	-
Income	6.77	7.13	***	6.24	6.84	***
Income satisfaction	5.11	6.10	***	4.91	5.46	***
<b>Housework hours</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>14.03</b>	<b>17.57</b>	<b>***</b>
Residential move		30.80%			20.98%	
New children in HH		5.51%			12.87%	



# Social selection



## Germany (SOEP)

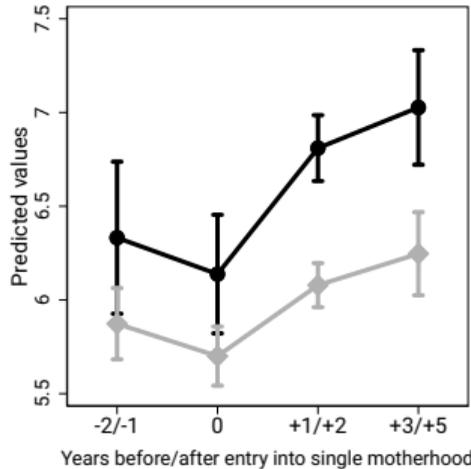


# Social selection

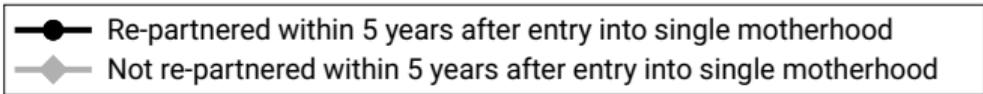
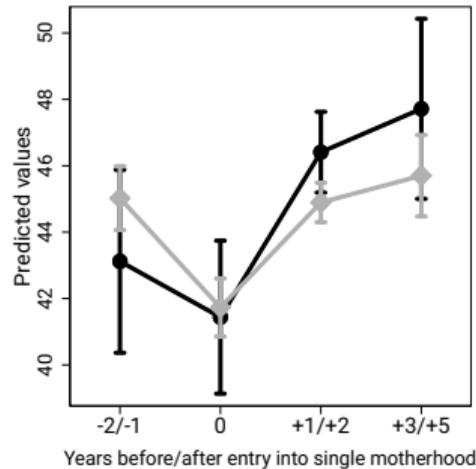


## United Kingdom (BHPS/UKHLS)

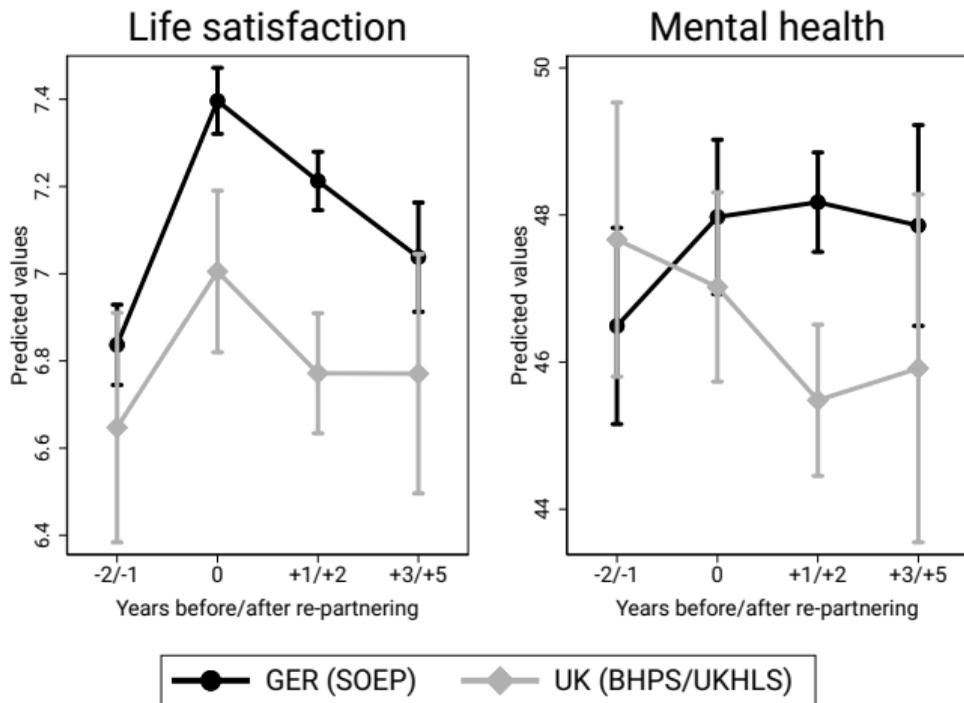
### Life satisfaction



### Mental health



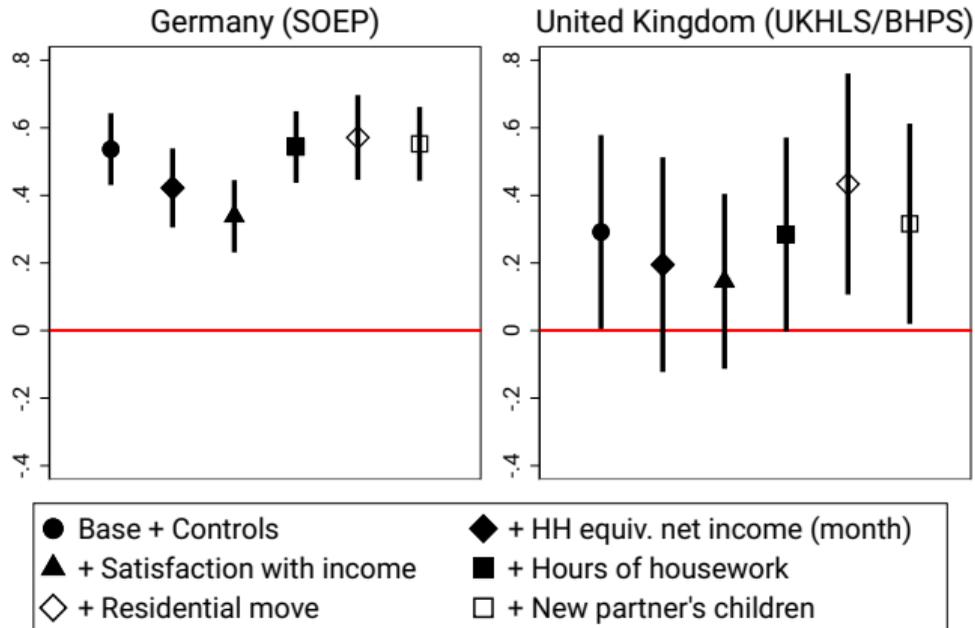
# Causation



# Mechanisms

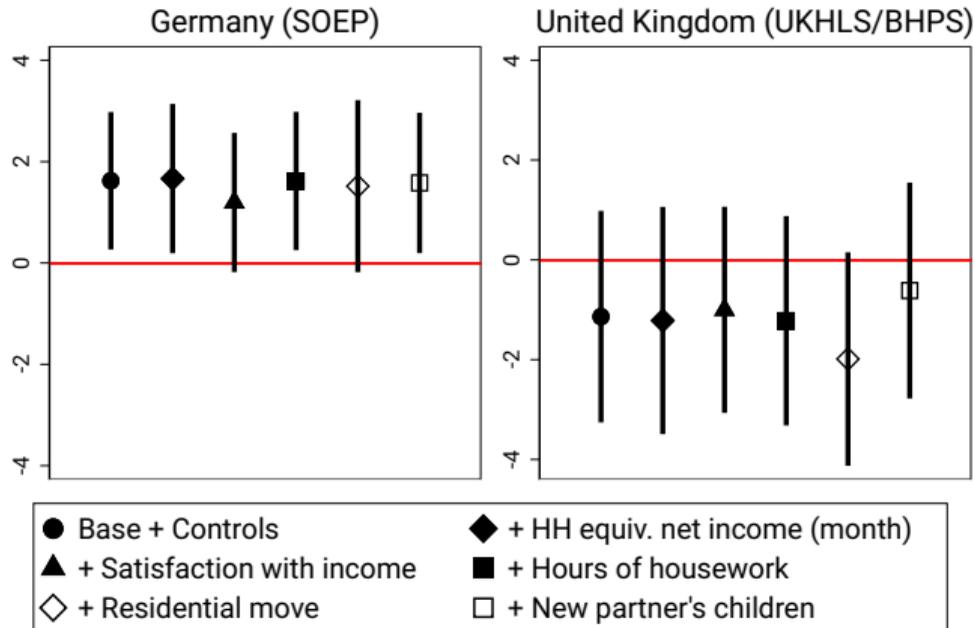


## Life satisfaction



# Mechanisms

## Mental health



# Conclusion

## Conclusion

- ▶ Social selection in both countries only for life satisfaction

## Conclusion

- ▶ Social selection in both countries only for life satisfaction
- ▶ Positive effect of re-partnering on life satisfaction in Germany and UK; on mental health only in Germany

# Conclusion

- ▶ Social selection in both countries only for life satisfaction
- ▶ Positive effect of re-partnering on life satisfaction in Germany and UK; on mental health only in Germany
- ▶ Weaker/negative effects in UK indicate unstable re-partnering patterns

# Conclusion

- ▶ Social selection in both countries only for life satisfaction
- ▶ Positive effect of re-partnering on life satisfaction in Germany and UK; on mental health only in Germany
- ▶ Weaker/negative effects in UK indicate unstable re-partnering patterns
- ▶ Only income variables are efficient mediators; housework does not serve as social support variable as it increases in re-partnering relationships

## Conclusion

- ▶ Social selection in both countries only for life satisfaction
- ▶ Positive effect of re-partnering on life satisfaction in Germany and UK; on mental health only in Germany
- ▶ Weaker/negative effects in UK indicate unstable re-partnering patterns
- ▶ Only income variables are efficient mediators; housework does not serve as social support variable as it increases in re-partnering relationships

**Thank you!**

✉ dierker@demogr.mpg.de — 🐦 @philippdierker

# Appendix I

Table: Sample descriptions

	Within sample		Between sample	
	SOEP	UKHLS/BHPS	SOEP	UKHLS/BHPS
N (individuals)	1198	715	1707	9448
N (observations)	5688	1962	9730	5496
Re-partnered within 5 years			28.59%	23.84%

## Appendix II

Table: FE-estimates – selection

	Life satisfaction				Mental health			
	SOEP		BHPS/UKHLS		SOEP		BHPS/UKHLS	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Ref.: -2/1								
0	-0.18*	-0.19	0.17	-0.19	-2.75***	-1.43	-3.29***	-1.68
	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.68)	(1.28)	(0.65)	(1.50)
+1/2	0.07	0.28*	0.21	0.48	-0.34	2.78*	-0.13	3.29*
	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.26)	(0.82)	(1.16)	(0.71)	(1.58)
+3/5	0.34*	0.52***	0.37	0.69*	-0.69	3.89*	0.68	4.60
	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.20)	(0.35)	(1.28)	(1.69)	(1.05)	(2.69)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N (observations)	6242	3055	3530	1202	2277	885	2284	468
N (individuals)	1218	488	715	222	949	352	455	76

## Appendix III

Table: FE-estimates – causation

	SOEP		UKHLS/BHPS	
	Life Satisfaction	Mental health	Life satisfaction	Mental Health
Ref.: -2/1				
0	0.56*** (0.06)	1.48* (0.73)	0.36* (0.16)	-0.65 (1.14)
+1/2	0.38*** (0.07)	1.68 (0.89)	0.12 (0.18)	-2.18 (1.30)
+3/5	0.20 (0.11)	1.37 (1.31)	0.12 (0.26)	-1.75 (2.01)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
N (observations)	5687	1785	1958	859
N (individuals)	1198	847	714	422

## References I

-  Amato, Paul R. (2000). “The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children”. In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62.4, pp. 1269–1287.
-  Avison, William R. et al. (2007). “Family structure, stress, and psychological distress: A Demonstration of the impact of differential exposure”. In: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 48.3, pp. 301–317.
-  Burstrom, Bo et al. (2010). “Health inequalities between lone and couple mothers and policy under different welfare regimes - The example of Italy, Sweden and Britain”. In: *Social Science and Medicine* 70.6, pp. 912–920.

## References II

-  Carr, Deborah and Kristen W. Springer (2010). “Advances in Families and Health Research in the 21st Century”. In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72.3, pp. 743–761.
-  Cooper, Carey E. et al. (2009). “Family Structure Transitions and Maternal Parenting Stress”. In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71.3, pp. 558–574.
-  Crosier, Timothy et al. (2007). “Mental health problems among single and partnered mothers: The role of financial hardship and social support”. In: *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 42.1, pp. 6–13.

## References III

-  Demo, David H. and Alan C. Acock (1996). “Singlehood, Marriage, and Remarriage. The Effects of Family Structures and Family Relationships on Mothers’ Well-Being”. In: *Journal of Family Issues* 17.3, pp. 388–407.
-  Dziak, Ewelina et al. (2010). “Inequalities in the psychological well-being of employed, single and partnered mothers: The role of psychosocial work quality and work-family conflict”. In: *International Journal for Equity in Health* 9.6, pp. 2–9.
-  Evans, Mariah D.R. and Jonathan Kelley (2004). “Effect of family structure on life satisfaction: Australian evidence”. In: *Social Indicators Research* 69.3, pp. 303–349.

## References IV

-  Ganong, Lawrence H. and Marilyn Coleman (1991). “Remarriage and health”. In: *Research in Nursing Health* 14.3, pp. 205–211.
-  Glenn, Norval D. (1981). “The Well-Being of Persons Remarried after Divorce”. In: *Journal of Family Issues* 2.1, pp. 61–75.
-  Gloor, Sandra et al. (2021). “Repartnering and trajectories of life satisfaction after separation and divorce in middle and later life”. In: *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 38.7, pp. 2205–2224.
-  Hiyoshi, A. et al. (2015). “Remarriage after divorce and depression risk”. In: *Social Science and Medicine* 141, pp. 109–114.
-  Hughes, Mary Elizabeth and Linda J. Waite (2009). “Marital Biography and Health at Mid-Life”. In: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 50.3, pp. 344–358.

## References V

-  Ivanova, Katya et al. (2013). “The Effect of Children on Men’s and Women’s Chances of Re-partnering in a European Context”. In: *European Journal of Population* 29.4, pp. 417–444.
-  Kühn, Mine (2018). “Changes in Lone Mothers’ Health: A Longitudinal Analysis”. In: *Life Course Research and Social Policies*. Ed. by Laura Bernardi and Dimitri Mortelmans. Vol. 8, pp. 323–338. ISBN: 9783319632957.
-  Langlais, Michael R. et al. (2016). “Consequences of Dating for Post-Divorce Maternal Well-Being”. In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78.4, pp. 1032–1046.

## References VI

-  Lansford, Jennifer E. et al. (2001). “Does Family Structure Matter? A Comparison of Adoptive, Two-Parent Biological, Single-Mother, Stepfather, and Stepmother Households”. In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63.3, pp. 840–851.
-  Li, Xiaomin et al. (2021). “Remarriage After Divorce and Health in Later Life: Findings From CHARLS in China”. In: *Journal of Family Issues* 0.19, pp. 1–23.
-  Lin, I. Fen et al. (2019). “Depressive Symptoms Following Later-life Marital Dissolution and Subsequent Repartnering”. In: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 60.2, pp. 153–168.

## References VII

-  Noda, Tatsuya et al. (2009). “The health impact of remarriage behavior on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: Findings from the US longitudinal survey”. In: *BMC Public Health* 9, pp. 1–6.
-  OECD (2021). *OECD Family Database Child poverty*.
-  Perelli-Harris, Brienna and Mark Lyons-Amos (2015). “Changes in partnership patterns across the life course: An examination of 14 countries in europe and the United States”. In: *Demographic Research* 33.1, pp. 145–178.
-  Pevalin, David J. and John Ermisch (2004). “Cohabiting unions, repartnering and mental health”. In: *Psychological Medicine* 34.8, pp. 1553–1559.

## References VIII

-  Pollmann-Schult, Matthias (2018). “Single Motherhood and Life Satisfaction in Comparative Perspective: Do Institutional and Cultural Contexts Explain the Life Satisfaction Penalty for Single Mothers?” In: *Journal of Family Issues* 39.7, pp. 2061–2084.
-  Recksiedler, Claudia and Laura Bernardi (2019). “Lone Mothers’ Repartnering Trajectories and Health: Does the Welfare Context Matter?” In: *Journal of Family Issues* 40.17, pp. 2582–2604.
-  Spanier, Graham B. and Frank F. Furstenberg (1982). “Remarriage after Divorce: A Longitudinal Analysis of Well-Being”. In: *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 44.3, p. 709.

## References IX

-  Weingarten, Helen (1980). “Remarriage and Well-Being: National Survey Evidence of Social and Psychological Effects”. In: *Journal of Family Issues* 1.4, pp. 533–559.
-  Weingarten, Helen R. (1985). “Marital Status and Well-Being: A National Study Comparing First-Married, Currently Divorced, and Remarried Adults”. In: *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47.3, p. 653.
-  Wiel, Roselinde van der et al. (2020). “From living apart to living together: Do children born before the current partnership matter?” In: *Comparative Population Studies* 45, pp. 115–142.

## References X



Williams, Kristi and Debra Umberson (2004). “Marital Status, Marital Transitions, and Health: A Gendered Life Course Perspective”. In: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 45.1, pp. 81–98.