Does it take a village to raise a child? Buffering effect of family support during parenthood.

Małgorzata Mikucka, Ester Rizzi

UCL, Louvain-la-Neuve

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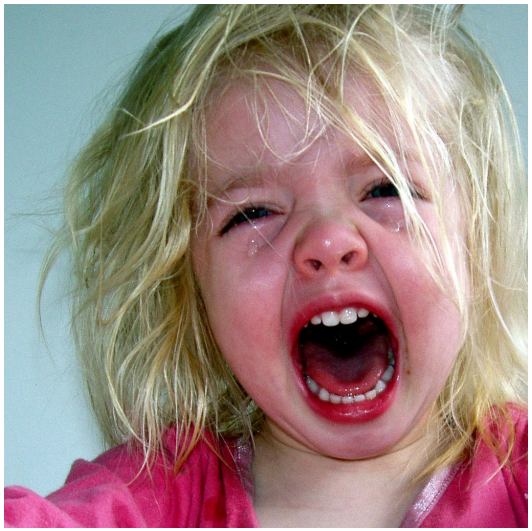
June 2, 2015, Lausanne

“It takes a village...”

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Parenthood may be difficult







only few studies demonstrated a sustained positive effect of parenthood on life satisfaction (Baetschmann et al., 2012; Kohler et al., 2005; Pollmann-Schult, 2014; Aassve et al., 2012)

the effect of parenthood on subjective well-being differs across individuals (Galatzer-Levy et al. 2011, Myrskylä and Margolis, 2012)

Support from relatives



Families provide extensive help to parents of young children, mainly by offering childcare and housework, advice and information, as well as material support (Chan, 2009; Chan and Ermisch, 2011; Hank and Buber, 2009)

and family support is activated in response to critical, difficult events (Eggebeen and Davey, 1998)

Buffering mechanism

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During difficult events social support may act as a buffer, alleviating the negative consequences of the event (on subjective well-being, health, et.c.) (Cohen, 1985; Thoits, 1982)



Our question

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Does the support from relatives acts as a buffer
(improves the experience of parenthood)
in contemporary Switzerland?

Hypotheses

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H1 Availability of support from relatives increases in response to parenthood.
... after the birth?
... during the care intense stages?
... later?

H2 Persons with higher support from relatives experience more positive changes of life satisfaction in response to parenthood.

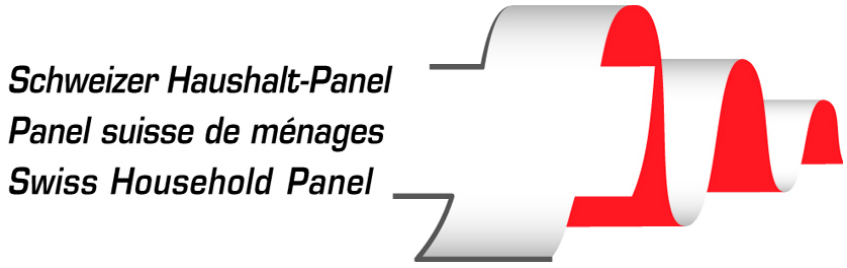
Why bother?



Switzerland – do networks compensate the weak state support?

under-investigated channel through which social capital and networks make people's lives better

Data



- waves 2-12 (years 2000-2011)
- sample: parents, prospective parents, and childless persons, limits on own (18-70) and child's age (> 30)

model	N	N(id)	N parents
Δ contact, men, 1*st* child	23,085	4,952	12,300
Δ contact, women, 3*rd* child	31,080	5,938	4,965

Method

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- fixed-effect models: focus on change
- long-term perspective
- the main challenge: distinguish between the historical time, aging of the parent, and aging of the children

Measures

- How frequent are your contacts with these relatives? *(relatives living outside of respondent's household, with whom the respondent is on good terms and enjoys a close relationship)*
- If necessary, in your opinion, to what extent can these relatives or your children who do not live in your household provide you with practical help (this means concrete help or useful advice)? 0 – *"not at all"*, 10 – *"a great deal"*
- To what extent can these relatives or these children be available in case of need and show understanding, by talking with you for example? 0 – *"not at all"*, 10 – *"a great deal"*

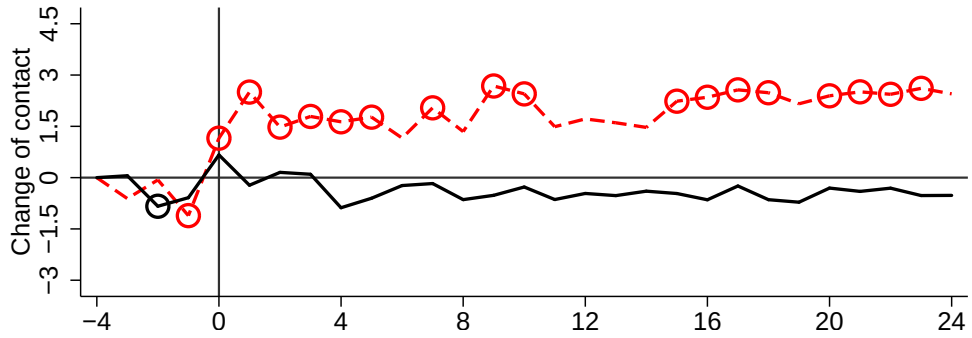
Likely parents, but we do not know if parents are alive, stay in contact, etc.

- In general, how satisfied are you with your life? 0 – *"not at all satisfied"*, 10 – *"completely satisfied"*

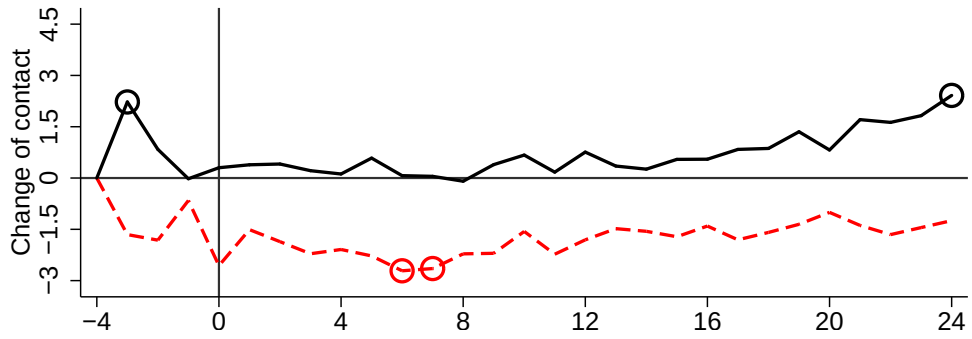
Does the support increase?

Does the frequency of contact increase?

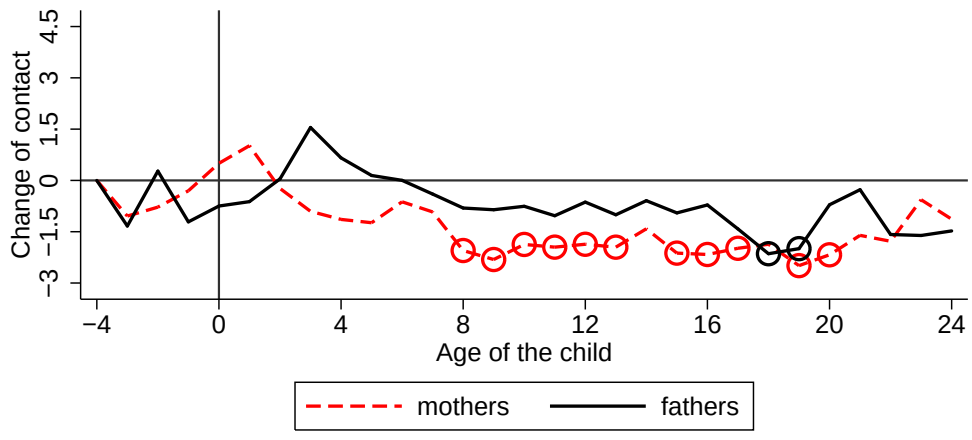
1st child:



2nd child:



3rd child:



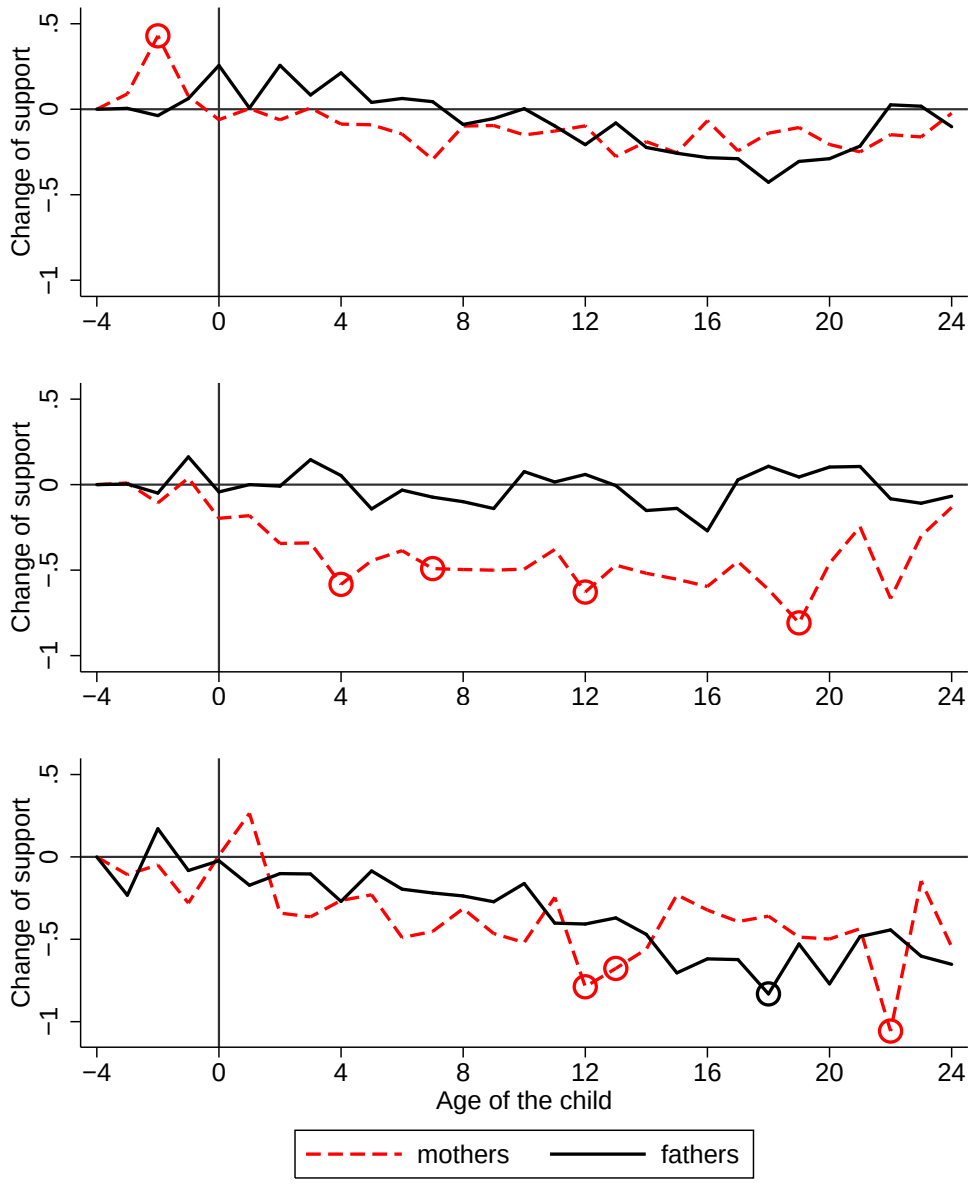
reference: 4+ years before the birth

Does the practical support increase?

1st child:

2nd child:

3rd child:



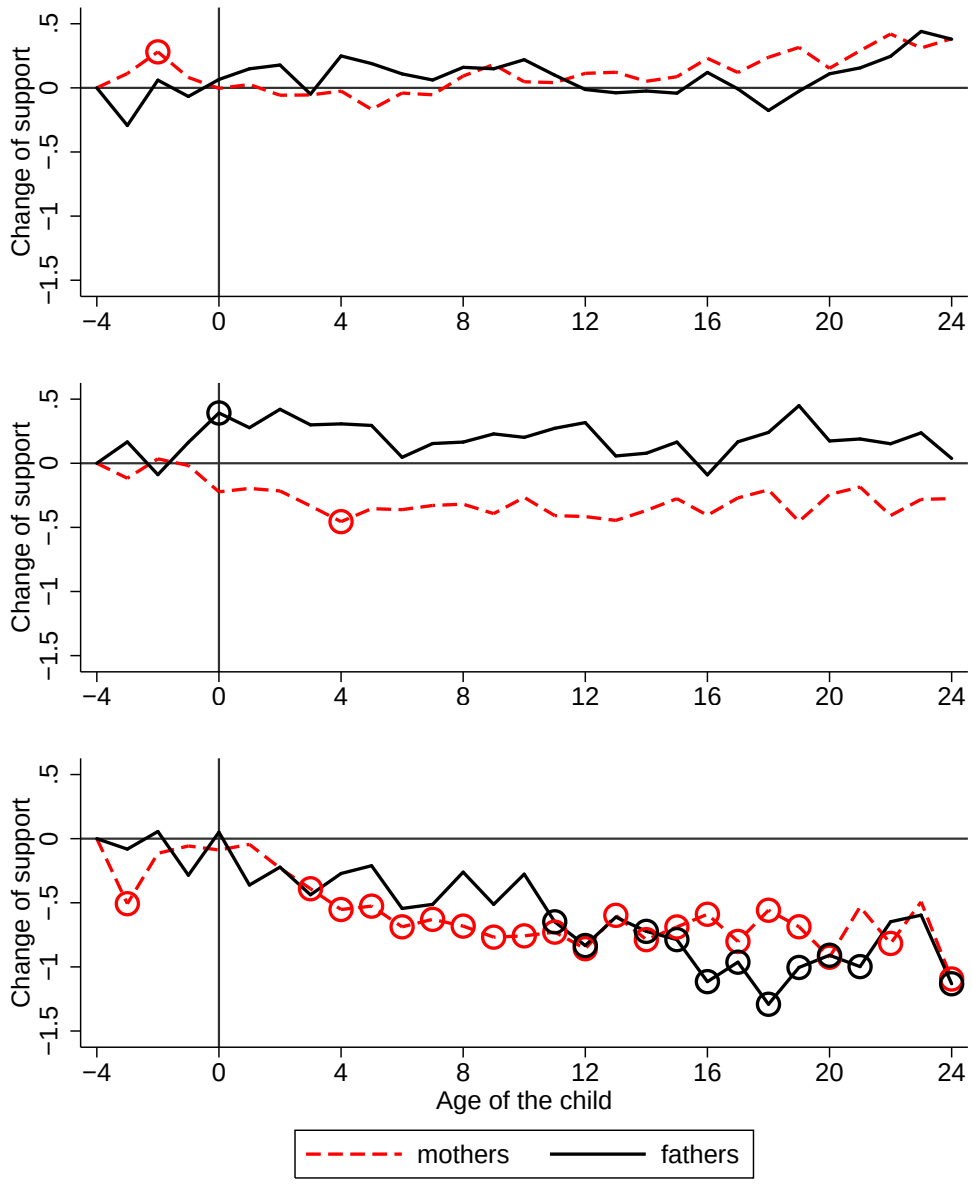
reference: 4+ years before the birth

Does the emotional support increase?

1st child:

2nd child:

3rd child:



reference: 4+ years before the birth

Summing up

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H1 Availability of support from relatives increases in response to parenthood.

- contact frequency increases among women after the first birth
- BUT contact frequency is lower for mothers of two or more (age 6-7) or three or more (age 8-20) children than of those with one child or childless
- parents of two or more children receive systematically less support from non-resident relatives than childless or those with only one child

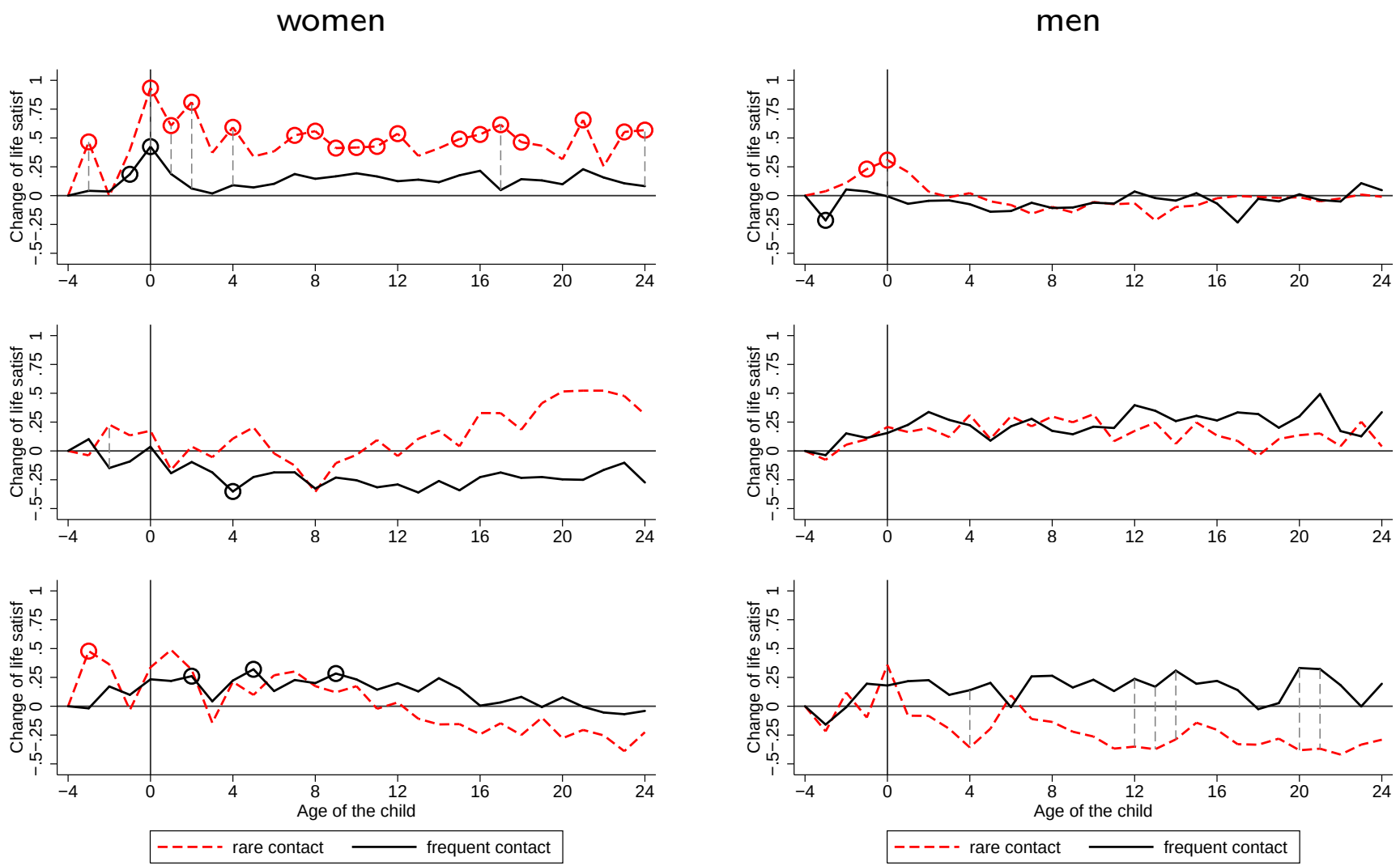
Are parents with higher support happier?

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- Frequent contact: $>= 4$
- High practical support: $>= 7$
- High emotional support: $>= 7.9$

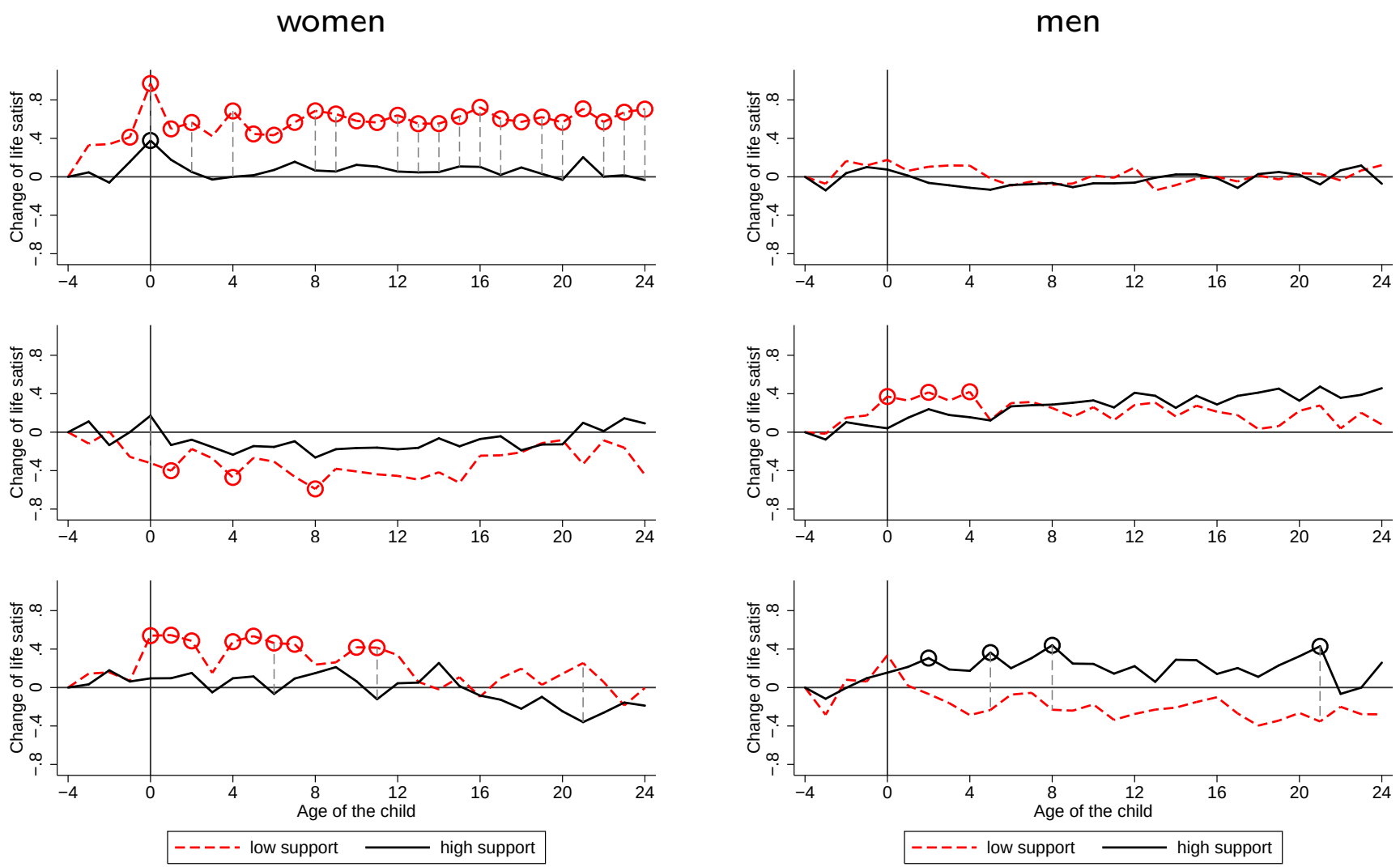
Are parents with higher frequency of contact happier?

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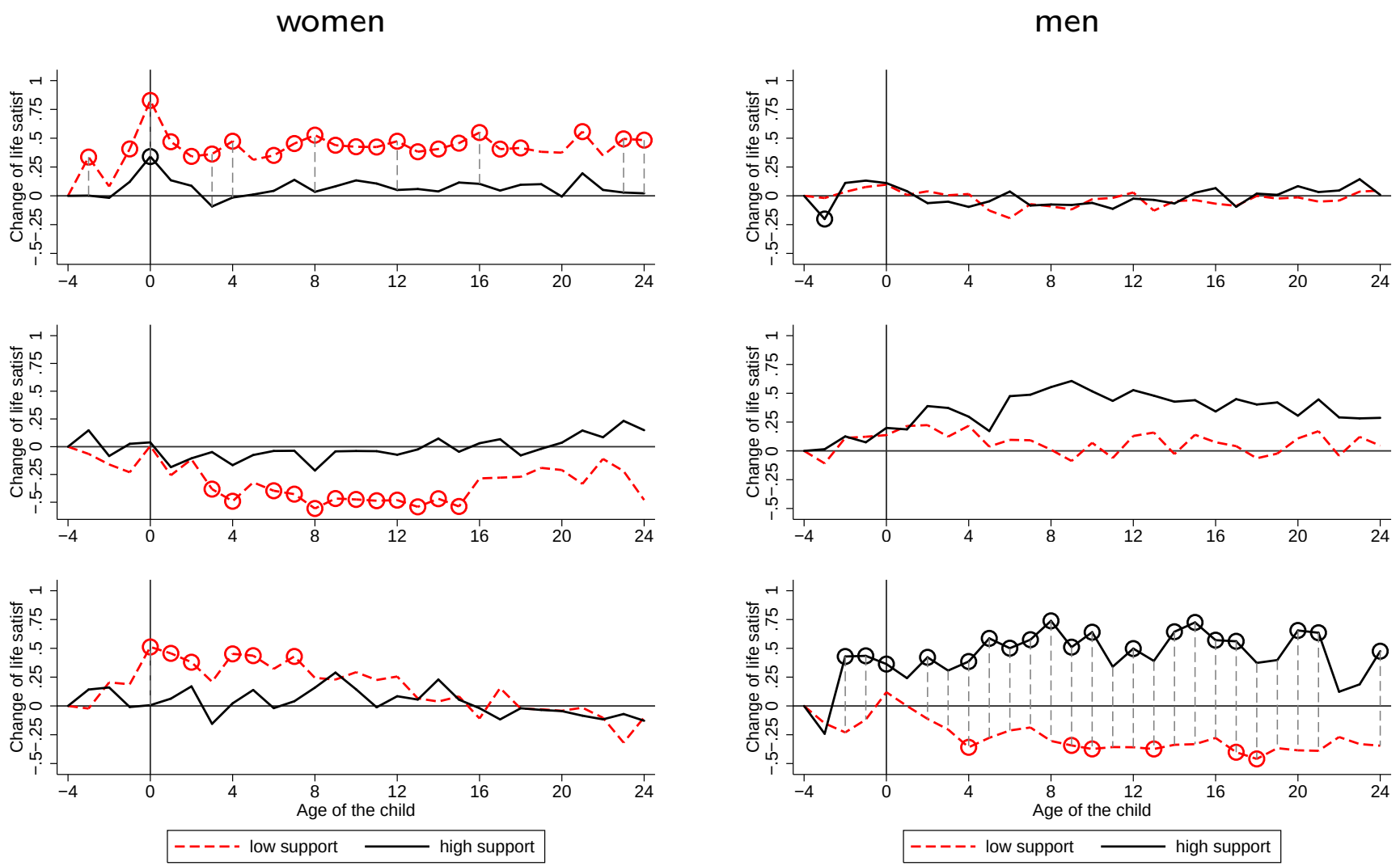
reference: 4+ years before the birth

Are parents with higher practical support happier?



reference: 4+ years before the birth

Are parents with higher emotional support happier?



reference: 4+ years before the birth

Summing up

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H2 Persons with higher support from relatives experience more positive changes of life satisfaction in response to parenthood.

- 1*st* child for women:
  women with lower support or less frequent contact experience more consistent increase of life satisfaction
  - are contact and support just indicators of unobserved problems? ($\rightarrow$)
- a consistent buffering effect among fathers having their third child – strongest for emotional support

Are contact and support just indicators of unobserved problems?

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Are contact and support just indicators of unobserved problems?

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	contact frequency	practical support	emotional support
primary education		reference	
secondary education	1.05	1.22	1.15
tertiary eduation	1.36*	1.36*	1.25
household income	1.19**	1.11*	1.07
women	2.32***	1.84***	1.91***
born bofore 1950	0.35***	0.19***	0.36***
born 1950-59	0.42***	0.26***	0.45***
born 1960-69	0.75*	0.69***	0.79*
born 1970+		reference	
Swiss passport and language		reference	
Other passport and language	1.50	0.89	1.52
Swiss passport, other language	1.57*	1.59*	2.04***
Other passport, Swiss language	0.57***	0.46***	0.67**
age at 1st birth	1.00	1.01	1.00
Observations	2,336	2,336	2,336
Pseudo R^2	0.078	0.100	0.058

logistic regression (OR), sample: parents with 1 child

Conclusions (1)

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H1 Availability of support from relatives increases in response to parenthood.

- only contact frequency at first birth among women
- decline of contact and support in families with 2 or more children

Conclusions (2)

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H2 Persons with higher support from relatives experience more positive changes of life satisfaction in response to parenthood.

- some buffering effect only among fathers of 3 or more children
- opposite mothers having their first child
- but frequent contact and high support is a sign of privilege rather than of problems
- $\rightarrow$ selection?
  - child means more for those who have less?
  - stronger "taste for children" necessary to trigger parenthood among those who have low support?

malgorzata.mikucka@uclouvain.be

Thank you!

