

Introduction

- Becoming a parent is a major, pivotal life course event (Galdiolo & Roskam, 2012). While many people desire having children, research on parenthood and life satisfaction suggests that the emotional benefits of parenthood are outweighed by time, psychosocial stress and financial costs (Polmann-Schult, 2014).
- It has been suggested that parenthood has a more negative effect on life satisfaction for women as compared to men (Hansen, 2012).
- The aim of the current study is to extend findings regarding gender and life satisfaction across transition to parenthood, by looking at changes in satisfaction in various life domains across a 4-year time period.

Method

- We used data from the German Panel of Intimate Relationships and Family Dynamics (pairfam), an annual representative national survey available from 2008 on. Only individuals who were childless during the first annual survey (2008) but had a child in the second (2009) were selected for the experimental group.
- Participants included 65 men (mean age=31.52, range 25-37) and 72 women (mean age=28.83, range 24-38). A control group of childless married individuals was randomly selected. The control group consisted of 50 men (mean age=31.66, range 25-37) and 50 women (mean age=29.60, range 25-37). T-tests revealed no age differences between the control and experimental groups.

Results

- We performed Repeated Measures ANOVA analyses to understand whether there are changes in satisfaction with the life domains over time, separately for women and men.
- Compared to men, women experience more deterioration in satisfaction with various life domains (Table 1) across transition to parenthood.
- Sex life satisfaction is an exception, where men experience more deterioration.
- Women's loss of satisfaction with their career is partially compensated over time.
- Women's relationship satisfaction decreases over time, as does their perception of their male partner's relationship satisfaction. In contrast, men experience no change in satisfaction or perception of change in partner's relationship satisfaction.
- In the control group, no changes were found in satisfaction with the life domains during the four years, except for a significant decrease in satisfaction with sex life among female participants.

Discussion

- Becoming parents affects satisfaction in different life domains, and these effects are usually negative and more substantial in women.
- The current study does not support folk wisdom that holds that women need children in order to feel happy and fulfilled (de Vaus, 2002; Inglehart et al., 2004; van de Kaa, 2001) and that having children is good for romantic relationships (Hansen, 2012).
- Sex life satisfaction deterioration in men is in line with previous qualitative research about the effect of childbirth on men's sexual expression (MacAdam, Huuva and Berterö, 2011; Olsson et al., 2009).
- Future studies may include cross-cultural comparisons of the changes in life satisfaction domains, and identify factors that predict this change in satisfaction, such as traditional gender role perceptions, unemployment and support networks.

Table 1. Satisfaction with life domains, by gender and time

		Pre-Parenthood	Post-Parenthood (Months)			F	p
			0-12	12-24	24-36		
School, Education & Career	Men	7.61	7.25	7.54	7.53	0.45	0.72
	Women	7.52	7.56	6.69	7.37	3.56	0.02
Leisure Activities & Hobbies	Men	7.03	6.37	6.31	6.37	2.19	0.10
	Women	7.22	7.17	6.35	6.93	3.98	0.01
Friends & Social Contacts	Men	7.61	7.42	7.12	6.98	2.14	0.10
	Women	8.26	8.05	7.64	7.61	3.84	0.01
Sex Life	Men	7.08	6.15	5.88	4.98	8.88	0.00
	Women	7.02	7.15	6.47	6.00	3.91	0.01
Romantic Relationship	Men	8.11	8.16	7.95	7.78	0.35	0.79
	Women	8.51	8.55	8.11	7.64	5.08	0.02
Estimation of Partner's Satisfaction with Relationship	Men	7.91	7.87	7.74	7.57	0.26	0.86
	Women	8.53	8.51	7.94	7.31	6.84	0.00