

# Rethinking happiness (measures)

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## Introduction

- Sociological research on happiness: happiness = life satisfaction
- Psychological perspective: happiness = many faceted construct with (at least) two distinct components: hedonic & eudaimonic well-being
- Aim of this research: discovering the potentials of this perspective for sociological studies

## Theoretical concepts

### ➤ Hedonic well-being

Maximisation (minimisation) of experiences of pleasure (displeasure) of mind and body → high levels of positive emotions, low levels of negative emotions

### ➤ Eudaimonic well-being

Living an autonomous, self-determined life in accordance with one's true self and perceived development of one's best potentials → sense of purpose and meaning in life

### ➤ Life satisfaction

More general, overarching concept which refers to an assessment of people's feelings and attitudes towards their life as a whole (plus, in some cases, towards subdomains of their life)

## Data & Measures

- **Data:** British Household Panel Survey, waves 6-10 ('96-'00) & 12-18 ('02-'08)

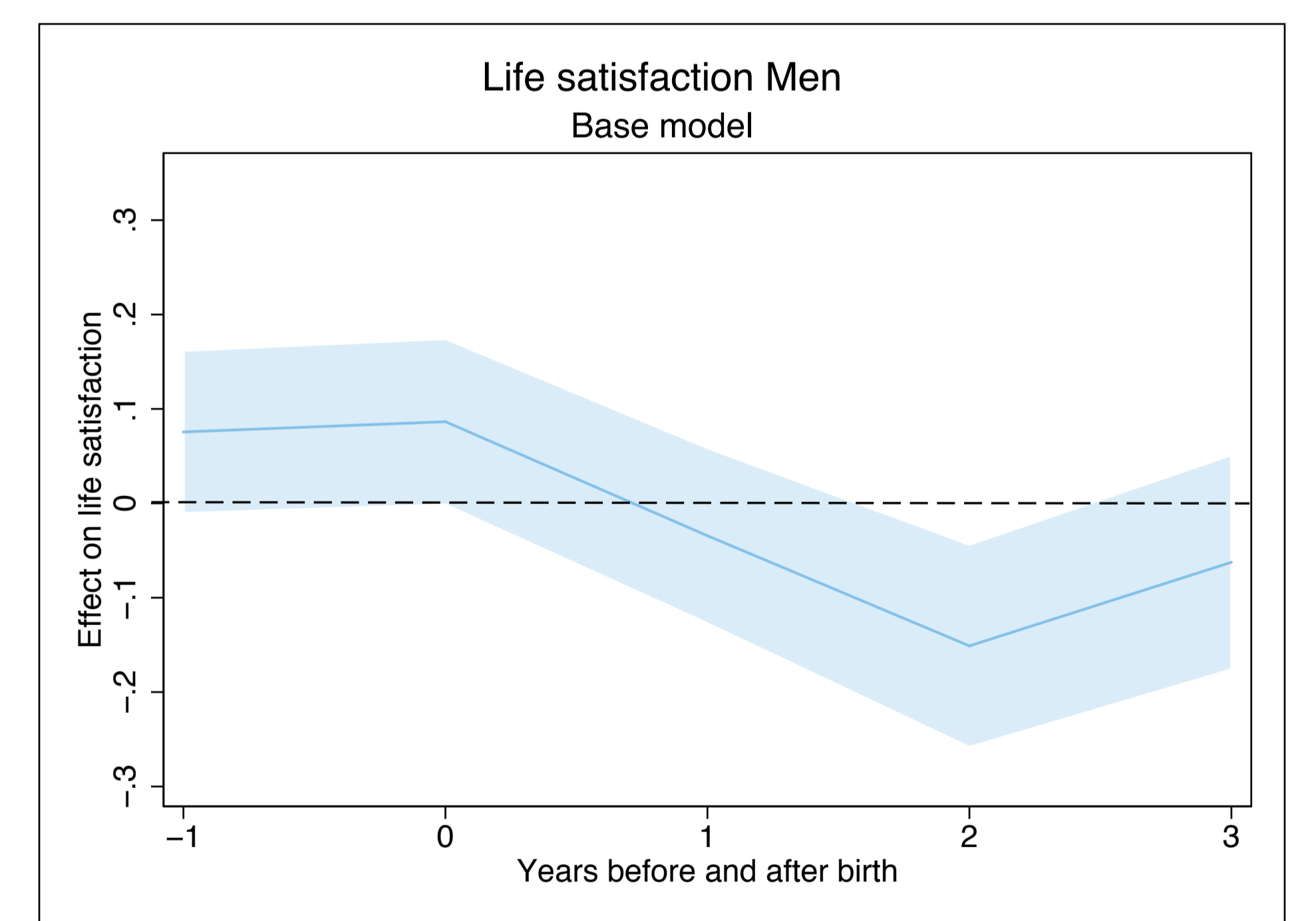
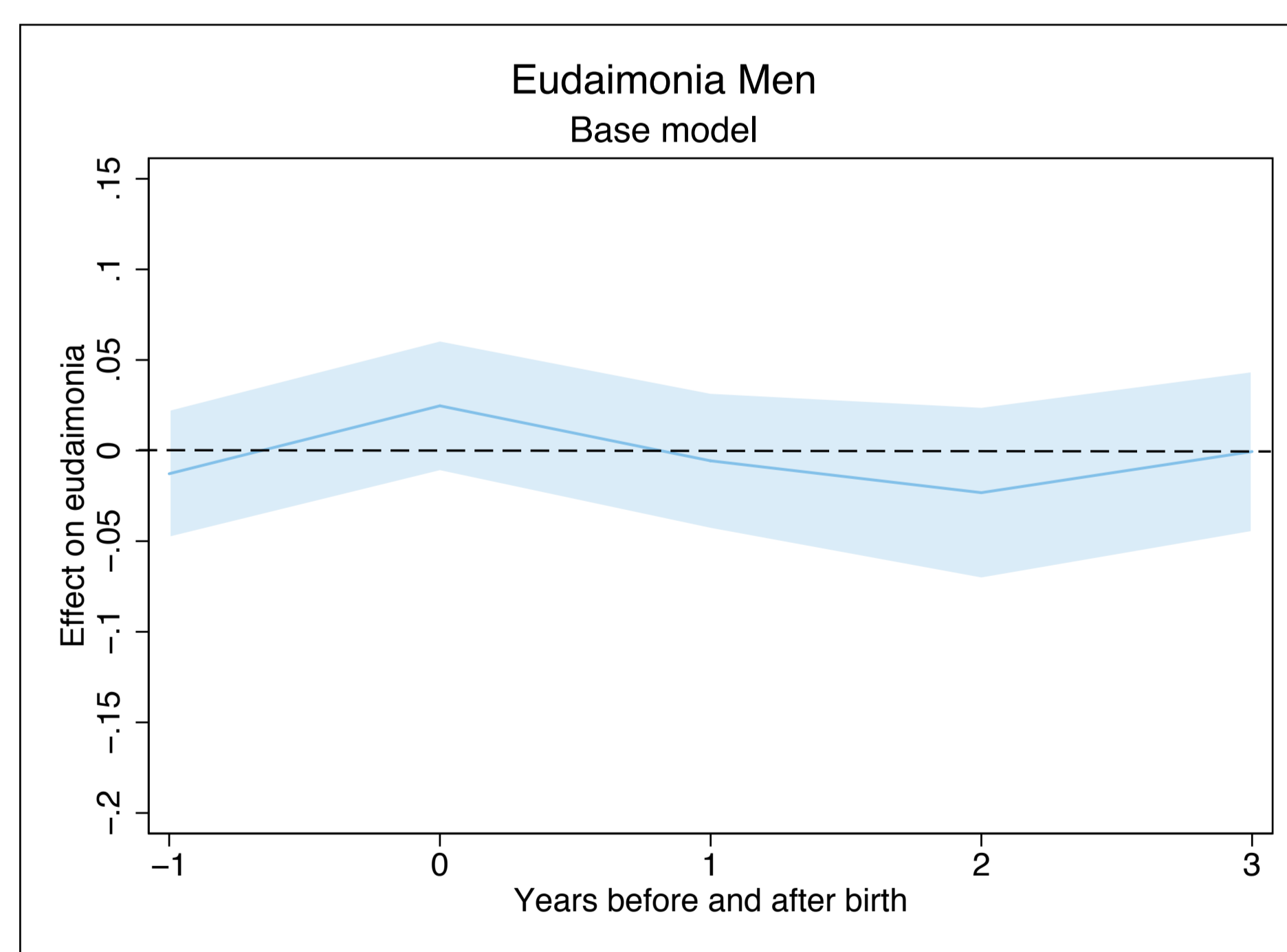
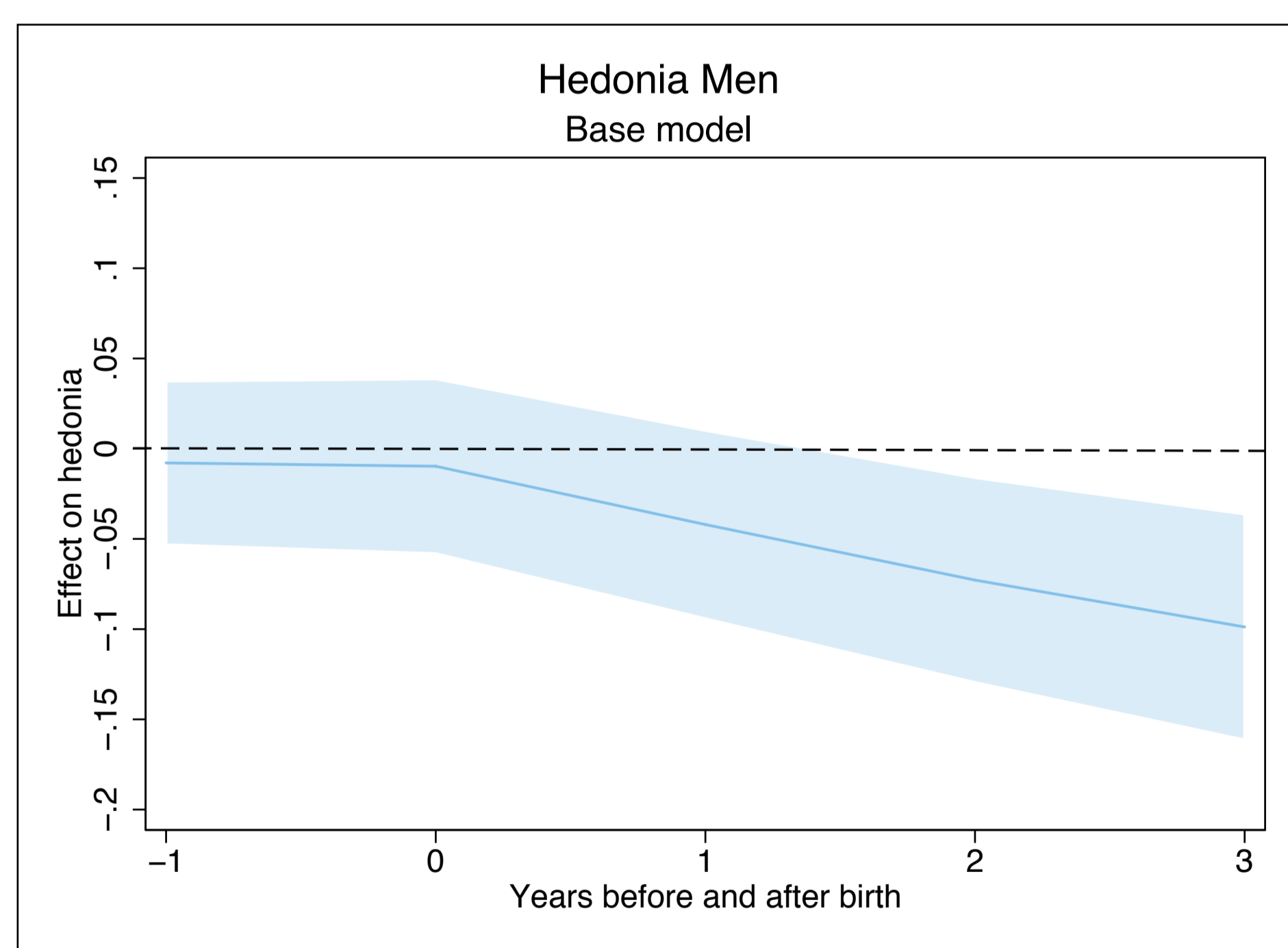
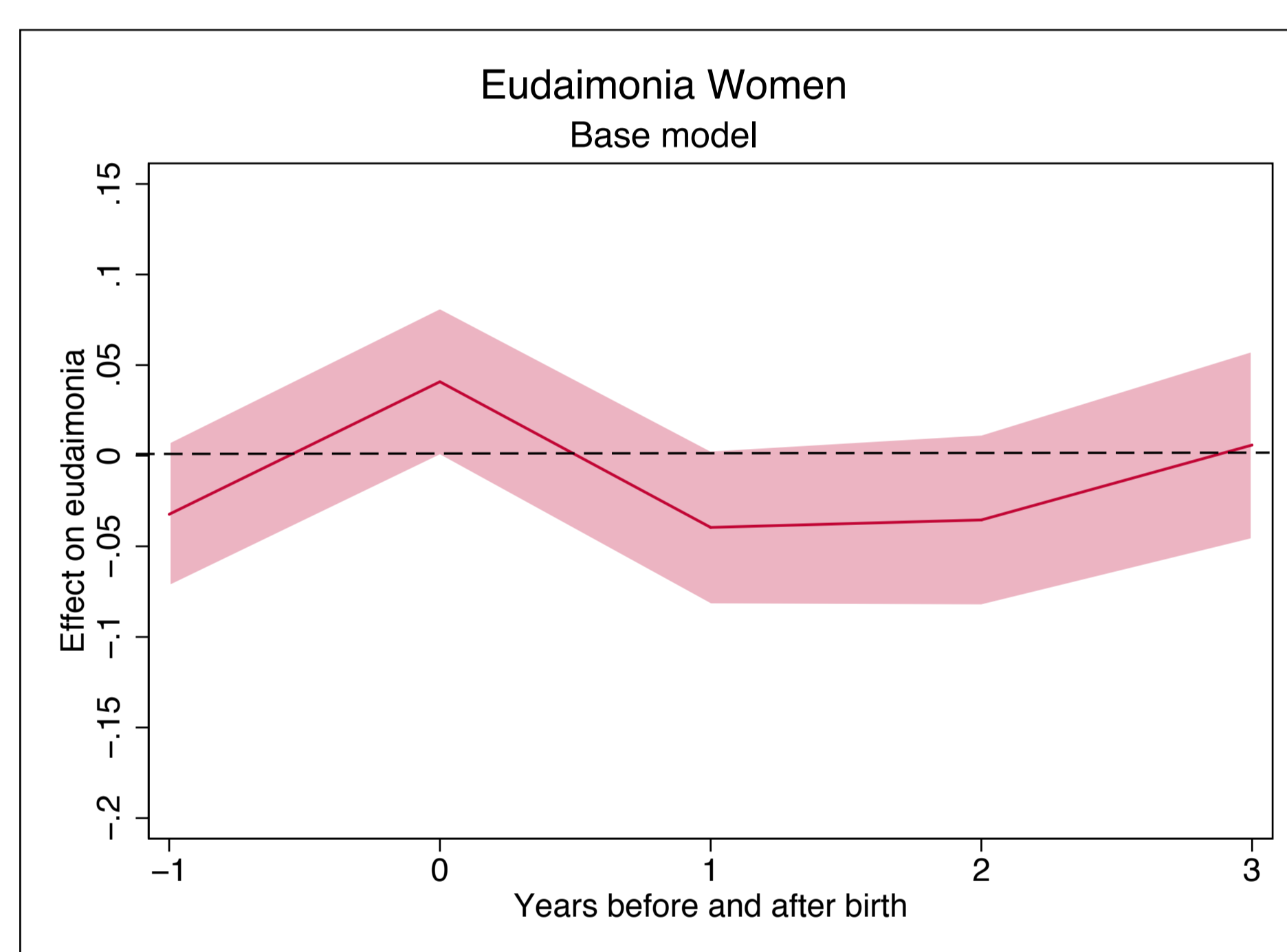
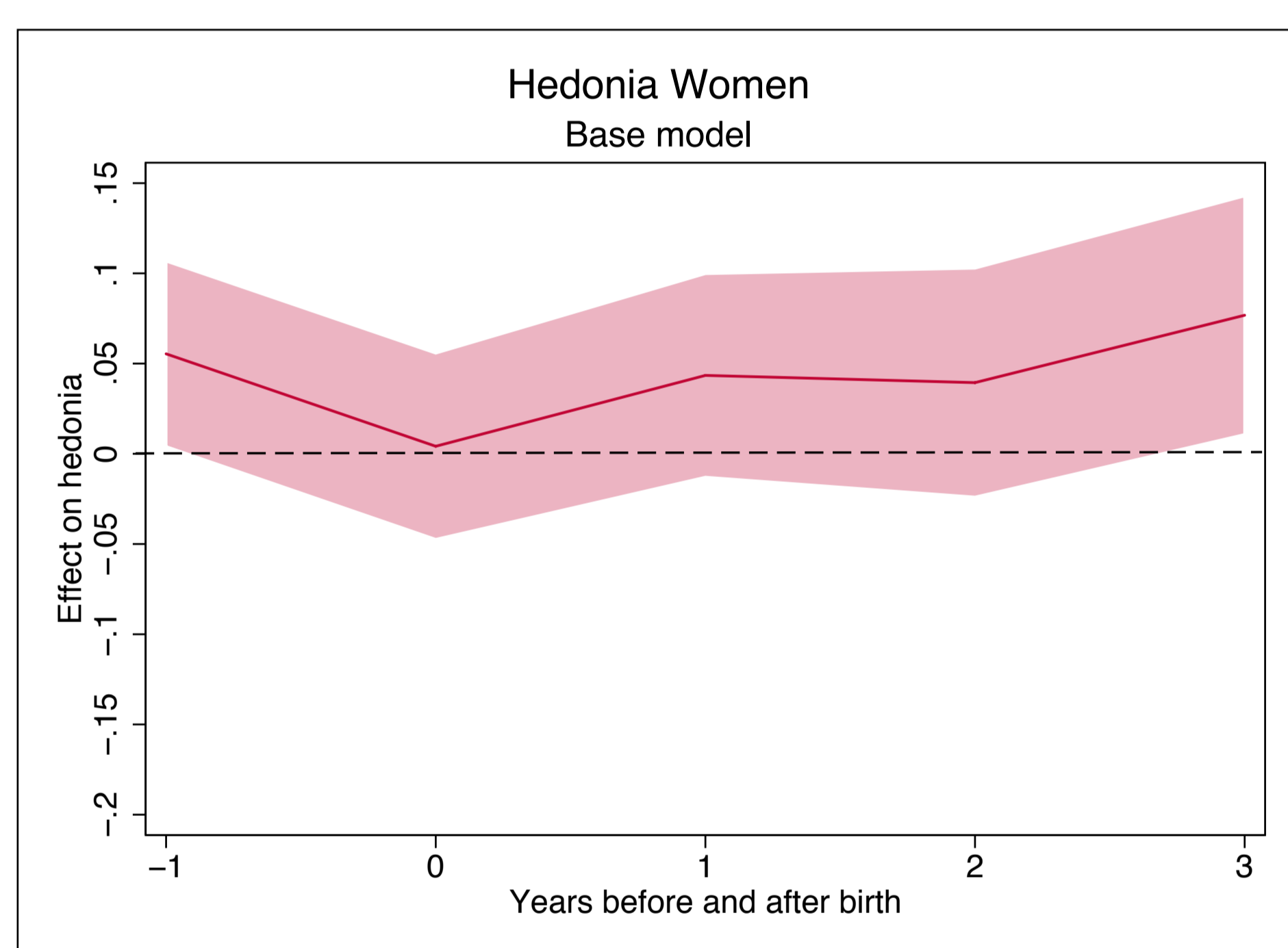
- **Operationalisation Hedonia / Eudaimonia:** Factor analysis of GHQ-12 scale

Have you recently...	Hedonia	Eudaimonia
...lost much sleep over worry?	0.756	0.117
...felt constantly under strain?	0.801	0.096
...felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?	0.749	0.246
...been feeling unhappy or depressed?	0.800	0.249
...felt that you were playing a useful part in things?	0.137	0.751
...felt capable of making decisions about things?	0.128	0.806
...been able to face up to problems?	0.301	0.701

- **Operationalisation life satisfaction:** Standard single-item question  
*How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with your life overall?*

- **Empirical application:** Fixed-Effects-Models; separate for men and women

## Empirical application: Effects of children on parental happiness



Scale: 1 (low) – 4 (high)

Scale: 1 (low) – 4 (high)

Scale: 1 (low) – 7 (high)

## Results

- Effects of the birth of a first child show diverging tendencies for the three different dimensions over the course of time
  - Consistently positive (negative) effect on mothers' (fathers') *hedonic well-being*
  - Alternating positive and negative effects on mothers' and fathers' *eudaimonic well-being*
  - Initial positive effects followed by negative effects on mothers' and fathers' *life satisfaction*
- However: effects not significant in most time periods

## Discussion & Conclusion

- Measures constructed here can only be considered rough approximations of the constructs hedonia and eudaimonia
- Particularly critical: operationalisation of hedonic well-being based on items assessing the *absence of negative affective states*, while the *presence of positive affective states* (not in the data) is an equally important component of hedonic well-being
- Summary: Results can be regarded as a first indication that the one-dimensional concept 'life-satisfaction' does not capture all aspects of happiness and that further pursuit of a multidimensional conceptualisation might indeed prove beneficial to future advances of sociological research