Parenthood and Life Satisfaction in Europe: The Role of Family Policies and Working Time Flexibility

Matthias Pollmann-Schult¹

Received: 28 October 2016 / Accepted: 10 May 2017 / Published online: 19 July 2017
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2017

Abstract The life satisfaction of parents residing with dependent children varies greatly between countries. This article examines how country-level characteristics—the provision of family allowances and formal child care, and the level of working time flexibility—account for these cross-national differences, using data from the European Social Survey from 2004 and 2010 for 27 countries. Parents report greater life satisfaction in countries that offer generous financial benefits to families, high child care provision, and high working time flexibility than parents residing in counties with low levels of support. Results also show that these national contextual factors are associated with lower levels of financial strain and work–life conflicts among parents. These findings suggest that the mitigating effect of family benefits, child care provision, and working time flexibility on the psychosocial and financial burdens of parenthood is a key mechanism in the association between national contextual factors and parental life satisfaction.

Keywords Children · Cross-country comparison · Life satisfaction · Policies · Family stress

1 Introduction

The question of whether parents with dependent children are happier than non-parents has been subject to considerable debate in the literature (for overviews, see Hansen 2012; Nelson et al. 2014; Kohler and Mencarini 2016). Contrary to popular wisdom, most studies on this topic have found that parents of minor children (those

✉ Matthias Pollmann-Schult
matthias.pollmann-schult@ovgu.de

¹ Faculty of Human Sciences, Magdeburg University, Zschokkestraße 32, 39104 Magdeburg, Germany

under the age of 18) do not experience higher levels of subjective well-being than childless individuals. A common interpretation of this finding is that the emotional rewards of parenthood are outweighed by the psychosocial and financial costs. Recent studies have formulated this argument variously as the cost-of-children hypothesis (Hansen 2012), the demand–reward perspective (Nomaguchi 2012), and the parent well-being model (Nelson et al. 2014).

There are, however, considerable cross-country variations in life satisfaction between parents and non-parents. Within Europe, parenthood is more positively associated with happiness in social democratic countries than in conservative, liberal, and Eastern European countries (Aassve et al. 2012). Notably Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian parents are more satisfied with their lives than their childless counterparts (Kohler et al. 2005; Hansen et al. 2009; Daukantaite and Zukauskienė 2006). A positive association between parenthood and life satisfaction has also been found in Russia (Mikucka 2016). Parents in the USA and continental European countries, in contrast, experience equal or lower levels of life satisfaction than childless individuals (Alesina et al. 2004; Umberson and Gove 1989; Keizer et al. 2010; Myrskylä and Margolis 2014; Pollmann-Schult 2014; Rizzi and Mikucka 2015).

Despite this extensive research on parents' well-being, the cross-country variation in parental well-being is still under-researched. In particular, it is not known exactly why parents are happier than non-parents in some countries but unhappier in others. Scholars in this field usually argue that cross-country disparities in parents' subjective well-being result from cross-national differences in institutional resources and support provided to parents (e.g. Aassve et al. 2012; Hansen 2012; Kohler and Mencarini 2016). To date, however, only two studies have explicitly examined this hypothesis. Glass, Simon, and Anderson (2016) demonstrated that parents are happier than childless people in countries with low child care costs and generous parental, vacation, and sick leave policies. Aassve et al. (2015) showed that parents enjoy a happiness premium in countries that provide extensive child care services and have greater gender equality. Aassve et al. (2015) also found that parents are happier than non-parents in countries where socio-economic development is high and corruption is low.

My research builds on and extends previous studies in two ways. First, I investigate whether financial benefits to parents and working time flexibility are associated with parents' life satisfaction. Several scholars have argued that these two factors play a crucial role in parents' life satisfaction (e.g. Glass et al. 2016; Ono and Lee 2013). Previous studies, however, either did not take these factors into account (Aassve et al. 2015) or found no positive association with parental well-being (Glass et al. 2016). A second innovative contribution of this study is the examination of the mechanisms underlying the association between institutional factors and parents' life satisfaction. I explore whether country-level characteristics—family allowances, child care, and working time flexibility—are associated with lower levels of financial stress and work–family conflict in parents. Overall, my study assesses whether—and to what extent—institutional factors affect parents' life satisfaction by reducing the costs of parenthood. It responds to a recent call by Kohler and Mencarini (2016: 334) for future research to “capture better the manifold ways in which labour market flexibility, social security and individual

welfare, gender and economic equality, societal human capital levels, and social and family policies can facilitate a relatively high satisfaction with parenthood in advanced societies”.

By investigating how contextual factors relate to parents’ life satisfaction, this study provides important indications of how policies could be designed to improve parents’ well-being. Knowledge of the impact of country-level factors on parents’ subjective well-being also enhances our understanding of cross-national discrepancies in fertility rates. Previous cross-country studies linked fertility decisions to family policies (e.g. Billingsley and Ferrarini 2014), but rarely addressed the causal pathways. Nevertheless, recent research has repeatedly suggested that fertility decisions are influenced by expected increases in subjective well-being (Kohler 2012; Margolis and Myrskylä 2015; Aassve et al. 2015; Aassve et al. 2012; Luppi 2016). Thus, my findings contribute to Margolis’ and Myrskylä’s request that “policy-makers concerned about low fertility should pay attention to factors that influence the well-being of new parents” (Margolis and Myrskylä 2015: 1161).

The present study is limited to the association between having children under the age of 18 and life satisfaction. I do not include empty nest parents in the analysis, because the effects of minor children on life satisfaction differ greatly from that of adult children (e.g. Evenson and Simon 2005). Moreover, the life satisfaction of parents with adult children is most probably affected by other contextual factors than that of parents with minor children (see, for instance Hank and Wagner 2013).

2 Background

Much of the sociological and psychological research on parental well-being has examined whether the association between parenthood and life satisfaction varies by individual and household characteristics (see, Nelson et al. 2014, Hansen 2012). Parental life satisfaction has been found to be associated with age, education, income, marital status, employment status of parents, as well as child characteristics such as the age and number of children (e.g. Myrskylä and Margolis 2014; Pollmann-Schult 2014; Stanca 2012; Kohler et al. 2005; Aassve et al. 2012; Nomaguchi and Milkie 2003). A popular explanation for the moderating effect of socio-demographic characteristics is that the costs and rewards of parenthood vary with these factors (Kohler and Mencarini 2016). What has been given less attention, however, is the question of how socio-institutional contexts modify the costs and rewards of parenthood and therefore affect parents’ life satisfaction.

In the following, I first outline the costs associated with parenthood. Then, I discuss how country-level factors can reduce the costs of parenthood and thus increase parents’ life satisfaction. Finally, I discuss whether the effects of country-level factors on parents’ life satisfaction differ between fathers and mothers.

2.1 Costs of Parenthood

It is a widely held belief that watching children grow up is one of life’s greatest joys (Jones and Brayfield 1997) and that one cannot be really happy without children

(Sobotka and Testa 2008). Undoubtedly, parenthood provides individuals with personal gratification. Being a parent conveys a sense of responsibility and feelings of greater meaning in life. At the same time, however, parenthood is associated with various costs. Having children increases household expenditures for food, clothing, and housing and often entails opportunity costs such as unearned wages when parents leave the labour force or reduce their working hours to care for children. Consequently, parents often experience higher financial strain (McLanahan and Adams 1987; Umberson and Gove 1989) and lower satisfaction with their financial situation (Stanca 2012) than non-parents.

Children increase not only the financial demands on parents, but also the psychological demands. The psychosocial cost of parenthood is another potential mechanism by which parenthood might negatively affect subjective well-being. Consistent with this notion, there is evidence that parents exhibit higher levels of depression (Evenson and Simon 2005) and anger (Ross and Van Willigen 1996) than childless people do. Compared to childless couples, parents also report greater difficulties in reconciling work and private life (Gallie and Russel 2009; Winslow 2005) as well as higher pressure due to time constraints (Mattingly and Sayer 2006) and therefore more inter-role conflict and role overload. Parents who experience strong work–family tensions, in turn, report disproportionally low levels of life satisfaction (Matysiak et al. 2016).

Although the association between financial and psychosocial costs of parenthood and the life satisfaction of parents' is well established, we know little about how contextual factors affect these costs. The overall aim of this study is to investigate how contextual factors affect parents' life satisfaction by reducing the costs associated with parenthood.

2.2 Contextual Factors Affecting Parental Life Satisfaction

Most scholars agree that financial and psychosocial stressors associated with parenthood suppress positive effects of children on life satisfaction. Institutional resources and support for parents, however, may reduce the financial costs of parenthood and help parents to reconcile paid work and care work. I will focus on three contextual factors—financial benefits for families, child care provision, and the level of working time flexibility within a country—that protect parents from the economic and psychological consequences of parenting and that may explain the disparate impacts of minor children on life satisfaction across countries.

Income support policies, such as child allowances and child tax credit, aim to alleviate the financial burdens of parenthood and therefore reduce the financial strain on parents. The levels of income support for parents vary greatly within Europe. For instance, Spanish parents received child allowances of 24€ a month for their first child in 2012, whereas German parents received child allowances of 184€ (OECD 2014). Previous studies repeatedly documented the positive effects of family benefits on parents' economic well-being (e.g. Misra et al. 2012; Moller et al. 2003). However, to my knowledge, there is no research on the effects of family benefits on parents' life satisfaction. I expect that parents living in countries with generous family benefits report less financial strain and are in turn more satisfied

with their lives than parents who lack such support. In addition, I hypothesize that parents residing in countries with generous family benefits experience lower levels of financial stress than parents living in countries with low family benefits.

Child care services relieve parents of some of their care duties, thereby reducing psychosocial stress. Indeed, parents who have inadequate access to child care report exceptionally high levels of psychosocial distress (Bird 1997) and depression (Ross and Mirowsky 1988). Previous research (Aassve et al. 2015) also indicates that parents are happier in countries that provide extensive child care services than those in countries with restricted access to public child care. In accordance with the findings of Aassve et al. (2015), I expect that child care provision is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction among parents. Moreover, I expect that parents in countries that offer extensive child care services experience lower levels of work–family conflict than parents in countries with limited child care options.

Another factor affecting psychosocial stress is the availability of family–friendly policies and practices in the workplace. These include extra-statutory leave arrangements, employer-provided child care, and flexible working time arrangements. Beyond child care, the availability of flexible working time arrangements is a key determinant of parents’ ability to reconcile paid work and family life (OECD 2014). By helping to balance work and family life, flexible working time arrangements lessen exposure to distress, work–life conflict, and burnout (Schieman et al. 2009; Grzywacz et al. 2008; Fenwick and Tausig 2001). Therefore, I expect that parents report higher levels of psychosocial stress and lower levels of life satisfaction in countries with low working time flexibility than in countries with high working time flexibility. A recent study by Glass et al. (2016) examined this hypothesis using combined data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), but found that working time flexibility is not more but in fact less important for parents’ happiness than for the happiness of non-parents.

2.3 Gender Differences

The role of country-level characteristics in shaping the parenthood gap in life satisfaction might vary by gender. Despite the sharp increase in female employment in recent decades, traditional gender role expectations still prevail throughout much of Europe (Fortin 2005). Consequently, women spend significantly more time on housework and child care than men, even when they are employed full-time (Knudsen and Wærness 2008). Moreover, working mothers perform many chores by multitasking, which is associated with an increase in negative emotions, psychological distress, and work–family conflict (Offer and Schneider 2011).

Fathers, in contrast, often bear greater responsibility for the families’ financial well-being than mothers. Thus, the financial stress associated with having children may affect men’s subjective well-being more than women’s. Indeed, as previous research (Pollmann-Schult 2014) has shown, men’s life satisfaction is more dependent on the family’s financial well-being than women’s life satisfaction.

On the basis that mothers still perform more domestic work than fathers, it can be argued that mothers benefit more than fathers from policies reducing the emotional

stress of parenthood, such as formal child care and flexible working time arrangements. Because fathers are still often the primary earners, they might benefit more than mothers from public policies designed to reduce the financial costs of parenthood. However, due to gender convergences in paid work and domestic work in recent decades, gender differences in policy effects might be rather small. Indeed, previous research found only minor differences in the effect of public policies on the subjective well-being of fathers and mothers (Glass et al. 2016; Aassve et al. 2015).

3 Data and Method

3.1 Data

The data for this study were derived from the European Social Survey (ESS). The ESS has been conducted biannually since 2002 and provides high-quality data for cross-national comparisons (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>). The survey uses either a single- or multistage random probability sampling procedure to interview respondents aged 15 or older. Each round of the ESS consists of a core module and several rotating modules. The core module provides information on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics as well as the reported level of life satisfaction, whereas the rotating modules provide in-depth information on various themes. For this analysis, I used data from Round 2 and 5 of the ESS (2004 and 2010), which contain information on family work and well-being. These two rounds included data from 27 European countries (see Table 2 for the list of countries) and 86,939 respondents. As my aim was to study the life satisfaction of parents with minor children, I excluded all parents with only adult children. I also excluded all respondents younger than 18 years and older than 60 years. Keeping older respondents in the sample would introduce a great amount of (unobserved) heterogeneity within the group of childless respondents. Respondents younger than 18 years were excluded because becoming a parent affects the life satisfaction of people so young most probably in different ways than that of adults (see, Mollborn 2007). From the remaining observations, 6.0% of respondents were excluded from the analysis due to missing information, resulting in a final sample of 19,547 men and 21,117 women. The country-specific sample size ranged from 308 in Iceland to 2757 in Germany.

3.2 Micro-Level Variables

The dependent variable in my analysis was the respondents' level of life satisfaction. The life satisfaction variable in the ESS is based on a question that asks respondents how satisfied they are with their lives. The response scale ranges from 0 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 10 (*completely satisfied*).

My primary explanatory variable was the presence of minor children in the household. Due to insufficient information in the ESS, I could not differentiate between biological children, stepchildren, and adopted children. Also, because the ESS does not provide information on noncustodial parenthood, it was not possible to

distinguish between childless respondents and respondents with minor children living outside the household. Strictly speaking, my analysis explored the life satisfaction effect of having minor children at home and not of being a parent. Nevertheless, in the following, the terms “parents” and “parenthood” refer specifically to parents with minor children at home.

Other important variables are work-to-family conflict and financial strain. To measure the respondents’ work-to-family conflict, I created an index variable by summing up the responses to the questions “How often do you find that your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner or family?”, “How often do you keep worrying about work problems when you are not working?”, and “How often do you feel too tired after work to enjoy the things you would like to do at home?”. These items are similar to those used in other studies (e.g. Schieman et al. 2009). All three items have values ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), so higher values of the index variable indicate higher levels of work-to-family conflict (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.67$). For the analysis, I standardized this index variable (mean = 0, SD = 1). Financial strain was measured by a question asking respondents how they feel about their household income. The response categories of this variable ranges from “*living comfortably on present income*” (1) to “*finding it very difficult on present income*” (4).

Various individual characteristics may confound the association between parenthood and life satisfaction. Parents differ from non-parents in various socio-demographic characteristics (see, Tanturri et al. 2015) that also affect life satisfaction. Mothers are less often gainfully employed than childless women. Fathers, in contrast, are more often gainfully employed and higher educated than childless men. Parents also differ from childless men and women with regard to their partnership status, as parents are more often married or living with a partner than childless individuals. These individual characteristics are also crucial predictors of life satisfaction (Argyle 2003) and need to be accounted for in the multivariate analysis. Respondents’ educational level was proxied by the number of years spent in education. Employment status was represented by indicator variables for whether the respondent is gainfully employed, in education, non-employed (e.g. homemaker), or unemployed. For those who are gainfully employed, I also controlled for the number of weekly employment hours. Partnership status was captured by a variable indicating whether the respondents were married or living with a partner, or not. Finally, I controlled for the respondents’ age (linear and squared).

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for life satisfaction and the explanatory variables. Fathers, but not mothers, reported higher levels of life satisfaction than their childless counterparts. I also found differences between parents and non-parents regarding work-to-family conflict and financial strain. Both fathers and mothers reported higher levels of work-to-family conflict than childless respondents. Significant discrepancies between mothers and childless women also emerged with respect to financial strain: 23% of childless women, but 31% of mothers reported financial difficulties. Surprisingly, and contrary to my hypothesis, fathers and childless men reported similar levels of financial strain.

Table 1 Women's and men's characteristics by parenthood status: descriptive statistics

Variable	Women				Men			
	Childless		Mothers		Childless		Fathers	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Life satisfaction	7.06	2.09	7.02	2.18	6.87	2.14	7.14*	2.09
Marital status								
Partnered (married or cohabiting)	0.33		0.82*		0.24		0.96*	
Single	0.67		0.18*		0.75		0.04*	
Employment status								
Gainfully employment	0.55		0.58*		0.60		0.87*	
Economically inactive	0.10		0.32*		0.07		0.05*	
In education	0.25		0.02*		0.20		0.01*	
Unemployed	0.09		0.08*		0.12		0.07*	
Employment hours (if employed)	39.11	10.57	36.07*	11.85	43.37	11.55	45.03*	11.44
Education (in years)	13.71	3.33	13.23	3.48	13.22	3.31	13.22*	3.59
Age (in years)	31.45	11.92	37.79*	7.42	31.63	11.30	40.35*	7.62
Work-to-family conflict	-0.05	0.98	0.03*	0.98	-0.14	0.99	0.10*	0.94
Financial strain								
Living comfortably on present income	0.30		0.25*		0.32		0.31*	
Coping on present income	0.46		0.44*		0.44		0.46*	
Difficult on present income	0.17		0.22*		0.17		0.18	
Very difficult on present income	0.06		0.09*		0.07		0.06*	
N	9225		11,897		10,930		8628	

* Differences between childless women (men) and mothers (fathers) are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

In preliminary analyses, I tested for differences in the dependent and independent variables between the ESS data from 2004 and 2010. These analyses showed significant, albeit small differences between the two ESS rounds (see Table 6 in “Appendix”). Using multivariate regression models, I also tested whether the effect of parenthood on life satisfaction has changed between 2004 and 2010. This was not the case, as the associations between parenthood and life satisfaction did not differ significantly between the two ESS rounds (results are discussed below). These findings indicate that pooling the data from 2004 and 2010 does not distort the result pattern reported in this study.

3.3 Macro-Level Variables

To assess whether the parenthood–life satisfaction association is modified by contextual factors, I considered country-level indicators for child care provision,

Table 2 Mean life satisfaction (LS) of parents and non-parents and macro-level variables, by country

	Mean LS women		Mean LS men		Child care provision		Family benefits		Working time flexibility		N of cases
	Childless	Mothers	Childless	Fathers	2003	2010	2004	2010	2005	2010	
Belgium	7.4	7.4	7.5	7.5	33.6	39.2	2.0	2.2	47.5	44.9	1778
Bulgaria	5.8	5.2*	5.2	4.9	— ^c	9.6	— ^c	1.9	— ^c	20.6	808
Switzerland	7.8	8.1*	7.6	8.0*	n/a	n/a	1.4	1.4	n/a	n/a	1889
Cyprus	7.1	7.2	7.4	7.3	— ^c	31.4	— ^c	1.9	— ^c	23.4	472
Czech Republic	6.6	6.6	6.3	6.6*	3.0	4.0	1.4	2.0	37.4	40.0	2072
Germany	7.0	6.9	6.8	7.0*	9.0	23.1	3.2	3.1	42.5	45.3	2757
Denmark	7.9	8.4*	8.0	8.5*	56.1	65.7	3.8	4.1	58.8	59.2	1488
Estonia	6.9	6.5*	6.3	6.2	18.1 ^b	23.6	1.6	2.2	37.0	36.6	1649
Spain	7.3	7.4	7.2	7.5*	11.3	39.3	1.1	1.5	33.2	27.0	1977
Finland	8.0	8.3*	7.6	8.1*	21.3	27.7	2.8	2.9	54.9	54.5	1866
France	6.4	6.2	6.3	6.5	28.0	48.0	2.4	2.5	46.0	38.6	816
UK	7.1	6.8	7.0	7.1	27.1	42.0	1.6	3.2	46.7	41.8	2052
Greece	6.2	6.2	6.1	6.1	7.0	11.3	1.5	1.8	40.7	41.3	2439
Hungary	6.1	6.0	6.0	5.7	6.7	10.9	2.4	2.9	28.0	27.8	1390
Ireland	6.8	7.0	6.6	7.1*	15.0	28.8	2.4	3.2	48.1	38.5	2480
Netherlands	7.5	7.6	7.4	7.7*	29.5	60.6	1.2	1.2	63.3	64.9	1853
Norway	7.7	7.8	7.6	7.8*	29.5	54.0	3.0	3.1	46.7	53.2	1761
Poland	7.0	6.8	6.6	6.7	2.0	6.9	1.0	1.3	37.7	38.6	1827
Portugal	6.1	5.9	6.2	5.9	12.7	45.9	1.2	1.3	25.2	25.4	1607
Sweden	7.7	7.8	7.6	8.1*	44.1	46.7	2.8	2.9	65.6	62.1	1708
Slovenia	7.6	7.3	7.3	6.9	32.5 ^b	41.8	1.9	2.1	34.9	28.9	1130
Slovakia	6.5	6.0*	6.1	6.2	4.9 ^b	3.0	1.7	1.7	30.7	31.3	1405
Lithuania	6.1	5.2*	5.3	5.2	— ^c	15.6	— ^c	2.2	— ^c	26.5	498

Table 2 continued

	Mean LS women		Mean LS men		Child care provision		Family benefits		Working time flexibility		N of cases
	Childless	Mothers	Childless	Fathers	2003	2010	2004	2010	2005	2010	
Austria	7.4	7.8*	7.2	7.5*	5.2	— ^c	3.0	— ^c	52.1	— ^c	1188
Iceland	8.6	8.5	8.6	8.5	56.3	55.7	3.0	3.0	n/a	n/a	307
Luxembourg	8.0	7.8	7.6	7.7	14.0	45.8	3.8	4.0	43.4	41.4	897
Italy	6.5	6.7	6.3	7.4*	6.3	24.2	1.0	1.1	50.9	40.6	566

Child care provision: Proportion of children aged 0–2 enrolled in formal child care. *Source:* OECD Family Database. Family Benefits: Percentage of GDP spent on benefits (in cash or kind) to children and families. *Source:* Eurostat. Working time flexibility: Percentage of workers that have at least some control over their working time. *Source:* Eurofound Database

* Differences between mothers (fathers) and childless women (men) are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

^a Refers to 2007

^b Refers to 2006

^c ESS data not available

n/a = macro-level indicator not available

family allowances, and the level of working time flexibility within a country (see Table 2). In the analysis, all national context indicators were centred to the mean.

Child care was measured in terms of the percentage of children aged 0–2 years enrolled in formal child care in a given country. Enrolment rates varied between 2% in Poland (in 2003) and 67% in Denmark (in 2010). I used the percentage of children aged 0–2 to construct the child care indicator, because child care for these children is explicitly intended to help families balance care and employment, whereas programs for children aged 3 to 6 primarily aim at providing education (see also Misra et al. 2011). I interpreted the availability of child care for 0–2-year-olds as a proxy for child care in general. Countries with extensive child care services for under-3-year-olds usually also offer extensive child care for older children and after-school care, but not vice versa (Steiber and Haas 2009; Pettit and Hook 2005). The child care indicator is missing for Switzerland, so the country-level sample size is limited to 26 for all models including this indicator.

Family benefits were measured as the percentage of GDP spent on social protection benefits for children and families. According to the European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS), these benefits include all transfers to families and children, in cash or in kind, intended to relieve them of the financial burden of several risks and needs. This indicator is provided by the Eurostat database and ranges from 1.0% in Bulgaria, Poland, and Italy (in 2004) to 4.1% in Denmark (in 2010).

The indicator for working time flexibility represents the percentage of workers in a country that have at least some control over their working hours. This information is derived from the Eurofound Database, which is based on the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). The Eurofound Database reports the share of workers who (a) can choose between several fixed working schedules, (b) can adapt their working hours within certain limits, (c) have entirely self-determined working hours, and (d) have working hours that are entirely set by the employer. To construct an indicator for flexible working time arrangements, I summed up the percentages relating to the first three mutually exclusive categories. The extent to which employers had some sort of control over their working hours varied considerably between countries. Whereas in the Netherlands and Sweden, almost 2 out of 3 employees enjoyed some sort of flexibility in setting their working hours, only 25% of Portuguese employees reported having some flexibility in choosing when to work (Table 2). Because the Eurofound database does not provide information on working time flexibility in Switzerland and Iceland, the country-level sample size was 25 for models including this indicator.

My indicator for working time flexibility differs greatly from that used in a recent study (Glass et al. 2016) investigating the association between work–family reconciliation policies and parental life satisfaction. Glass and colleagues measured a country’s level of work flexibility as the proportion of companies or establishments that offer flexible work hours. The indicator used in the present study, in contrast, measures work flexibility as the proportion of workers who experience flexible work hours. Because company and establishment size can vary greatly between countries, it is arguable that the indicator used here better reflects cross-

country differences in workers' access to flexible work hours than the indicator used by Glass et al. (2016).

3.4 Method

For the multivariate analysis, I used multilevel regression modelling. Because I pooled ESS data from 2004 and 2010, the data contained three levels: respondents (Level 1) were nested within waves (Level 2), which were nested within countries (Level 3). I estimated a three-level random coefficient model and allowed the effect of the parenthood indicator to vary between contexts. To test whether the correlation between parenthood and life satisfaction is moderated by the national context, I included cross-level interactions between the context indicators and the parental status indicator. Because statistical causality is difficult to establish in cross-sectional research, the results presented here need to be interpreted as statistical associations rather than causal effects.

Because of the relatively small number of Level 3 units it is not advisable to include all three macro-level indicators at a time. Therefore, in the results section I present separate models for each macro-level indicator. However, models including all three country-level indicators simultaneously produced results similar to those reported here.

4 Results

In the first step, I examined the differences in parents' life satisfaction across countries. To do so, I calculated country-specific means of life satisfaction for parents of minor children and for childless individuals (Columns 1–4 of Table 2). As can be seen, the life satisfaction gaps between parents and childless individuals differ substantially between countries. Mothers in Bulgaria, Estonia, Slovakia, and Lithuania reported significantly lower levels of life satisfaction than their childless counterparts, whereas mothers in Denmark, Finland, Austria, and Switzerland were significantly more satisfied with their lives than childless women. However, in most countries life satisfaction of mothers did not differ significantly from that of childless women.

Overall, fatherhood was more positively associated with life satisfaction than motherhood. No country showed a significant negative association between fatherhood and life satisfaction. In 12 out of 27 countries, fathers were significantly more satisfied than childless men. Large positive life satisfaction gaps between fathers and childless men emerged in Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and Italy.

4.1 Associations Between Country-Level Factors and Parent's Life Satisfaction

The first multivariate analysis examined whether the cross-country variation in the life satisfaction gaps between parents and non-parents can be attributed to cross-national differences in child care provision, family benefits, and working time

flexibility. In the first model, I estimated the association of parenthood and other individual-level characteristics with life satisfaction in the overall cross-national sample (Table 3). Across nations, parenthood was not significantly associated with men's and women's life satisfaction. This result is consistent with most previous research showing no or only small associations between parenthood and subjective well-being in cross-national samples (e.g. Aassve et al. 2015; Glass et al. 2016, Ono and Lee 2013). In additional analyses (findings not reported), I tested whether the association between parenthood and life satisfaction varies between 2004 and 2010 by adding interaction terms between the ESS round (2004 vs. 2010) and the parental status variable to the model. The interaction effect was statistically insignificant for men ($b = 0.09$, $p = 0.23$) and women ($b = -0.04$, $p = 0.56$), indicating that the association between parenthood and life satisfaction did not change significantly between 2004 and 2010.

To address the question of whether, and to what extent, contextual factors modify the relation between parenthood and life satisfaction, I added the country-level indicators as well as the cross-level interactions between the country-level indicators and the parental status variable to the model. In Model 2 (Table 3), I investigated whether the provision of child care moderates the association between parenthood and life satisfaction. Because the child care indicator is mean centred, the coefficient for parenthood indicates the association between parenthood and life satisfaction in countries with average levels of child care provision. The statistically insignificant main effects for parenthood show that in these countries, parents and non-parents experienced similar levels of life satisfaction. The main effect of child care reflects the association between child care and the life satisfaction of childless people (when the parenthood variable has a value of 0). Surprisingly, the main effects are statistically significant for men and women, although there is no reason to believe that the well-being of non-parents is affected by the provision of child care. I suspect that child care provision is positively associated with the level of social expenditures in a country, and that this also affects non-parents' subjective well-being.

In the model for women (upper panel), the cross-level interaction coefficient between parenthood and the child care indicator is statistically significant, revealing that child care provision moderates the association between parenthood and mothers' life satisfaction. In order to graphically illustrate the moderating effect of child care, I estimated the life satisfaction of mothers and childless women across the observed range of values of child care provision (Fig. 1, upper panel). As Fig. 1 shows, in countries that offer only little child care, mothers' level of life satisfaction fell below that of childless women by 0.12 points ($p = 0.10$). In contrast, in countries that provide extensive child care, mothers' life satisfaction exceeded that of childless women by 0.25 points ($p < 0.05$). The interaction effect for men, displayed in the lower panel in Model 2, was statistically insignificant, suggesting that fathers do not benefit more from extensive child care provision than childless men (see also Fig. 1, upper panel). Nevertheless, although the interaction effect between parenthood and child care for mothers was almost twice as large as that for fathers, the gender difference in the interaction coefficients was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.60$, $df = 1$).

Table 3 Multilevel regression models predicting life satisfaction from parental status, country-level indicators, and covariates for women and men

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Women								
Parent	0.019	0.050	-0.014	0.051	0.020	0.043	0.001	0.050
Single	-0.719**	0.037	-0.722**	0.033	-0.734**	0.033	-0.720**	0.033
Education (in years)	0.064**	0.004	0.068**	0.004	0.066**	0.004	0.064**	0.004
Age	-0.117**	0.011	-0.120**	0.011	-0.121**	0.012	-0.117**	0.012
Age squared	0.124**	0.014	0.127**	0.015	0.129**	0.015	0.124**	0.015
Economically inactive ^a	-0.324**	0.067	-0.355**	0.071	-0.354**	0.071	-0.324**	0.064
In education ^a	0.037	0.080	0.006	0.083	0.016	0.084	0.037	0.080
Unemployed ^a	-1.187**	0.078	-1.208**	0.081	-1.193**	0.081	-1.187**	0.078
Employment hours	-0.002	0.001	-0.003*	0.001	-0.003 [†]	0.002	-0.002	0.002
<i>Country indicators and cross-level interactions</i>								
Child care provision			0.019**	0.005				
Parent × child care provision			0.006**	0.002				
Working time flexibility					0.032**	0.007		
Parent × flexibility					0.016**	0.003		
Family benefits							0.207 [†]	0.106
Parent × family benefits							0.121*	0.054
<i>N</i> of countries/cntry-years obs.	27/46		26/44		25/43		27/46	
Observations	21,122		20,159		20,006		21,122	
Men								
Parent	0.073	0.053	0.056	0.056	0.078	0.042	0.057	0.052
Single	-0.533**	0.040	-0.521**	0.042	-0.537**	0.042	-0.534**	0.040
Education (in years)	0.046**	0.004	0.049**	0.004	0.048**	0.004	0.047**	0.004

Table 3 continued

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Age	−0.122**	0.010	−0.127**	0.011	−0.128**	0.011	−0.122**	0.010
Age squared	0.130**	0.013	0.137**	0.013	0.137**	0.013	0.130**	0.013
Economically inactive ^a	−0.738**	0.085	−0.731**	0.087	−0.741**	0.088	−0.737**	0.085
In education ^a	0.249**	0.079	0.223**	0.082	0.219**	0.082	0.251**	0.079
Unemployed ^a	−1.117**	0.077	−1.178**	0.079	−1.183**	0.080	−1.172**	0.077
Employment hours	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.003**	0.001
<i>Country indicators and cross-level interactions</i>								
Child care provision			0.026**	0.005				
Parent × child care provision			0.003	0.002				
Working time flexibility					0.038**	0.007		
Parent × flexibility					0.014**	0.003		
Family benefits							0.247 [†]	0.127
Parent × family benefits							0.120*	0.050
<i>N</i> of countries/cntry-years obs.	27/46		26/44		25/43		27/46	
Observations	19,558		18,632		18,478		19,558	

All models include indicator variables for the survey year

[†] $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

^a Reference group: gainfully employed

Fig. 1 Predicted life satisfaction for parents and non-parents (from Table 3)

The results shown in Model 3 of Table 3 tested whether the prevalence of flexible working time arrangements in a country affects parents' life satisfaction. The main effects of parenthood were statistically insignificant, indicating that parenthood was not associated with life satisfaction in places with average levels of working time flexibility. However, as indicated by the positive and statistically significant main effect of flexibility in working hours (childless) individuals in countries with high levels of flexibility were more satisfied with their lives than people in countries with low levels of flexibility.

The cross-level interaction effects between parenthood and flexibility in working hours indicate that the correlation between parenthood and life satisfaction varied with the country-level of working time flexibility. To illustrate this moderating effect, I estimated the levels of life satisfaction across the observed range of values of the flexibility indicator. As Fig. 1 (middle panel) shows, the prevalence of

working time flexibility in a country reverses the association between parenthood and life satisfaction. In countries with low levels of flexibility, fathers ($b = -0.173$, $p < 0.05$) and mothers ($b = -0.256$, $p < 0.001$) were less satisfied with their lives than their childless peers, whereas in countries with high levels of flexibility, fathers ($b = 0.415$, $p < 0.01$) and mothers ($b = 0.405$, $p < 0.01$) reported higher levels of life satisfaction than their childless counterparts.

A similar pattern emerged with regard to the generosity of family benefits (Model 4 in Table 3). Parents residing in countries with average levels of family benefits were equally satisfied with their lives as their childless counterparts. However, as can be seen in Fig. 1 (lower panel), in countries that offer only low levels of family benefits fathers ($b = -0.072$, $p = 0.37$) and mothers ($b = -0.127$, $p = 0.11$) were slightly less satisfied with their lives than childless individuals. In contrast, in countries that provide generous family allowances, fathers' and mothers' levels of life satisfaction exceeded those of non-parents by 0.300 points ($p < 0.01$) and 0.249 points ($p < 0.05$), respectively.

Overall, the results shown in Table 3 indicate that the parenthood–life satisfaction association is modified by contextual factors. The findings, however, only partially support the hypothesized gender differences. As expected, mothers benefit somewhat more than fathers from child care provision, relative to childless individuals. Flexible working hours, however, are associated equally with both fathers' and mothers' life satisfaction. Also, in contrast to my expectations, the generosity of family benefits does not affect the life satisfaction of fathers more strongly than that of mothers.

4.2 Associations Between Country-Level Factors and Parents' Stress and Strain

In subsequent analyses, I examined the mechanism underlying the association between the national contextual factors and parents' levels of life satisfaction. I proposed that child care provision, family benefits, and flexible work hours affect parents' life satisfaction by alleviating the financial and psychosocial stress and strain associated with children. I addressed this hypothesis in two steps. In a first step, I examined whether elevated levels of work-to-family conflict and financial strain—that is, the costs of parenthood—are negatively correlated with parents' life satisfaction. This analysis also investigated whether the costs of parenthood suppress a positive association between parenthood and life satisfaction, as suggested by the cost-of-children hypothesis and related arguments. Because the cost-of-children hypothesis has been examined by previous studies in great detail (Pollmann-Schult 2014; Matysiak et al. 2016), I discuss my findings only briefly. In a second step, I explored whether family benefits, child care, and working time flexibility are associated with lower levels of financial stress and work–family conflict in parents.

The results of the first step—the associations of work-to-family conflict and financial strain with parents' life satisfaction—are reported in Table 4. Because stay-at-home parents do not experience work–family conflict, these analyses were restricted to respondents who work outside the home. As expected, both financial

Table 4 Multilevel effects regression models predicting life satisfaction from parental status, work-to-family conflict, financial strain, and covariates for women and men

Variable	Without controls for work-to-family conflict and financial strain				With controls for work-to-family conflict and financial strain			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Parent	−0.072	0.048	0.049	0.050	0.129**	0.046	0.171**	0.048
Single	−0.660**	0.037	−0.519**	0.044	−0.469**	0.036	−0.508**	0.042
Education (in years)	0.055**	0.005	0.041**	0.004	0.035**	0.004	0.016**	0.004
Age	−0.064**	0.015	−0.077**	0.012	−0.059**	0.014	−0.063**	0.012
Age squared	0.062**	0.019	0.076**	0.016	0.054**	0.018	0.056*	0.015
Employment hours	−0.002 [†]	0.001	0.002 [†]	0.001	−0.002	0.001	0.004**	0.001
Work-to-family conflict					−0.322**	0.016	−0.288**	0.016
Financial strain ^a								
Coping on present income					−0.523**	0.038	−0.580**	0.034
Difficult on present income					−1.265**	0.052	−1.396**	0.049
Very difficult on present inc.					−2.242**	0.089	−2.115**	0.088
<i>N</i> of countries/country-years obs.	27/46		27/46		27/46		27/46	
Observations	12,066		14,103		12,066		14,103	

All models include indicator variables for the survey year

[†] $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

^a Feeling about household's income. Reference group: Living comfortably on present income

strain and work-to-family conflict were negatively correlated with life satisfaction. Moreover, after controlling for work–family conflicts and financial strain, the parenthood coefficient became statistically significant for both mothers and fathers. Thus, when taking into account differences in psychosocial and financial distress between parents and non-parents, parents display significantly higher levels of life satisfaction than their childless counterparts. These findings are consistent with previous studies, indicating that psychosocial and financial costs associated with parenthood suppress direct positive effects of children on life satisfaction (Pollmann-Schult 2014; Matysiak et al. 2016).

Now I turn to the question of whether formal child care, child allowances, and flexibility in working time arrangements reduce the psychosocial and financial costs of parenthood. To do so, I tested whether these country-level factors moderate the association of parenthood with work-to-family conflict and financial stress. Table 5 shows the results from 3 different models. Each model tested the effect of parenthood, a country-level factor (child care provision, working time flexibility,

Table 5 Multilevel regression models predicting work-to-family conflict and financial stress from child care provision, working time flexibility, and generosity of family benefits for women and men

Variable	Outcome variable					
	Work-to-family conflict		Work-to-family conflict		Financial stress	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	SE
Women						
Parent	0.147**	0.022	0.148**	0.021	0.274**	0.027
Single	−0.015	0.020	−0.010	0.016	0.473**	0.019
Education (in years)	0.029**	0.002	0.029**	0.002	−0.073**	0.002
Age	0.006	0.005	0.006	0.006	0.058**	0.005
Age squared	−0.004	0.008	−0.005	0.010	−0.075**	0.008
Economically inactive ^a					0.159**	0.039
In education ^a					−0.070	0.046
Unemployed ^a					0.628**	0.045
Employment hours	0.022**	0.001	0.022**	0.001	−0.005**	0.001
<i>Country indicators and cross-level interactions</i>						
Child care provision	0.001	0.001				
Parent × child care provision	−0.002 [†]	0.001				
Working time flexibility			0.004	0.002		
Parent × flexibility			−0.004**	0.001		
Family benefits					−0.132	0.110
Parent × family benefits					−0.028	0.030
<i>N</i> of countries/cntry-years obs.	26/44		25/43		27/46	
Observations	11,461		11,360		20,948	
Men						
Parent	0.088**	0.027	0.085**	0.025	0.175**	0.028
Single	−0.139**	0.023	−0.137**	0.023	0.111**	0.025
Education (in years)	0.021**	0.002	0.022**	0.002	−0.077**	0.002
Age	0.048**	0.005	0.048**	0.005	0.066**	0.005
Age squared	−0.061**	0.007	−0.061**	0.008	−0.083**	0.008
Economically inactive ^a					0.289**	0.050
In education ^a					−0.063	0.047
Unemployed ^a					0.697**	0.046
Employment hours	0.020**	0.001	0.020**	0.001	−0.008**	0.001
<i>Country indicators and cross-level interactions</i>						
Child care provision	0.001	0.001				
Parent × child care provision	−0.001	0.001				
Working time flexibility			0.002	0.003		
Parent × flexibility			−0.003*	0.001		
Family benefits					−0.129	0.109
Parent × family benefits					−0.056*	0.026

Table 5 continued

Variable	Outcome variable					
	Work-to-family conflict		Work-to-family conflict		Financial stress	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	SE
<i>N</i> of countries/cntry-years obs.	26/44		26/44		27/46	
Observations	13,335		13,215		19,338	

All models include indicator variables for the survey year. Models shown in Models 1 and 2 are restricted to gainfully employed respondents

[†] $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

^a Reference group: gainfully employed

and family allowances), and their interaction on work-to-family conflict and financial strain, respectively. The main effects for parenthood were statistically significant in all models, indicating that mothers and fathers in countries with average institutional resources and support for parents experience significantly higher levels of work-to-family conflict and financial strain than their childless counterparts. The main effects for child care provision, working time flexibility, and family benefits were statistically insignificant, suggesting that these factors are not associated with work-to-family conflict and financial strain among childless men and women.

Model 1 (Table 5) examined whether parents' experience of work-to-family conflict was associated with the provision of child care services within a country. The interaction between parenthood and child care provision was marginally statistically significant for women ($b = -0.002$, $p < 0.1$), suggesting that mothers experience lower levels of work-to-family conflict in countries with extensive child care services than mothers in countries with limited access to child care. Indeed, the estimated gap in work-to-family conflict between mothers and childless women was only statistically significant in countries with low levels of child care provision ($b = 0.179$, $p < 0.01$), but not in countries that offer extensive child care services ($b = 0.066$, $p = 0.15$). The corresponding interaction effect for men was not significant (Model 1, lower panel), suggesting that fathers' experience of work-to-family conflict is unrelated to the availability of child care services. However, a Wald Chi-square test of the gender difference in coefficients for the interaction indicated that the interaction effects were not statistically different for men and women.

Model 2 tested whether the negative association between parenthood and work-to-life conflict is moderated by the availability of flexible working time arrangements. Here, the interaction effect was statistically significant for both men and women, indicating that parents in countries with high levels of flexibility in working hours experience less work-to-family conflict than parents in countries with limited flexibility. The predicted gap in work-to-family conflict between mothers and childless women was statistically significant in countries with low levels of working

time flexibility ($b = 0.202, p < 0.01$), but not in those with high levels of flexibility ($b = 0.057, p = 0.16$). Likewise, fathers reported higher levels of work-to-family conflict than childless men when there is low flexibility in working hours ($b = 0.144, p < 0.01$), but not when flexibility in working hours is high ($b = 0.005, p = 0.90$).

Finally, the results shown in Model 3 explored whether the generosity of a country's family benefits moderated the association between parenthood and feelings of financial strain. Because financial strain was captured by an ordered categorical variable, I used a multilevel ordered probit regression model. Mothers and fathers experienced higher levels of financial stress than non-parents. But only fathers' experience of financial stress was associated with the level of family benefits provided in the country. The parenthood gap in financial stress is statistically significant for men in countries providing low levels of family benefits ($b = 0.236, p < 0.01$), but becomes insignificant in countries with generous family benefits ($b = 0.062, p = 0.28$). Mothers, in contrast, reported significantly higher levels of financial stress than childless women, irrespective of the level of financial benefits. However, the gender difference in coefficients for the interaction is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.48, df = 1$).

In sum, these findings provide strong evidence for the hypothesis that child care provision, flexibility in working hours, and generous family benefits alleviate the negative effects of parenthood on work-to-family conflict and financial strain. However, gender differences in the moderating effect of the contextual factors are small. Contrary to my expectations, contextual factors seem to reduce the experience of financial stress and work-family conflict of fathers and mothers in similar ways.

5 Discussion

Previous research has documented a large degree of cross-national variation in the life satisfaction gap between parents and non-parents: Whereas some countries exhibit a negative association of parenthood with life satisfaction, others show a positive association (Aassve et al. 2012; Margolis and Myrskylä 2011; Aassve et al. 2015; Glass et al. 2016). The predominant explanation for these cross-national disparities is that some countries provide higher levels of resources and support to parents than others and that these factors buffer the stress and strain that diminish parents' subjective well-being. To date, however, very few studies (Glass et al. 2016; Aassve et al. 2015) have linked cross-country variations in parental life satisfaction to institutional factors and family policies alleviating financial and psychological burdens of parenthood.

The present study shows that institutional resources and support provided to parents significantly benefit their life satisfaction. These findings to some extent echo previous research by Aassve et al. (2015) and Glass et al. (2016), showing that extensive child care provision, low childcare costs, and extended leave for parents are associated with parental happiness. My study complements this research by suggesting that the provision family benefits and flexible work hours play a major role in parents' life satisfaction as well.

Moreover, my findings extend previous research by investigating the mechanism underlying the link between policy contexts and parental life satisfaction. My analyses reveal that child care provision, family benefits, and working time flexibility increase parents' life satisfaction by buffering psychological and financial stresses associated with parenthood. In countries that provide substantial institutional resources and support to parents, fathers and mothers report similar levels of stress and strain and higher levels of life satisfaction than childless people. In contrast, parents with limited resources and support experience more stress and strain as well as lower levels of life satisfaction than their childless counterparts. Thus, the provision of resources and social support to parents such as child care, working time flexibility, and financial benefits seem to eliminate negative effects of parenthood on life satisfaction by reducing the stressors associated with parenthood.

Contrary to my expectations, I found few gender differences in the association between contextual factors and parents' life satisfaction. The effect of parenthood on the perception of work–family conflict and financial strain is quite similar for men and women. Also, a country's level of child care provision, working time flexibility and financial support for families affects fathers' and mothers' life satisfaction by similar magnitudes. One possible reason for the absence of significant gender differences is that today fathers and mothers experience similar levels of stress and strain due to the convergence of men's and women's participation in paid work and domestic work. Indeed, whereas older studies for the USA found pronounced gender differences in parents' distress and anger (Bird 1997; Ross and Van Willigen 1996), a recent study by Musick et al. (2014) showed only small differences in happiness and stress between fathers and mothers.

Some crucial limitations of this study should be mentioned. First, the analysis presented here is based on cross-sectional data. Consequently, it is not possible to make causal inferences about the association between parenthood and life satisfaction. Unfortunately, the lack of cross-national longitudinal datasets that provide information about respondents' life satisfaction bars an analysis of causal effects of national contextual factors on life satisfaction. Second, this study does not address the question of whether individual characteristics mediate the impact of institutional support on parents' life satisfaction. To evaluate the impact of policies such as child care provision or family allowances, it is also important to know if these policies affect different groups of parents differently. For instance, it would be reasonable to assume that the life satisfaction of low-income parents is more responsive to family allowances than that of high-income parents. Future research should therefore pay special attention to how individual characteristics and contextual factors interact in their effect on parental life satisfaction.

In all, this study contributes to the ongoing debate whether, and under which circumstances, parenthood has positive effects on subjective well-being. It corroborates the claim that institutional resources and support for parents enhance parental life satisfaction. In addition, this study is one of the first to examine the underlying mechanism. It indicates that family benefits, public child care, and working time flexibility positively affect parents' life satisfaction by mitigating financial strain and work–family conflict among parents.

Funding This study was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), Grant Number: PO 1569/5.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Appendix

Table 6.

Table 6 Respondents' characteristics by survey year: descriptive statistics

Variable	2004				2010			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Life satisfaction (all respondents)	7.14	2.12	7.06	2.09	6.93*	2.16	6.92*	2.16
Life satisfaction (childless only)	7.11	0.10	6.96	2.09	7.01*	2.10	6.80*	2.19
Life satisfaction (parents only)	7.17	2.17	7.19	2.07	6.86*	2.22	7.09*	2.13
Partnered (vs. single)	0.61		0.57		0.59*		0.55*	
Employment status								
Gainfully employment	0.56		0.74		0.58*		0.70*	
Economically inactive	0.24		0.06		0.20*		0.06*	
In education	0.12		0.12		0.12*		0.12*	
Unemployed	0.08		0.80		0.09*		0.13*	
Employment hours (if employed)	37.32	11.57	44.53	11.84	37.38	11.28	43.97*	11.16
Education (in years)	13.06	3.36	12.99	3.39	13.84*	3.45	13.46*	3.46
Age (in years)	34.93	10.04	35.27	10.65	35.10	10.26	35.69	10.86
Work-to-family conflict	−0.06	0.97	−0.04	0.98	0.05*	0.98	0.03*	0.96
Financial strain								
Living comfortably on present income	0.29		0.33		0.25*		0.29*	
Coping on present income	0.46		0.45		0.44*		0.46*	
Difficult on present income	0.18		0.16		0.22*		0.18*	
Very difficult on present income	0.06		0.05		0.09*		0.08*	
N	10,618		9883		10,504		9675	

* Difference between 2004 and 2010 is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$

References

- Aassve, A., Goisis, A., & Sironi, M. (2012). Happiness and childbearing across Europe. *Social Indicators Research*, 108(1), 65–86.
- Aassve, A., Mencarini, L., & Sironi, M. (2015). Institutional change, happiness and fertility. *European Sociological Review*, 31(6), 749–765.

- Alesina, A., Di Tella, R., & MacCulloch, R. (2004). Inequality and happiness: Are Europeans and Americans different? *Journal of Public Economics*, 88(9–10), 2009–2042.
- Argyle, M. (2003). Causes and correlates of happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (Vol. 353–373). New York: Russel Sage Foundation.
- Billingsley, S., & Ferrarini, T. (2014). Family policy and fertility intentions in 21 European countries. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(2), 428–445.
- Bird, C. E. (1997). Gender differences in the social and economic burden of parenting and psychological distress. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59(4), 809–823.
- Daukantaite, D., & Zukauskienė, R. (2006). Swedish and Lithuanian employed women's subjective well-being. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 15(Suppl. 1), S23–S30.
- Evenson, R. J., & Simon, R. W. (2005). Clarifying the relationship between parenthood and depression. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 46(4), 341–358.
- Fenwick, R., & Tausig, M. (2001). Scheduling stress family and health outcomes of shift work and schedule control. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44(7), 1179–1198.
- Fortin, N. M. (2005). Gender role attitudes and the labour-market outcomes of women across OECD countries. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 21(3), 416–438.
- Gallie, D., & Russel, H. (2009). Work family conflict and working conditions in Western Europe. *Social Indicators Research*, 93(3), 445–467.
- Glass, J., Simon, R. W., & Anderson, K. G. (2016). Parenthood and happiness: Effects of work–family reconciliation policies in 22 OECD countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 122(3), 886–929.
- Grzywacz, J. G., Carlson, D. S., & Shulkin, S. (2008). Schedule flexibility and stress: Linking formal flexible arrangements and perceived flexibility to employee health. *Community, Work and Family*, 11(2), 199–214.
- Hank, K., & Wagner, M. (2013). Parenthood, marital status, and well-being in later life: Evidence from SHARE. *Social Indicators Research*, 114(2), 639–653.
- Hansen, T. (2012). Parenthood and happiness: A review of folk theories versus empirical evidence. *Social Indicators Research*, 108(1), 26–64.
- Hansen, T., Slagsvold, B., & Moum, T. (2009). Childlessness and psychological well-being in midlife and old age: An examination of parental status effects across a range of outcomes. *Social Indicators Research*, 94(2), 343–362.
- Jones, R. K., & Brayfield, A. (1997). Life's greatest joy? European attitudes towards the centrality of children. *Social Forces*, 75(4), 1239–1269.
- Keizer, R., Dykstra, P. A., & Poortman, A.-R. (2010). The transition to parenthood and well-being: The impact of partner status and work hour transitions. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(4), 438–492.
- Knudsen, K., & Wærness, K. (2008). National context and spouses' housework in 34 countries. *European Sociological Review*, 24(1), 97–113.
- Kohler, H.-P. (2012). Do children bring happiness and purpose in life? In E. Kaufman & W. B. Wilcox (Eds.), *Whither the child? Causes and consequences of low fertility* (pp. 47–75). Boulder, London: Paradigm Publisher.
- Kohler, H.-P., Behrman, J. R., & Skytthe, A. (2005). Partner + children = happiness? The effects of partnerships and fertility on well-being. *Population and Development Review*, 31(3), 407–445.
- Kohler, H.-P., & Mencarini, L. (2016). The Parenthood Happiness Puzzle: An Introduction to the Special Issue. *European Journal of Population*, 32(3), 327–338.
- Luppi, F. (2016). When is the second one coming? The effect of couple's subjective well-being following the onset of parenthood. *European Journal of Population*, 32(3), 421–444.
- Margolis, R., & Myrskylä, M. (2011). A global perspective on happiness and fertility. *Population and Development Review*, 37(1), 29–56.
- Margolis, R., & Myrskylä, M. (2015). Parental well-being surrounding first birth as a determinant of further parity progression. *Demography*, 52(4), 1147–1166.
- Mattingly, M. J., & Sayer, L. C. (2006). Under pressure: Gender differences in the relationship between free time and feeling rushed. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68(1), 205–221.
- Matysiak, A., Mencarini, L., & Vignoli, D. (2016). Work–family conflict moderates the relationship between childbearing and subjective well-being. *European Journal of Population*, 32(3), 355–379.
- McLanahan, S., & Adams, J. (1987). Parenthood and psychological well-being. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 13, 237–257.
- Mikucka, M. (2016). How does parenthood affect life satisfaction in Russia? *Advances in Life Course Research*, 30, 16–29.

- Misra, J., Budig, M. J., & Boeckmann, I. (2011). Work–family policies and the effects of children on women’s employment hours and wages. *Community, Work & Family*, 14(2), 139–157.
- Misra, J., Moller, S., Strader, E., & Wemlinger, E. (2012). Family policies, employment and poverty among partnered and single mothers. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 30(1), 113–128.
- Mollborn, S. (2007). Making the best of a bad situation: Material resources and teenage parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(1), 92–104.
- Moller, S., Huber, E., Stephens, J. D., Bradley, D., & Nielsen, F. (2003). Determinants of relative poverty in advanced capitalist democracies. *American Sociological Review*, 68(1), 22–51.
- Musick, K., Meier, A., & Flood, S. (2014). *How parents fare: Mothers’ and fathers’ subjective well-being in time with children*. Los Angeles: California Center for Population Research (PWP-CCPR-2014-010).
- Myrskylä, M., & Margolis, R. (2014). Happiness: Before and after the kids. *Demography*, 51(5), 1843–1866.
- Nelson, S. K., Kushlev, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). The pains and pleasures of parenting: When, why, and how is parenthood associated with more or less well-being? *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(3), 846–895.
- Nomaguchi, K. M. (2012). Parenthood and psychological well-being: Clarifying the role of child age and parent–child relationship quality. *Social Science Research*, 41(2), 489–498.
- Nomaguchi, K. M., & Milkie, M. A. (2003). Costs and rewards of children: The effects of becoming a parent on adult’s lives. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65(2), 356–374.
- OECD. (2014). *OECD family database*. Paris: OECD.
- Offer, S., & Schneider, B. (2011). Revisiting the gender gap in time-use patterns multitasking and well-being among mothers and fathers in dual-earner families. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6), 809–833.
- Ono, H., & Lee, K. S. (2013). Welfare states and the redistribution of happiness. *Social Forces*, 92(2), 789–814.
- Pettit, B., & Hook, J. (2005). The structure of women’s employment in comparative perspective. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 779–801.
- Pollmann-Schult, M. (2014). Parenthood and life satisfaction: Why don’t children make people happy? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(2), 319–336.
- Rizzi, E. L., & Mikucka, M. (2015). *The happiness-parenthood link in a context of limited state support: The case of Switzerland*. FORS Working Paper Series, paper 2015-3. Lausanne: FORS.
- Ross, C. E., & Mirowsky, J. (1988). Child care and emotional adjustment to wives’ employment. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 29(2), 127–138.
- Ross, C. E., & Van Willigen, M. (1996). Gender, parenthood, and anger. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58(3), 572–584.
- Schieman, S., Milkie, M. A., & Glavin, P. (2009). When work interferes with life: Work–nonwork interference and the influence of work-related demands and resources. *American Sociological Review*, 74(6), 966–988.
- Sobotka, S., & Testa, M. R. (2008). Attitudes and intentions toward childlessness in Europe. In C. Höhn, D. Avramov, & I. Kotowska (Eds.), *People, population change and policies. Lessons from the Population Policy Acceptance Study* (Vol. 1, pp. 177–211). Berlin: Springer.
- Stanca, L. (2012). Suffer the little children: Measuring the effects of parenthood on well-being worldwide. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 81(3), 742–750.
- Steiber, N., & Haas, B. (2009). Ideals or compromises? The attitude–behaviour relationship in mothers’ employment. *Socio-Economic Review*, 7(4), 639–668.
- Tanturri, M. L., Mills, M., Rotkirch, A., Sobotka, T., Takács, J., Miettinen, A., et al. (2015). *State-of-the-art report: Childlessness in Europe*. Families and Societies Working Paper Series 32.
- Umberson, D., & Gove, W. R. (1989). Parenthood and psychological well-being: Theory, measurement, and stage in the family life course. *Journal of Family Issues*, 10(4), 440–462.
- Winslow, S. (2005). Work–family conflict, gender, and parenthood, 1977–1997. *Journal of Family Issues*, 26(6), 727–755.