Parenthood and Well-being

The Late Years

Thorsten Kneip
Gerrit Bauer
Martina Brandt
Christian Deindl
• Common beliefs (Hansen 2012)
  – Parents are happier
  – Childless are lonely
  – Childless are hedonistic

• Previous research has produced competing results concerning the gap in well-being between parents and non-parents
  – Cross-sectional evidence: parental happiness gap
  – Longitudinal evidence: a short-term positive effect with a back-to-baseline adaptation or long-term negative effects
Motivation & Background

Effect on life satisfaction

Women

Men

Time before and after birth (6-month intervals)
Motivation & Background

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• What happens in the long run?
  – How do children affect parental well-being in older age?
  – Do children buffer negative life events?

• Methodological issues
  – Different well-being measures & dimensions
  – Selection into parenthood
  – Endogeneity of social support
• Value-of-Children (Hoffman & Hoffman 1973)
  – Love, meaning, fulfillment, excitement, happiness
  – and esp. in old age: companionship, support
  – “fear of loneliness and depression” (Hansen 2012)

• Changes in social networks across the life course, concentration on close relations (=family) in older age (Wrzus et al. 2013)
  – Socio-emotional selectivity: active selection due to changing needs (Carstensen 1992)
  – Convoy: passive process due to life events (Antonucci 2014)

• Investment in future well-being?
  – Life satisfaction effect of parenthood changes from negative to positive with higher age (Stanca 2009, Margolis 2010)
Fig. 1 The effect of parenthood on life satisfaction by gender and age (ceteris paribus) across 94 countries (WVS). All $p < .01$ except age 45–54 and age 55–65 ($p > .05$). Source: Stanca (2009, some ancillary analyses provided via personal communication)

Source: Hansen (2012), p.36
Our Contribution

• How do different dimensions of well-being develop for parents and non-parents in later life?
  – Holistic view

• Do children “buffer” the effect of negative life events?
  – Transition-centered view

• Causal effect of children (as potential resources) vs. selection into parenthood
Identification

Well-being

Parental status

Age

e.g. cohort, country, SES, biography
Identification

- Parental status
- Well-being
- Chronic disease
- Age
Parental status

Support

Well-being

Chronic disease

Age
Identification

Parental status

Support

Well-being

"Need"

Chronic disease

Age
Chronic disease
Parental status
Support
“Need”
Well-being
Age
Chronic disease
Data & Methods

- SHARE W1-W6
- Well-being is a broad concept comprising emotional aspects as well as evaluations of one’s satisfaction with life in general and in different domains (Diener et al. 1999)
  - General measure: life satisfaction (single item, 0-10)
  - Mental and emotional aspects: depressiveness (Euro-D, 12 items, 0-12)
  - Quality of life in older age (Hyde et al. 2003): control-autonomy-self-realization-pleasure (CASP, 12 items, 12-48)
- Life event: Onset of chronic disease
- Linear fixed effects models
- FE Growth Curve Model for age trajectories
- IPW
Growth Curves

Life Satisfaction

Parents

Childless

Age

50 60 70 80

7 7.5 8 8.5 9

*
Growth Curves

Life Satisfaction vs. Age

- Orange line: Parents
- Gray line: Childless

Age ranges from 50 to 80, and Life Satisfaction ranges from 7 to 9.
Growth Curves

Depressiveness

Parents
Childless

Age

50 60 70 80

Depressiveness

1.5 2 2.5 3

50 60 70 80

Growth Curves

Depressiveness vs. Age

- Parents
- Childless

Age (50 to 80)
Depressiveness (50 to 0)
Growth Curves

![Graph showing growth curves for parents and childless individuals over age range 50 to 80. The graph indicates a peak in CASP12 scores around age 70 for both groups, with a notable asterisk on the childless curve.]
Growth Curves

- **Parents**
- **Childless**

CASP12 vs. Age

- The graph shows the comparison between parents and childless individuals over age.
- The orange line represents parents, and the gray line represents childless individuals.
- Significant differences are indicated by asterisks (*) at specific age points.
Effects of Life Events

Life Satisfaction

Chronic

Chronic x has children
Effects of Life Events

Depressiveness

Chronic

Chronic x has children

-0.2 0 0.2 0.4 0.6
Effects of Life Events

CASP12

Chronic

Chronic x has children
Summary

• Age-related increase in life satisfaction, stronger for childless.
  – selection effect

• Age-related decline in CASP shifted to higher age for parents

• No difference in terms of depressive symptoms

• For all outcomes: health deterioration effect is less pronounced for parents
  – For life satisfaction, this is again due to a selection effect
Discussion

• How to get closer to mechanisms?
• There may be heterogeneity in levels of supportiveness BUT: support is endogenous!

Next steps:
• Other life events, e.g. widowhood, unemployment (firm closure)
• Analyses by gender (of child) & welfare state type (degree of defamilization)
• Attrition
Thank You
Backup
Kernel Density Estimate

Prediction model includes: marital status, educational status, wealth, (log) income, chronic conditions, gender, cohort, country, age, (log); Pseudo-$R^2= .24$
Prevalence of having a chronic disease

P(Chronic disease)

Parents
Childless

Age

50 60 70 80

0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1.0