

## **Parenthood and Psychological Well-Being: The Moderating Role of Lifestyle**

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### **Abstract (150 words)**

This study contributes to our knowledge on the association between parenthood and psychological well-being by examining the role of individuals' lifestyles (leisure and work) before and after the transition to parenthood. We argue that individuals' lifestyles may moderate the impact of parenthood on well-being. We investigate this question using fixed-effect models in eleven waves of the Swiss Household Panel ( $N = 1,332$  men and 1,272 women; 1999–2008, 2010) for men and women separately. Results show that -on average- parenthood does not influence well-being for men, for women we find an increase. As expected, we find that the well-being premium/cost to parenthood is contingent upon individuals' lifestyle before the transition to parenthood. For men, parenthood reduces well-being if they more frequently participated in active leisure before becoming fathers. For women, the beneficial effect of motherhood was decreased, but only if they combined active leisure with working long hours before motherhood.

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades fertility rates have decreased dramatically in Western societies. Some scholars have argued that one of the driving forces is people's reluctance to forgo the benefits of their jobs and social lives (e.g., (Balbo, Billari, & Mills, 2012); Jacobs & Winslow, 2004). The underlying assumption, that the time demands of children are difficult to reconcile with paid work and leisure, is mirrored in the literature on parenthood and well-being. Although the literature shows that children bring rewards as well as costs, a number of scholars emphasize the time demands that children impose upon their parents. More specifically, it is argued that parenthood is harmful to one's well-being because children inhibit (couple) leisure and create role overload and conflict (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Nelson, Kushlev, & Lyubomirsky, 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Umberson, Pudrovskaya, & Rezek, 2010). Yet, whereas these studies assume that *all* individuals who make the transition to parenthood encounter similar problems combining work, leisure, and parenthood, it is more realistic to assume that the level of change depends on individuals' lifestyles. Individuals who seldom participated in leisure before the transition to parenthood do not *need* to adapt their lifestyles as much as their more active counterparts. As a result, variations in individuals' leisure before and after the transition to parenthood may explain part of the heterogeneity in the effects of parenthood on well-being.

We conceptualize lifestyles as individuals' participation in 'active leisure' and paid work. With the term 'active leisure' we refer to individuals' participation in specific activities, such as sports, socializing, and cultural participation, rather than the total 'free time' that is spent outside of paid and unpaid labor and self-care. We believe that by looking at these "truly elective uses of time" (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003: 1010), we capture individuals' lifestyles best. We also excluded television watching because this activity is particularly easy to combine with child care and does not bring the same benefits as other leisure activities do (Craig & Mullan, 2013). Although we consider paid work to be a part of an individuals' lifestyles, our study focuses mostly on leisure. We are interested in the limits children impose upon individual activities that have a high intrinsic value and the intrinsic value of active leisure is higher and more self-evident than that of paid work. Nevertheless, we pay specific attention to pre- and post-parenthood paid work hours, because they partly determine the possibilities for combining parenthood and leisure.

The analyses are based on eleven waves of the Swiss Household Panel (SHP,  $N = 1,332$  men and 1,272 women, 1999-2008, 2010). The SHP provides an ideal opportunity to investigate this issue as it contains yearly data on psychological well-being and a wide range

of leisure activities. We estimate fixed-effects models to investigate the impact of parenthood, net of time-invariant individual characteristics such as personality. We analyze men and women separately because the division of labor and the nature of leisure are strongly gendered.

By differentiating between parents with different lifestyles, our study adds to the existing knowledge on the conditions under which parenthood is more or less beneficial for individual well-being (Keizer & Schenk, 2012; Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014; Nomaguchi, 2012). Although the potential relevance of parents' time use is often mentioned in the literature, few studies actually investigate its' role. The few studies that do look into it either analyzed its' effects by either controlling for parents' activities before the transition to parenthood (e.g., Koester & Eggebeen, 2006; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2013), or studied non-child care activities as possible *mediators* (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Keizer & Schenk, 2012). To our knowledge, there are no studies that considered the possibility that the impact of parenthood varies for individuals with different lifestyles.

## **2. Background**

### *2.1. Parenthood and well-being: rewards and costs*

Research on the impact of parenthood on well-being is abundant and characterized by a wide variety in theories, measures, samples, and methods. There is no scholarly consensus on the net effect of parenthood. Whereas some studies find that parenthood increases well-being (Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014), others find that it has a negative effect (Evenson & Simon, 2005). Although these inconsistencies can in part be explained by theoretical and methodological differences between studies, there is an emerging consensus that "Parenthood, per se, does not predict well-being in a systematic way" (Umberson et al., 2010: 614). Instead, research has shown that the impact of parenthood on well-being is contingent upon factors such as the age and educational level of parents (Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014) and the age of children (Nomaguchi, 2012). (See (Nelson et al., 2014 for extensive reviews of the literature. Umberson et al., 2010)

On a more theoretical level, the literature on parenthood addresses a wide range of (possible) rewards and costs of parenthood. With regard to the rewards, our brief overview focuses on those that are most commonly mentioned: the intrinsic value of children and the benefits for parents' social integration.

*Rewards.* The first line of research shows that children induce positive emotions (e.g., love and affection), a sense of meaning or purpose, and an experience of psychological growth (Coles, 2009; Hughes, 1998; Erikson, 1950; Morgan & King, 2001; Nelson et al., 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Woo & Raley, 2005; Umberson & Gove, 1989; see Nelson et al., 2014 for an overview). The second field suggests that parenthood is associated with higher levels of social integration. (New) Parents have more frequent contact with relatives, friends, and neighbors (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003), provide more care to kin and non-kin outside the household (Gallagher & Gerstel, 2001), and are more involved in service-oriented activities (Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006). It is important to note that the association between parenthood and social integration is strongly contingent on the age of children. Whereas parents with older children have relatively high levels of social resources, parents' of younger children seem to be constrained by them (Ishii-Kuntz & Seccombe, 1989; Munch, McPherson, & Smith-Lovin, 1997).

*Costs.* The literature on the costs of parenthood is more abundant (for detailed overviews see (Nelson et al., 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003; Umberson et al., 2010). In general, scholars argue that the impact of parenthood is indirect, because it increases certain stressors that, in turn, decrease well-being. Examples of stressors are financial distress and marital conflict. Children are expensive (Nelson et al., 2014), especially when government support is limited. As a result, parents experience more financial struggles compared to their childless counterparts (Bird, 1997; Nelson et al., 2014). Children also induce pressure on the partner relationship: partners have to renegotiate the division of labor, spend less quality time together, and experience a decrease in the level of sexual intimacy (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007; Nelson et al., 2014; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Twenge et al., 2003; Umberson et al., 2010). Because our study centers on parents' time use, the next paragraph provides a more extensive overview of the literature on the 'time-related' costs of children.

## *2.2. Parenthood and well-being: the role of time use*

### *2.2.1. The impact of parenthood on leisure*

Children require direct care and supervision, but also increase family demands in terms of household labor, as there is more cleaning, laundry, and cooking to do (Craig & Bittman, 2008; Gjerdingen & Center, 2005; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; L. C. Sayer, 2005). Assuming that time, energy, and availability are limited resources (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985),

scholars argue that these demands come at the costs of other activities, such as leisure (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Munch et al., 1997; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Umberson et al., 2010). Moreover, the ‘restriction of freedom’ model, posits that having children decreases parents’ flexibility to do whatever they want, whenever they want (Twenge et al., 2003; Umberson & Gove, 1989).

Research shows that parents (of young children) spend less time in sleep (Nelson et al., 2014) and leisure (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Crawford & Huston, 1993; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006; L. C. Sayer, 2005). Moreover, couples with children spend less time in couple leisure (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Voorpostel, Van der Lippe, & Gershuny, 2010).

### *2.2.2. The impact of leisure on well-being.*

So why would the time demands of children harm parents’ well-being? First, it is argued that if parents curtail their leisure, they are deprived from its’ benefits (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Goldberg & Perry Jenkins, 2004; Nelson et al., 2014; Twenge et al., 2003; Wethington & Kessler, 1989). When less time is spend in leisure, relationships with partner and friends may decrease in quality, social support may decrease. Moreover, leisure is an activity with a high intrinsic value that is associated with high levels of positive affect (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Twenge et al., 2003; Umberson et al., 2010). Thus, individuals who spend less time in leisure, have fewer opportunities to recharge, for self-development, and to pursue their “*own pleasures*” (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Nelson et al., 2014; Shaw, 2008; Twenge et al., 2003).

A second line of research argues that the time demands of parenthood are harmful for well-being because parents have to balance multiple demands, which increases role overload and conflict. Although this approach is mainly discussed in the context of paid work (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Bird, 1997; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Milkie, Mattingly, Nomaguchi, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004; Treas, Van der Lippe, & Tai, 2011), it can also be applied to leisure. For example, the literature on the quality of leisure argues that leisure is more stressful and less relaxing when individuals’ multitask (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Offer & Schneider, 2011; Twenge et al., 2003; Umberson et al., 2010). Competing demands deplete an individuals’ energy and may result in mental and physical health problems (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Rothbard, 2001).

### 2.2.3. *Prior research on role of leisure and work time*

Few studies on the transition to parenthood and well-being test the mediating or moderating effects of changes in time use. The literature does provide suggestive evidence. Wethington and Kessler (1989) find that women's role changes in the work domain (e.g., dropping out of employment) affected changes in psychological distress, net of the impact of parenthood. Moreover, Keizer, Dykstra, and Poortman (2010) find that relatively large reductions *and* increases in women's (but not men's) work involvement following parenthood reduce mental health.

The marital-satisfaction-literature paid more attention to the role of changes in time use (Dew & Wilcox, 2011; Kluwer, 2010; Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, & Bradbury, 2010). For example, Claxton and Perry-Jenkins (2008) investigated how prenatal leisure and the level of change impact marital quality after the transition to parenthood. Their results suggest that parenthood is less detrimental for couples with joint lifestyles, but that these are also the parents who experience the strongest reduction in couple time. In contrast, Keizer and Schenk (2012) find almost no effects of changes in paid and unpaid work, and conclude that the impact of parenthood on marital satisfaction is likely to be mediated by subjective characteristics of paid and unpaid work, such as perceived fairness.

### 2.3. *Hypotheses*

The life course perspective provides a useful theoretical framework for our hypotheses, as it emphasizes heterogeneity between individuals and contends that individuals can employ a range of coping strategies when facing major life events (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Keeton, Perry Jenkins, & Sayer, 2008; Umberson et al., 2010).

Our base hypothesis reads as follows: *The transition to parenthood is associated with a decrease in psychological well-being and the strength of this association decreases over time (Hypothesis 1)*. Although empirical evidence on the impact of parenthood on well-being is highly inconclusive and showed that the strength and direction of this effect depends on many factors, we start from the presumption that the net effect of parenthood is negative. We do so because the literature tends to focus on the costs of parenthood. Prior research did conclusively show that the impact on individuals' lives is strongest when children are young (Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014; Nelson et al., 2014; Umberson et al., 2010)

Our main expectation is that the impact of parenthood is contingent upon parents' involvement in leisure *before* the birth of the child. Most transition-to-parenthood studies

implicitly or explicitly assume that childless individuals spend a substantial proportion of their time in leisure. Nevertheless, in reality, individuals' lifestyles vary. Whereas some people frequently participate in active leisure (e.g., socializing or sports), others may spend more time in non-leisure (e.g., domestic labor) or more passive forms of leisure (e.g., watching television). Such differences may be driven by preferences as well as by opportunities.

So what does the transition to parenthood imply for those with active lifestyles? Once the child is born these parents can respond in roughly two ways: (i) they can scale back and curtail their leisure or (ii) they can try to maintain their old lifestyle as much as possible.

In the first case, in which parents change and limit their leisure, we expect that their psychological well-being decreases. According to the 'role expansion approach', parents would lose the benefits of their leisure activities if they reduce the frequency of leisure activities. For example, it would imply that friendships deteriorate and there are fewer opportunities to exercise. Losing these benefits is likely to be particularly harmful for 'active' parents, because their involvement before parenthood suggests that these parents highly value these activities.

In the second case, in which parents maximize their leisure after the transition to parenthood, we may also see a decrease in psychological well-being. The 'role strain approach' predicts that parents who accumulate demands are more likely to experience role overload and role conflict. For example, persons who are active in sports and/or other hobbies will find it stressful and difficult to combine such activities with the more home oriented task of parenting. We expect that both multitasking and outsourcing bring stress, because the former demands a great deal of effort and distraction, whereas the latter may cause feelings of guilt. Thus, we expect that active individuals will experience a decrease in psychological well-being after they become parents, regardless of their coping strategy.

The transition to parenthood is likely to have a different impact on individuals who, before the transition to parenthood, participate less in leisure. Just as their active counterparts, passive individuals can choose to change their lifestyle or not. Nevertheless, we expect that the effect of having a child on well-being is less detrimental (or more beneficial) because the (unintended) consequences of their decisions are less likely to harm their well-being. First, the fact that they seldom participated in leisure before the birth of their child may indicate that they do not particularly value these activities. As a result, they may not be affected if they have to scale back. For example, someone who met his friends once per month before becoming a parent, may not mind if this frequency is reduced to once every two months.

Secondly, if new parents do not scale back, they may be less likely to experience role overload because they are more able to accommodate children in their old schedule. These reasons lead us to expect that *people who have more leisure activities experience a larger well-being decrease following parenthood (Hypothesis 2)*. Because empirical evidence on the net effect of parenthood on well-being is inconclusive, we may find that the net effect is positive. If this is the case we expect that the strength of the *positive* effect is contingent upon individuals' lifestyles.

#### 2.4. *Work Constraints and Gender*

Because we are interested in the role of leisure, we need take the amount of time that is spent in paid and unpaid work into account as well. Parents who often participate in leisure *and* work long hours (at work and/or at home) are more likely to experience the unintended consequences of parenthood than people who have an active lifestyle but work fewer hours. These parents can more easily adapt to parenthood.

In the transition-to-parenthood literature it is common to analyze the effects of parenthood separately for men and women (Claxton & Perry Jenkins, 2008; Keizer & Schenk, 2012; Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005; Munch et al., 1997). Prior research suggests women are more susceptible to the costs of parenthood than men because they still carry the main responsibility for children (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Kluwer, 2010; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Umberson & Gove, 1989). For these reasons, we separately analyze men and women.

### **3. Methods**

#### 3.1. *Data and sample.*

For our study we make use of the Swiss Household Panel (SHP). The SHP follows a random sample of households in Switzerland on an annual basis since 1999. Currently there are fourteen waves available. Because wave 11 (2009), 13 (2011) and 14 (2012) did not include information on all leisure activities, we only used the first ten waves (1999 – 2008), and wave 12 (2010). Data are collected using computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI). Every wave covers three types of questionnaires: (i) a household grid (used to assess the composition of the household); (ii) a household survey; and (iii) individual questionnaires. The individual questionnaires are targeted at all household member aged 14 or older.



The total sample is composed of two parts. The SHP started with a first sample in 1999 (SHP I), and was supplemented with a second sample in 2004 (SHP II). Both samples are representative of private households in Switzerland, stratified by region (Voorpostel et al., 2013). The SHP I-sample consisted of 7,799 respondents from 5,074 households. The SHP II-sample was smaller with 3,654 respondents from 2,538 households. On the household level response rates were 64% in the first wave of the first sample (1999) and 65% in the first wave of the second sample (2004). On the individual level response rates (conditional upon household participation) were respectively 85% and 76% (Voorpostel et al., 2013 79 - 80). During the course of the panel individuals entering the household were included as new sample members. Household members leaving the original household stayed in the sample and were included in the study as new households.

Attrition is a common issue in panel data (Groves, 2006): in the SHP attrition rates were relatively high in the first few waves, but overall nonresponse bias in the Swiss Household Panel is mild and comparable to other panel studies (Voorpostel, 2010). About 65% of the original 1999 and 2004 samples still participated in 2008 (Voorpostel et al., 2013 26).

We selected men and women aged 18 to 40 years old who did not have children at baseline (1,827 men and 1,723 women), as they are at risk of becoming parents. Respondents were followed from the moment they entered the sample. The panel design was unbalanced, which means that respondents can temporarily exit the panel. As a second restriction, we only include respondents for whom we have at least two waves of observation in order to be able to detect the transition to parenthood (1,336 men, 1,278 women and 14,000 observations in total). We applied listwise deletion of missing values, as there were relatively few missing values. The final sample size comprises 1,332 men and 1,272 women and a total of 13,944 observations.

### 3.2. Measures

*Psychological well-being.* Well-being is measured with a single item. The respondents were asked: "Do you often have negative feelings such as having the blues, being desperate, suffering from anxiety or depression, if 0 means "never" and 10 "always?" We reversed-coded this measure so that higher values correspond with higher levels of psychological well-being.

*Transition to parenthood.* We constructed a dummy variable indicating whether individuals were a parent at the interview date. This information was constructed based on the birth dates of reported children (8 at most). We only took biological or adopted children

into account.

*Involvement in leisure.* The respondents were asked how frequently they individually participated in a number of leisure activities (the interviewer explicitly mentioned that the list of activities concerned *leisure* activities). Twelve activities returned in each questionnaire (only wave 12 differed slightly): (a) Meeting friends, acquaintances or colleagues; (b) reading; (c) playing an instrument or singing; (d) DIY (Do it yourself) or gardening; (e) attending courses (except vocational training) (not asked in wave 12 and therefore excluded); (f) going to a disco, a dance hall or a techno party; (g) going to a bar, pub or restaurant; (h) practicing an individual or team sport; (i) walking (includes also hiking in wave 12); (j) attending sports events; (k) going to the theatre, the opera, visiting an exhibition (split in three separate questions in wave 12); (l) going to the cinema. We constructed a scale by taking the average over the eleven items (all except e) courses). The original answer categories (1= *every day* through 5 = *never*) were recoded so that higher values corresponded with a higher frequency (0 = *never* through 4 = *every day*). Note that we did not consider television watching as the time use literature considers this as a default activity with mainly adverse effects (Craig & Mullan, 2013).

In order to capture the role of leisure before parenthood we constructed a time-invariant variable that measures the average involvement over the waves during which the respondent is childless. Thus, for those respondents who make the transition to parenthood, the time-invariant variables measure the average involvement before the transition to parenthood (i.e., average leisure frequency). By interacting this time-invariant variable with the transition-to-parenthood dummy, we can analyze whether the impact of parenthood is contingent upon pre-parenthood leisure for those who become parents. In addition to this time-invariant variable, we also constructed a time-varying variable, measuring leisure involvement in each wave. This measure enables us to investigate whether changes in leisure are associated with changes in psychological well-being.

*Involvement in paid work.* Employed respondents were asked the question: “how many hours per week do you usually work each week for your main job?” Respondents were instructed to include usual paid and unpaid overtime. Non-employed respondents were assigned a value of 0 on the work hours variable. We used the information on the respondents’ work hours to construct variables similar to those for leisure. We control for employment status (0 = *nonemployed*, 1 = *employed*) in models that include the time-variant work hours variable to better capture changes in work.

*Control variables.* Because we use fixed-effects models, time-invariant characteristics are cancelled out, only time-varying characteristics remain. The control variables are age of the respondent and respondents' civil status (single, cohabiting but unmarried, married) and self-reported general health (5 point scale, higher is better health). These variables are well-known correlates of well-being and are also determinants of time spent on work and leisure. Because one would expect that people adjust their time use as children grow up and while the mother is pregnant, we also calculated the number of months since the transition to parenthood and constructed a dummy-variable indicating that the interview took place within six months before the birth of the first child.

### 3.3. *Analytical method*

We are interested in changes within individuals and want to minimize the risk that unobserved, omitted individual characteristics (e.g., personality, work-leisure preferences) bias our results. Hence, we employ fixed effects models. Fixed effects models estimate within-person change by analyzing variations across the observations. Note that we run the analyses separately for men and women, we therefore do not need to adjust for the clustering of individuals in households.

The analysis proceeds in five steps. First, we show a base model that estimates the average relationship between subjective well-being and becoming a parent (Model 1, see table 3 for men and table 4 for women). This analysis replicates previous findings on the transition to parenthood. Second, in Model 2, we investigate whether the average association between parenthood and well-being obscures differences in the impact of parenthood between parents who, before parenthood, had active lifestyle versus those that were less active. We do so by including an interaction term between the time-invariant pre-parenthood leisure indicator and the transition-to-parenthood dummy variable. Note that pre-parenthood leisure is a time-constant covariate, and so the main effect of the interaction cannot be estimated. In the third and fourth step we investigate the role of paid work by including interactions between the transition-to-parenthood dummy and pre-parenthood work hours (Model 3) as well as a three-way-interaction between parenthood, pre-parenthood leisure, and pre-parenthood work hours (Model 4). Fifth, the final model (Model 5) includes time-varying indicators of current leisure and work, to see whether changes in leisure and work can explain possible heterogeneity (by pre-parenthood work and leisure involvement) in the association between parenthood and well-being.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive analyses

Within the observation window of this study about a quarter of the people make the transition to parenthood (294 men, 22.1% and 330 women, 25.9%). Tables 1 for men and 2 for women show all descriptive statistics separately for three groups of observations: 1) observations of those individuals who do not make the transition to parenthood during the period of observation, 2) observations of future parents before the transition to parenthood, and 3) observations of parents after the transition to parenthood.

[Tables 1 and 2]

Among both men and women, the group who does not make the transition into parenthood shows the lowest score on psychological well-being. Parents score higher before the transition to parenthood, but their well-being score decreases after the transition. On average, women report lower levels of psychological well-being. Based on these figures we find support for the idea that the transition into parenthood has a negative effect on wellbeing, although parents remain happier than the childless comparison group. Parents before the transition as well as the group that remains childless have similar levels of leisure. After becoming a parent involvement leisure goes down as expected. Regarding work hours different patterns emerge for men and women. Both future mothers and fathers work more hours before the transition compared to their childless counterparts. Mothers reduce their work hours after the transition from about 35 to about 17 hours a week, whereas fathers remain working about the same amount of hours (42).

The average age for men who do not become parents is slightly lower compared to the parents (31 years compared to 31 years before the transition). For women it is the opposite: 31 years for the women who do not become parents compared to 29 for those who will transition into motherhood. Regarding partner status the tables show predictable patterns: for most observations from individuals who do not become parents the partner status is single (66% for men and 60% for women). Nonmarried cohabitation is most common among parents before the transition (37% for men, 40% for women), whereas after the transition in the majority of observations the individuals are married (88% for men and women).

Of the observations before parenthood 10% for men and 12% for women pertain to the period in which the woman was pregnant. The average time since the birth (or age of the child) is about 3.3 years for both men and women.

Not presented in the table are differences in background characteristics such as education and occupational status. Compared to the childless group, the group who will become parents tends to be higher educated (both men and women) and have a higher occupational status (men only). These characteristics are not included in our fixed effects models, because fixed effects models are based on changes within individuals and there is very little variation in these over time.

#### 4.2. *Explanatory analyses*

[Tables 3 and 4]

The results of the explanatory analyses are depicted in Table 3 (for men) and Table 4 (for women). Models 1a and 1b show the baseline models for men and women respectively. This first model investigated the relationship between becoming a parent and psychological well-being by including a set of variables that captures this life course transition. Men's well-being is not affected by becoming a father, nor is it associated with the pregnancy of their partner or the time in months since becoming a father. For women, we find that psychological well-being is increased when they were pregnant, by about a quarter standard deviation (.237). It also increased once they entered motherhood but by a lesser extent (.161). The beneficial effect of having a child is attenuated over time, as the negative months since birth coefficient indicates (-.021): In about eight years the net impact of motherhood on distress is zero (.167/.021  $\approx$  8 years).

Models 2a and 2b show whether the impact of parenthood on psychological well-being varies with the pre-parenthood leisure frequency. For men, the negative interaction shows that men with more active lifestyles experience a decrease in well-being after becoming a father. The effect size of -.086 is relatively small (all variables were standardized), but this finding supports Hypothesis 2. For women, well-being does not appear to be contingent upon leisure before parenthood.

In Models 3a and 3b we also included an interaction between parenthood and pre-parenthood work hours as the level of involvement in paid work also determines one's lifestyle. For men, the pre-parenthood leisure interaction remains, which suggests that the

moderating effect for men cannot be accounted for by heterogeneity in their paid work involvement. For women, including this interaction did not alter the results either.

The role of leisure before parenthood is explored further in Models 4a and 4b by including a three-way-interaction between parenthood, leisure, and paid work. People that score high on this variable are those who, before the transition to parenthood, combined an active leisure life with long paid work hours. Arguably, these people face the most difficulties combining their previous life with parenthood. For men, this interaction is negative as expected, but not significantly different from zero (model 4a), but for women it is (Model 4b). The negative interaction term in Model 4b (-.085) suggest that the beneficial effect of becoming a mother on psychological distress (.144) is weaker for women who combined relatively high levels of leisure with relatively high work hours before becoming a mother. So also for women we find that pre-parenthood leisure moderates parenthood -as predicted by Hypothesis 2-, but only if prior work hours are taken into account.

The finding that the impact of parenthood on well-being is contingent on pre-parenthood lifestyle arises perhaps because fathers and mothers maintained a high involvement after becoming parents (and thus experienced more role overload) or because they needed to adapted their lifestyles by reducing leisure and/or work involvement (and thus experienced less benefit from leisure and/or work involvement). We test these possible explanations by including the time-varying leisure and work involvement (Model 5). Men who increased their work hours experienced an increase in well-being, but the leisure interaction remains (changes from -.089 to -.082), which suggests that this effect is not related to parenthood. For women, these variables were not related to psychological well-being and the results remain the same. This suggests that it is the pre-parenthood lifestyle that matters (especially leisure involvement), regardless of changes in behavior following parenthood.

### *Robustness*

We ran a number of robustness checks. First, we tested whether the gender differences were significantly different by pooling the models for men and women (taking the nested structure into account). The results (not reported) suggest that the gender differences in the main parenthood effect, and for the moderating effects of pre-parenthood leisure and work are significant. Second, we investigated whether the results would change if we conceptualized 'work' as the combination of paid and unpaid work, which may be especially relevant for women. Results were very similar. Third, we obtained similar results if we took the average of only the three years before becoming a parent as pre-parenthood measures instead of

averaging over all the years. Finally, we ran models that took the nested structure of the data into account (the few same-sex respondents living in the same household) by estimating standard errors that allow for intragroup correlation. This did not affect the results.

## 5. Discussion

The current study aimed to better understand the association between parenthood and well-being by examining the role of individuals' lifestyles and their involvement in leisure in particular. Instead of assuming that parenthood is always difficult to reconcile with leisure, we argued that parents who participated less in leisure before the transition to parenthood, would find it easier to adapt to parenthood. By acknowledging the heterogeneity between parents and theorizing on possible coping mechanisms, our study takes a life course perspective and adds to the literature on parenthood and well-being.

Based on fixed effects models using the Swiss Household Panel ( $N = 1,332$  men and 1,272 women, of whom 294 men and 330 women became parents, who were followed over time for an average of 5.4 years) we can draw three main conclusions. First, we found that - on average- for men there was no relationship between parenthood and psychological well-being, but for women, we did find -on average- a positive effect for well-being, which attenuated over time. Second, these average effects appeared to hide considerable heterogeneity as differentiating between individuals with different lifestyles appeared to be a fruitful endeavor. Results showed that especially parents' leisure *before* parenthood mattered. Parenthood decreased well-being for men who more actively participated in leisure. Similarly, women who combined high levels of leisure involvement with a high level of labor force participation reaped fewer benefits of becoming a mother for their well-being. Third, the moderating effects were not accounted for when controlled for changes in lifestyle following parenthood. Thus, prior ('pre-parenthood') lifestyle forms an important moderating factor, but the with the level of changes in lifestyle following parenthood does not seem to explain the observed patterns. Summarizing, we show that part of the heterogeneity in the effects of parenthood has to do with prior lifestyle. Our results suggest that parenthood is more harmful for some parents than for others because they are used to different lifestyles. This path-dependency closely fits in the life course perspective.

Our study suggests that there is no best practice for active parents to deal with the transition to parenthood. In other words, parenthood appears to be more harmful for individuals with more active lifestyles, not because they are more or less likely to *change*

their time use (as prior research suggests), but because their well-being decreases *regardless* of their strategies to deal with this transition. If these individuals scale back they lose the benefits of an active lifestyles, but if they do not, the combination of demands and activities creates role overload. These mechanisms are in line with predictions from respectively the ‘role expansion’ and ‘role strain’ perspectives. Interestingly, these perspectives are often presented as contradicting, but our results suggest that they both apply, but only to those individuals who had more active lifestyles to begin with. In contrast, individuals with less active leisure patterns and/or less demanding jobs may not face the same dilemma because they have more flexibility to accommodate the demands of children, and as a result, the costs of parenthood are lower.

A comparison of the results for men and women reveals a surprising similarity. It seems that men as well as women who combined an active lifestyle with long work hours have more difficulties adapting to parenthood. Because the vast majority of men works long hours, this implies that the impact of leisure is similar once work hours are taken into account. Thus, if we consider those individuals who were relatively active before they had a child, neither men *nor* women seem to be able to have it all after the transition to parenthood.

This similarity between men and women is interesting considering the fact that the popular media and work-family literature often claim that women cannot have it all, while men can. Yet, these analyses are usually restricted to the work-family interface and neglect time spent in leisure. Our study suggests that if we broaden the scope to consider leisure, we may detect gender similarities that we would otherwise miss. Women may experience difficulties combining parenthood with a career, but if they work fewer hours they do seem to be able to combine parenthood and leisure. Men, on the other hand, may be able to combine parenthood and a career, but it seems to be problematic to reconcile this with active leisure life. Thus, although there are substantial differences in time allocation, neither men nor women seem to be able to have it all.

Although the findings are in line with our theoretical expectations, our conclusions should be considered with care. Analytically, we cannot explain the observed moderating factors. Are the detrimental effects of scaling back outweighed by the beneficial effects or is there another mechanism at play? Future research may investigate whether there are any conditions under which one of the two mechanisms dominates. For example, change may more harmful for than beneficial when family demands pass a certain threshold. Moreover, even though fixed effects models are a major improvement of cross-sectional models, we cannot exclude the possibility that dynamic selection biases the results.



Furthermore, we relied on a single-item measure of well-being, multiple-item constructs are much to be preferred. Also, we did not have time diary data, so we used individual reports of the overall frequency of leisure. An advantage of such broad measures is that they are more likely to detect infrequent activities, such as going to the theatre. However, they are more prone to social desirability and can result in a large measurement error bias (Kan & Pudney, 2008). Time diary data also provide a rich source of information on social interactions. With-whom data would have enabled us to distinguish couple leisure from independent leisure and thereby provided more insight in couples' lifestyles (Kalmijn & Bernasco, 2001). We believe our study was a useful first step, but future research may refine our lifestyle measure using time diary data.

Future research could also look into cross-over or partner effects. It would be interesting to see whether the change in leisure and work hours of one parent, affects the well-being of the other. The effect could be indirect (via the partners' well-being), direct (e.g., it may function as a signal of commitment) or interact with the parents' own involvement. For example, if the mother strongly curtails her leisure whereas the father does not, this may create conflict. In any case, it will also be interesting to look at more subjective characteristics of parents' time use, such as perceived fairness. Also, it would be interesting to study whether the same mechanisms occur in other countries. Part-time work is relatively common in Switzerland, although only among women (Ernst Stahli, Le Goff, Levy, & Widmer, 2009). Government support for families is rather limited and mostly oriented towards the traditional breadwinner family, although there is some variation on the cantonal level (Bonoli, 2008). Possibly, more elaborate work-family policies do not only help parents to reconcile work and family demands, but may also enable them to retain their involvement in leisure.

To conclude, this study both confirms and nuances prior research on parenthood and psychological well-being. We confirm the idea that there is substantial heterogeneity in the 'parenthood effect', but whereas prior research tended to *describe* variation along socio-demographic characteristics, such as age and marital status, our study shows variation by lifestyle. Variation by lifestyle is theoretically more interesting and comes closer to an understanding of the mechanism behind variation in the parenthood effect. Our novel finding that parenthood is more harmful for men and less beneficial for women with more active lifestyles before the birth of the child, goes to show that neither men nor women can have it all.

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## Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (Unstandardized) Men.

Variable (range)	No transition to parenthood		Pre-Parenthood		After Parenthood	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Well-being (0-10)	8.22	1.86	8.66	1.58	8.53	1.70
Leisure (0.27-3.27)	1.93	.39	1.98	.35	1.84	.36
Pre-parenthood leisure (1-2.73)	-	-	1.98	.28	1.97	.28
Work hours (0-90)	35.80	17.38	41.49	12.85	42.82	11.64
Employed (0-1)	.87	-	.95	-	.97	-
Pre-parenthood work hours (0-80)	-	-	41.49	10.29	41.94	11.46
Transition to parenthood (0-1)	0	-	0	-	1	-
Pregnancy (0-1)	0	-	.10	-	0	-
Months since birth/12 (0-11)	0	.00	0	.00	3.38	2.54
Age (18-51)	30.66	7.65	31.26	5.04	36.28	5.13
Single (0-1)	.66	-	.28	-	.02	-
Cohabiting (0-1)	.20	-	.37	-	.10	-
Married (0-1)	.14	-	.35	-	.88	-
Self-rated health (1-5)	4.23	.62	4.32	.58	4.20	.59
<i>N</i> observations	5,098		1,005		1,016	
<i>N</i> individuals	1,038				294	

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (Unstandardized) Women.

Variable (range)	No transition to parenthood		Pre-Parenthood		After Parenthood	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Well-being (0-10)	7.70	2.03	8.07	1.83	7.97	1.82
Leisure (0.00-3.18)	1.91	.39	1.97	.37	1.80	.42
Pre-parenthood leisure (0.82-3.00)	-	-	1.98	.31	1.97	.34
Work hours (0-85)	33.14	15.62	35.19	14.55	17.14	14.44
Employed (0-1)	.89	-	.91	-	.77	-
Pre-parenthood work hours (0-80)	-	-	35.19	11.46	35.75	12.61
Transition to parenthood (0-1)	0	-	0	-	1	-
Pregnancy (0-1)	0	-	.12	-	0	-
Months since birth/12 (0-11.08)	0	.00	0	.00	3.32	2.51
Age (18-51)	30.90	7.70	28.92	4.50	34.35	4.81
Single (0-1)	.60	-	.24	-	.03	-
Cohabiting (0-1)	.24	-	.40	-	.09	-
Married (0-1)	.16	-	.36	-	.88	-
Self-rated health (1-5)	4.14	.66	4.27	.63	4.16	.61
<i>N</i> observations	4,638		997		1,190	
<i>N</i> individuals	942				330	

Table 3. Men. Fixed effects model estimates of the transition to parenthood on psychological well-being (std.). Unstandardized Coefficients (Standard Errors between Brackets).

	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 3a	Model 4a	Model 5a
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Age (std.)	-.009* (.004)	-.009* (.004)	-.009* (.004)	-.009* (.004)	-.010** (.004)
Single	-.263*** (.047)	-.270*** (.047)	-.270*** (.047)	-.270*** (.047)	-.267*** (.047)
Cohabiting	-.135** (.043)	-.143*** (.043)	-.144*** (.043)	-.143*** (.043)	-.143*** (.043)
Married (ref.)	-	-	-	-	-
Self-reported health (std.)	.151*** (.017)	.150*** (.017)	.151*** (.017)	.150*** (.017)	.149*** (.017)
Pregnancy	-.100 (.076)	-.095 (.076)	-.096 (.076)	-.096 (.076)	-.094 (.076)
Parenthood	-.055 (.049)	-.055 (.049)	-.045 (.050)	-.045 (.050)	-.038 (.050)
Months since birth /12	-.013 (.010)	-.013 (.010)	-.013 (.010)	-.013 (.010)	-.012 (.010)
<i>Pre-birth lifestyle * parenthood interactions:</i>					
Leisure (std.)		-.086* (.038)	-.085* (.038)	-.089* (.041)	-.082* (.041)
Work hours (std.)			-.038 (.037)	-.039 (.038)	-.026 (.038)
Leisure (std.) * Work hours (std.)				.011 (.043)	.008 (.043)
<i>Time-varying lifestyle:</i>					
Leisure (std.)					.021 (.013)
Work hours (std.)					.048* (.020)
Employed					-.026 (.056)
Constant	-.048 (.149)	-.035 (.149)	-.034 (.149)	-.034 (.149)	.017 (.156)
N <sub>observations</sub>	7,119	7,119	7,119	7,119	7,119
N <sub>individuals</sub>	1,332	1,332	1,332	1,332	1,332

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Table 4. Women. Fixed effects model estimates of the transition to parenthood on psychological well-being (std.). Unstandardized Coefficients (Standard Errors between Brackets).

	Model 1a	Model 2a	Model 3a	Model 4a	Model 5a
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Age (std.)	-.005 (.004)	-.005 (.004)	-.005 (.004)	-.005 (.004)	-.005 (.004)
Single	-.089 (.054)	-.092 (.054)	-.094 (.054)	-.099 (.054)	-.100 (.054)
Cohabiting	-.021 (.049)	-.023 (.049)	-.028 (.050)	-.035 (.050)	-.038 (.050)
Married (ref.)	-	-	-	-	-
Self-reported health (std.)	.224*** (.018)	.224*** (.018)	.224*** (.018)	.224*** (.018)	.224*** (.018)
Pregnancy	.237** (.083)	.242** (.083)	.239** (.083)	.228** (.083)	.229** (.083)
Parenthood	.161** (.054)	.161** (.054)	.151** (.055)	.144** (.055)	.168** (.059)
Months since birth /12	-.021* (.011)	-.021* (.011)	-.021 (.011)	-.021 (.011)	-.020 (.011)
<i>Pre-birth lifestyle * parenthood interactions:</i>					
Leisure (std.)		-.029 (.035)	-.029 (.035)	-.053 (.036)	-.051 (.036)
Work hours (std.)			-.030 (.037)	-.032 (.037)	-.024 (.038)
Leisure (std.) * Work hours (std.)				-.085** (.032)	-.086** (.032)
<i>Time-varying lifestyle:</i>					
Leisure (std.)					.006 (.016)
Work hours (std.)					.021 (.022)
Employed					-.013 (.052)
Constant	-.896*** (.168)	-.896*** (.168)	-.890*** (.168)	-.888*** (.168)	-.863*** (.176)
N <sub>observations</sub>	6,825	6,825	6,825	6,825	6,825
N <sub>individuals</sub>	1,272	1,272	1,272	1,272	1,272

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001