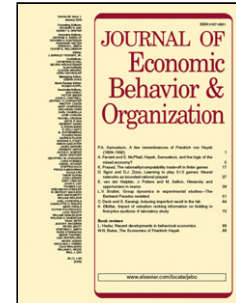


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Author: Gregori Baetschmann Kevin E. Staub Raphael Studer



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Does the stork deliver happiness? Parenthood and life satisfaction*

GREGORI BAETSCHMANN[†]
University of Bern

KEVIN E. STAUB[‡]
University of Melbourne
IZA, Bonn

RAPHAEL STUDER[§]
University of Zurich

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between parenthood and life satisfaction using longitudinal data on women from the German Socio-Economic Panel. Previous studies have focused on satisfaction differences between parents and *ex-post* similar childless adults or between pre- and post-birth years of mothers. Mostly small and often negative effects of parenthood are reported. Both comparisons are problematic if life satisfaction increases before giving birth; that is, if dynamic self-selection into parenthood exists. In this study we exploit the extended longitudinal dimension of the panel to track self-reported life satisfaction of women eventually to become mothers and of women eventually attaining a completed fertility of zero. In our estimations we employ matching and regression techniques which account for the selection into motherhood. We find motherhood to be associated with positive satisfaction gains occurring over several years.

Keywords: Happiness, subjective well-being, children, fertility, motherhood, parenthood, life cycle, selection, matching, fixed effects.

JEL classification: D10, J11, J12, J13.

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[†]University of Bern, Institute of Sociology, Fabrikstrasse 8, 3012 Bern, Switzerland. Phone: +41 31 631 48 74. E-mail: gregori.baetschmann@soz.unibe.ch

[‡]*Corresponding author:* The University of Melbourne, Department of Economics, 111 Barry Street, Carlton, VIC 3010, Australia. Phone: +61 3 903 53776. E-mail: kevin.staub@unimelb.edu.au

[§]University of Zurich, Department of Economics, Zuerichbergstrasse 14, 8032 Zuerich, Switzerland.

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