

Abstract submitted to:

**SOEP 2016 - 12th International German Socio-Economic Panel User Conference (June 22-23, 2016)**

**Paper Title:**

“Routes into lone motherhood – routes into poverty? The importance of selection for explaining lone mothers’ poverty risks”

**Abstract:**

Lone mothers in Germany face extra-ordinarily high poverty risks compared to other social groups within Germany and lone mothers in other European countries. So far, in explaining this phenomenon, research has been neglecting two important issues: *First*, lone mothers are not a homogenous group, but rather come from very distinct life circumstances. *Second*, it is important to take these different routes into lone motherhood – and their underlying selection processes – into account in order to disentangle potential selection effects on poverty and actual lone motherhood effect on poverty.

This paper adds to the existing literature addressing these shortcomings in the following way: *First*, Three routes into lone motherhood are distinguished and treated separately throughout the paper: lone motherhood after marriage; lone motherhood after cohabitation and lone motherhood after out-of-relationship child birth. *Second*, this paper employs a potential outcomes framework using matching and Difference-in-Difference techniques in order to deal with potential selection effects. Analyses are based on the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (GSOEP), running on an annual basis since 1984. This paper uses all years 1984-2013 and controls for period and cohort effects.

Descriptive results show that before entering lone motherhood married mothers have the lowest risk of being poor followed by the so called ‘birth lone mothers’, while already one fourth of cohabiting mothers is at risk of poverty. The transition into lone motherhood aggravates the economic well-being of all three groups, but to a very different degree: While, for formerly married mothers the risk of poverty almost doubles, it increases by 35% for formerly cohabiting lone mothers and ‘only’ by 28% for unpartnered women. Multivariate results from matched Difference-in-Difference estimation point into the same direction: After taking selection into lone motherhood into account, the effect of becoming a lone mother on poverty is strongest for formerly married mothers and weakest for birth lone mothers.

**Author information:**

Sabine Hübgen

PhD Student

WZB Berlin Social Science Research Center

Reichpietschufer 50, 10785 Berlin

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