

Parenthood and Life Satisfaction: A Dyadic Analysis

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Introduction

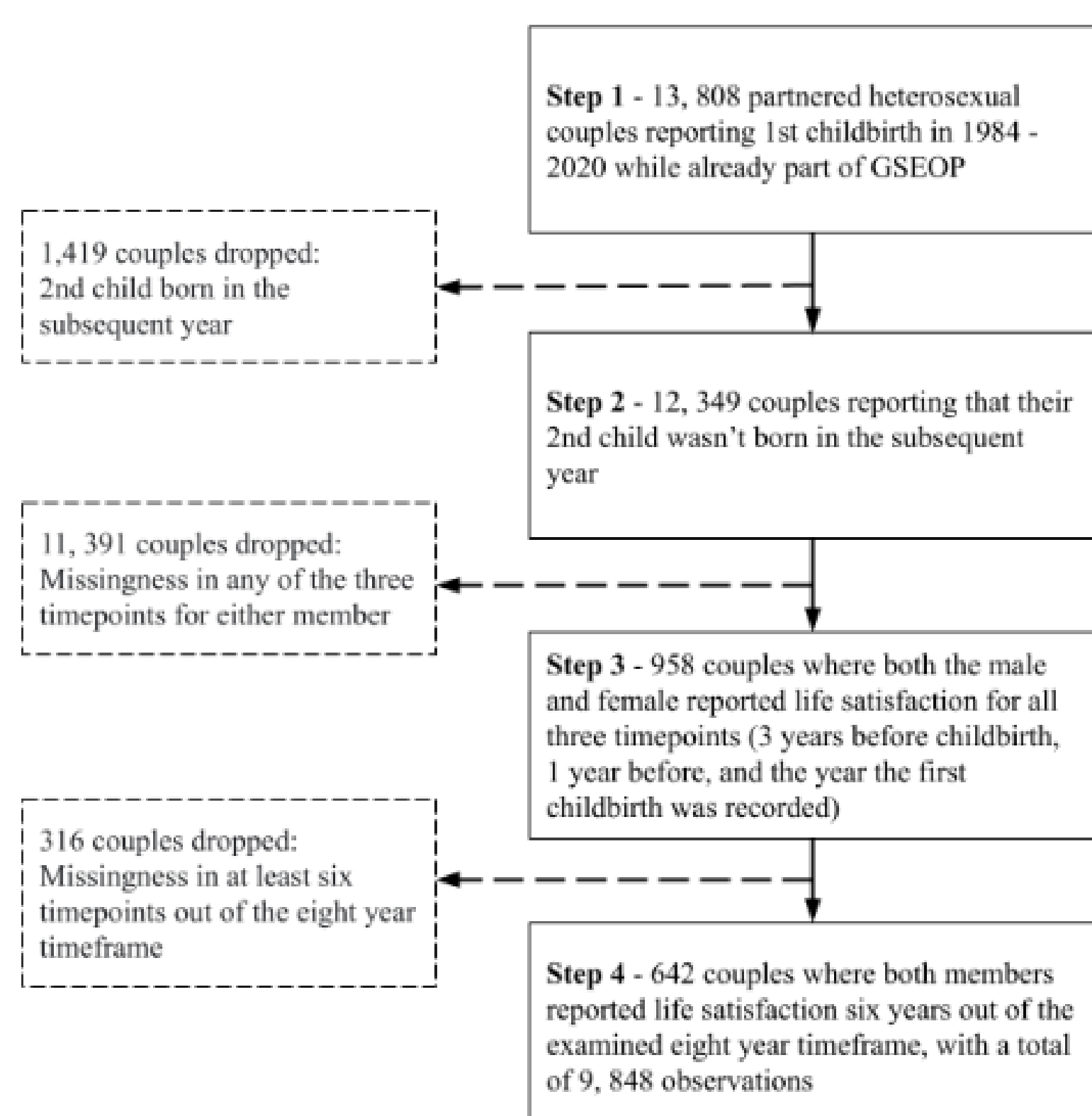
Following the arrival of a baby, couples undergo a significant transformation in their relationship dynamics, which involves negotiating parenting responsibilities and establishing new household duties (Cowan & Cowan, 2000).

Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to examine well-being in parenthood as a dyad, taking into account the interactions between partners and their potential impact on each other.

However, research on the interdependence within couples during the transition to parenthood is limited (Figueiredo et al., 2018), especially the investigation of associations between partners' life satisfaction trajectories during this period.

Sample

Nationally representative data for the current study was obtained from the German Socio-Economic Panel and restrictions were applied that defined our final sample of parents.



After applying these restrictions, our final sample comprised 642 heterosexual couples.

Analysis

Following the analytic approach developed by Krämer & Rodgers (2020), we created a **longitudinal multilevel model** with four piecewise regression coefficients:

- intercept (at the first year of observation)
- before-event slope (i.e., the linear change in the three years before childbirth)
- post-event slope (i.e., the linear change in the five years after childbirth)
- jump (i.e., the change from one year before childbirth to one year after).

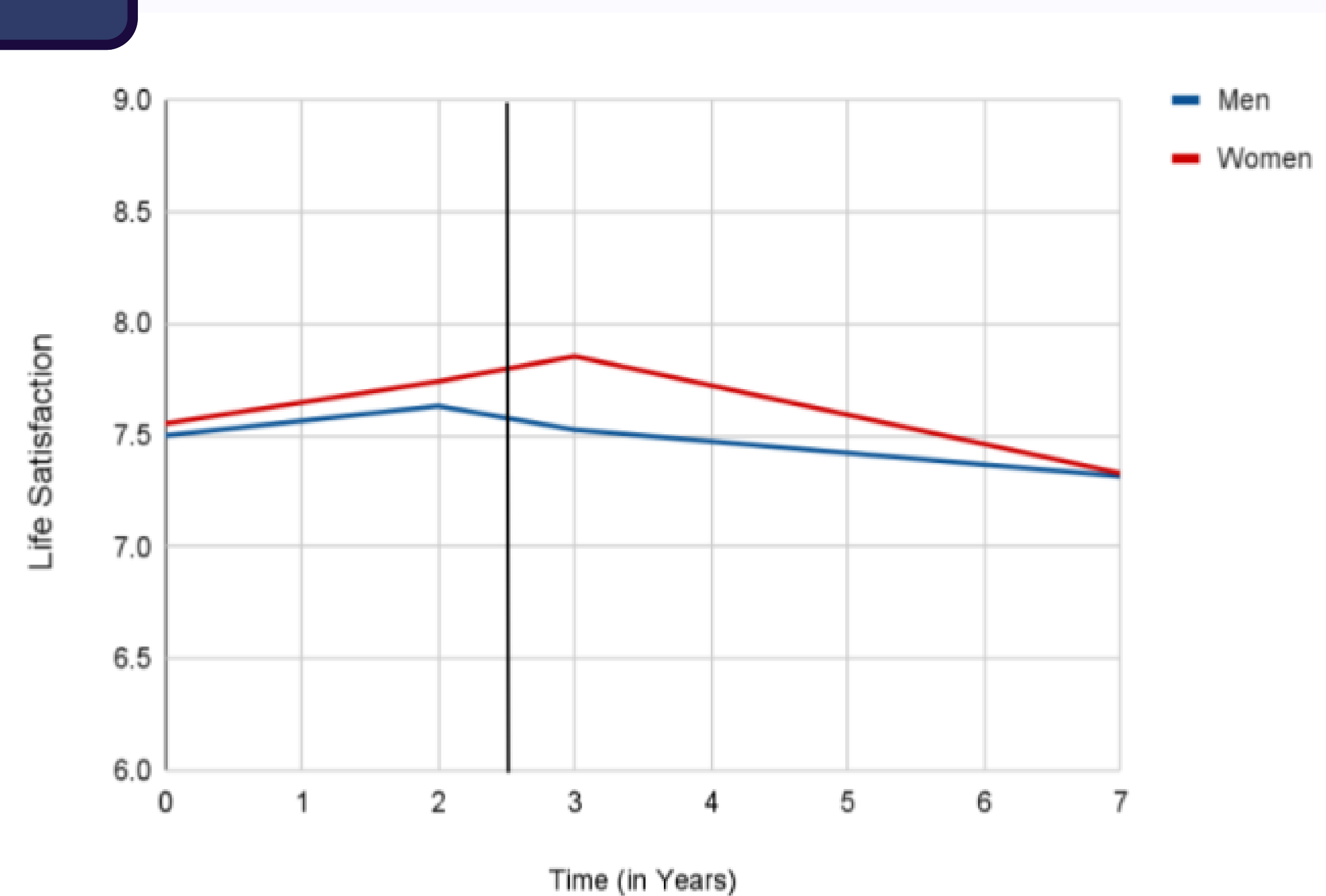
Dataset compilation was performed in R (Version 12.0; R Core Team, 2022), and analyses were implemented in SPSS (Version 28.0; IBM, 2021)

Research Questions

Is there an association between fathers' and mothers' trajectories of life satisfaction before the first childbirth?

Is there an association between change in fathers' and mothers' trajectories of life satisfaction after the first childbirth?

Results



Being multilevel models, these only account for the fixed effects portion of the model. The approximate time of birth is indicated by the vertical line. Consistent with prior research, both fathers and mothers exhibited an initial increase in life satisfaction before childbirth, followed by a subsequent decline post-childbirth.

Table 4

Correlations Among Random Effects Multilevel Modeling Parameters

Parameter	Variance	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. intercept, male, γ_{01}	1.28***	—					
2. intercept, female, γ_{02}	1.14***	.62***	—				
3. slope1, male, γ_{11}	0.86***	-.45**	-.40***	—			
4. slope1, female, γ_{12}	0.20***	-.33***	-.60***	.79***	—		
5. slope2, male, γ_{21}	0.02***	-.14	.13	-.02	-.40**	—	
6. slope2, female, γ_{22}	0.03***	.20	.16	.26	-.50***	.54***	—

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As hypothesized, the fathers' pre-childbirth levels of life satisfaction were correlated with the mothers'.

Importantly, we found a positive association between the pre-childbirth increase in life satisfaction for both fathers and mothers, as well as a positive correlation in their post-childbirth decrease, **indicating a degree of interdependence in life satisfaction within the relationship.**

Discussion

This study went beyond past work by examining the interdependence in life satisfaction trajectories among couples, revealing a positive association between pre-childbirth increase in life satisfaction for both fathers and mothers, as well as a positive correlation in their post-childbirth decrease. Future studies could further investigate the concept of interdependence in couples' life satisfaction using pseudo-pairs.

These findings **underscore the importance for future studies to adopt a dyadic perspective** to capture the intricacies of well-being dynamics between partners during the transition to parenthood.

References:

- Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (2000). *When partners become parents: The big life change for couples* (pp. xxi, 258). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Figueiredo, B., Canário, C., Tendais, I., Pinto, T. M., Kenny, D. A., & Field, T. (2018). Couples' relationship affects mothers' and fathers' anxiety and depression trajectories over the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 238, 204–212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.05.064>
- Krämer, M., & Rodgers, J. (2020). The impact of having children on domain-specific life satisfaction: A quasi-experimental longitudinal investigation using the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) data. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 119, 1497–1514. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000279>