



Well-being in crisis. Unpaid work and parents' subjective well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic in Austria

ECSR Thematic Conference „COVID-19 and Social Inequality in Well-being”

Gwen Göttl

Department of Sociology, University of Vienna

gwen.goetl@univie.ac.at

Parenting in Austria

- Persistent traditional gender roles:
Mothers take on most childcare and household tasks, fathers work more hours in employment (Wegscheider-Pichler et al. 2017)
- Insufficient childcare facilities for younger children and on afternoons (Haas und Hartel 2009, Kröger 2011)
- Grandparents take on a substantial share of childcare (Geserick et al. 2015)

Changes in paid and unpaid work in the pandemic

Protective measures to reduce spread of Covid-19 led to:

- Reductions of hours („Kurzarbeit“), layoffs
- Increase in work from home (often while caring for children)
- High work pressure in essential services

- Closed childcare facilities (spring to summer 2020)
- Childcare support from grandparents discouraged
- Services such as restaurants and cleaning temporarily unavailable
- Increase in unpaid workload of parents (Berghammer 2022)



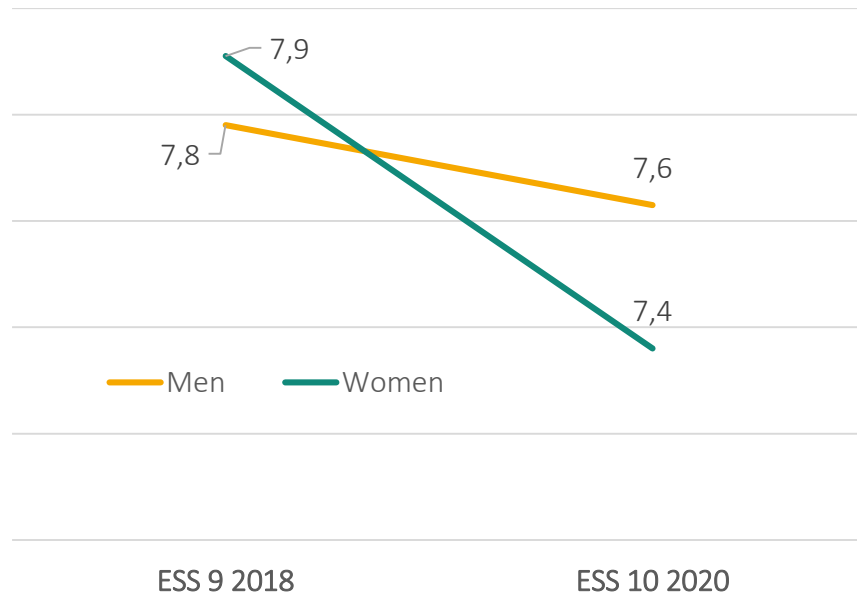
Source: Stephanie Martin / Unsplash

Changes in life satisfaction

Substantial reduction in self-assessed life satisfaction from 2018 to 2020 *.

Women stated higher satisfaction prior to the pandemic but experienced a bigger reduction than men in 2020.

* Possible influence of change from face-to-face interviews to CAWI surveying (Liedl und Steiber 2023)



Life satisfaction [scale 0,10] in Austria, unweighted.

Research interest

What explains the gender gap in life satisfaction? Does it show up in overall subjective well-being (SWB)?

Is the gendered division of unpaid labour a factor in the low SWB (especially of mothers)?

Existing research

Pre-pandemic

- High (or unfair) amount of household tasks leads to reduced SWB (Boye 2009; Mencarini und Sironi 2012, Waddell et al. 2021)
- Relationship between childcare and SWB more complex (Riederer 2018)

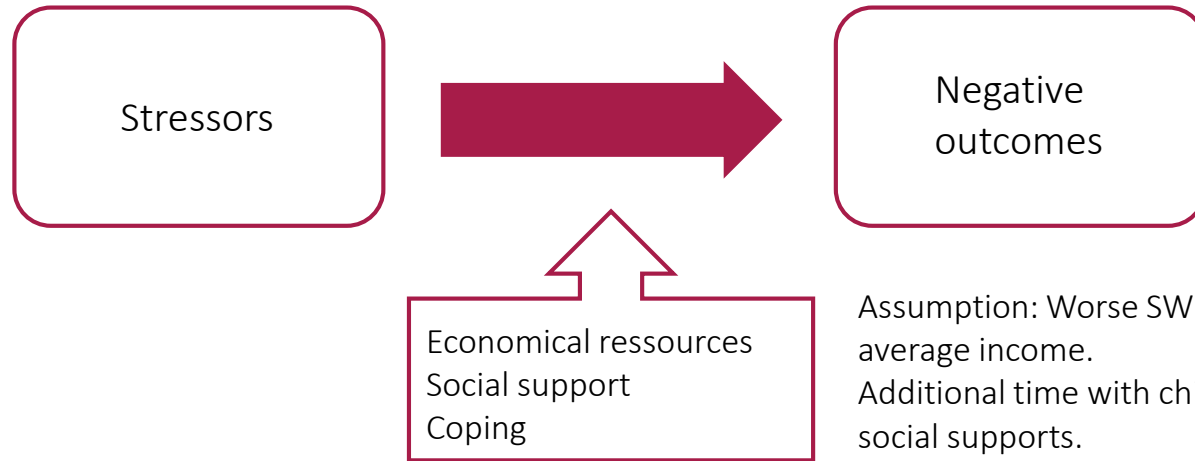
In the pandemic

- Additional childcare taken on mostly by women (Wöhl und Lichtenberger 2021, Seedat und Rondon 2021)
- Differences in mental health outcomes by gender and parenthood (Hövermann 2021, Sun et al. 2023, Vicari et al. 2022).

Theoretical background

Stress-Process-Theory by Pearlin et al. (1981).

Recently: SWB outcomes in the pandemic (Möhring et al. 2021; Vicari et al. 2022)



Assumption: Worse SWB outcomes for women due to lower average income.
Additional time with children and partnership might act as social supports.

Data, measurement and methods

Austrian Corona Panel Project (ACPP) online survey (<https://viecer.univie.ac.at/coronapanel/>)

- 32 waves from March 2020 to May 2022
- quota sampling (non-random sampling)

Analytical sample: 396 respondents (men and women) aged 25-59 with at least one child under 15 years and a partner in the household

Descriptive time series 2020 - 2022

Linear regression analysis with pooled data for the first lockdown phase

Measuring subjective well-being

Life satisfaction

Self-assessed
10-point scale

Negative affect

feeling lonely, annoyed,
anxious, sad
5-point scale

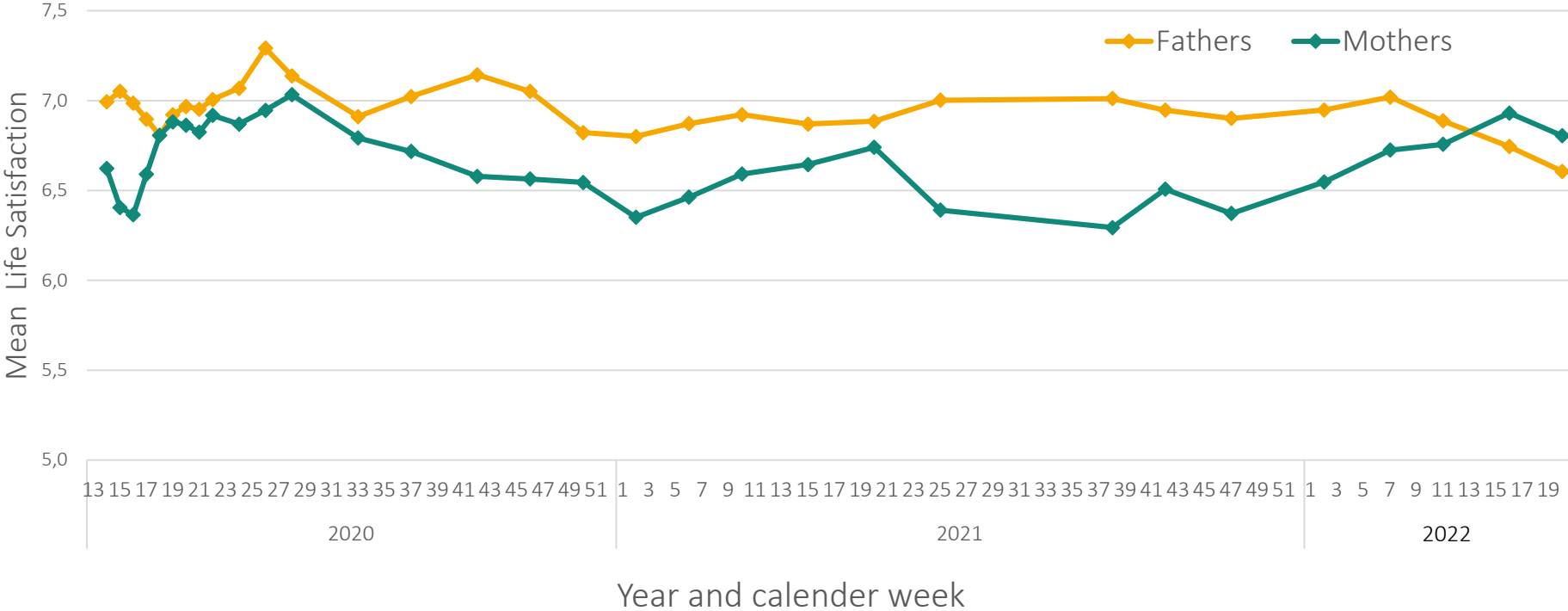
Positive affect

feeling calm, happy,
full of energy
5-point scale

Subjective well-being (SWB)

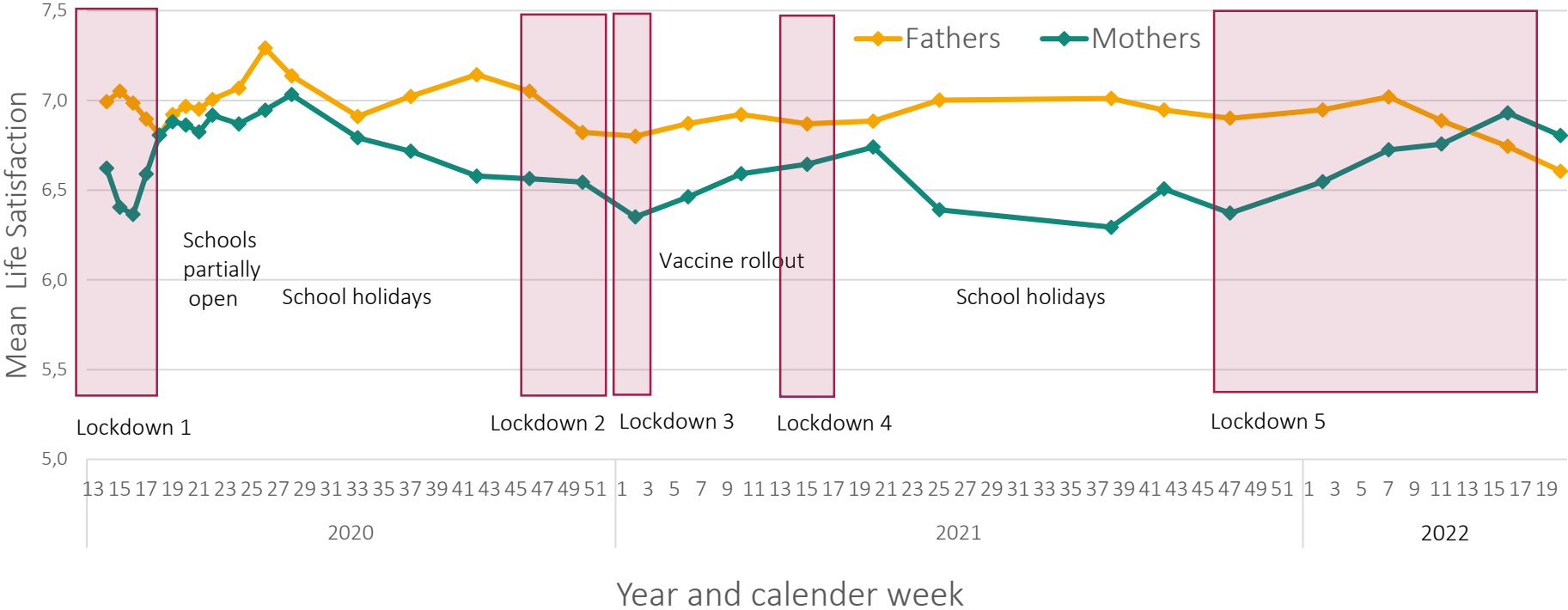
Following the hedonic concept on SWB and operationalisation by Lucas, Diener und Suh (1996)

Results I: Dimensions of subjective well-being over time



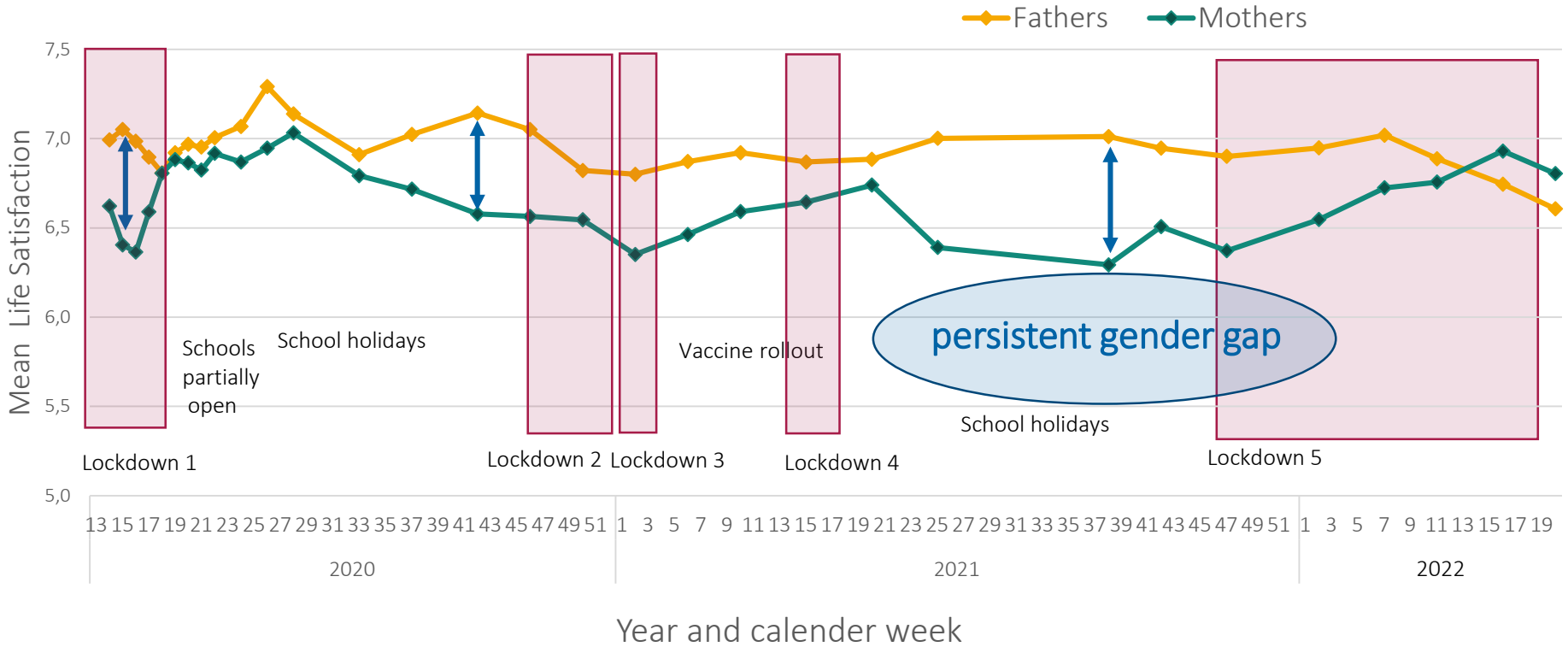
2-wave average, weighted data, [0,10]

Results I: Dimensions of subjective well-being over time



2-wave average, weighted data, [0,10]

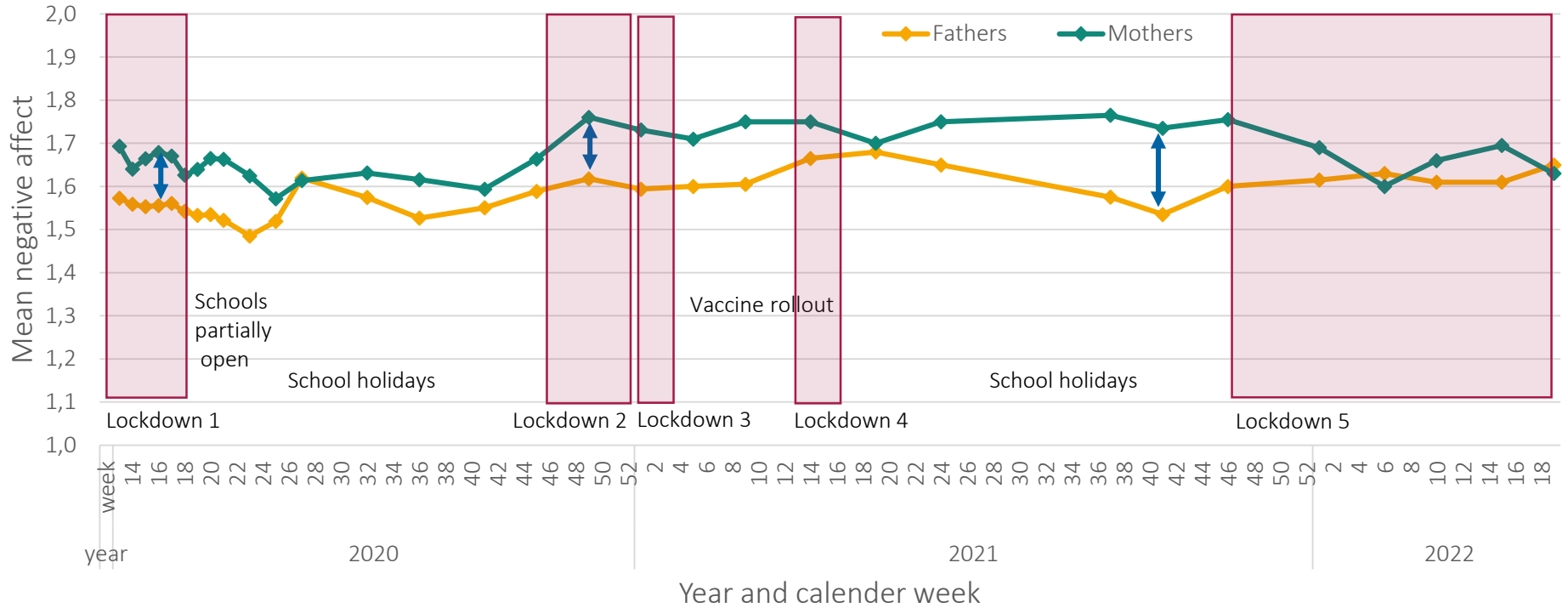
Life Satisfaction



2-wave average, weighted data, [0,10]

Negative affect

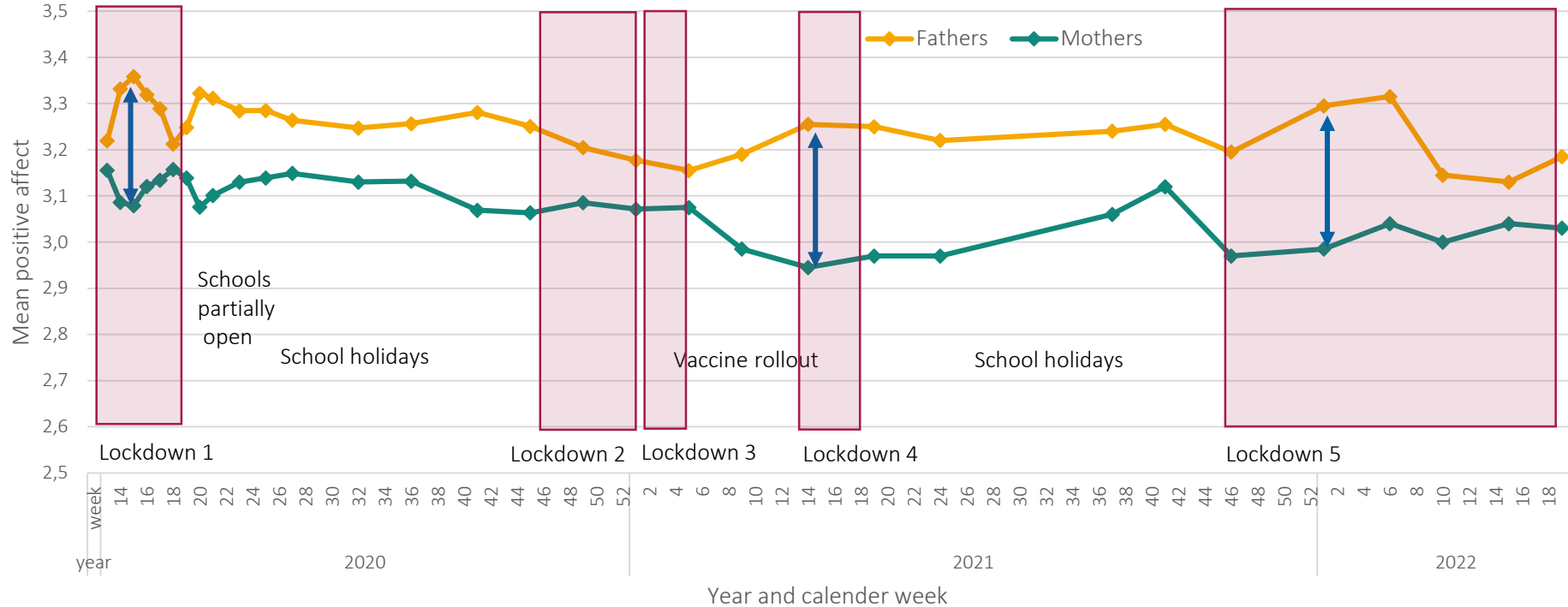
persistent gender gap



2-wave average, weighted data, [1,5]

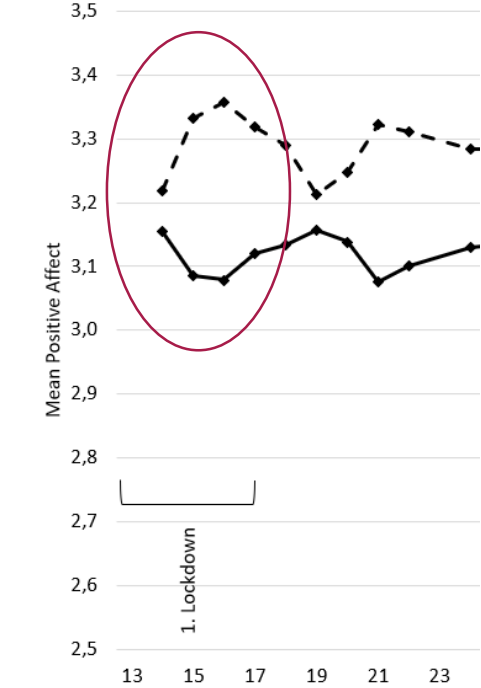
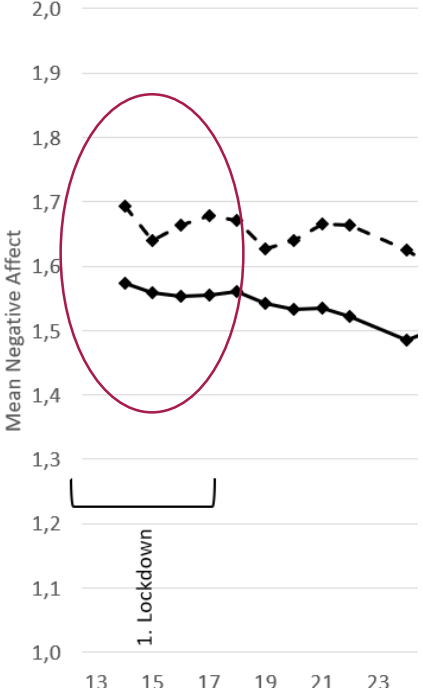
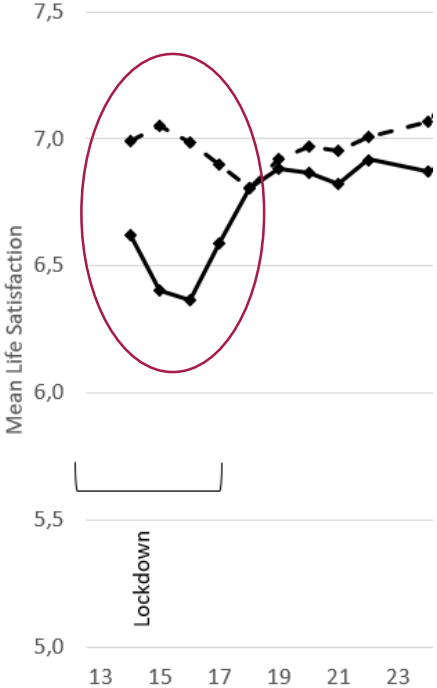
Positive affect

persistent gender gap



2-wave average, weighted data, [1,5]

First Lockdown Phase → Gender Gap in SWB



Results II: Regression analysis for the first lockdown phase

- Mothers had **lower life satisfaction, higher negative affect and lower positive affect** than fathers (partially sig.)
- Gender coefficient reduced by inclusion of childcare and household tasks
- Only slight reduction in SWB by number of unpaid work hours (not sig.)
→ **number of unpaid hours possible, but not main factor in low SWB**
- **Lower SBW if childcare is seen as a problem** (sig.) especially for women (interaction not sig.)

Results II: Regression analysis for the first lockdown phase

Further factors for reduced SWB were:

- Low household income (<2700€ net income/month)
- High perceived personal health and economic risks
- Immigration (esp. in life satisfaction)

Conclusion

- School and kindergarten closures put **pressure on families**, SWB of parents changed with pandemic situation
- **Gender gap in SWB**: Fathers had higher SWB than mothers, especially on first lockdown phase
- **SWB was lower for parents who had problems covering childcare**. Reduction in SWB (non-sig.) higher for mothers, hints towards the burden of additional childcare laying on mothers.
- Financial, social and health security of families support higher SWB

Questions or suggestions?



Source: congerdesign / Pixabay.

This research was funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF as part of the project „Couples’ division of work during Covid-19 lockdown in Austria” (P 34362).

<https://cowork.univie.ac.at>

FWF

Der Wissenschaftsfonds.

References

Berghammer, Caroline. 2022. Childcare and housework during the first lockdown in Austria: Traditional division or new roles? *Journal of Family Research*, 34(1), 99–133. <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-701>

Boye, Katarina. 2009. Relatively Different? How do Gender Differences in Well-Being Depend on Paid and Unpaid Work in Europe? *Social Indicators Research* 93(3). <https://doi.org/110.1007/s11205-008-9434-1>

Geserick, Christine, Markus Kaindl, und Olaf Kapella. 2015. Wie erleben Kinder ihre außerhäusliche Betreuung? Empirische Erhebung unter 8- bis 10-Jährigen und ihren Eltern in Österreich. *ÖIF Forschungsbericht* 17. <https://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:528725>

Haas, Barbara, und Margit Hartel. 2009. Towards the universal care course model. *European Societies* 12(2), 139-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616690902874705>

Hövermann, Andreas. 2021. Belastungswahrnehmung in der Corona-Pandemie. Erkenntnisse aus vier Wellen der HBS-Erwerbspersonenbefragung 2020/21. Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut Policy Brief 50. Düsseldorf: WSI - Hans-Böckler Stiftung.

Kröger, Teppo. 2011. Defamilisation, dedomestication and care policy: Comparing childcare service provisions of welfare states. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 31(7/8). <https://doi.org/10.1108/01443331111149860>

Liedl, Bernd, und Nadia Steiber. 2023. Führen Online-Befragungen zu anderen Ergebnissen als persönliche Interviews? Eine Schätzung von Moduseffekten am Beispiel eines Mixed-Mode Surveys. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11614-023-00532-4>

Lucas, Richard, Ed Diener, und Eunkook Suh. 1996. Discriminant Validity of Well-Being Measures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(3): 616-628. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.71.3.616>

Mencarini, L., und M. Sironi. 2012. Happiness, Housework and Gender Inequality in Europe. *European Sociological Review* 28: 203–219.

Möhring, Katja et al. 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic and subjective well-being: longitudinal evidence on satisfaction with work and family. *European Societies* 23: 601–617.

References

Pearlin, Leonard I., Elizabeth G. Menaghan, Morton A. Lieberman, und Joseph T. Mullan. 1981. The Stress Process. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 22.

Riederer, Bernhard Edwin. 2018. *Elternschaft und Wohlbefinden*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.

Seedat Soraya, und Marta Rondon. 2021. Women's wellbeing and the burden of unpaid work. *BMJ*: 374:n1972. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1972>

Sun, Ying, Yin Wu, Suiqiong Fan, Tiffany Dal Santo, Letong Li, Xiaowen Jiang, Kexin Li, Yutong Wang, Amina Tasleem, Ankur Krishnan, Chen He, Olivia Bonardi, Jill T Boruff, Danielle Rice, Sarah Markham, Brooke Levis, Marleine Azar, Ian Thombs-Vite, Dipika Neupane, Branka Agic, Christine Fahim, Michael Martin, Sanjeev Sockalingam, Gustavo Turecki, Andrea Benedetti, and Brett Thombs. 2023. Comparison of mental health symptoms before and during the covid-19 pandemic: evidence from a systematic review and meta-analysis of 134 cohorts. *BMJ* 380:e074224 <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2022-074224>

Vicari, Basha, Gundula Zoch, und Ann-Christin Bächmann. 2022. Childcare, work or worries? What explains the decline in parents' well-being at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany? *Journal of Family Research*, 34(1), 310–332. <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-707>

Wegscheider-Pichler, Alexandra, Kathrin Gärtner, Catherine Prettnner, Barbara Leitner, und Waltraud Unger. 2017. *Wie geht's Österreich? Schlüsselindikatoren und Überblick*. Wien: Statistik Austria.

Waddell, Nina, Nickola C. Overall, Valerie T. Chang, und Matthew D. Hammond. 2021. Gendered division of labor during a nationwide COVID-19 lockdown: Implications for relationship problems and satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 38(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407521996476>

Wöhl, Stefanie, Hanna Lichtenberger. 2021. Die Covid-19-Pandemie und Wirtschaftskrisen: die Mehrfachbelastungen von Frauen in Privathaushalten. *Momentum Quarterly*, 10 (2), 66-129.

Changes in Life satisfaction: Parents / overall population

