Re-Partnering and Single Mothers’ Mental Health and Life Satisfaction Trajectories

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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).
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- 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).
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▶ Effects of re-partnering could depend on welfare state and family policies of the national context (Recksiedler and Bernardi, 2019).
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?
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▶ 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

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

Negative relationship
Hiyoshi et al. (2015)

No relationship

Positive effects only for specific groups
Langlais et al. (2016), Li et al. (2021), Recksiedler and Bernardi (2019), H. R. Weingarten (1985)
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.
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

N=714

N=1941

Within sample

N=1913
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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOEP</th>
<th>UKHLS/BHPS</th>
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<td>Single</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life satisfaction</td>
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<td>7.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>46.44</td>
<td>47.95</td>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>7.13</td>
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<td>6.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housework hours</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential move in HH</td>
<td>30.80%</td>
<td>20.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New children in HH</td>
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<td>7.19</td>
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<td>46.44</td>
<td>47.95</td>
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<td>2.70</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>
Social selection

Germany (SOEP)

Life satisfaction

Mental health

-2/-1 0 +1/+2 +3/+5

Years before/after entry into single motherhood

-2/-1 0 +1/+2 +3/+5

Years before/after entry into single motherhood

Re-partnered within 5 years after entry into single motherhood

Not re-partnered within 5 years after entry into single motherhood
United Kingdom (BHPS/UKHLS)

Life satisfaction

-2/-1 0 +1/+2 +3/+5

Years before/after entry into single motherhood

Mental health

-2/-1 0 +1/+2 +3/+5

Years before/after entry into single motherhood

- Re-partnered within 5 years after entry into single motherhood
- Not re-partnered within 5 years after entry into single motherhood
Causation

Life satisfaction

Mental health

Years before/after re-partnering

Predicted values

-2/-1 0 +1/+2 +3/+5

Years before/after re-partnering

Predicted values

-2/-1 0 +1/+2 +3/+5

GER (SOEP) UK (BHPS/UKHLS)
Mechanisms

Life satisfaction

Germany (SOEP)  United Kingdom (UKHLS/BHPS)

- Base + Controls
- + Satisfaction with income
- + Residential move
- + HH equiv. net income (month)
- + Hours of housework
- + New partner’s children
Mechanisms

Mental health

Germany (SOEP)  United Kingdom (UKHLS/BHPS)

- Base + Controls
- + HH equiv. net income (month)
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- + Hours of housework
- + Residential move
- + New partner's children
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!
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Thank you!

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## Appendix I

### Table: Sample descriptions

<table>
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<td>715</td>
<td>1707</td>
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<td>N (observations)</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>9730</td>
<td>5496</td>
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<tr>
<td>Re-partnered within 5 years</td>
<td>28.59%</td>
<td>23.84%</td>
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## Appendix II

Table: FE-estimates – selection

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<th>Mental health</th>
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<tr>
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<td>SOEP (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>+1/2</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
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<tr>
<td>+3/5</td>
<td>0.34*</td>
<td>0.52***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N (observations)</td>
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<td>3055</td>
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<tr>
<td>N (individuals)</td>
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<td>488</td>
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### Appendix III

#### Table: FE-estimates – causation

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>Mental health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ref.: -2/1</td>
<td>0.56***</td>
<td>1.48*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+1/2</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
<td>1.68</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
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<tr>
<td>+3/5</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>1.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>N (individuals)</td>
<td>1198</td>
<td>847</td>
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References I


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 III


References IV

References V


References VI


References IX

References