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Does Marriage and Having Children Make Life Better in Europe?

Mare Ainsaar* & Kadri Rootalu

Abstract

The diversity of family types is increasing in Europe. Existing research provides inconsistent results on whether having children in a family influences life satisfaction, and even less is known about how different partnership and social support types influence life satisfaction. We investigate the life satisfaction of officially registered and cohabiting persons with and without children in 24 European countries using the latest European Social Survey data from 2012. To investigate the influence of society and individual selection on family types, we include a range of individual and macroeconomic indicators in the multilevel analyses. The results demonstrate that life satisfaction is influenced by partnership and partnership type, children in a household do not elevate life satisfaction, and lack of economic coping problems might raise the positive value of children. Although the general life satisfaction levels follow predominantly the East–West alignment, the life satisfaction of families within countries is more driven by social support and a clear division of countries between East and West societies is not perceivable.

Keywords: life satisfaction, family types, children, social support.

Introduction

Declining fertility and marriage rates have raised questions about the sustainability of the demographic future of Europe. Although marriage and children remain an essential part of family life in Europe, the share of single, never married persons and persons without children is increasing (Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008; Thomson, 2014). Also the different forms of cohabitation are replacing traditional ones (Perelli-Harris, Kreyenfeld, Single-Rushton, Keizer, Lappegård, Jasiloniene, Berghammer, & Di Giulio, 2012). There is no universal judgement about the influence of the different family forms on personal well-being, but analyses of the costs and benefits of these forms can provide some hints about their overall value for people living in different family formations. Measurement of life satisfaction has recently become one of the most popular tools to evaluate general life success. At a time when partnership and fertility behaviour is becoming less influenced by social norms and is more subject to individual choices in Europe, comparison of life satisfaction in different family types can provide some estimates about the future development of family behaviour. We assume that family types with higher life satisfaction will also be the more popular choices in future demographic behaviour of people, if they are rational. For example, if children in a family will diminish life satisfaction, there will be less incentives to have children, or if cohabiting couples are happier than married couples, it might be a strong incentive for the spread of cohabitation. Previous studies by Testa and Basten (2014) had, for example, demonstrated how satisfaction with life is directly and indirectly related to fertility plans. However, international analyses of life satisfaction in different family types combining the presence of children and partnership types are still rare, and most of them fail to take into account country situations.

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The aim of the paper is to compare and understand the sources of life satisfaction in different family types in Europe. We are especially interested in the difference between families with and without children, and whether persons living in officially registered partnerships are more satisfied than cohabiting couples. We use different individual and country variables in the multilevel analyses in order to understand the sources of life satisfaction differences.

Life satisfaction and children

According to the value of children approach, children bring different benefits to their parents. In recent years, the value of children seems to be more related to emotional benefits than utilitarian or normative values (Mayer & Trommsdorff, 2010). The benefits of having children may vary under different social and economic conditions (Nauck, 2014). Because the majority of births are planned or at least wished for (Ainsaar, 2011) and children are expected members of a family in contemporary Europe, we can assume that they might provide positive life satisfaction to parents. At the same time, raising children requires additional resources (Becker, 1991), and, therefore, children might also cause an additional burden to their parents. Therefore, the influence of children on a parent's well-being is not very clear.

Previous empirical studies have analysed changes in life satisfaction of parents according to a different parity of children (Vignoli, Pirani, & Salvini, 2014; Aassve, Goisis, & Sironi, 2012; Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005; Van der Lippe, Voorpostel, & Hewitt, 2014; Musick & Bumpass, 2012; Margolis & Myrskylä, 2013), but most of studies analyse only one country case. The country comparative analyses are still limited and reveal different results. For example, Billari (2008) presents a descriptive analysis from the Gender and Generations Surveys of France, Germany, Bulgaria, Georgia, Russian and Hungary, showing a positive modest effect of children on happiness. Aassve, Goisis and Sironi (2012), using ESS data from rounds 1 and 2, report a positive and significant association between happiness and childbearing, especially in the case of a newborn child. They also found that more children do not increase a father's subjective well-being, while they do increase a mother's subjective well-being, and having children in a partnership results in higher levels of well-being; conversely, having children while being single corresponds to a more disadvantaged condition, especially for women.

At the same time, several surveys report only a limited positive effect of children (Aassve, Goisis, & Sironi, 2012; Kohler, Behrman, & Skytthe, 2005; Stutzer & Frey, 2006) or no effect at all (Zimmermann & Easterlin, 2006).

One of the most recent studies was published by Vignoli, Pirani and Salvini (2014), who investigated the life satisfaction of different family types in Europe and found that levels of life satisfaction among couples with children were significantly higher than in other family types. However, after the socioeconomic situation of the family was taken into account, the influence of family status on life satisfaction disappeared and they concluded that life satisfaction differences can be largely attributed to socioeconomic differences. They included two country level components in the analyses – net social protection benefits and full unemployment benefits, but because of their general influence on the total population these indicators do not help to explain the life satisfaction differences between family types.

We have a hypothesis that targeted social protection schemes for families with children should increase the life satisfaction of parents, because they help to cover the need for additional resources (Ainsaar, 2008, 2014; Aassve et al., 2012; Harknett, Billari, & Medalia, 2014). A bias between needs and resources might be the source of a life satisfaction drop. Families with children are supported in all European countries, although the support level and schemes may differ. Also, norms and attitudinal environments might be important. For example, single parents are happier in countries with a weak two-parent family norm, where separation and single parenthood are more common (Rootalu, 2008;

Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015). Additionally, work and life reconciliation conditions are an important part of life for families with children (Simone, Lampis, Lasio, Serri, Cicotto, & Putzu, 2014), and are therefore included in our analyses.

Marriage, cohabitation and life satisfaction

Partnership is often seen as a security network to raise the well-being of persons and diminish economic, health and social risks (Martikainen, Martelin, Nihtilä, Majamaa, & Koskinen, 2005), although the success of different partnership types is not clear. It is traditionally assumed that marriage is more solid and, therefore, a better form of partnership compared to cohabitation. Also, the majority of previous studies report higher life satisfaction among married people (see Soons, Kalmijn, & Teachman, 2009; Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2014).

At the same time, demographic data shows a steady increase of cohabiting people in all European countries, and some research has found no differences in two union types. For example, Musick and Bumpass (2012) longitudinally studied changes in the wellbeing of people in marriages and cohabitation unions in the US did not find persistent advantages of marriage over cohabitation. They concluded that: Differences tend to be small and appear to dissipate over time, even when the greater instability of cohabitation is taken into account (Musick and Bumpass, 2012, p. 1).

Most researchers also notice that the life and behaviour of cohabiters may be different from the behaviour of married people because of the values, economic situation or their life-course stage (Perelli-Harris, 2014; Van der Lippe, Voorpostel, & Hewitt, 2014). Part of these differences are explained by demographic selectivity – cohabiters tend to be younger than married people, they have different attitudes, and have not yet achieved economic stability (Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005; Hardie & Lucas, 2010), which has an influence on life satisfaction. Despite great differences in the life of cohabiters and married persons in different regions of Europe (Perelli-Harris, 2014), cohabitation seems to be a more vulnerable partnership type, partly because of the lack of legal recognition, but also because of cautious social attitudes (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2014).

Methods

Data from 24 countries with relevant country level macro variables from the European Social Survey (ESS) latest wave 2012/2013 (ESS Round 6 ..., 2010) is used for analyses. The collection of countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia) provides a representative overview of different family and social protection regions in Europe. The selection of respondents is limited to ages 20-60 because this is the age range of people most likely to have minor children in the household and to have a quite similar life satisfaction level across different age groups. The total number of respondents in the analysis was 28137.

We compare life satisfaction in six family types: registered partnerships with and without children, cohabiting with and without children, and single persons with and without children for descriptive analyses. The life satisfaction of different family types is compared with the life satisfaction of registered couples that have children under the age of 19 (including adopted, step, and foster children) in the household, because they are still the most common family types in Europe.

To study the influence of partnership status and of children on life satisfaction, two variables were formed. The first variable is a combination of the presence of a partner in a household and partnership status: married, cohabiting or single. The second indicator measures a presence of children under 19

in the household. The presence of a partner and a child (or children) in the household was attained from the household members' grid. The type of relationship with the partner was assigned on the basis of the questions: You just told me that you live with your husband / wife / partner. Which one of the descriptions on this card describes your relationship to them? The answers legally married and in a legally registered civil union were merged into the category 'married'. The answers Living with my partner (cohabiting) – not legally recognised and Living with my partner (cohabiting) – legally recognised were used to detect cohabitation. Persons who lived in the same household with a partner but were legally divorced or separated from the partner were excluded from the current analyses (0.003 % from all respondents), because it was not possible to determine their relationship with the present partner.

We use a subjective self-evaluation indicator of life as a dependent variable. The subjective life satisfaction was measured with the question All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life on the whole nowadays? on a 11 point scale, where 0 meant extremely dissatisfied and 10 meant extremely satisfied.

Although ESS data do not allow controlling for pre-selectivity of the life histories (for example, only more optimistic persons find a partner and become parents), we control for individual selectivity by adding different individual factors, such as gender, age, years in education, working or unemployment status, evaluation of coping with present income, subjective health status, generalised trust, satisfaction with democracy in the country, and attending religious services. The influence of all these indicators is well documented and quite well known from previous research (Bradshaw, Hoelscher, & Richardson, 2007; Drobnic, Beham, & Präg, 2010; Hooghe & Vanhoutte, 2011; Gudmundsdottir, 2011; Lever, Piñol, & Uralde, 2005; Groot, Maassen van den Brink & van Praad, 2007; Meer, 2014; Ott, 2011; Pittau, Zelli, & Gelman, 2010; Suldo & Huebner, 2006; Osborne, Berger, & Magnuson, 2012; Prince, Manolis, & Minetor, 2007). Separate indicators for other adult members in the household (apart from the partner) and dichotomous indicators about the fact whether the person had ever divorced or separated from a civil union was added to the models as well, because divorce experience can affect the well-being of adults (Amato, 2000, 2010; Kalmijn, 2010; Symoens, de Velde, Colman, & Bracke, 2014; Wang & Amato, 2004).

The variable that showed coping with present income clearly divided those who answered into two groups – those who said that they live comfortably with present income or cope with it, and the other group who reported that their coping is very difficult or difficult with the current household income.

Personal well-being is also a product of the socio-economic environment. Since family behaviour differs regionally in Europe, we also assume that diverse social environments influence the life of married and cohabiting persons. Wealth levels, social support schemes, and unemployment risk usually have an influence on general individual well-being (Welsch, 2007; Hooghe & Vanhoutte, 2011; Suldo & Huebner, 2006; Zagorski, Evans, Kelley, & Piotrowska, 2013; Drobnic, Beham & Präg, 2010). We included country indicators that we expect to influence the well-being of families with children and partnered people, such as the country's real expenditure per capita (PPS per inhabitant), the proportion of GDP spent on family/children policies and a variable measuring the mean satisfaction of respondents with a balance between work and other aspects of life. The data for real expenditure per capita (the best indicator of the wealth level of individuals in a country according to Eurostat) and the share of GDP allocated for family and children are obtained from Eurostat databases. Satisfaction with work/other aspects of life balance is a country mean from the ESS 2012 dataset on the scale of 0-10 (10 indicating higher satisfaction). Finally, we assume that social attitudes might have an influence on the life satisfaction of families (see Soons, Kalmijn, & Teachman, 2009; Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015). Therefore, we include the proportion of cohabiting persons derived from ESS as country level indicators in country level models.

Multilevel linear regression with random effects was used in models. All independent continuous variables are centred in the models towards a country's mean to measure differences in values compared to the mean level in each country and not to accentuate between-country effects. This is a standard requirement in multilevel models (Hox, 2002).

Results

The family structures in 24 European countries among people aged 20-60 are diverse. There are essential differences in the proportion of married and cohabiting people and children in the households, but also differences within some family types (Appendix 1). This paper does not analyse the demographical processes behind this structure (country specific timing of childbirth, emancipation of children, marriage, divorce behaviour trends), but instead it looks at life satisfaction differences between these types.

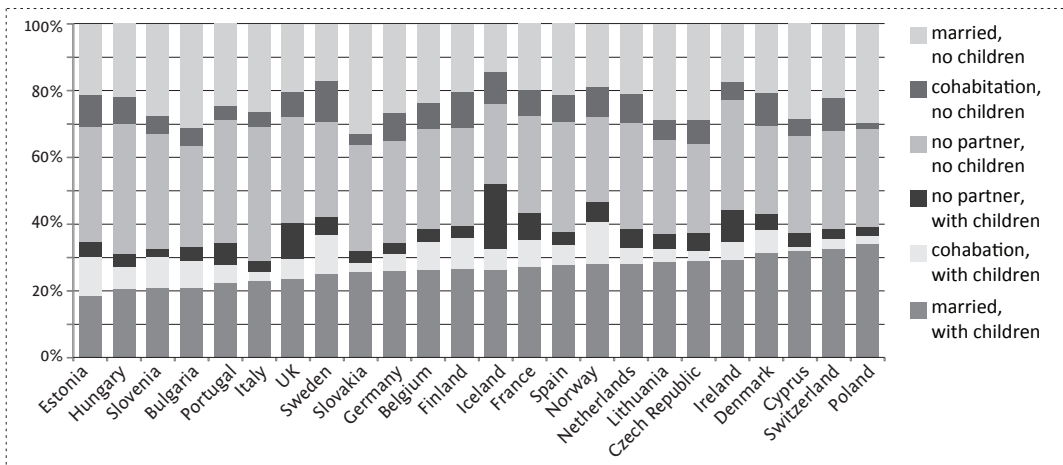


Figure 1. The family structure of people aged 20-60 in different European countries
 Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data

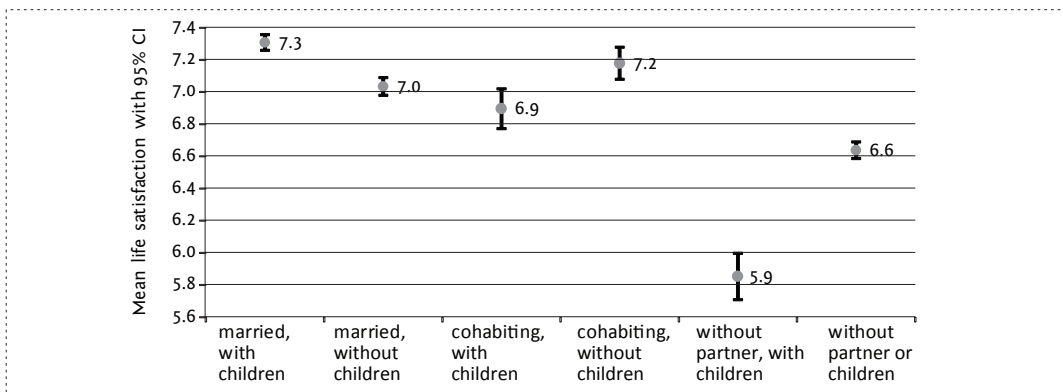


Figure 2. Mean life satisfaction in different family types (data weighed by design and population weights, all countries, scale of 0-10)
 Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data

The share of single parents with children is marginal in all countries, however, it varies significantly as well from 2% in Slovenia and Poland up to 11% in the United Kingdom (Figure 1). The majority of persons aged 20-60 in all countries live in some kind of partnership, either in a marriage or cohabitation. Marriage is the most popular family form of partnership. Cohabitation is more spread in Nordic countries – Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Estonia. Also, the tradition of having children in cohabitation varies largely in different European countries. Countries that have the greatest share of children, such as Iceland, Norway, Ireland, Denmark, France, Sweden, Great Britain and Denmark are child rich mainly because of the share of cohabiters and single parents among those engaged in child rearing (Figure 1). In particular, Estonia has a large share of single persons and cohabitation, and like in many Nordic countries, raising children in cohabitation is usual.

Why families have different levels of life satisfaction

The first overview about the mean life satisfaction in family groups (Figure 2) shows that marriage and cohabitation without children in the household are associated with quite similar life satisfaction levels. Married couples with children are at the same time essentially more satisfied with their lives than cohabiting couples with children. It is also clear that life without a partner is less fulfilling than with a partner. Single parents are the least satisfied group in European countries. The hypothetical social and emotional gain of living together with a child or children does not compensate for a lack of additional resources. Single persons without children in the household are more satisfied compared to single parents, but less pleased with their life than people in partnerships. All considered, it seems that children are not necessarily related to a higher life satisfaction, but it depends on a parent's presence and partnership type.

The life satisfaction of different family types fluctuates in different countries (Table 1).

Country comparisons demonstrate that partnership is associated mostly with the highest life satisfaction, and in the majority of countries there is no difference between cohabiting couples with or without children and married couples without children. Only in a few Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania) and in Portugal married people without children in the household have a clearly lower level of life satisfaction than married people with children. In a majority of countries, cohabitants with and without children are as satisfied with life as married couples with children. Cohabiting parents and single parents are the most diverse groups in terms of life satisfaction (Figure 1) in Europe.

In most of the countries, single parents experience the lowest life satisfaction, but there are exceptions such as Switzerland, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, and Slovenia, where there are no essential life satisfaction differences between married parents and single parents (Table 1).

Life satisfaction is influenced by individual perception and the social environment in which people live. Next we used multilevel linear models to analyse the factors that shape life satisfaction differences in different families (Table 2). The intra-class correlation coefficient for the null model (containing no independent variables) was 15.3%, indicating that the proportion of unexplained variation in the country level was acceptably high.

First, a model with only the family type variables was run in order to provide a basis for later comparisons. The results from the first model show once again that married couples with children constitute the group with the highest life satisfaction, and other family types have a lower life satisfaction level by comparison. The group with the lowest life satisfaction is single parents.

In the second model, a set of individual characteristics were added to the model – other adult family members in the household, being divorced or having a registered union dissolved, gender, main activity, age, education, generalised trust, subjective health status, attending religious services and satisfaction with democracy in the country, employment/unemployment. After adding individual

Table 1. Mean life satisfaction in countries by family type, all groups are compared with the 'married with children' type (with design weight)

	Married with children	Married, no children	Cohabiting with children	Cohabiting, no children	No partner, with children	No partner, no children	Total
Belgium	7.8	7.6	7.3	7.5	6.0**	7.0**	7.4
Bulgaria	5.2	4.7**	4.1**	5.1	3.9**	4.4**	4.7
Switzerland	8.4	8.3	7.8	8.0	7.4	7.7**	8.1
Czech Republic	7.0	6.6**	6.5	6.3**	5.5**	6.6	6.7
Cyprus	6.7	7.0	6.4	6.1	5.3	6.7	6.7
Germany	7.8	7.6	7.2	7.5	6.3**	7.1**	7.4
Denmark	8.7	8.6	8.4	8.5	8.1	8.2**	8.5
Estonia	6.7	6.1**	6.5	6.4	6.1	5.9**	6.2
Spain	7.1	7.0	6.7	6.7	5.9**	6.6**	6.8
Finland	8.3	8.3	8.1	8.1	8.0	7.7**	8.1
France	6.7	6.4	6.5	6.7	5.3**	5.9**	6.4
United Kingdom	7.4	7.4	7.0	7.5	6.0**	6.6**	7.1
Hungary	5.8	5.4	5.1	5.7	5.3	5.4	5.5
Ireland	6.6	6.7	6.4	7.0	6.0**	6.4	6.5
Iceland	8.2	8.4	8.0	8.0	7.7	7.4**	8.0
Italy	7.2	6.6	7.6	7.1	5.2**	6.6**	6.8
Lithuania	6.5	5.9**	6.3	6.6	5.4**	5.8**	6.1
Netherlands	8.0	8.0	8.1	7.8	7.3**	7.4**	7.8
Norway	8.3	8.2	8.3	8.2	7.5**	7.6**	8.1
Poland	7.4	7.1	7.2	7.1	5.1**	6.6**	7.0
Portugal	6.2	5.8**	4.9**	5.7	5.3**	6.2	6.0
Sweden	8.1	8.0	7.9	7.8	6.8**	7.2**	7.7
Slovenia	7.4	7.0	7.0	7.0	6.9	6.7**	7.0
Slovakia	7.0	6.7	6.4	7.7	5.9**	6.6	6.8

* p<0.05; **p<0.01

Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data

variables, the effect of children on life satisfaction of cohabitation dissolved, cohabitation became a less advantageous family type compared with marriage, and married persons without children became slightly more satisfied than married people with children. Namely individual characters not directly related to the family life seem to elevate the life satisfaction of cohabitants and married people with children. The model also demonstrated that women generally have higher life satisfaction compared with men, that having an additional adult person in household besides the partner does not have an impact on life satisfaction, and that life satisfaction differences cannot be explained with previous relationship dissolution experiences.

The third model included the economic coping of households. The life satisfaction of married people with and without children became similar. This is evidence of the fact that the economic coping problems of married persons with children can diminish their life satisfaction. Also, the influence of other adult household members became statistically significantly negative. Other household members seem to have a positive effect on household economic coping, but they do not raise life satisfaction otherwise.

The fourth model includes country level variables, but the effect of different family types on life satisfaction did not change after adding them. The country's GDP has a positive effect on life satisfaction, but the overall work/life balance in the country and share contribution from state budget to families and children had no statistically significant effect on the differences between

Table 2: Satisfaction with life and different family types (multilevel linear regression models unstandardised coefficients, models 2-5 control also for age, years of education, generalised trust, subjective health status, attends religious services, satisfied how democracy works in the country, main activity: employment/unemployment)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Family type (Ref: married)					
Cohabiting	0.04	-0.23**	-0.19**	-0.19**	-0.32*
Without partner	-0.40**	-0.51**	-0.42**	-0.42**	-0.39**
Children in household: (Ref: no)					
Yes	0.27**	-0.09*	-0.01	-0.01	0.08
Family type * children in household					
Without partner, with children	-0.70**	-0.26**	-0.18**	-0.18**	-0.62**
Cohabiting, with children	-0.40**	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.11
Other adult family members in household (Ref: no)					
Yes		-0.05	-0.07**	-0.07**	-0.06*
Gender (Ref: male)					
Female		0.09**	0.09**	0.09**	0.09**
Ever divorced or civil union dissolved (Ref: no)					
Yes		-0.06	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01
No answer		0.02	0.06	0.06	0.07
Coping with present income (Ref: difficult or very difficult to cope)					
Coping or living comfortably			1.12**	1.12**	1.12**
No answer			1.01**	1.01**	1.02**
Country level indicators					
Balance work/other aspects				0.32	0.32
Proportion of cohabiting in the country				0.01	0.01
Real expenditure per capita in PPS_EU28 (in 1000s)				0.09**	0.09**
Proportion of GDP on family/children				-0.05	-0.05
Family type*children in household*proportion of GDP on family/children					
Married, with children					-0.04
Without partner or children					-0.01
Without partner, with children					0.14*
Cohabiting, without children					0.05
Cohabiting, with children					0.05
Constant	7.03**	5.50**	4.84**	1.03	1.02
Log likelihood	-60507.25	-57826.84	-57058.13	-57045.7	-57039.6

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data

family types. The same was true for the share of cohabiting persons in the country. It did not change any cohabitation related coefficients. An interaction between family type and country expenditures on family and children was added to the last model (model 5). In this model, we were particularly interested in the effects of support provided for families on the life satisfaction of different family types. The results show that higher spending on families and children has a particularly strong effect on single parents' life satisfaction. When a country's spending on families and children is low, single parents have a significantly lower life satisfaction than married couples. With an increase of country spending on families and children, the difference becomes smaller. The state spending on families and children increases the life satisfaction of single parents, but does not have a clear effect on the life satisfaction of other family types, if the household economic coping and other country level variables are already taken into account.

Conclusions and discussion

The paper investigates life satisfaction differences in Europe among families with partners who are married or who are cohabiting, with and without children. The unique contribution of this work is the ability to simultaneously compare different family types and take the effect of children into account. In order to explain family type differences and control for an individual selectivity of persons into the different family types (see Kravdal, 2014), we added a set of individual and country indicators into the analyses.

Our analyses demonstrated that children generally do not provide higher life satisfaction, but life satisfaction is more shaped by partnership and partnership type. Married couples with children and cohabiting families are the groups with the highest life satisfaction. After considering individual selectivity among these groups, marriage without children remains the most rational choice to achieve the highest life satisfaction. A lack of economic difficulties in a household makes life with children as good (but not better) than in households without children. We could not find clear positive effects of children on life satisfaction, despite the hypothesis that children can hold some emotional value for their parents (Mayer & Trommsdorff, 2010).

A simple comparison of life satisfaction means between the family types showed that there is no life satisfaction difference between marriage or cohabitation if a household has no children. However, couples with children are essentially more satisfied with life if they live in marriage. This might be because cohabiting parents are less socially respected than married couples, as argued by Stavrova and Fetchenhauer (2014), but our analyses did not provide the final answer to this question.

Married people without children in the household had lower life satisfaction only in a few countries (Eastern Europe and Portugal), compared with married people who had children in the household. These group differences can be explained by the attitudinal environment.

The group with the lowest life satisfaction is single parents with children, but at same time the life satisfaction of single parent families demonstrated the most diverse results across countries. Although clear general trends did emerge, country specific results were also discovered, which deserve further investigation. The country level particularities did not fit with any known country classifications that we could use for explanations.

Previous literature reported lower life satisfaction levels of cohabiting couples and argued that it is partly the outcome of economical vulnerability or social attitudes. This paper did not find positive proof for the hypothesis of economic vulnerability, nor did it find any positive influence of the share of cohabiting couples on the life satisfaction of cohabiters (see the descriptive norm explanation by Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2014).

Objectively, the economic situation of single parents is the worst, but their life satisfaction remained worse also after taking into account economic coping. Although child and family allocations from governments did diminish the gap of life satisfaction among single parents compared to other family types, it still remained the lowest and is probably also influenced by factors not covered in our analyses.

The partially missing indicator for how the share of GDP allocated to families influences life satisfaction differences (the only clear effect found was on single parent families' life satisfaction) can be explained by the fact that we already took into account the economic coping of persons on the individual level models. The majority of family policy is usually targeted to improve the economic situation of all families with children, which is already reflected in their individual evaluations on coping. Part of the phenomenon is also related to the collinearity of country level variables. In 2012 the wealthier countries also allocated a greater share of resources to children and families from their GDPs, and real expenditure per capita in a country dissolved a weak positive influence of family friendliness.

All results of this study lead us to the conclusion that although the diversity of different family forms might increase, married couples still have several advantages in Europe. There are no doubts about the benefit of partnership on well-being, but the benefit of children on life satisfaction seems to depend on the economic situation of parents and to some extent on the wealth level and support of a country. Single parenthood is the least advantageous family form from the point of view of life satisfaction, but the large share of divorced and separated persons in this group shows that this is not a voluntary choice. Although in general life satisfaction levels follow the East–West divide, the life satisfaction of families within countries is more driven by the diversity of social support and a clear division of countries into Eastern and Western family types is not present.

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Appendix 1: Description of different family types in the databases (data with weights)

	Married with children N = 8439	Married, no children N = 7558	Cohabiting with children N= 1596	Cohabiting, no children N = 1932	No partner with children N = 1264	No partner or children N = 8784	Total N = 29573
Other adult family members in household %	25.1	47.1	13.3	14.0	34.5	62.8	41.0
Female %	54.4	56.5	54.7	52.3	84.8	45.9	53.60
Subjective health status bad or very bad %	2.8	7.5	3.9	4.1	6.3	6.1	5.3
Never attend religious services %	26.9	29.5	47.3	46.9	37.6	37.2	33.5
Main activity %							
Working	73.9	68.5	68.9	74.2	65.0	57.1	66.9
Unemployed	7.6	8.1	11.8	10.2	12.9	14.9	10.5
Other	18.5	23.4	19.3	15.6	22.1	28.0	22.6
Satisfied with how democracy works in the country 6-10 points %	42.2	36.6	43.6	46.5	33.5	38.6	39.7
Ever divorced or civil union dissolved %	6.5	8.4	21.1	21.4	49.5	16.9	13.7
Difficult to cope with income %	28.0	28.5	28.9	21.5	50.0	32.2	29.9
Age mean (sd)	40.6 (7.4)	50.3 (8.7)	35.9 (7.9)	36.8 (11.9)	39.7 (8.4)	35.1 (13.1)	40.9 (11.7)
Years of education, mean (sd)	14.0 (7.0)	13.2 (8.2)	13.6 (6.4)	14.1 (5.2)	13.7 (7.6)	14.1 (7.7)	13.8 (7.4)
General trust mean (sd)	5.2 (4.3)	4.9 (4.6)	5.3 (3.2)	5.4 (3.8)	4.8 (2.5)	5.1 (4.9)	5.1 (4.5)

Source: authors' compilation based on ESS 2012 data