

Title: Life satisfaction, loneliness, and depressivity in consistently single young adults in Germany and the UK

Abstract:

Young adults increasingly abstain from romantic relationships. However, theories of singlehood are lacking and it remains unclear who selects into remaining single throughout emerging adulthood and how consistent singles' well-being is affected longitudinally. Here, we included 17,390 initially never partnered respondents from three panel studies from the UK and Germany providing 110,261 yearly observations from ages 16 to 29. First, survival analysis indicated that young adults with lower well-being, male gender, higher education, and living alone or with parents remained single longer. Second, we compared within-person age trajectories of well-being between consistent singles and eventually partnered respondents. Consistent singles experienced comparatively stronger life satisfaction decreases and loneliness increases. Deficits became more pronounced in the later 20s, when depressivity increases also diverged between groups. Moderation of these changes (e.g., by gender) was absent or inconsistent. Third, experiencing the first romantic relationship was associated with short- and long-term increases in life satisfaction and decreases in loneliness but not depressivity. Together, the findings indicate robust average well-being risks when staying single in emerging adulthood which were exacerbated with prolonged singlehood. We discuss critical questions for singlehood theory development.

Preprint:

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