

## Does Lone Motherhood Indeed Decrease Women's Subjective Well-Being?

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European Population Conference 2012  
Stockholm, 13-16.06.2012

## Existing evidence



- ▶ **Quantitative studies:**
    - ▶ Negative association between lone parenthood and subjective well-being (Cairney et al. 2003, Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003, Cunningham and Knoester 2007)
    - ▶ Mainly compare married mothers to single mother (in cross-section)
      - ▶ Differences in happiness might be caused by partnership status
      - ▶ Selection of intrinsically unhappy women into single motherhood
  - ▶ **Qualitative studies:**
    - ▶ Look how having a child changed woman's lives
    - ▶ Find many positive aspects of lone motherhood:
      - ▶ Increase in women's self-esteem and social status (Edin and Kefalas 2005)
      - ▶ Purpose to their lives (Smithbattle 2000)
      - ▶ Impetus for changing women's lives for better: abandon abusive behaviours, escape from an unhappy parental home, gain independence and a new identity, as well as to "create a loving family of one's own" (Coleman and Cater 2006, Duncan 2007, Smithbattle 2000)
    - ▶ Focus on selected, often disadvantaged groups
- ▶ Does lone motherhood indeed decrease subjective well-being?



## Research objective

- ▶ To re-evaluate the effects of parenthood on the subjective well-being of single mothers
  - ▶ Poland: a „conservative test”
    - ▶ Strong disapproval of other family forms (Vanassche et al. 2012), low acceptance for lone motherhood (Chapple 2009)
      - ▶ "People who want to have children should marry" – 70% agrees in Poland, European average 48%
    - ▶ Poor childcare provision and poor financial support for single mothers
      - ▶ 20% of children aged 0-6 raised by single mothers attend public childcare
  - ▶ Mixed-method approach
    - ▶ Qualitative: to explore positive and negative aspects of lone motherhood
    - ▶ Quantitative: general impact of lone motherhood on subjective well-being (which aspects – positive or negative – dominate?)
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## Qualitative study

- ▶ Semi-structured interviews with 16 women
  - ▶ Recruited (snowball sampling) and interviewed in May-July 2011
  - ▶ Age 26-38
  - ▶ Separated from the child's father during the pregnancy or shortly after birth
  - ▶ Heterogenous group (different social backgrounds, occupations...)

Variable	Categories	Number of respondents
Age at first birth	19	2
	20-24	8
	25-29	3
	30-34	3
Place of residence	Warsaw	4
	Over 100,000	8
	50,000-100,000	1
	Under 10,000	3
Educational level	Tertiary	2
	Secondary general	5
	Secondary professional	8
	Primary	1



## Quantitative study

- ▶ Data:
- ▶ Panel data from *Social Diagnosis 2003–2011* - 5 waves with a question:
  - ▶ “Taking all things together, would you say you are:  
1 - not at all happy, 2 - somewhat happy, 3 - quite happy, 4 - very happy”
- ▶ Control variables: age, education attainment and status, self-rated health, self-rated material standard of living, labour market status
- ▶ Interaction effects: parenthood & marital status – focus on single & with children

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## Quantitative study

### Panel data analysis

- ▶ “Blow and Cluster Estimator” (BUC) - Baetschmann et al. (2011)
  - ▶ FE estimator, dichotomizes the dependent variable at all possible cutpoints and jointly estimates the resulting fixed-effects logit models
- ▶ Estimator proposed by Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters (2004)
  - ▶ FE estimator, dichotomizes at only one a priori specified cutpoint (i.e. the mean of the dependent variable)
- ▶ Correlated random effects ordered probit model – Mundlak (1978)
  - ▶ RE model equivalent to an FE model
  - ▶ Individual effect is decomposed into an effect correlated and uncorrelated with the explanatory variables :

$$u_i = \bar{x}_i \delta + \eta_i \text{ where } \eta_i | \bar{x}_i \sim N(0, \sigma_\eta)$$

$$y^*_{it} = x_{it} \alpha + \bar{x}_i \delta + \eta_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

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## Qualitative findings

- ▶ **Negative consequences of lone motherhood:**
  - ▶ No partner to provide emotional and financial support
  - ▶ Painful experiences of separation with child's father
  - ▶ Social exclusion and stigmatization of lone mothers
- ▶ **Positive consequences:**
  - ▶ Valuable support from family, which might have been missing otherwise
  - ▶ Impetus for changing women's lives for better:
    - ▶ Separation from partners who were often addicted to drugs or alcohol
    - ▶ More careful while involving in other relationships

*„There was really nothing else, but alcohol. It is a miracle that I've finished school, studies, that I manage normally (...) If I hadn't got pregnant, I would have probably got stuck in this relationship longer, but then I had to care for a child (...) and with a big support from my parents I've managed.”*

*(Renata, 31, single, child at 21, tertiary education)*



## Qualitative findings

- ▶ Children absolutely central to women's lives, the major source of joy and happiness, „compensate for everything”, source of future support

*„I didn't plan [to have a child], but now, I wouldn't change this, not in a world! My children are my greatest treasure, happiness that happened to me. I can only be grateful that I have kids.”*

*(Julia, 32, single, first child at 24, secondary education)*

**„Q: And if you could name just one thing? That brings most joy in life? Most? Maybe a child. My daughter.**

**Q: And why?**

*Even if I don't enter any new relationship, I still have a child. And when I am old, maybe she won't turn her back on her mother”*

*(Dagmara, 38, single, a child at 31, secondary education)*

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## Quantitative findings

Effects of family status on women's subjective well-being, model coefficients

Family status (single, no children=ref.)	BUC estimator	FCF estimator	Mundlak approach
married, no children	1.046***	0.986***	0.519***
married, with children	1.106***	0.896***	0.656***
single & non-cohabiting, with children	0.470	0.483	0.339*
previously married, non-cohabiting, no children	-1.398*	-1.487*	-0.559
previously married, non-cohabiting, with children	0.008	-0.158	0.136
N	4395	3941	15246

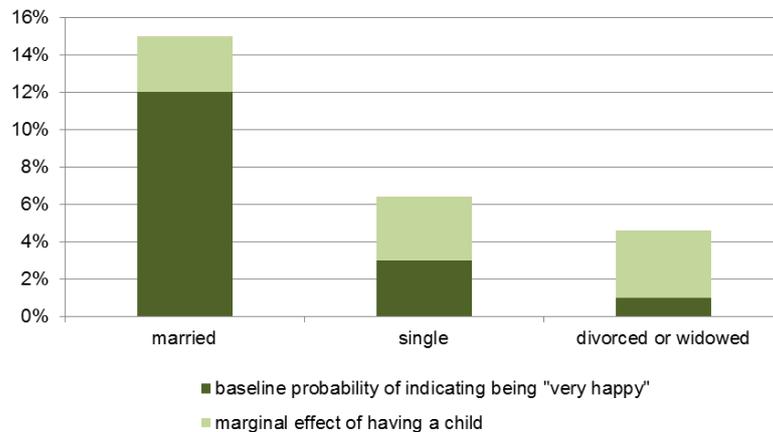
Control variables: age, education status and attainment, self-rated health and income, employment, age of youngest children

\* < 0.1, \*\* < 0.05, \*\*\* < 0.01



## Quantitative findings

Probability of indicating being „very happy” among women in Poland – the marginal effects of children among married and unmarried women



„baseline” predicted probability is estimated for: a women aged 27, who completed upper secondary education, with well self-rated health and income, employed



## Conclusions

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- ▶ Unmarried mothers constitute a disadvantaged group, and raising a child outside marriage clearly poses many challenges (financial, organisational, social stigma)
- ▶ The negative emotions refer mainly to external conditions (ex-partners, job environment, social environment, financial issues)
- ▶ Children itself evoke many positive feelings: main focus of love, the brightest aspect of life, the greatest source of joy and happiness
- ▶ Positive consequences of motherhood: impetus to make decisions they had not been able to make before pregnancy
- ▶ Quantitative evidence confirms that the general level of happiness among unmarried women is lower than among their married counterparts, but a childbirth does **NOT** reduce the subjective well-being of single women

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**Thank you for your attention!**  
**Comments, questions:**

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