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Family Trajectories After Marital Separation in Germany: Patterns and Antecedents

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Abstract: Marital separation has been an important driver of the diversification of contemporary family arrangements, yet the diversity and the nature of family patterns after marital separation in Germany remain understudied. In this study, we adopt a trajectory-based approach to address two key questions. First, what are the typical family trajectories following marital separation? Second, what marital circumstances lead to specific family trajectories after marital separation?

We analysed a sample of 1,563 individuals who separated from their first marriage and participated in the German Socio-Economic Panel between 1991 and 2019. We followed the trajectories of combined partnership and parenthood episodes for these respondents over a 60-month period after their marital separation. To capture the diversity in post-marital trajectories, we used sequence and cluster analysis.

To examine the antecedents of post-marital trajectories, we employed discrete-time event history analysis for multinomial outcomes, using all first-time married respondents as the at-risk population along with typical predictors of marital separation. This approach allowed us to link characteristics of the first marriages with family trajectories after separation.

Our results reveal that most separated individuals spent this period in single living arrangements, often combined with some episodes of non-cohabiting relationships, and with (particularly women) or without (particularly men) children from their first marriage. During this early post-marital period, a relatively small percentage of these respondents remarried or had post-marital childbirth. Additionally, we found that certain post-marital trajectories corresponded to specific demographic and socioeconomic profiles. For instance, our results show that the personal income of women and their contribution to household income during their first marriage likely determined their family trajectories after separation. Overall, our study provides insights into the development of the post-marital life course, and thus on the consequences of marital separation.

Keywords: Post-separation outcomes · Sequence analysis · Family trajectories · Re-partnering · Post-divorce partner market

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1 Introduction

In most OECD countries, the crude divorce rate doubled between the 1970s and the early 2010s (*OECD* 2025). In Germany too, divorce rates increased over these decades until around 2005. Between 2005 and 2010 divorce rates plateaued and have declined since then (*BiB* 2025d; *Schmid/Wagner* 2023). The divorce trend contributed largely to a diverse family landscape in contemporary societies that includes rising shares of post-marital single and lone-parent households, as well as stepfamilies and blended families. As the increasing prevalence of post-marital families has demographic and socioeconomic implications (e.g., *Raley/Sweeney* 2020), more research is focusing on how these families' lives evolve. First, marital separation *per se* marks the start of a new chapter in an individual's family life. The associated dynamics of repartnering, remarriage, or childbearing in higher-order unions indicate that today many family transitions are occurring in the post-marital stage (e.g., *Kreyenfeld/Trappe* 2020; *Raley/Sweeney* 2020). As separation and subsequent family processes do not follow normatively grounded scripts (see e.g., *Guzzo* (2018) for stepfamily instability), the increasing prevalence of post-marital families contributes to an increase in the diversity of (non-*standard*) family life courses. When studying family demography, it is important to understand the extent to which union stability and fertility levels vary between first marriages and subsequent unions. Second, marital separation has traditionally had important implications for the accumulation of disadvantage over the life course (e.g., *Leopold* 2019; *Lersch/Vidal* 2014) and the reproduction of disadvantage across generations (e.g., *Schulz* 2023 on the intergenerational transmission of divorce). However, there is evidence that post-marital family life courses are also relevant for life outcomes. Research has shown that while adults and children in a traditional intact family remain the most advantaged, repartnering and remarriage can buffer some of the negative consequences of marital separation (*Dewilde/Uunk* 2008; *Jansen et al*. 2009).

While the relevance of research on post-marital family outcomes is clear, the depth and the diversity of family paths after marital separation are not yet well understood. The existing evidence on post-marital family outcomes is scattered, as studies have often examined seemingly interdependent transitions separately, such as repartnering and remarriage (e.g., *Beaujouan* 2012; *Schimmele/Wu* 2016; *Schnor et al*. 2017), or processes like childbearing with multiple partners (e.g., *Thomson et al*. 2014) or within a stepfamily context (e.g., *Sweeney* 2010; *Thomson et al*. 2002). To our knowledge, there are only a few studies investigating the combination of partnership and fertility outcomes from post-marital family arrangements (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015 (Flanders); *Vanassche et al*. 2015a (Flanders); *Vidal/Van Damme* 2024 (comparing France, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK)); none of these previous studies focused on Germany. Finally, *Kreyenfeld* and *Trappe* (2020) pointed out that studying the post-separation trajectories from a life-course perspective under consideration of pre-divorce characteristics is relevant.

To close some gaps in knowledge, we study a comprehensive sequence of family transitions that follow the marital separation of first-time married individuals. Cohabitation, particularly first-time cohabitation, carries a distinct societal meaning

unlike that of marriage (*Hiekel et al*. 2014) – one that extends to childbearing (e.g., *BiB* 2025b; *Groepler et al*. 2021; *Holland* 2017) and childrearing (*Perelli-Harris et al*. 2012), both of which in Germany are closely linked to the institution of marriage itself. Thus, our study focuses only on life courses after marital separation. However, we assume that the post-marital trajectory starts after separation irrespective of whether the couple is divorced, and discuss this issue in the background section.

We have two research questions: *First, what are the typical family trajectories after marital separation? Second, what marital circumstances lead to specific family trajectories after marital separation?*

We derive two research objectives from these questions. First, we examine the specific patterns of post-marital family trajectories during the early separation period, combining partnership and parenthood episodes. This approach contributes new knowledge about patterns of continuity and change in family lives after separation, considering differences in occurrence, timing, and stability of family transitions. We analyse post-marital partnership life by considering partnership types by varying levels of institutionalisation: non-cohabitation relationships, unmarried cohabitation, and remarriage. We also consider the presence of children from previous marriages and the timing of post-marital childbearing. Second, we examine how traditional determinants of marital separation are associated with typical post-marital family trajectories to shed more light on the nature of each specific post-marital pattern. Investigating the continuity of separation antecedents over individuals' post-separation life courses provides new knowledge about the development of post-marital family life and path dependencies.

Our empirical analysis uses rich longitudinal data from a sample of individuals newly separated from their first marriage who participated in the German Socio-Economic Panel between 1991 and 2019. We employ sequence and cluster analysis methods to gather evidence of the diversity in post-marital trajectories. To examine the nature of post-marital trajectories of men and women, our analysis employs – for the first time in this kind of study – discrete-time event history analysis of the time to marital separation with clusters of sequences as multinomial outcomes using typical predictors of marital separation as independent variables. Because event history models also consider censoring (i.e., individuals who did not separate by the end of the observation period), we can use all first-time married respondents in the study period as the at-risk population. This approach enables us to obtain better estimates of separation-related determinants of the likelihood of following a specific post-marital trajectory. Our findings reveal that there was diversity in the pathways and the nature of the combined partnership and parenthood life courses observed during the 60 months after marital separation. We discuss the results against the backdrop of recent changes in family dynamics and of divorce in Germany.

2 Background

2.1 Family trajectories after marital separation

The recent literature linking marital separation to an increased complexity of family relationships and living arrangements informs our research into the first research question. We can divide recent lines of enquiry into research focusing on repartnering and research broadly investigating post-marital fertility and stepfamilies.

When studying *repartnering behaviour* after divorce, a key theory proposes that individuals seek new partners based on a combination of factors: their need for a partner, their attractiveness to potential partners, and their opportunities to mate with a new partner (*Becker et al.* 1977; *de Graaf/Kalmijn* 2003; *Goldscheider et al.* 2009). The need for a partner is related to the benefits associated with being part of a couple as opposed to being single, including emotional relationship and a gratifying family life, additional contributions to financial well-being, or parenthood. An individual's personal qualities and resources often determine their attractiveness as a potential partner. Finally, an individual's opportunities to mate are contingent on his/her exposure to and the overall effectiveness of the partner market.

The literature generally agrees on the socio-demographic profiles of individuals most or least likely to repartner quickly after separation. These profiles reflect characteristics tied to their need for a partner and their attractiveness as a partner. Increasing age at marital separation, but also higher age at first marriage, being a parent with physical custody, and having young children are negatively associated with rapid repartnering after marital separation, particularly among women (*de Jong Gierveld* 2004; *Gałęzewska et al.* 2017; *Schimmele/Wu* 2016), also in Germany (*Jaschinski* 2011). Many people who divorce in older ages have children from their first marriage, which can reduce their chances of rapid repartnering. This negative parenthood effect is foremost pronounced among women, who frequently keep physical custody following a separation (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015; *Schnor et al.* 2017; *Vanassche et al.* 2015b). In Germany too, most children live with their mother after parental separation, while only 6-8 percent of children are in shared physical custody (*Langmeyer et al.* 2022). A current study showed no differences in parenting arrangements between the eastern and western federal states of Germany (*Walper et al.* 2021). However, German law allows different arrangements after marital separation. Married couples have joint legal custody if the child is born during the marriage, and divorce or marital separation does not automatically trigger a change in legal custody (*Dethloff* 2015; *Walper et al.* 2021). In 2019, joint parental custody remained stable in 97.5 percent of divorces, i.e. these divorcees had common minor children and neither parent applied for a change at the family court (*Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis)* 2019).

This indicates that divorced mothers' childcare responsibilities – or their reluctance to introduce a new paternal figure into the household at least while their children are young – lowers their likelihood to repartner compared to divorced fathers. Additionally, women with care obligations are often deemed less attractive in partner markets (*de Graaf/Kalmijn* 2003; *Ivanova et al.* 2013; *Pasteels/Mortelmans*

2015). In contrast, separated fathers are likely to repartner earlier. Not only are they less likely to have physical custody of their children, being a father also signals the potential of being a good father (*Wu/Schimmele* 2005). Evidence has shown that compared to women, men repartner more frequently in general, also in Germany (e.g., *de Jong Gierveld* 2004; *Ivanova et al.* 2013; *Jansen et al.* 2009). However, *Ivanova et al.* (2013) has shown that the gender effect is driven by parenthood; among childless individuals in several countries including Germany, chances of repartnering into cohabiting unions are not gendered.

A general empirical finding is that repartnering is becoming a widespread pattern in contexts where divorce is common, as the approval of repartnering is broader in such societies. Additionally, the pool of *singles* for divorced people to match with is larger (*Beaujouan* 2012). When we look at recent historical patterns of family formation in Germany, we see that the age at first marriage is rising (*BiB* 2025b) and the prevalence of never-married individuals at higher ages is increasing (*BiB* 2025a). Furthermore, an increasing number of individuals have experienced divorce, as divorce rates were increasing until the beginning of the 21st century (*Schmid/Wagner* 2023). Change in post-marital behaviour is affecting women in particular, who have been found to be increasingly more likely to repartner in Norway and the Netherlands (*de Jong Gierveld* 2004; *Ivanova et al.* 2013). However, evidence from the Netherlands has shown that new relationships after separation are becoming less institutionalised across recent cohorts, as remarriage rates are now lower than cohabitation rates (*de Jong Gierveld* 2004). Due to the historical patterns in family formation, one might find similar changes across cohorts in Germany like in Norway and the Netherlands.

Education, employment, and income are indicators of an individual's attractiveness, as they determine their resources and thus are important characteristics regarding repartnering. Positive correlations between education and repartnering have been found for women and men in Germany (*Jaschinski* 2011; see *Schnor et al.* 2017 for similar findings for women in Flanders). However, the positive effect of education vanished when accounting for custody arrangements of mothers (as lower-educated mothers are more likely to be solely responsible for child care after marital separation in Flanders) (*Schnor et al.* 2017). Investigating single mothers' repartnering chances, no effects of employment on repartnering have been found in Germany (*Bastin* 2019). A study examining the association between current personal income and repartnering in Flanders found a positive correlation for men, but a negative correlation for women (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2017). In other words, the effect of resources on repartnering chances is gendered and related to parenthood. Higher socioeconomic status for a male divorcee likely makes him an attractive partner. A female divorcee is more likely to have an economic need for a partner as she is more likely to be responsible for (a) child(ren).

We aim to examine the trajectories after marital separation and the turbulence of post-marital life rather than track transitions to new relationships and further childbearing. Thus, it is essential for our analysis to understand the stability of states after separation. Research has shown that the stability of post-marital unions increases with age at union formation, decreases with childbearing in previous

unions, and is unrelated to the time since marital separation in the United States and in Flanders (*Teachman* 2008; *Vanassche et al.* 2015b; *Wolfinger* 2007).

Only a few studies examined the broader spectrum of post-marital relationship types, including unmarried cohabitation and relationships not based on cohabitation, often called "living apart together" (LAT) couples (e.g., *de Jong Gierveld* 2004 (Netherlands); *Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015 (Flanders); *Bastin* 2019 (single mothers in Germany)). Findings indicate that the *institutionalisation* of post-marital unions follows a clear-cut socio-demographic gradient. Age at marital separation influences individuals' type of post-marital relationships. Younger divorcees are more inclined to choose institutionalised relationship forms like cohabitation and remarriage. Conversely, older divorcees more frequently opt for less institutionalised, non-cohabiting relationships (*de Jong Gierveld* 2004). Research also shows substantive gender differences. For example, divorced men are more likely than divorced women to be in LAT or unmarried relationships (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015).

With the increasing prevalence of divorced people, previous research investigated *childbearing* in couples in which at least one partner had experienced a relationship breakdown. A frequently asked question is whether childbearing in post-marital unions compensates for lost births from disrupted first marital unions (*Thomson et al.* 2012). A body of literature has examined the trend toward individuals having childbearing episodes in several unions they formed over the life course (*Carlson/Furstenberg* 2006; *Guzzo/Furstenberg* 2007; *Thomson et al.* 2014). In many countries, fertility with multiple partners is associated for both men and women with having an early first birth, often outside of marriage, and a lower level of education (*Kreyenfeld et al.* 2017; *Thomson et al.* 2014). A second body of literature has focused on fertility among couples who are also stepfamilies or blended families – i.e., families in which one or both of the partners have children from prior relationships (*Heintz-Martin et al.* 2014; *Holland/Thomson* 2011; *Li* 2006). While focused on slightly different subpopulations, both bodies of literature have emphasized the importance of having a new partner and the existence or presence of *children from prior relationships*. Repartnering has an important mediating role for post-marital childbearing since a (relatively) stable partnership is still the preferred site for childbearing (*Van Bavel et al.* 2012). Although lone parenthood is now common (*Berghammer et al.* 2024), it is less likely to be driven by childbearing among unpartnered individuals than by remaining unpartnered after a marital dissolution.

The literature offers several explanations for post-marital childbearing. First, among childless individuals, the birth of a child confers the status of parenthood in a new union formed after a marital separation (e.g., *Prskawetz et al.* 2003; *Thomson et al.* 2002). Second, having a child in a new relationship, particularly when the partners have children from prior relationships, may help to ensure the union's social confirmation (e.g., *Prskawetz et al.* 2003; *Thomson et al.* 2002; *Vanassche et al.* 2015b). Third, post-marital childbearing can enable individuals with a single child from a previous union to provide the child with a sibling (e.g., *Thomson et al.* 2002; *Vanassche et al.* 2015b). Fourth, compared to parents who do not live with their children, parents with physical custody of children from a previous union have greater childrearing responsibilities. They are thus less likely to have additional children

(e.g., *Vikat et al.* 2004). Several studies have found that despite their heterogeneity, stepfamilies and blended families display higher-than-average fertility rates (*Guzzo* 2017; *Henz/Thomson* 2005; *Holland/Thomson* 2011; *Meggiolaro/Ongaro* 2010). In many of these families, childbearing episodes tend to occur independently of whether the partners have children from previous unions. This pattern highlights the value that common children bring to (new) unions. However, research has also suggested that under certain conditions, having children from a previous union could depress childbearing. Notably, research showed that childbearing episodes depend negatively on the number of pre-union children in the household. That is, the higher the number of pre-union children present in the household, the lower the childbearing chances; this is likely due to the partners' already having expenses and responsibilities associated with childrearing (*Prskawetz et al.* 2003; *Vikat et al.* 2004). This association tends to be stronger for women than men, and it is not conditional on the women's higher childrearing responsibilities for their children born from a previous union. In contrast, some studies have found that the presence in the household of a man's children from a previous union increases the chances of childbearing in the post-marital union (*Buber/Prskawetz* 2000; *Thomson* 1997). Researchers explained this effect as resulting from the signal of being a good father resulting from the care of pre-union children. In addition, age may partly account for these patterns. Individuals with pre-union children might be older, and empirical research shows that the likelihood of childbearing in higher-order unions declines with increasing age at repartnering, age at first birth, and time spent outside a union (e.g., *Kreyenfeld et al.* 2017; *Thomson et al.* 2012; *Vikat et al.* 2004). Thus, lower post-marital fertility may reflect both parity-specific constraints and – particularly among women – age-related limitations in the remaining reproductive window.

2.2 Antecedents of marital separation and their link to post-separation trajectories

Our empirical analysis builds on the idea that the circumstances and the contexts in which marital separations occur are related to types of post-marital trajectories. By making this assumption, we acknowledge the ample evidence on the relevance of observed and unobserved variation in marital separation for repartnering and childbearing episodes (e.g., *Lillard/Waite* 1993; *Steele et al.* 2005). Contributing to the evidence regarding separation-related factors of post-marital trajectories is a relevant preliminary step to addressing endemic selection processes in the associations between childbearing and partnership dynamics.

The (above-mentioned) literature has already highlighted relevant antecedents of post-marital family transitions. These conditions include socio-demographic factors (i.e., duration of marriage, age at marriage/marital separation, and parenthood status (see e.g., *Gałęzewska et al.* 2017; *Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015; *Teachman* 2008; *Vanassche et al.* 2015b)) as well as spousal resources (i.e., educational level, employment status, and income (see e.g., *Bastin* 2019; *Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2017; *Schnor et al.* 2017). From research on divorce risk in Germany, we furthermore know that household income reduces the risk of divorce, though the spouses' individual

income contributions does not affect a couple's stability (*Schmid* 2021). Regarding overall divorce trends, rates in Germany increased from the mid-1960s until approximately 2005, followed by a decline since about 2010 (*BiB* 2025d; *Schmid/Wagner* 2023). Nevertheless, current divorce rates remain elevated compared to the 1970s, indicating their persistently high level. In East Germany, the divorce rate developed similarly upward but remained at higher levels compared to West Germany until 1990. The divorce rate sharply decreased with German reunification and the associated harmonisation of the legal framework to West German divorce laws. Since about 2000, divorce rates in former East Germany have converged with West German trends but remain slightly below the West German level. The divorce risk has been shown to vary by marriage cohort (*Schmid/Wagner* 2023) and is thus a relevant antecedent for post-separation family trajectories. German divorce research commonly estimates divorce risks separately for the eastern and western federal states of Germany to account for divergent historical divorce trends and distinct former family policy regimes (*Mazzeo et al.* 2024; *Schmid/Wagner* 2023; *Schnor* 2012). While *Schnor* (2012) identified lower divorce risks among eastern German marriages (when accounting for religious denomination), a more recent study using a machine-learning approach found no significant differences in marital stability between eastern and western Germany (*Arpino et al.* 2022).

Despite the relevance of previous research, systematic evidence on post-separation family trajectories in Germany remains limited. Existing studies on Germany have focused predominantly on single transitions – such as repartnering, remarriage, or stepfamily fertility – rather than examining how partnership dynamics and childbearing unfold jointly over time after marital separation. Moreover, little is known about the heterogeneity of post-separation pathways in the German institutional context, where marriage remains strongly linked to childbearing and custody arrangements as well as gendered care responsibilities shape opportunities for repartnering and further fertility. By adopting a life-course perspective and analysing partnership and parenthood processes together, our study provides the first comprehensive typology of post-separation family trajectories in Germany and links them to pre-separation marital circumstances.

From previous research and theoretical arguments come expectations about the post-marital partnership and parenthood patterns. We expect to find that divorcees in the younger marriage cohorts tended to enter new, but less institutionalised partnerships (i.e., LAT relationships instead of cohabitation or remarriage) and to fewer childbirths in a context in which the current post-divorce partner market offers men and women more opportunities to repartner because the trend in divorce rates have produced a larger post-divorce partner market. Furthermore, we expect to find divorcees of lower age at marriage following more institutionalised partnership trajectories (i.e., stable cohabiting or married partnership trajectories likely with children), as their unions ended earlier; i.e., at the relatively young ages having more opportunities on the partner market to find a new partner. As resources are closely related to the need for and the attractiveness of a partner, we expect to find that having greater spousal resources leads to higher rates of repartnering, but we cannot derive expectations with regard to the level of institutionalisation of the partnership

trajectories. The resulting empirical associations between these antecedents and the specific post-marital trajectories will be discussed and compared with our expectations and the findings from the previously presented literature.

Marital separation and marital divorce

We note that the literature displays some duality and inconsistency in its framing of the start of the post-marital trajectory after either marital separation or marital divorce. In this study, we assume that the post-marital trajectory starts after separation – i.e., when one or both spouses leave the marital home – independently of whether or when the divorce is finalised. We partially justify our decision on the wide variation in divorce laws across and within countries, which suggests that separation might be more comparable than divorce across studies. In addition, as not all separations end in divorce (at least not immediately), focusing on divorce only could lead to an under-reporting of post-marital unpartnered stages in the short run. The study of post-marital trajectories starting after divorce could, however, also be advantageous given that family behaviour is more clearly regulated from this point onward. After divorce, the ex-spouses can legally start a new traditional family project, and they are less likely to reconcile.

Furthermore, the legal issues surrounding child custody and financial obligations are not clearly regulated during the pre-divorce separation period. However, cross-national research on repartnering outcomes after marital break-ups has suggested no substantive differences between marital separation and divorce (*Gałęzewska et al*. 2017). As we are interested in understanding sequential processes of marital dissolution with a prospective perspective, we have chosen to start our investigation at the point of separation rather than divorce, which allows us to monitor relationships and childbearing episodes that started after dissolution of first marriages but before the divorce, incorporating all transitions after marital break-ups. Finally, we note that separated spouses may reconcile, which is more likely to occur before they file for divorce. To avoid further study complexity, we assume that the period of separation begins at the last point in time the couple was cohabiting.

3 Data and Method

3.1 Dataset

For the empirical analysis, we use longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (*SOEP* 2023 (v38.1)), which is a large, ongoing, representative household panel study conducted since 1984 in West Germany and since 1990 also in East Germany (*Wagner et al.* 2008). The dataset fits our study design because (i) it follows individuals after separation and divorce, even for non-original sample respondents; (ii) it contains detailed partnership and (biological and adoptive) fertility histories, including information pre-dating the study, for all survey respondents; and (iii) it contains information on relevant predictors of marital separation, including the

responses of both (ex-)spouses if they were married at the time of at least one interview.

3.2 Sample

Sample for diversity of post-marital life courses (RQ1)

To analyse typical post-marital family trajectory patterns (RQ1), we use post-marital observations from a sample of adult-age, first-time married respondents who ended their union through a separation between 1991 and 2014. The lower limit results from the study having been expanded to eastern Germany in 1991. The upper limit is set to avoid the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have influenced the post-marital trajectories of those separating after 2014 because we observe five-year periods after marital break-ups. We count 2,398 respondents who meet these sample criteria. We exclude 835 respondents (34.84 percent) who provided less than 60 months of information on their post-marital trajectory due to gaps in partnership information and, particularly, due to panel attrition. After exclusions, our analytical sample consists of 1,563 individuals. The socio-demographic profile of the divorcees in our sample is as follows: 59 percent were female, their median age at marital separation was 39 years, 27 percent were living in eastern Germany, and 15 percent had a direct or indirect migration background which means that either themselves or their parents migrated to Germany (see Table 1, Overall). As shown in Table A1 (Appendix), among the respondents excluded due to incomplete information on post-marital trajectories, women are slightly underrepresented (54 percent), and individuals with a migration background (25 percent) are overrepresented, a pattern that might be partly explained by attrition due to international migration.

Sample for nature of post-marital life courses (RQ2)

We use this sample of separated individuals to analyse the separation-related determinants of post-marital living arrangement trajectories (RQ2). To obtain better estimates of the antecedents, we also include a comparison group composed of individuals with censored information; i.e., respondents with shorter post-marital trajectories or whose marital separations are not observed in the study window. For the comparison group, we draw married observations of all adult-aged, first-time married respondents (i) who did not (definitively) separate from their first marriage between 1991 and 2014; (ii) whose spouse died; or (iii) who separated but the observation of the post-marital trajectory is censored before 60 months following the marital separation. The sample of individuals meeting these criteria, including the separated individuals studied in RQ1 and the comparison group, sums to 36,793 individuals and 278,722 observations (person-years) between 1991 and 2014. After excluding individual observations with missing information in key model

Tab. 1: Cluster type's socio-demographic composition, internal consistency, and within-sequence heterogeneity (mean values)

	Lone parents	Unpartnered and childless	Childless in LAT relationships	Parents	Childless in coresidential partnership	Parents	Childbearing	Overall
Socio-demographic profile								
Women	0.82*	0.43*	0.43*	0.83*	0.48*	0.58	0.66	0.59
Eastern Germany	0.31	0.27	0.21*	0.28	0.25	0.34*	0.23	0.27
Migration background	0.18	0.14	0.14	0.15	0.13	0.14	0.17	0.15
Marriage duration	13.35	15.67*	12.05*	12.49	14.73*	12.39	6.48*	13.04
Separation year	2000*	2002*	2003*	2001	2002*	1999*	1998*	2001
Age at separation	38.18	43.47*	39.12	37.23*	41.41*	37.01*	30.35*	39
Cluster internal consistency								
Average silhouette width	0.48*	0.68*	0.02*	0.26*	0.30*	0.25*	0.11*	0.33
Within-sequence heterogeneity								
Complexity index	0.06*	0.04*	0.11*	0.11*	0.09	0.10*	0.13*	0.08
Turbulence index	3.90*	2.84*	6.00*	5.88*	4.82	5.23*	5.85*	4.68
N	333	284	285	108	246	185	122	1563
%	21.31	18.17	18.23	6.91	15.74	11.84	7.81	100

Notes: Typical post-marital trajectory paths (cluster types) over 60 successive months after dissolution of the first union. Marital unions dissolved between 1991 and 2014.
* Cluster-type value differs significantly from the average value at 5 percent two-tailed.

Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019).

variables, the sample for the event history analysis consists of 239,606 observations from 29,422 individuals.[1]

3.3 Empirical strategy

Diversity of post-marital life courses (RQ1)

Defining states of post-marital life courses

We define post-marital trajectories as sequences of monthly states starting at the month when the marital separation occurred and over the subsequent 60 months. The monthly partnership data used to reconstruct post-marital family trajectories were collected retrospectively as part of life-history modules and corroborated with prospectively collected information from the annual panel interviews. Our state sequences combine the *partnership states* (i.e., unpartnered, living apart together (LAT, i.e., in a non-cohabiting relationship), cohabitation, remarriage) with the presence states of the respondent's own (biological and adoptive) *children* (i.e., no children, children born or adopted before marital separation, children born or adopted after marital separation). Combining the states across these family dimensions recognises the local interdependence of the two family dimensions; i.e., the states develop jointly and affect each other at any given time. Our decision to analyse the partnership states and the presence states of the respondent's children is based not only on the theoretical insights, but also on our desire to include in the analysis empirical group permutations of sufficient size to allow for the meaningful interpretation of patterns (i.e., all sequence states account at least for three percent of the state space).

Furthermore, we decided to focus on children's presence instead of parenthood, as previous research has shown that the former is more relevant than the latter to repartnering (e.g., *Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015; *Vanassche et al.* 2015b). Among other insights, we find that childbearing in post-marital relationships often occurs in the context of a cohabitation-based (whether married or not) relationship, and in which the partners' children from the previous union are also present. This result limits the number of categories we can generate. First, in cases in which the respondents were unpartnered or in relationships not based on co-residence, we do not distinguish between pre- and post-marital children. Second, in cases where the respondents were in post-marital unions based on cohabitation or marriage, the observations of the respondents' children who were present in the household before and after the marriage dissolved are merged into a single category. Taking this into account, our sequence alphabet consists of 10 differentiated states: "Unpartnered, no children"; "Unpartnered, with children"; "LAT, no children"; "LAT, with children"; "Cohabiting, no children"; "Cohabiting, with previous children"; "Cohabiting, with further children";

[1] The bulk of the missing data is in the variable "contribution to household income" from a lack of information on the partner's income. We note that sensitivity analyses excluding this variable led to similar model results.

"Married, no children"; "Married, with previous children"; and "Married, with further children".

Sequence analysis and cluster methods

We apply sequence analysis methods in the following two steps to assess the level of heterogeneity in post-marital family trajectories. First, we assess the average time spent in each state using sequence distribution visualisations by gender. Second, we establish patterns based on the similarities across respondents' sequences. To this end, we compare each respondent's sequence to the sequences of all other sample respondents using a dynamic Hamming distance algorithm. The algorithm deploys empirical transition rates calculated from the sample to compare the sequences. In the analysis, two sequences with the same changes in family roles occurring at about the same time are considered more similar. An analysis using alternative algorithms prioritising sequence order over the timing of transitions yielded similar results.[2]

In a third step, we apply cluster analysis to the resulting matrix of distances to generate sequence clusters that represent typical post-marital trajectories. We use the Ward method for clustering because it generates homogeneous clusters of relatively equal sizes. Based on empirical fit and theoretical criteria, we chose the cluster solution. As the clustering of sequences across genders or gender-specific sequences is equivalent (with minor differences explained in the results section), we chose to pool men and women in the analysis. Cluster sequence visualisations and tabular information support the description of patterns in post-marital trajectories. We discuss the diversity in post-marital trajectories based on the number of clusters and their compositional features. These clusters reflect socio-demographic profiles based on the cluster average of gender, region, migration background, marriage duration, divorce year, and age at divorce. We also use two composite measures of within-sequence heterogeneity to assess how clusters vary regarding average occurrence, duration, and timing of family states in post-marital sequences. The first of these measures is a *complexity* index (*Gabadinho et al.* 2011), in which higher values indicate an increasing number of episodes and family states within the sequences. The second measure is a turbulence index (*Elzinga/Liefbroer* 2007), in which higher values indicate an increasing number of episodes and family states within sequences and increases in the length of time spent in each state. In addition, we assess the statistical fit of the cluster using average silhouette widths, an internal cluster consistency measure in which higher values indicate that, on average, sequences fit better within the assigned cluster than in other clusters.

[2] We obtained the same cluster solutions (but slightly different cluster sizes) using distances calculated with alternative algorithms such as optimal matching (substitution costs of two and indel costs of one) or longest common subsequence.

Nature of post-marital life courses (RQ 2)

Event history analysis on the outcome post-marital trajectories with the control group of still married

We employ event history analysis to assess the separation-related correlates of post-marital living arrangement trajectories. We adjust the discrete-time hazard rates of marital separation to the time since first marriage and calculate the specific hazard rates for each post-marital trajectory outcome as competing risks. That is, our outcome variable is the cluster solution from RQ1, meaning that the event is the transition to one of the seven post-marital trajectories or no transition (remaining in the first marriage). The method is well-suited to our analysis because it allows us to (i) assess the contribution of censored cases (i.e., respondents with no observed marital separation[3]) to the estimated associations, and (ii) to include time-varying covariates. Censored cases are not trivial in our analysis, as their omission will lead to biased estimates of correlates of post-marital trajectories. In addition, by modelling some antecedents as time-varying covariates – all measured in the previous year, at t-1 – the analysis offers more insight into how changing circumstances during the first marriage led to specific family trajectories following separation.

Covariates of the event history model

A general finding is that the hazard rate of divorce increases marginally at the early stages of the marriage, then decreases steadily (*Kulu* 2014). Thus, our models include marriage duration with linear and quadratic terms. Additionally, we include time-constant measures as the marriage cohort broken down into three categories (before 1981 (reference), 1981-1990, and after 1990); the individual's age at marriage; migration background and residing in eastern Germany before 1989. Time-varying categorical indicators included in our model are a dummy indicator of higher education attainment (level 3 of CASMIN classification) and employment status that is set to one if the individual was full- or part-time employed, and zero otherwise. As time-varying interval variables, we include work experience in years in either full-time or part-time jobs; the logarithm of personal income and respondents' contribution to household income, indicating his/her contribution of 2/3 or more to the household income. All these covariates were interacted with gender to address any relevant gendered associations.[4] Any substantive and statistically significant differences we find in the predictors' coefficients across post-marital trajectory outcomes will be used as initial evidence of the continuity of the circumstances of marital separation over the post-marital life course.

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[3] In our longitudinal dataset, the censored cases are either individuals who were continuously married during the study but who eventually separated, or they were individuals whose union was dissolved for other reasons (i.e., the death of a partner).

[4] As a sensitivity check, we assessed whether observations of ex-spouses in the sample were non-independent by modeling their shared variation by including of a random intercept at the couple level. The results remained unaffected.

4 Results

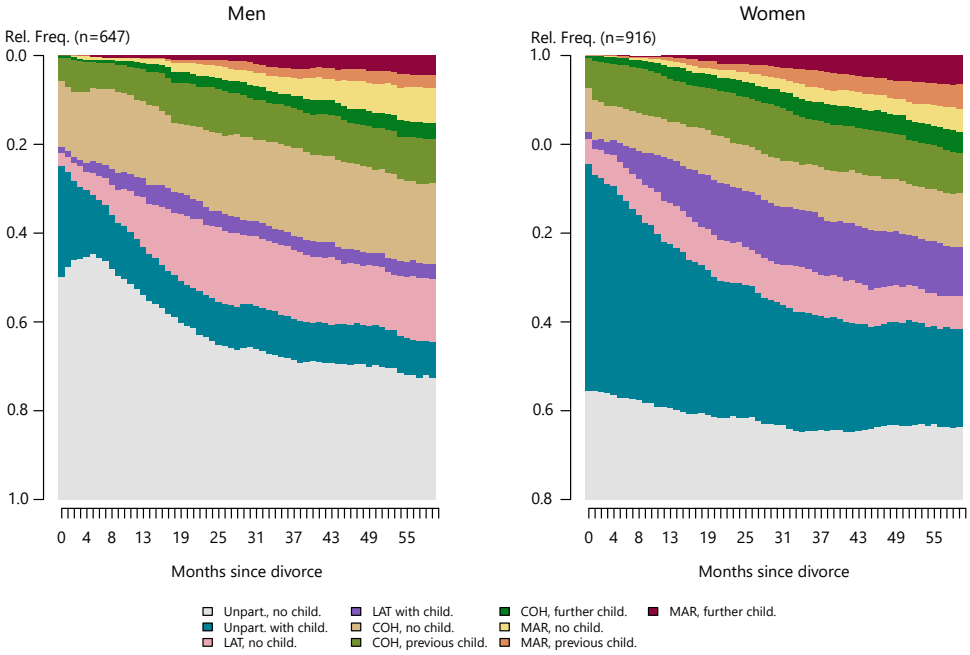
4.1 Description of post-marital family state distributions

Figure 1 shows the monthly sample distributions (as proportions) of the 10 post-marital family states over the first 60 months after separation for men and women who separated in the 1991-2014 period. A visual inspection of Figure 1 shows some heterogeneity in the distribution of family states between men and women. Consistent with prior evidence on child custody prevalence among women, we find that children from a previous union were more likely to stay with their mother than with their father. The most frequent post-marital state observed for women was lone motherhood ("unpartnered, with children"), with women spending an average of 23 months in this state over the 60-month study period. In contrast, the most frequent post-marital state found for men was "unpartnered, no children", with men spending an average of 18 months in this state. When we look at patterns of repartnering, we see that around one in five respondents were already repartnered within the first month after separation, and the proportion grew rapidly with time. An interesting finding is that a non-trivial percentage (circa 20 percent) of men (especially those with no pre-divorce children) and women (especially those with pre-divorce children) were in a LAT relationship within five years after the separation. Figure 1 also shows that coresidential unions grew steadily since first-union dissolution, but less than 20 percent of respondents were remarried within five years. A relatively small share of the men (30 percent) and a large share of the women (70 percent) live together with children upon marital separation. More striking is our finding that living with post-marital children was uncommon in our study sample, even five years after the marital separation. This result is in keeping with recent research showing that in several Western countries, rates of second-order childbearing are low, and the spacing between first- and second-order births is large after a divorce (*Kreyenfeld et al.* 2017).

4.2 Diversity of post-marital life courses

Using cluster analysis to generate a typology of post-marital family life courses, we address our first research question (RQ1: *What are the typical family trajectories after marital separation in Germany?*). We decided on a seven-cluster solution of post-marital trajectory types because this approach has empirical support from the cluster cut-off criteria (see Fig. A1, Appendix), and the resulting sequence patterns of each cluster are interpretable in accordance with the theoretical arguments presented above. Choosing larger cluster solutions would break down a middle-sized group of parents who enter a cohabiting union into two small groups – those who remain cohabiting and those who eventually remarry within the observation window. However, we chose to keep them together, as both trajectories reflect a transition into stable, long-term partnerships following separation, which is theoretically distinct from remaining unpartnered or entering less-committed forms of union. The seven-cluster solution is also consistent with an analogous analysis

Fig. 1: State distribution plots of post-marital family trajectories by gender



Notes: Combined states of partnership and children's household presence during the first 60 months after separation. Marital unions dissolved between 1991 and 2014. *Unpart.*: unpartnered; *LAT*: in a non-cohabiting relationship; *COH*: in unmarried cohabitation; *MAR*: married; *no child.*: no own children present; *with child.*: own children present; *previous child*: presence of own children born or adopted prior to marital separation; *further child.*: presence of own children born or adopted after marital separation.

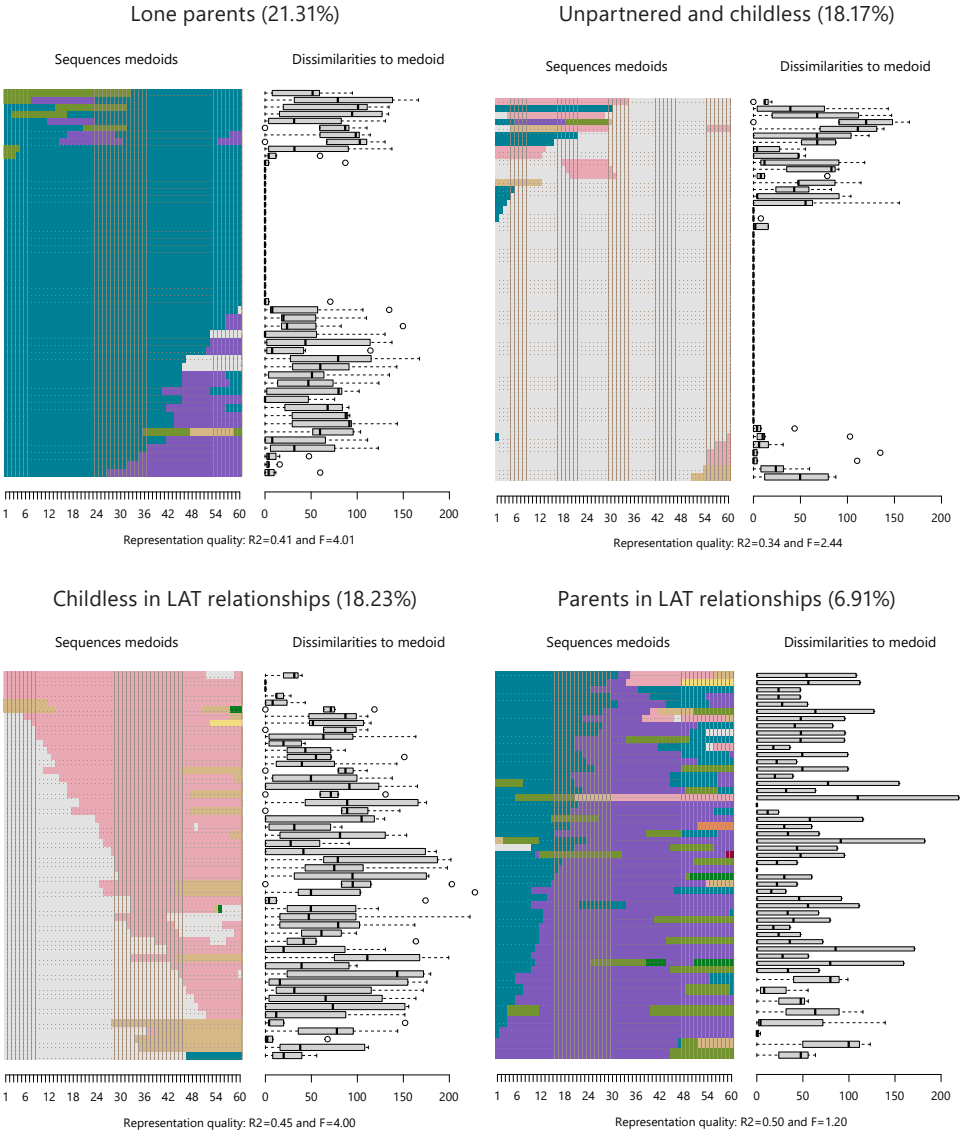
Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019).

done separately by gender. Similarly, larger cluster solutions from gender-specific analyses only broke down theoretically consistent clusters into smaller ones.

The sequences of the seven-cluster solution are graphically presented in Figure 2 as relative frequency plots. The horizontal stacked bars display a selection of representative (i.e., medoid) sequences for each of the seven clusters. Dissimilarities to medoids indicate heterogeneity between the represented sequences and their medoid, shown in the figure. We interpret the visual representation with the support of additional information displayed in Table 1, which includes the cluster's socio-demographic profile, the internal consistency of the cluster (average silhouette widths), and the average within-sequence heterogeneity of the cluster (complexity and turbulence) (*Elzinga/Liefbroer* 2007). A significance test for the difference between the sample average and cluster-specific averages is presented for all measures in Table 1.

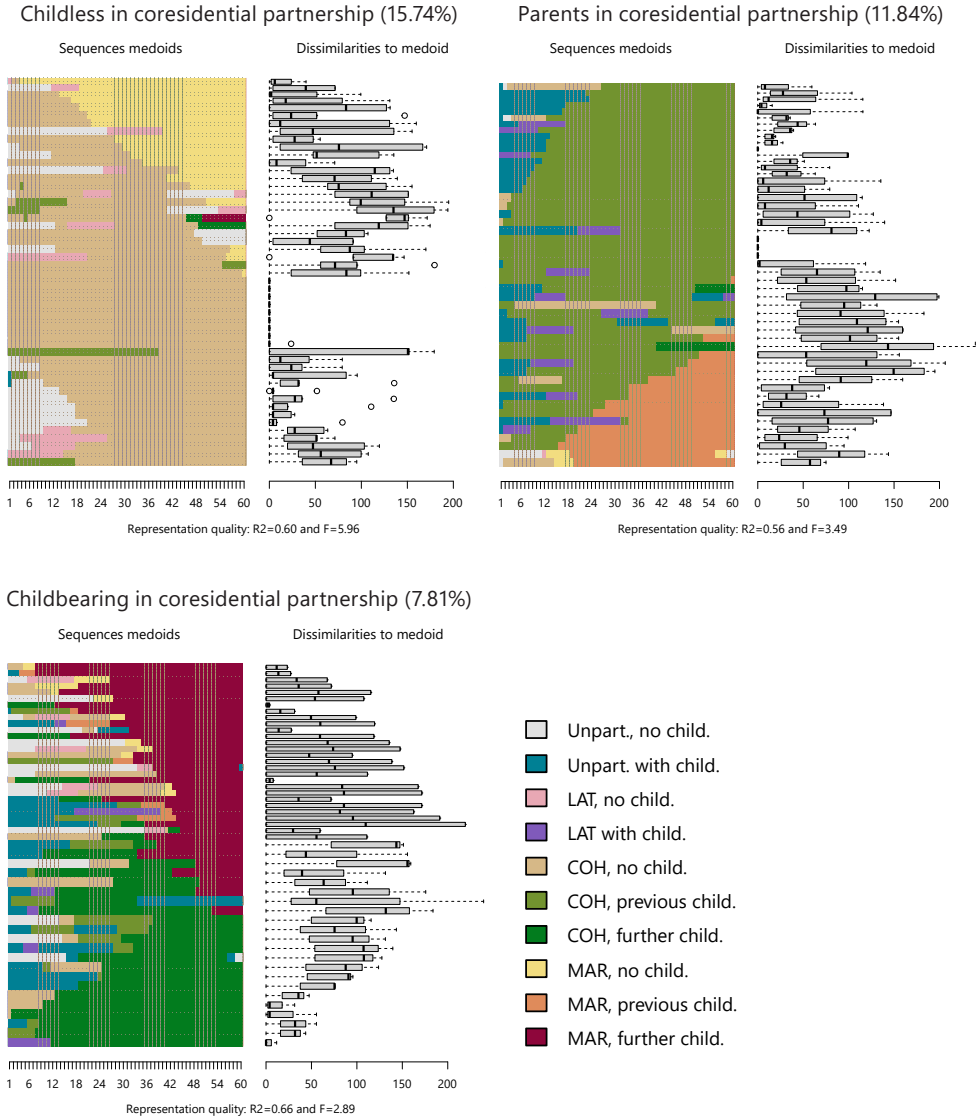
In Figure 2, we identify two large groups ("Lone parents" and "Unpartnered and childless") that together cover around 40 percent of all sequences. The sequences

Fig. 2: Sequence index plots by typical post-marital family trajectory patterns (cluster type)



for both of these groups consist primarily of unpartnered states, with or without children in the household. The "Lone parents" cluster accounts for 21 percent of the sample, and, children were present in the respondents' household in this cluster throughout the sequence. The bulk of these children were born in the previous marriage. Respondents in this group remained unpartnered throughout the observation window or experienced only brief periods of partnership, primarily in LAT relationships. Unsurprisingly, most of the respondents in this cluster were women

Fig. 2: Continuation



Notes: Horizontal stacked bars depict a selection of representative (i.e., medoid) sequences of combined partnership and children presence states over 60 successive months after dissolution of the first union. Marital unions dissolved between 1991 and 2014. *Unpart.*: unpartnered; *LAT*: in a non-cohabiting relationship; *COH*: in unmarried cohabitation; *MAR*: married; *no child.*: no own children present; *with child.*: own children present; *previous child*: presence of own children born or adopted prior to marital separation; *further child.*: presence of own children born or adopted after marital separation. Dissimilarities to medoids indicate heterogeneity between the represented and the representative (medoid) sequences.

Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019).

(82 percent of the cluster) who were awarded physical custody of their children upon separation. The "Unpartnered and childless" cluster comprised 18 percent of the sample, and, featured no children or new partner in the households. Most of the respondents in this cluster were men (57 percent of the cluster), were significantly older at the time of separation, and had longer marriages. The sequences in the "Lone parents" and "Unpartnered and childless" were reasonably consistent (indicated by above-average silhouette widths) and included fewer family transitions (i.e., had less complexity and lower turbulence values), at least in the earlier post-marital life course.

Two groups, featuring together 25 percent of the sample, consist of LAT relationships without children in the household ("Childless in LAT relationships") or with children in the household ("Parents in LAT relationships") throughout most of the observed post-marital trajectories. Within both clusters, being unpartnered with(out) children and transitioning to a LAT relationship with(out) children is the dominant pattern. If children are present, the children are predominantly from the previous marriage, as childbearing is very seldom in both clusters. The cluster "Childless in LAT relationships" accounts for 18 percent of marital-separated individuals in our sample, with a higher share of men (57 percent of the cluster) who have separated comparably early from their first marriage (after 12 years on average). Individuals in this cluster slowly start new LAT relationships after marital separation, and transitions to cohabiting or remarried unions are uncommon. Similar to the "Lone parents" cluster, respondents within the "Parents in LAT relationships" cluster are mainly female (83 percent) and on average slightly but significantly younger at the time of marital separation compared to the overall sample. The "Parents in LAT relationships" cluster is the smallest cluster in our analysis, consisting of only 7 percent of the marital-separated respondents. Most of these divorcees entered a new relationship about 18 months after marital separation, mainly in LAT relationships. Cohabiting, remarriage, or childbearing are seldom, but these marital-separated individuals live together with their child(ren) from their first marriage. However, the internal consistency of both LAT-characterised clusters is very low, and this is paired with a high level of transitions as indicated by high complexity and turbulence index levels. In other words, the post-separation relationships in these clusters are relatively unstable.

Last, three groups consisting of 35 percent of the sample featured co-residential unions during the post-marital trajectory, some with remarriages and/or the presence of children ("Childless in coresidential partnership", "Parents in coresidential partnership", and "Childbearing in coresidential partnership"). Unlike in the other clusters, the respondents in these clusters started cohabiting relationships relatively soon after their marital separation, with some but not most transitioning into marriages. Again, a distinctive feature across clusters was the presence of the respondent's children from the previous union or the new union in the household. The "Childless in coresidential partnership" (16 percent of the sample) displayed sequences in which the respondents started stable cohabiting unions within 12 months after marital separation, some after a period of LAT relationship. A common feature across sequences in this cluster is the absence of children in the household

throughout the observation period. About one-third of the respondents married their partner, and only a few dissolved their union by the end of the period. These respondents were about 2 years older than the average (41.4 years) at the time of marital separation and had been married longer than the average (14.7 years) of our sample.

The "Parents in coresidential partnership" cluster (12 percent of the sample) also features relatively early entries into cohabitation, a few preceded by short periods of LAT states and one in three featuring remarriage by the end of the observation period. In addition to entering a largely stable co-residential union throughout the study period, a common feature across all sequences is the presence of children from the previous union and the absence of post-marital children. The cluster was biased toward respondents living in eastern Germany and marital separation at earlier ages.

The respondents in the last cluster ("Childbearing in coresidential partnership") experienced childbearing episodes within the observation window (i.e., within 5 years after marital dissolution). This cluster accounted for 8 percent of the sequences of the sample and, in line with the arguments and the evidence presented in the literature, it consisted of younger respondents (with an average age of 30 at separation) who were in shorter-than-average first marriages (with an average of 6.48 years of marriage duration). The level of consistency across the sequences in the cluster was low because the trajectories varied depending on the timing of events, the destination states (i.e., married with new children, or cohabiting with new children) as well as on the preceding states (i.e., mostly unpartnered with or without children from previous relationships). The complexity of the sequences was high because the respondents underwent several transitions in a short period.

4.3 Divorce-related predictors of post-marital life courses

We address our second research question (RQ2: *What marital circumstances lead to specific family trajectories after marital separation?*) using event history models that calculate divorce hazard rates specific to each post-marital trajectory outcome. Table 2 displays coefficients of the discrete-time event history models of the marital-separated individuals with seven post-marital outcomes and the reference category of still married or censored spouses. The results are presented as relative risk ratios: values higher than one indicate increased risk and values lower than one indicate decreased risk for observing respondents with the respective characteristic in an outcome in comparison to the state of remaining in the first marriage.[5] We find a significant association of socio-demographic profiles with the risk of separation leading to specific post-marital trajectories.

[5] Figure A2 (Appendix) shows unadjusted hazard rates for each type of event (i.e., 7 clusters of post-marital trajectories). The hazard rates for each peak between 5 to 10 years after marriage and then levels off.

Tab. 2: Separation-related predictors of post-marital family trajectories (relative risk ratios), compared to still married (reference)

	Men						
	Lone parents	Unpartnered and childless	Childless in LAT relationships	Parents	Childless	Parents	Childbearing in coresidential partnership
Marriage duration							
linear term	1.27**	1.06	1.11*	1.73***	1.08(*)	1.19*	1.12
	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.24)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.15)
quadratic term	0.99***	1.00***	1.00**	0.99***	1.00(*)	1.00*	0.99
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Marriage cohort (ref.: <1981)							
1981-1990	1.00	2.18**	1.33	1.25	2.58**	1.78	6.87**
	(0.43)	(0.59)	(0.36)	(0.62)	(0.78)	(0.63)	(4.52)
>1990	0.85	1.28	1.68(*)	0.22	1.47	1.26	3.04(*)
	(0.41)	(0.36)	(0.52)	(0.27)	(0.53)	(0.62)	(2.00)
Age at 1st marriage	0.94*	1.05***	0.97	0.86**	0.97	0.90**	0.86**
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
University degree	0.77	0.43**	0.84	2.51	1.01	0.52	0.69
	(0.33)	(0.12)	(0.21)	(1.65)	(0.31)	(0.23)	(0.40)
Employed	0.25	5.54**	0.08	0.01	3.57	0.04(*)	0.00**
	(0.38)	(3.34)	(0.13)	(0.05)	(4.47)	(0.07)	(0.01)
Work experience	1.03	0.96**	1.00	1.03	0.97	1.02	0.98
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Personal income (log)	1.06	0.87*	1.43	1.52	0.85	1.66(*)	2.02*
	(0.24)	(0.06)	(0.34)	(0.74)	(0.14)	(0.48)	(0.58)
Contribution to household income (More than 2/3)	0.69	0.89	0.62*	1.13	0.97	0.79	0.76
	(0.26)	(0.19)	(0.13)	(0.74)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.39)
Migration background	0.29*	0.47**	0.36***	0.21	0.26**	0.42*	0.74
	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.11)	(0.19)	(0.33)
Eastern Germany	1.07	1.14	0.83	0.68	0.62	1.63	1.13
	(0.43)	(0.25)	(0.20)	(0.55)	(0.19)	(0.49)	(0.56)

Tab. 2: Continuation

	Lone parents	Unpartnered and childless	Childless in LAT relationships	Parents	Childless in coresidential partnership	Parents	Childbearing
			Women				
Marriage duration							
linear term	1.19***	1.01	0.98	1.20**	1.04	1.13(*)	1.37**
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.14)
quadratic term	0.99***	1.00	1.00	0.99***	1.00	1.00*	0.99*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Marriage cohort (ref.: <1981)							
1981-1990	1.70**	1.05	2.54*	1.89(*)	1.39	1.60	2.94
	(0.31)	(0.37)	(1.04)	(0.64)	(0.56)	(0.55)	(1.97)
>1990	1.35	1.14	3.20**	1.66	2.10(*)	0.98	3.72*
	(0.27)	(0.46)	(1.38)	(0.60)	(0.87)	(0.39)	(2.39)
Age at 1st marriage	0.96**	1.02	0.91**	0.96	0.92*	0.93**	0.83***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
University degree	0.65*	0.49(*)	1.16	0.44*	0.76	0.92	0.79
	(0.13)	(0.21)	(0.43)	(0.18)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.35)
Employed	1.09	0.26	0.50	2.28	0.08	2.05	0.01*
	(0.63)	(0.37)	(1.07)	(2.72)	(0.14)	(2.80)	(0.02)
Work experience	0.99	1.02	1.04	1.00	1.05(*)	0.99	0.97
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Personal income (log)	0.99	1.29	1.29	0.90	1.68*	0.94	2.00*
	(0.09)	(0.28)	(0.41)	(0.17)	(0.42)	(0.20)	(0.56)
Contribution to household income (More than 2/3)	2.56***	0.74	0.51	1.03	0.88	2.40**	1.93(*)
	(0.50)	(0.31)	(0.26)	(0.47)	(0.39)	(0.78)	(0.76)
Migration background	0.70*	0.97	0.54	0.53(*)	0.49(*)	0.33*	0.17***
	(0.13)	(0.32)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.15)	(0.08)
Eastern Germany	1.28	1.09	0.59	1.29	0.84	2.05**	0.82
	(0.21)	(0.32)	(0.19)	(0.35)	(0.28)	(0.51)	(0.27)

Notes: Relative risk ratios from discrete-time event history models for competing outcomes (multinomial logistic regression) of separation leading to post-marital trajectories presented in Figure 2; clustered standard errors in parentheses under the coefficients; censoring is due to no separation observed by the end of the observation window, death of the partner, or separation but with a post-marital trajectory of less than 60 months observed by the end of the observation window.
Model statistics: N=239,599; Log-likelihood=-8317.22; Chi-square=1167; AIC=16984.47
*** significant at 0.1%, ** significant at 1%, * significant at 5%, (*) significant at 10%.

Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019; unweighted), own calculations.

Differences between marriage cohorts and age at first marriage

First, the coefficients of the marriage cohort in Table 2 show positive and increasing gradients for women in the "Childless in LAT" cluster, the "Childless in coresidential partnership" cluster, and the "Childbearing in coresidential partnership" cluster, partly reaching statistical significance. Among the women in the "Lone parent" cluster and the "Parents in LAT relationships" cluster, we find significant risks for the divorcees who married between 1981 and 1990. Particularly in the marriage cohort 1981-1990, men's risks of being in the "Unpartnered and childless" cluster and the "Childless in coresidential partnership" cluster are substantially higher than the relative risks of women. Men's risk of being in the arrangement with further children, the "Childbearing in coresidential partnership" cluster, is also higher. Men have increasing and high risks to sort into the cluster "Childbearing in coresidential partnerships" across marriage cohorts. We find a significant positive effect only for the youngest marriage cohort for women. These findings suggest that recent divorcees may generally opt to either enter less formalised new relationships without children or have further children in formalised partnerships. The results are partly in line with our expectation that across marriage cohorts, repartnering is becoming less institutionalised and thus in line with previous findings (e.g., *de Jong Gierveld* 2004).

Second, our results show that age at first marriage is an important antecedent of the post-separation family trajectories and that, particularly older age at first marriage is related to trajectories without children and as a single for both men and women. This aligns with previous findings showing lower repartnering chances among individuals of higher ages at first marriage (*Schimmele/Wu* 2016). While the direction of all other coefficients consistently reduces the risk of belonging to the post-separation trajectories, higher age at first marriage significantly increases the risk for men sorting into the "Unpartnered and childless" cluster. For men and women, higher age at first marriage decreases significantly the risk to follow the "Lone parents" cluster but also the "Parents in coresidential" and "Childbearing in coresidential partnerships" cluster. A potential explanation for these results is that with increasing age at first marriage, separated individuals tend to be older at marital separation. Older separated men and women might perceive themselves as having fewer opportunities or might not have the need for a partnership or new traditional family. Our results are partly in line with our second expectation, as lower age at first marriage is significantly related to the formation of new families.

The role of spousal resources

The coefficients from variables that capture the respondents' socioeconomic status and their economic independence from their partner displayed varied associations of these factors with post-marital typologies and genders. First, consistent with the evidence that the educational gradient of union dissolution is turning negative (e.g., *Matysiak et al.* 2014), we find that most of the coefficients for education displayed negative associations with separation but are not statistically significant for most of the post-marital clusters. However, men with a high educational level have a significantly lower risk of belonging to the "Unpartnered and childless trajectory", which is in line with a previous study finding for Germany that higher education increases the likelihood of repartnering (*Jaschinski* 2011). For women, a high educational level significantly lowers the risk of following the trajectories "Lone parent", "Parents in LAT relationships" and "Unpartnered and childless". Second, for men, the pattern regarding the direction of the coefficients is, by and large, similar for employment status and educational level. Highly educated and employed men have significantly higher risks of following the "Unpartnered and childless" cluster. In addition, employed men show significantly lower risks of following the family clusters "Parents in coresidential partnerships" and the "Childbearing in coresidential partnership" after marital separation compared to non-employed men.

For women, we find that employment tends to be unrelated to post-separation trajectories which falls in line with the finding from *Bastin* (2019) on single mothers' repartnering chances. However, employed women have a significantly lower risk of following the "Childbearing in coresidential partnership" cluster than non-employed women. Labour-market experience indicates the economic potential of individuals to support themselves over the long run. However, we do not find relevant associations between labour-market experience and post-marital living arrangements. Our results show that women's personal income is positively related to two post-separation trajectories. Higher personal income increases the risk of women following a trajectory with stable coresidential partnerships without children or with new children. These findings tend in the direction that career-oriented and financially independent women delayed their childbearing and are not consistent with previous findings from Flanders, where divorced women's repartnering chances decreased with higher income (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2017). Finally, a partner's higher income share is shown to be more frequently related to trajectories of "Lone parenthood" for women (statistically significant) than for men (statistically non-significant). This result might indicate that a woman's level of financial need contributes to her post-divorce living arrangements, as women with more financial resources tend to live in arrangements without newly formed relationships. However, women with high contributions to the household income during their first marriage also show significantly higher risks of following stable partnership trajectories with (new) children. In the case of men with a high income share, their risk of sorting into the "Childless in LAT relationship" is significantly reduced compared to men with lower income contribution. To sum up, our findings are partly in line with our third expectation that having greater spousal resources leads to higher rates of

repartnering, as having more resources (personal and relative in the household) is found to be associated with post-separation trajectories for women and men. However, our results show that high income (contribution) is particularly relevant for stable trajectories with higher degrees of institutionalisation – a finding which goes against our expectation.

The German context and migration background

Eastern German women are significantly more likely to be in the "Parents in coresidential partnerships" pattern after a marital separation than women from western Germany. This cluster reflects stable partnerships without childbearing episodes. It could be related to less traditional family norms in eastern Germany, which are, e.g., reflected in higher rates of non-marital birth (*BiB* 2025c).

The results for the men and women with a migration background indicate that these respondents generally have lower separation rates as their risk of being sorted into any of the post-separation clusters is (significantly) lower than those without a migration background. Men's migration background is irrelevant regarding post-divorce trajectories with new children in coresidential partnerships, or with children in LAT relationships. In contrast, women with a migration background do not differ from women without a migration background in terms of their chances of being in childless without a partner or in a LAT relationships trajectory.

5 Conclusion

Our study used rich pre-marital and post-marital information from a German longitudinal dataset to address questions about post-marital family dynamics. We covered an under-examined area at the intersection of interrelated but fragmented literatures on repartnering and childbearing of the demographically relevant separated population. Our research aimed to demonstrate the diversity of post-marital family life course patterns in Germany, and to assess the antecedents of these patterns.

Following previous studies of the Belgian region of Flanders (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015; *Vanassche et al.* 2015a) and a multi-country comparison (*Vidal/Van Damme* 2024), we utilised a descriptive trajectory approach to address the first research question on the identification of typical family trajectories after marital separation. We found that in our sample, the most common non-cohabiting family trajectories after marital separation were being a lone parent or having neither partner nor children in the household; and that the trajectories after marital separation with the highest levels of institutionalisation were being childless or being a parent in unmarried cohabitation. We then addressed our second research question (on the antecedents of these patterns), as recent research has suggested that the context and the conditions of marital separation have implications for the family arrangements of the ex-spouses in the period immediately after separation.

Our study generated important findings that, when taken together, contribute to the literature on family development following marital separation. Our research suggests that family development generally does not occur in the early post-marital stages in Germany. This finding is consistent with previous studies of countries other than Germany (*Pasteels/Mortelmans* 2015; *Vanassche et al.* 2015a; *Vidal/Van Damme* 2024). Even relatively small delays in forming a new stable partnership can have consequences for post-marital fertility. It is likely that divorcees are foregoing fertility increase with the length of time they spend in single-household arrangements, as a divorcee without a partner may have fewer opportunities to conceive a child or come to believe s/he is too old to have children. In addition, a post-marital union tends to differ from a first marital union in several ways that may affect the levels of commitment and stability in the union (see e.g., *Teachman* 2008) and thus the likelihood of childbearing (e.g., *Vanassche et al.* 2015b). A stable marital union remains the leading site for childbearing in Germany, particularly in the western federal states (*BiB* 2025c; *Groepler et al.* 2021).

Thus, one possible explanation for why levels of childbearing tend to be low in post-marital trajectories is that most post-marital relationships are non-cohabiting or are unmarried cohabitations. Another potential reason why levels of post-marital childbearing are low is that many divorcees have children from their first marital union and may want to avoid the financial and care responsibilities associated with having more children. This second explanation appears relevant given that in our sample, around 70 percent of the women were living with their children at the time of separation, and it is likely that many of these children were the offspring of the men in our sample who were not living with children. In addition, our finding that marital separation had been spreading to older people and lower socioeconomic groups may explain the decreasing opportunities for (rapid) repartnering into stable relationships. We also found that a non-trivial share of the separated men and women who had been identified in previous research as following unpartnered trajectories were actually in committed and stable LAT relationships. In Germany, the formation of post-marital unions and childbearing might be delayed by the requirement that couples live separately for one year prior to the finalisation of the divorce (or three years if the spouses disagree) (*Krack-Roberg* 2011), and by joint child custody and alimony support arrangements. Receiving alimony payments and sharing a household with children have traditionally deterred women from living with a new partner (e.g., *Schnor et al.* 2017 for co-residence with children in Flanders). These considerations are less likely to apply to men or recent cohorts of women, who tend to have greater labour market resources than previous cohorts. Along these lines, additional analyses (not presented here) that followed family trajectories after divorce revealed that the share of individuals who had not started a cohabiting relationship within five years of divorcing is smaller. However, the rates of second-order marriage and post-marital childbearing remain low. Regarding our findings of low post-marital childbearing, the restricted access to medically assisted reproduction (MAR) in Germany might be of special interest, as the age of divorcees likely reduce the chances of (further) childbirth. In our study, individuals are on average 39 years old when transitioning in a post-marital separation trajectory.

However, in Germany, guidelines, legislation and health insurance coverage limit the access to MAR in general and particularly permit methods like egg donation (see e.g., *Köppen et al.* 2021; *Passet-Wittig et al.* 2025). This might further contribute to a limitation in older women's childbearing opportunities, when their own chances to conceive are reduced but the desire to have children is not fulfilled.

Our results also indicate that socioeconomic resources determine women's repartnering behaviour. For example, we found that women who earned more than their ex-husbands were more likely to follow a lone parenthood trajectory or a trajectory with stable formalised partnerships with(out) children. That is, women's resources might also correlate with their family orientations, as the divorced women in our sample with higher absolute incomes were also more likely to remain childless. These findings confirm that social strata and living arrangements are associated among divorcees. However, we do not know whether spousal resources allow an individual to choose to be childless or to maintain less institutionalised partnership living arrangements; or whether spousal resources are associated with the individual's family orientation. Our results tend in the direction that the latter is the case: we found that the divorcees without children from their first marriage tended to divorce at younger ages and often started a new family in an institutionalised relationship with children. Furthermore, our findings regarding higher resources with regard to personal income and relative income to the ex-spouse association with post-separation family trajectories tend in the same direction. In sum, we found that marital circumstances, like the timing of marriage in the life course and in historical time; as well as spousal resources during their first marriage are all linked to post-separation trajectories.

We note some limitations of our research and areas that deserve further scrutiny. A limitation of our approach is that sequence clustering assigns individuals deterministically to trajectory groups and therefore does not account for uncertainty in class membership, meaning that clusters should be interpreted as prototypical patterns rather than latent "true" types. Furthermore, our study covered the relatively short period of five years after a marital separation, during which we expected many relevant family transitions to occur. However, previous research has shown that repartnering events occur rather early after (marital) separation. In an international comparison of 11 countries using GGS data, it has been shown that in half of the countries, 50 percent of divorced/marital-separated individuals experience repartnering in a cohabiting union within 5 years (*Gałęzewska et al.* 2017). In Germany, the bulk of transitions to a cohabiting union after marital separations take place within 80 months following the separation (*Jaschinski* 2011). Consistent with this, parents with resident children (*Kuhlemann/Krapf* 2022) or single mothers (*Bastin* 2019) showed that already after 2 years of being a single-mother in a LAT relationship, breaking up is more likely than forming a cohabiting union. Nevertheless, since we found relatively little family development in the five years after marital separation, further research may be needed to examine patterns of continuity and change over longer periods of time. The reasons why post-marital trajectories are heterogeneous during the initial stages of separation also merit further scrutiny. While event history models yield reliable estimates of correlates of

holistic life courses, no causality should be inferred from these estimates. Despite these limitations, our study has shed more light on the diversity and the nature of post-marital trajectories in contemporary Germany.

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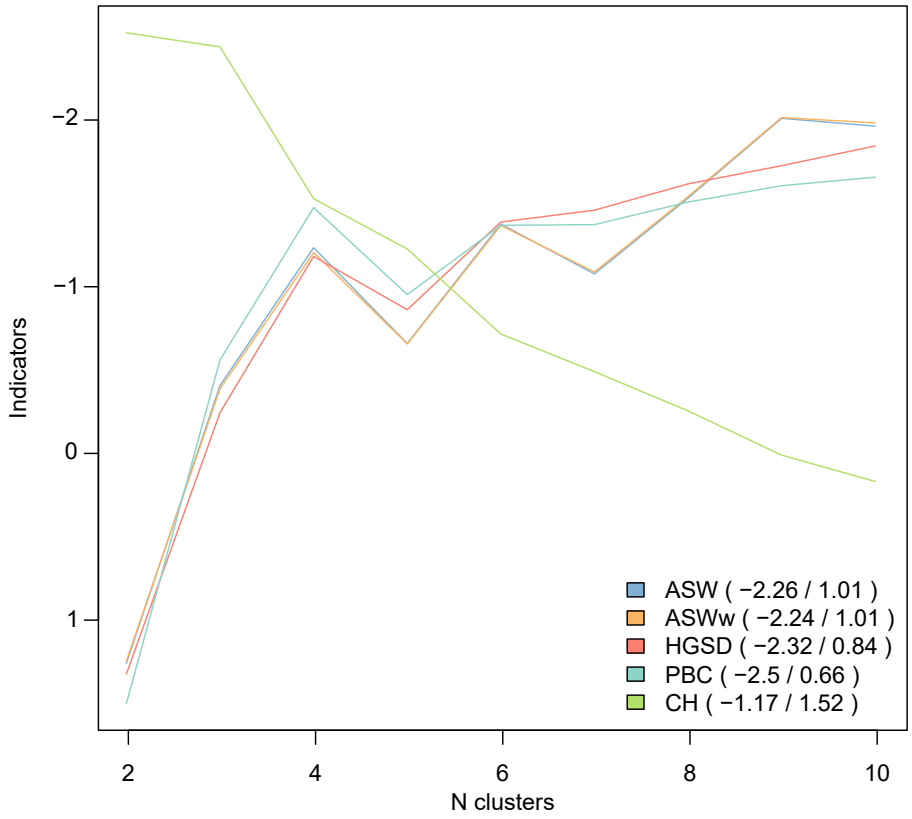
Appendix

Tab. A1: Comparison of socio-demographic profiles across the analytical sample and marital-separated individuals with incomplete post-marital observations (mean values)

	Analytical sample (divorcees with complete post-marital observation)	Divorcees with incomplete post-marital observation
Socio-demographic profile		
Women	0.59	0.54
Eastern Germany	0.27	0.26
Migration background	0.15	0.25
Marriage duration	13.04	13.86
Age at separation	39.00	39.85
N	1563	835

Notes: Marital unions dissolved between 1991 and 2014.
Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019), own calculations.

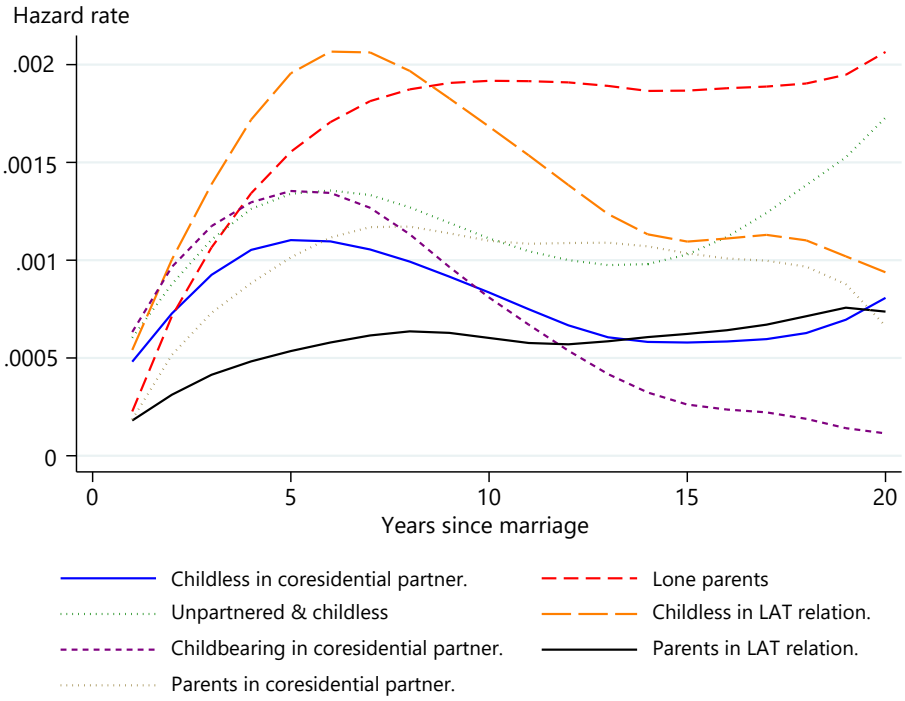
Fig. A1: Cluster cut-off criteria



Notes: ASW-Average silhouette width; ASWw-Average silhouette width (weighted); HGSD-Hubert's Gamma (Somers' D); PBC-Point Biserial Correlation; CH-Calinski-Harabasz index (see Studer, 2013 for definitions).

Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019), own calculations.

Fig. A2: Unadjusted hazard rates by type of event



Notes: Type 1: Childless in coresidential partnership; Type 2: Lone parents; Type 3: Unpartnered and childless; Type 4: Childless in LAT relationships; Type 5: Childbearing in coresidential partnership; Type 6: Parents in LAT relationships; Type 7: Parents in coresidential partnership.

Source: *SOEP* (v38; 1991-2019), own calculations.

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