

## The effects of single motherhood on subjective well-being – qualitative and quantitative evidence.

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### Motivation

- ▶ A long-standing discussion on the effects of children on the family members' well-being
  - ▶ growing interest in subjective measures: parental happiness or life satisfaction (Kohler et al. 2005; Billari & Kohler 2009; Margolis & Myrskylä 2010; Clark & Oswald 2002)
- ▶ Despite rising diversity of family forms, lone parents remained out of focus in this literature
  - ▶ Research question in this paper: how does raising children affect the subjective well-being among lone parents?

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## Existing evidence

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- ▶ Research on lone parenthood and well-being:
  - ▶ single mothers facing double burden of breadwinning and care provision, overrepresented among the poor (Christopher et al. 2003; Casper et al. 1994; Mejer and Siemann 2000)
- ▶ Quantitative studies on subjective well-being of single mothers:
  - ▶ negative association between lone parenthood and mental health (Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003; Hope et al. 1999; Cairney et al. 2003)
- ▶ Qualitative studies on subjective well-being of single mothers:
  - ▶ being a mother might raise young women's self-esteem and improve their social status (Edin and Kefalas 2005)
  - ▶ young women in lower social strata have more motivation to avoid drugs and alcohol abuse, impetus to find a proper job (Duncan 2007; Coleman & Cater 2006; Stauber 2010)

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## Mixed-method approach

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- ▶ Qualitative data
- ▶ to understand the mechanisms behind the effect of parenthood on lone mothers
- ▶ semi-structured interviews with 19 women
  - ▶ recruited (snowball sampling) and interviewed in May-July 2011
  - ▶ age 26-42
  - ▶ not in the relationship with child's father when we interviewed them (it was an occasional partner, or the relationship with child's father ended during the pregnancy or some time afterwards)
- ▶ bottom-up coding
  - ▶ modeled on "grounded theory" approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss 1987)

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## Mixed-method approach

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- ▶ Quantitative data
- ▶ to test if the effects observed in qualitative data can be used for inference on the whole population
- ▶ panel data from *Social Diagnosis 2003–2009* - 4 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
- ▶ panel data analysis:
  - ▶ random effects ordered probit with Mundlak approach
  - ▶ fixed effects logit - “Blow-Up and Cluster” (BUC) estimator (Baetschmann et al. 2011)
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## Qualitative evidence

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- ▶ numerous negative consequences of lone motherhood:
  - ▶ no partner to provide emotional and financial support
  - ▶ painful experiences related to termination of the relationship with child’s father
  - ▶ social exclusion and stigmatization of lone mothers
- ▶ Nevertheless, it seems that the arrival of the child had some positive influence on women’s life:
  - ▶ women separated from their partners who were often addicted to drugs or alcohol, i.e. escaped pathological relationships
  - ▶ women received valuable support from family, which might have been missing otherwise
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## Qualitative evidence

*„The man I used to be with, he had problems with alcohol and drugs. It was a reason, why I left him. I didn't think only about myself – but about a child too. I had to start thinking... I had been hesitating before, I had wanted to leave him, but you know... love is blind. And one may say that M. [a daughter] simply pushed me to do it...”*

*(Kamila, 32, cohabiting with new partner, child at 27, secondary education)*

*„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)*

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## Qualitative evidence

- moreover, the women quite unequivocally emphasize that a child is the greatest source of joy and happiness in their life

*„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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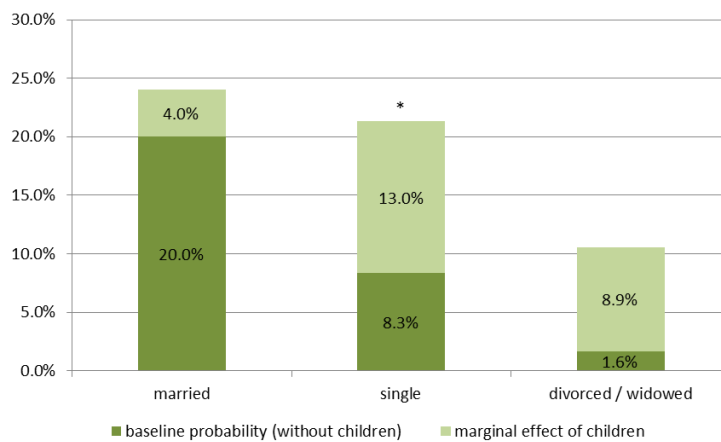
## Quantitative evidence

- ▶ Probability of indicating being „very happy” among women in Poland – the marginal effect of having children among married and unmarried women
  - ▶ it is clear that unmarried women are among less well-off group – their subjective well-being is lower, but...
  - ▶ the effect of childbearing within this group goes in the same direction as within the group of married women
  - ▶ in line with our qualitative evidence, raising children contributes positively to the overall happiness among unmarried women

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## Quantitative evidence

- ▶ Probability of indicating being „very happy” among women in Poland – the marginal effect of having 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 standard of living , employed

## Conclusions

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- ▶ there is no doubt that unmarried mothers constitute a disadvantaged group, and raising a child outside marriage clearly poses many challenges
- ▶ nevertheless, our qualitative evidence shows that children are a central point in unmarried women's life
- ▶ many important lifetime decisions, such as ending a relationship or starting a new one are taken with consideration of the child's (future) welfare
- ▶ our quantitative evidence supports rather than rejects qualitative results – although the general level of happiness among unmarried women is lower than among their married counterparts, raising a child contributes positively to the women's subjective well-being

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

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