

Parenthood and life satisfaction in Switzerland. Methodological challenges and substantive results.

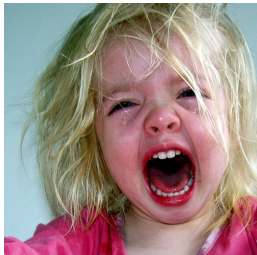
Małgorzata Mikucka, Ester Rizzi

UCL, Louvain-la-Neuve



July 16, 2015, ESRA, Reykjavik

Paradox of parenthood?



People want to have children, but...

“Trajectories of parental life satisfaction” ?

- ▶ Fixed effect models (within variation), clustered standard errors
- ▶ Life satisfaction regressed on the age of a child + control variables
- ▶ Separate for men and women
- ▶ Separate for first and second child
- ▶ Previous studies:
 - ▶ Myrskylä & Margolis (2014): GSOEP and BHPS,
 - ▶ Clark et al (2008): GSOEP,
 - ▶ Clark & Georgellis (2013): BHPS,
 - ▶ Frijters et al (2011): HILDA

This analysis

Goal:

Discuss the consequences of methodological choices

1. Which reference category to use?
2. On which sample estimate the models?
3. Does coding of the process make a difference?

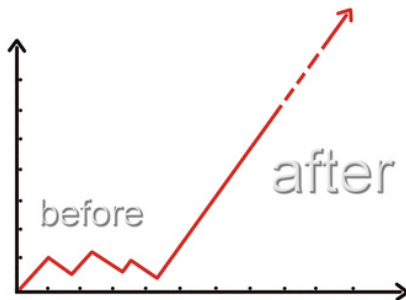
Applies to various types of events and transitions

Tool:

Schweizer Haushalt-Panel
Panel suisse de ménages
Swiss Household Panel



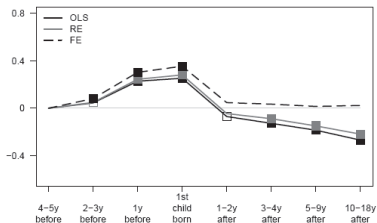
Which reference category to use?



Which reference category to use?

Problem

NOT necessarily the moment just before the event happened



Event?

- Birth?
- Pregnancy?
- Decision to have a child?
- Factors which trigger the decision?

Myrskylä & Margolis (2014)

Anticipation effect

we need to account for it to properly estimate the effect of parenthood on life satisfaction

Which reference category to use?

Objective

To chose reference before the increase begins. “True baseline”

Evidence

- consistently observed 1 year before the birth;
- in some studies also 2-3 years before the birth;

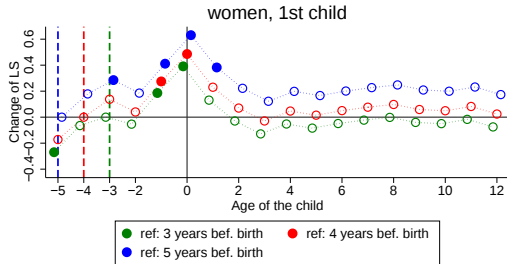
Practice

Myrskylä & Margolis (2014): 4-5 or 3-5 years before the birth;

Frijters et al (2011): year 0;

Clark et al (2008): separate pre-birth and post-birth estimation;

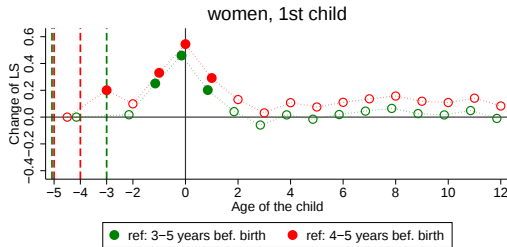
Which reference category to use?



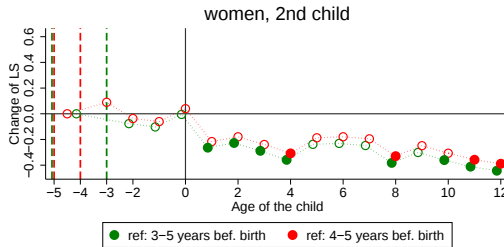
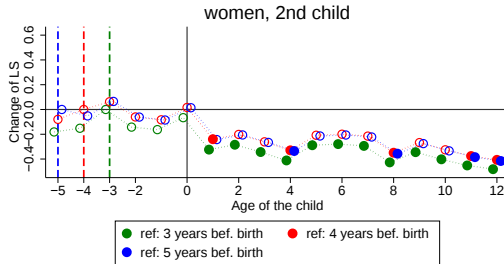
When does anticipation effect start?

How long does the temporary increase last?

What is the effect size?



Which reference category to use?



Does having two children make women consistently less happy?

On which sample estimate the models?



On which sample estimate the models?

Problem

3 processes:

- ▶ aging of the child,
- ▶ aging of the parent,
- ▶ historical time.

We need a control group to estimate them properly.

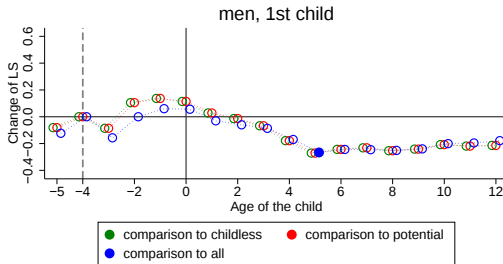
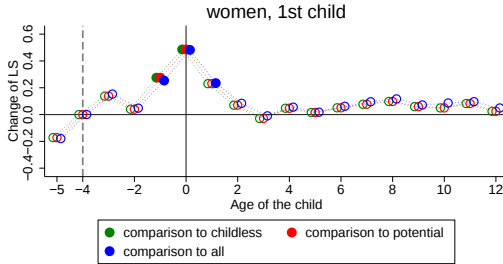
On which sample estimate the models?

Practice

- ▶ Myrskylä & Margolis (2014): “we focus on those who became parents during the observation window, excluding those who had children before entering the surveys and those who were childless at the end of our follow-up”
- ▶ Frijters et al (2011), Clark et al (2008), Baranowska & Matysiak (2011): whole sample (with age constraints)
- ▶ Brüderl & Ludwig (2014): recommendation “Person-years of those never marrying are included, because they provide the control group to estimating the common age effect. Further, person-years after a marriage dissolved contribute nothing to estimating the marriage effect and are therefore discarded.”

◀ ◻ ▶ ◀ ◻ ▶ ◀ ≡ ▶ ◀ ≡ ▶ ≡ 🔍 ↺ ↻

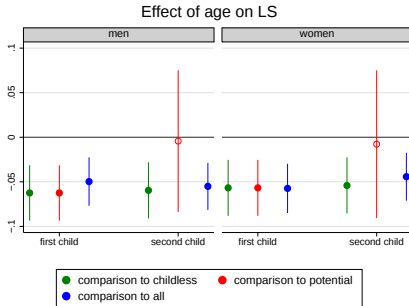
On which sample estimate the models?



How long does the positive effect for women last?

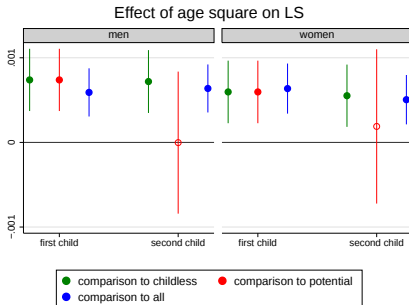
Is the effect negative for men or not?

On which sample estimate the models?



Are some samples better than others?

Some samples more selective than others – it may be problematic for estimation.



Does coding of the process make a difference?



Does coding of the process make a difference?

Problem

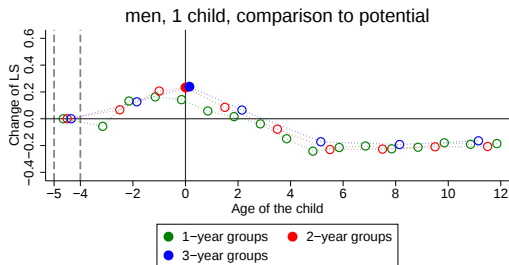
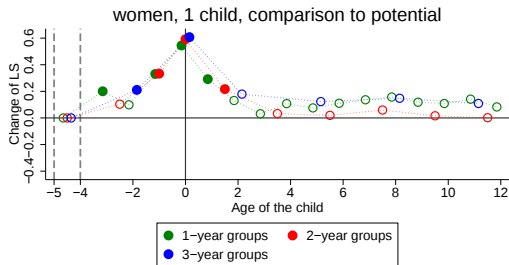
If age of the child is coded as a set of dummies, we end up with many variables. Grouping them together may make interpretation easier, and larger categories may lead to stronger estimates.

Does coding of the process make a difference?

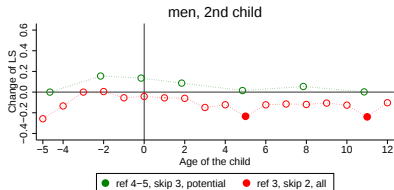
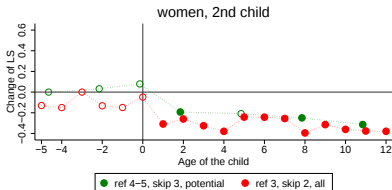
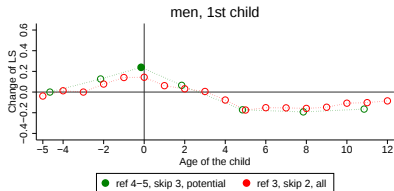
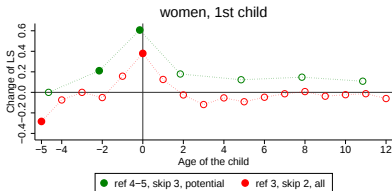
Practice

- ▶ Myrskylä & Margolis (2014): 2-3 before, 1 before, year of birth, 1-2 years, 3-4 years, 5-9 years, 10-18 years;
- ▶ Frijters et al (2011): quarterly data;
- ▶ Clark et al (2008): yearly;
- ▶ Baranowska & Matysiak (2011): is the youngest child over the age of one or not?

Does coding of the process make a difference?



Are men happy to have their first child or not?



Among women life satisfaction increases in the year of first childbirth. **There is no significant anticipation effect.** Anticipation effect is significant 2 years before the birth.

Birth of the first child does not affect life satisfaction of fathers. Life satisfaction of fathers increases in the year when their first child is born.

The effect of having the 2nd child is consistently negative for women, less consistently negative for men. The effect of having the 2nd child is in some periods negative for mothers and has no adverse effect on life satisfaction of fathers.



Recommendation

- ▶ investigate the sensitivity of results;
- ▶ search for theoretical motives of methodological decisions;

malgorzata.mikucka@uclouvain.be

Thank you!