



Fertility Decline, Fertility Reversal, and Changing Childbearing Considerations in Sweden: A Turn to Subjective Imaginations?

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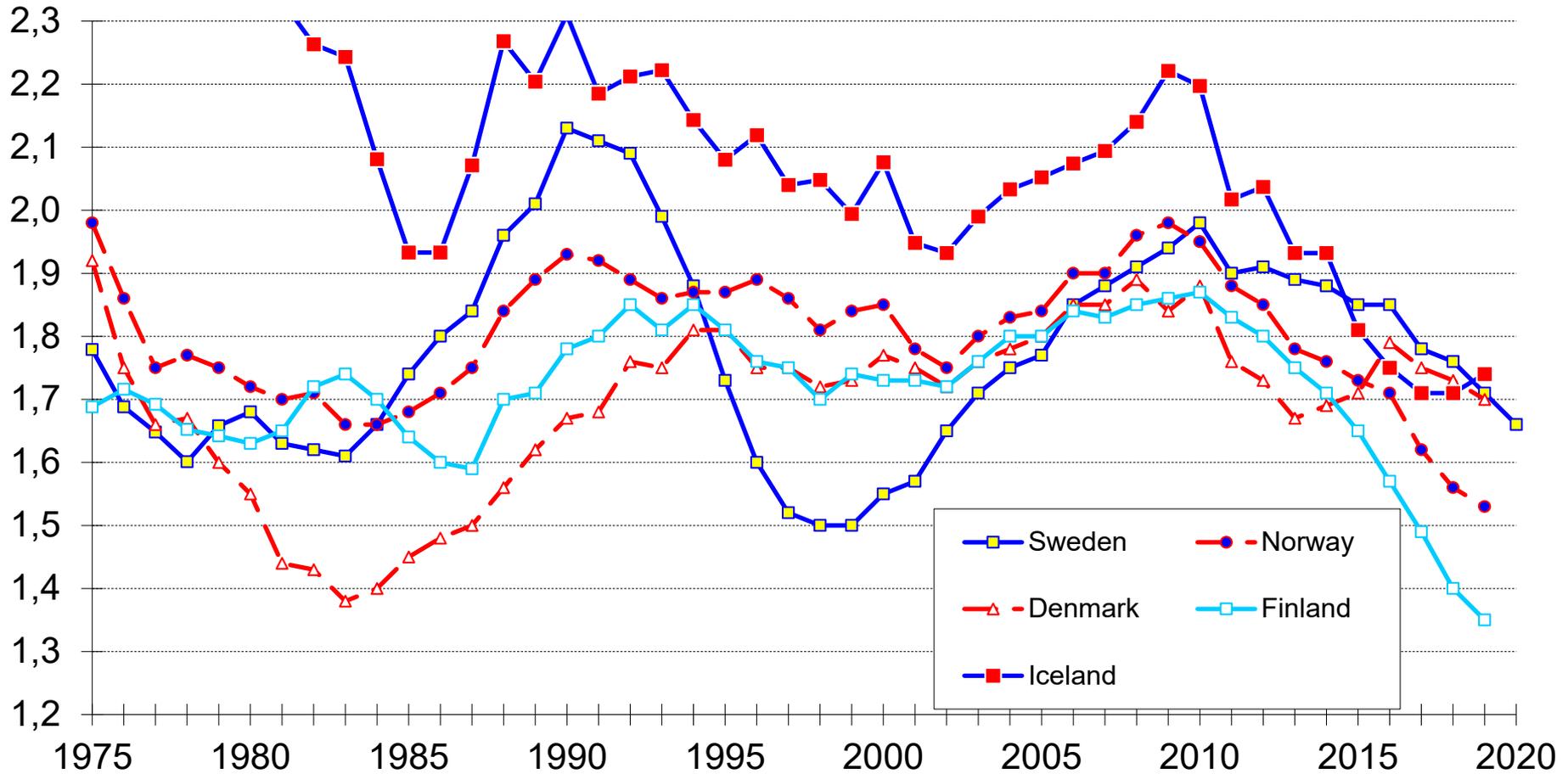
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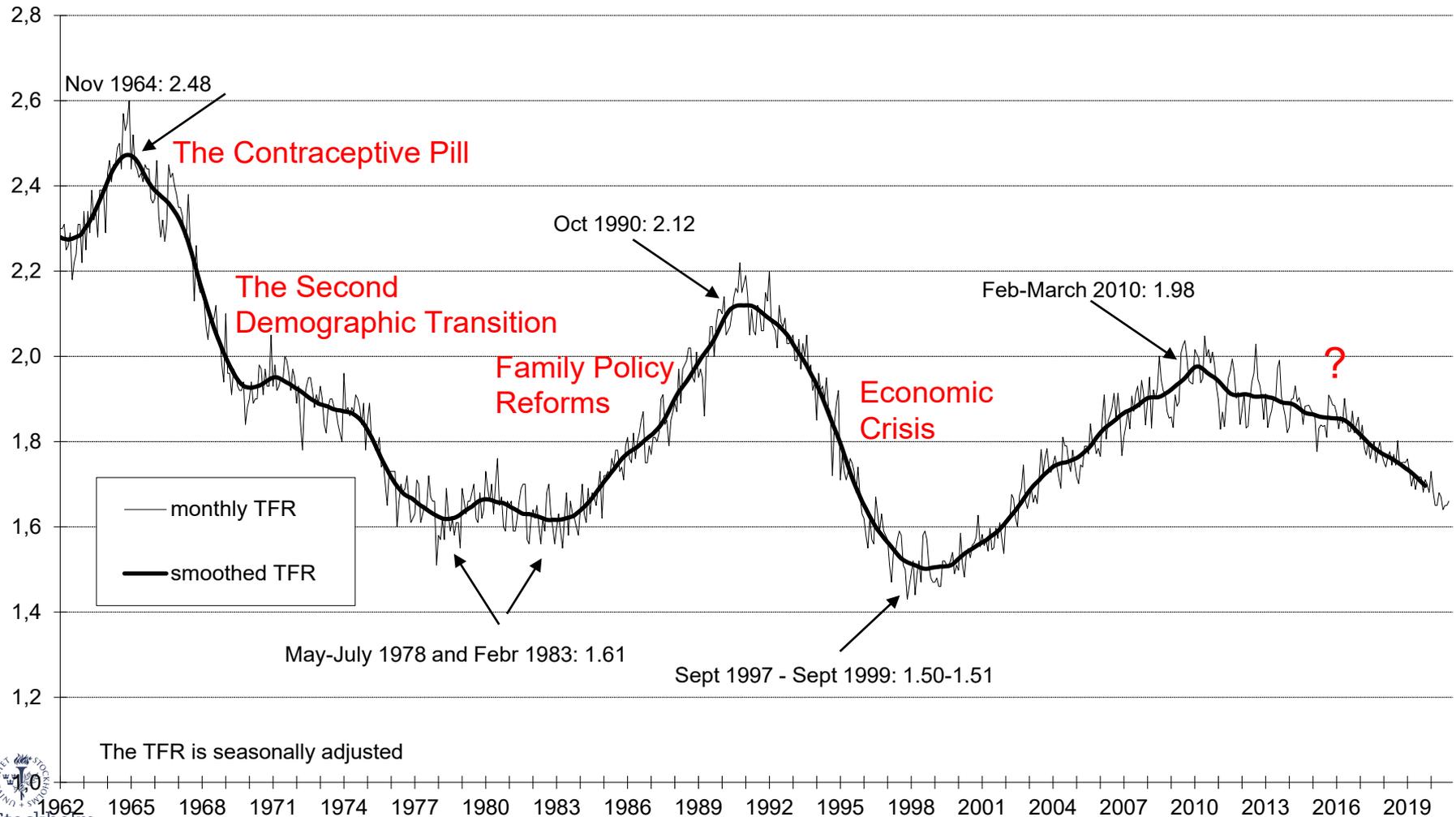
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University

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Nordic Total Fertility, 1975+



Sweden's roller-coaster fertility, 1962-2020



Conundrum of Fertility Decline 2010-2020

(1) no (obvious) structural explanation

no economic crisis

no welfare-state retrenchment

no backlash against gender equality

(Comolli et al. 2020; Hellstrand et al. 2021; Palme et al 2019)

decline of unemployment rate (till 2019)

decline of youth unemployment rate (till 2019)

What happened to fertility?

What has happened to fertility since pandemic outbreak?

What are the determinants of this development?



Research Questions, Data, ppt-Content

- (1) **Factors of the fertility decline?**
- (2) **Continued decline or reversal of decline since covid-19 onset?**
- (3) **Determinants of reversal / childbearing intentions?**

Three data sources:

Swedish register data for fertility decline

total population since 1962/1990

Monthly data for development since covid-19 onset (03/2020)

TFR calculated by Statistics Sweden

Swedish Generations and Gender Survey 2021 (GGG2021)

web (or postal) survey carried out in 2021

8.082 respondents (18-59; women and men)

survey linked to register data

This presentation: First results of analyses

some familiar to you – similar results by others

some surprising (to us); more questions than answers

Conundrum of Fertility Decline 2010-2020

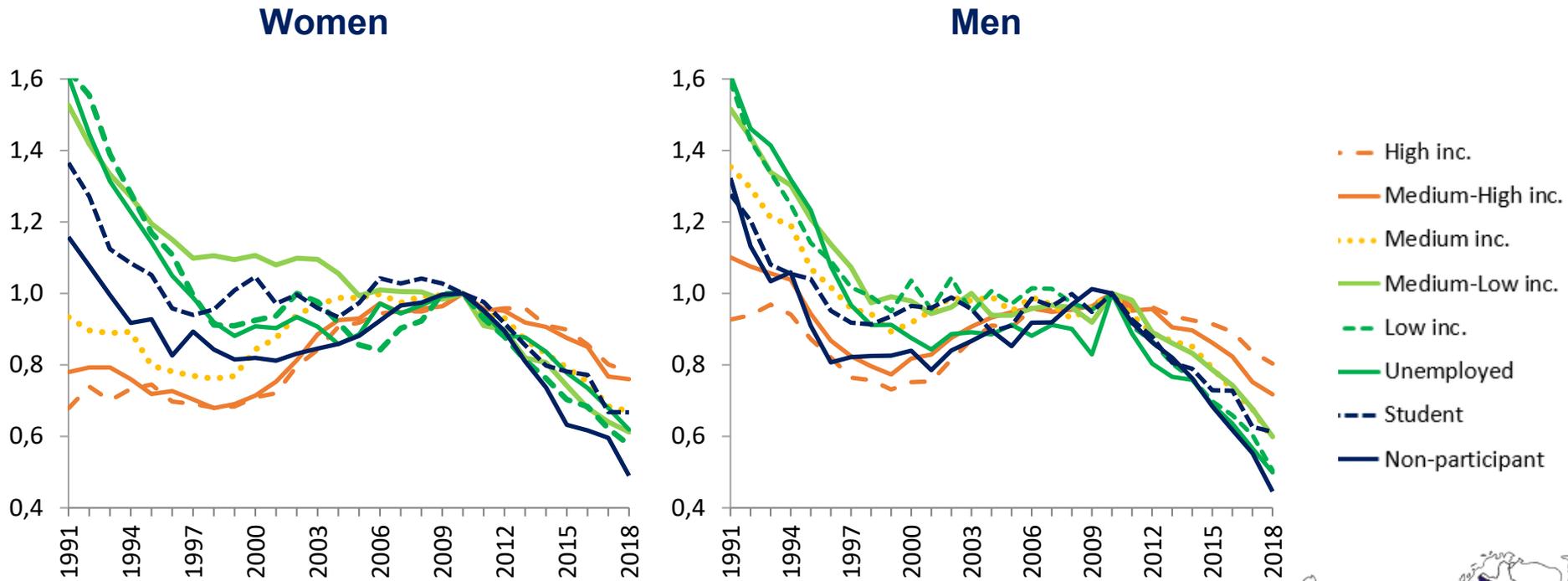
and results of register data analysis

- (1) no (obvious) structural explanation
- no economic crisis
 - no welfare-state retrenchment
 - no backlash to gender equality
 - decline of unemployment rate (till 2019)
 - decline of youth unemployment rate (till 2019)

- (2) Register-data results:
- homogenous decline across common indicators
 - age, sex, education
 - municipalities/regions
 - migration background
 - employment/income status



Results: first-birth rates by labor-market activity



Interaction of labor-market activity and year, standardized by age
Ref. Each labor-market category in 2010



Conundrum of Fertility Decline 2010-2020

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 - decline of unemployment rate (till 2019)
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- (2) homogenous decline across common indicators
 - age, sex, education
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- (3) Register-data results:**
 - decline concentrated among**
 - first birth**
 - childless couples**

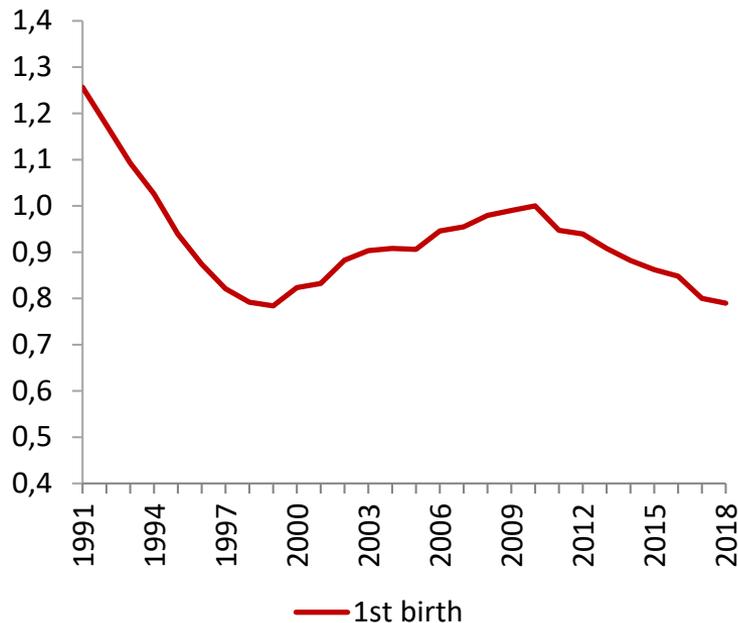
(see also: Hellstrand et al. 2021)



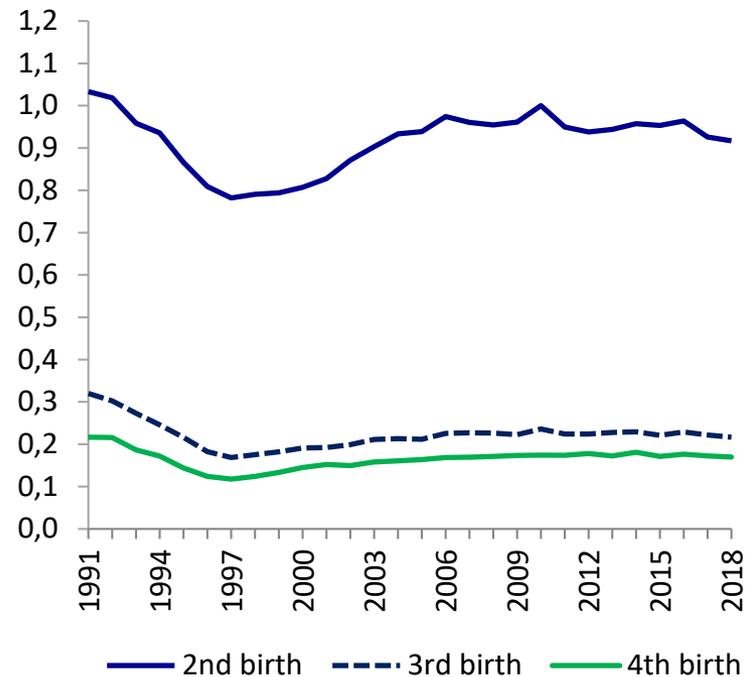
Conundrum of Fertility Decline 2010-2020

(3a) decline of first births vs. other parities

Relative risks by birth order 1991-2018, Swedish-born women



Standardized by single-year age



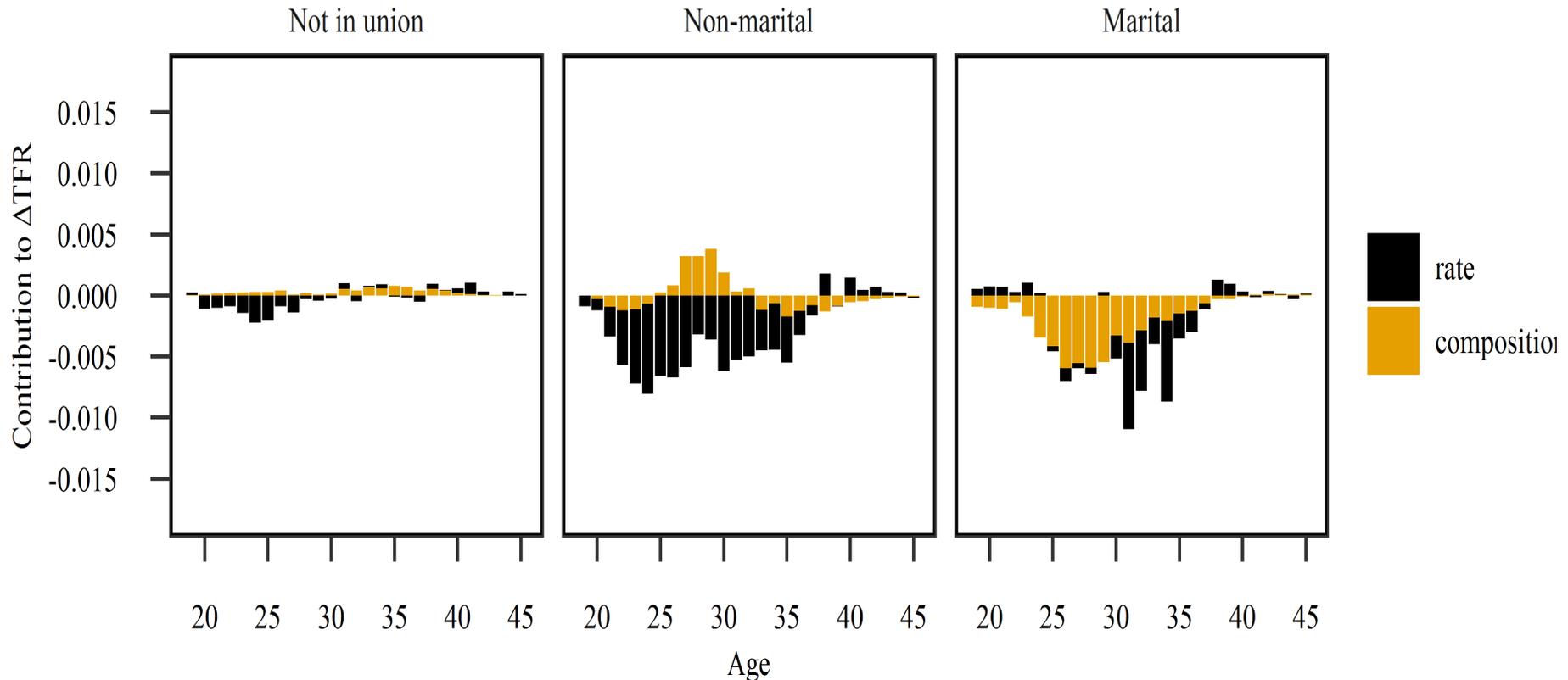
Interaction of birth order and calendar year
Standardized by age, time since last birth



Conundrum of Fertility Decline 2010-2020

(3b) decline of fertility among couples vs. singles

2012–2018 TFR change decomposed into rate & composition component
by union type



Determinants of Fertility Decline 2010-2020?

Theoretical assumptions:

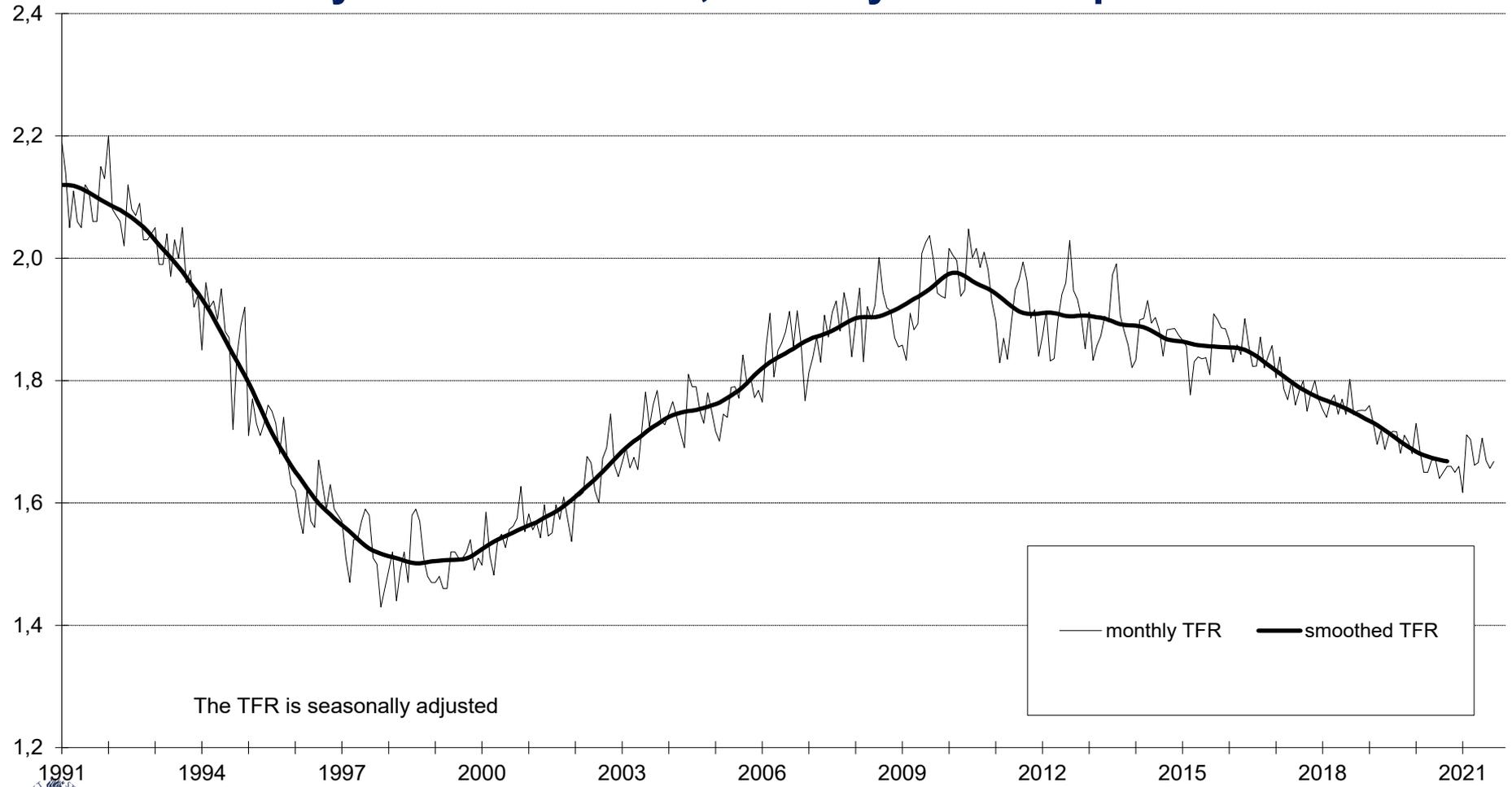
uncertainties about the future?

(Comolli et al. 2020; Vignoli et al. 2020)

- Should fertility not further decline during pandemic?
- Should pandemic not add to/increase uncertainties?
- Which uncertainties? If future – relation to intentions?

Conundrum of Pandemic Babies - Fertility Reversal in 2021

Monthly TFR for Sweden, January 1991 - September 2021



Conundrum of Fertility Reversal in 2021

- (1) Sweden's special way of handling the crisis
 - assume long-term pandemic from the onset
 - abstain from severe restrictions (e.g., lockdown; closure of childcare)
 - rely on compliance of population with governmental recommendations

 - + immediate expansion of labor-market policies (also in other countries)
 - + immediate expansion of family support (e.g., temporary parental leave)
- (2) Sweden's exceptionally high number of covid-19 death
 - much higher than other Nordic countries
- (3) Remarkable increase in trust in government and health authority
 - + highest trust in decades (Dagens Nyheter)

Conundrum of Fertility Reversal

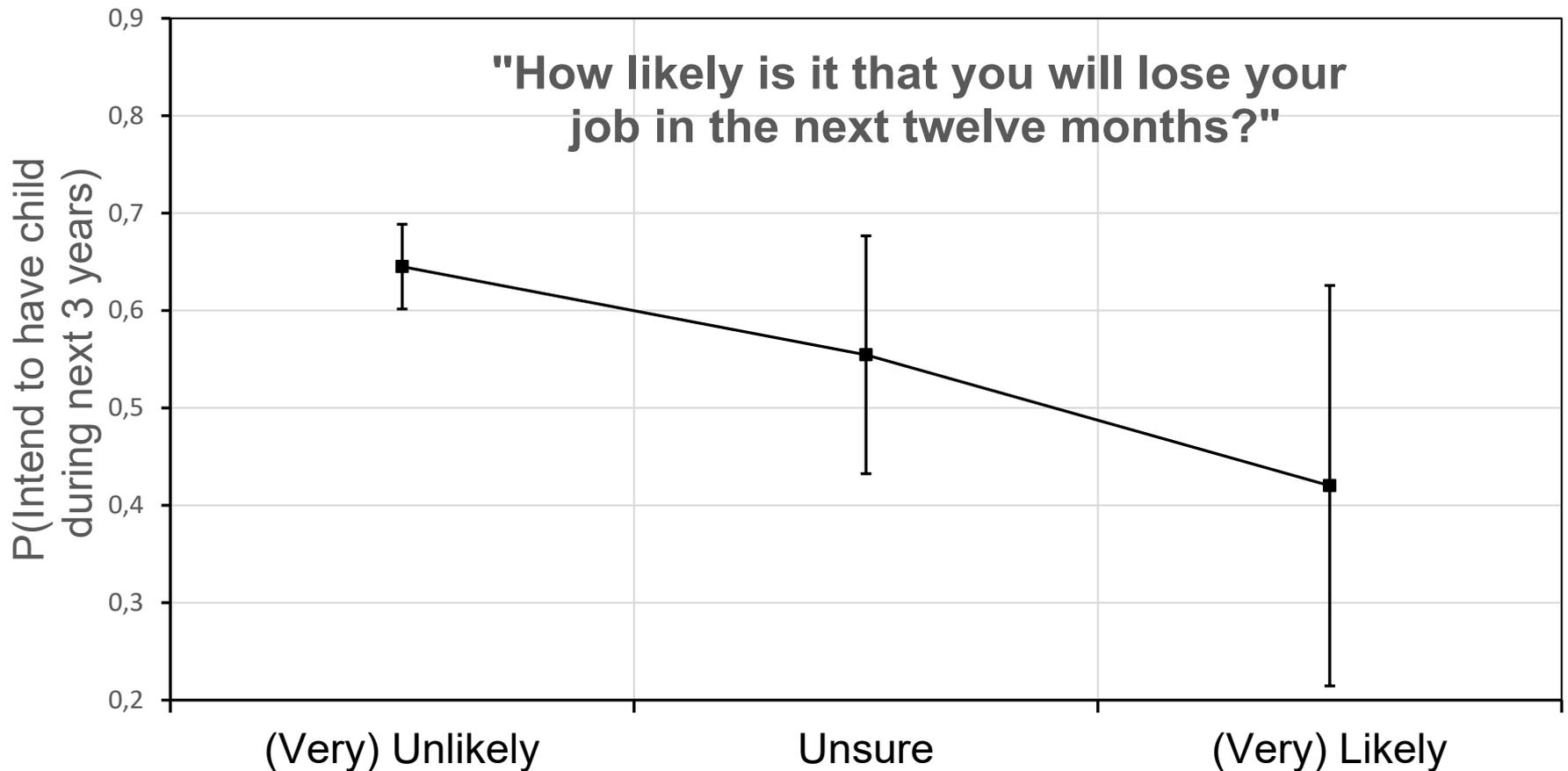
Swedish GGS2021

Which uncertainties matter?

- (1) individual economic uncertainties – loss of job within the next 3 years?
(Vignoli et al. 2020)
- (2) global uncertainties – terrorism, financial crisis, organized crime, etc.
(Comolli 2017)
- (3) institutional uncertainties – trust in institutions
- (4) pandemic related uncertainties – economic, family, mental changes

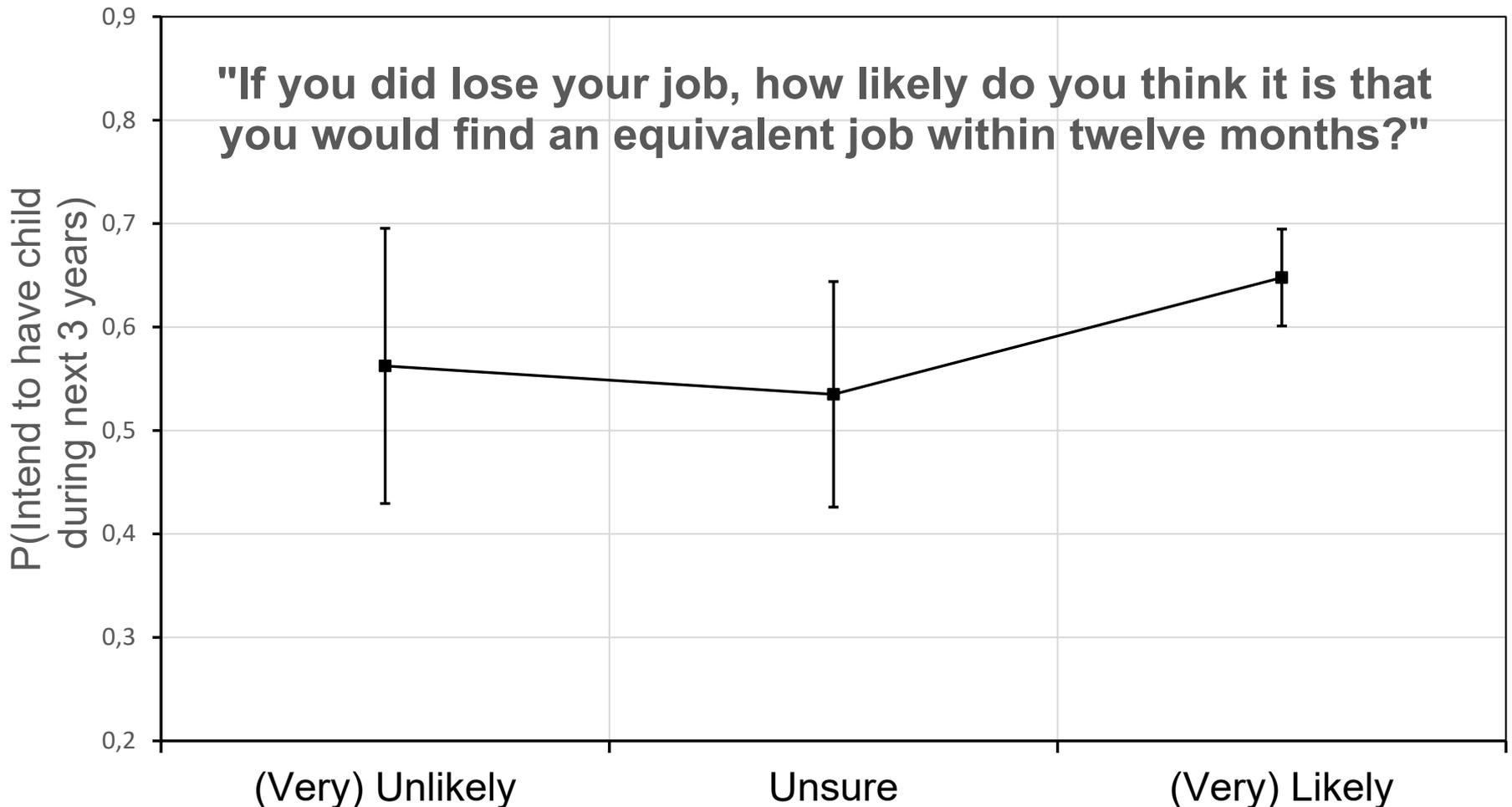
Intentions to Have a Child in the Next 3 Years? Economic Uncertainty

Childless respondents living in a relationship (incl. LAT), aged 20-40, in (self)employment; controlled for sex, age, education



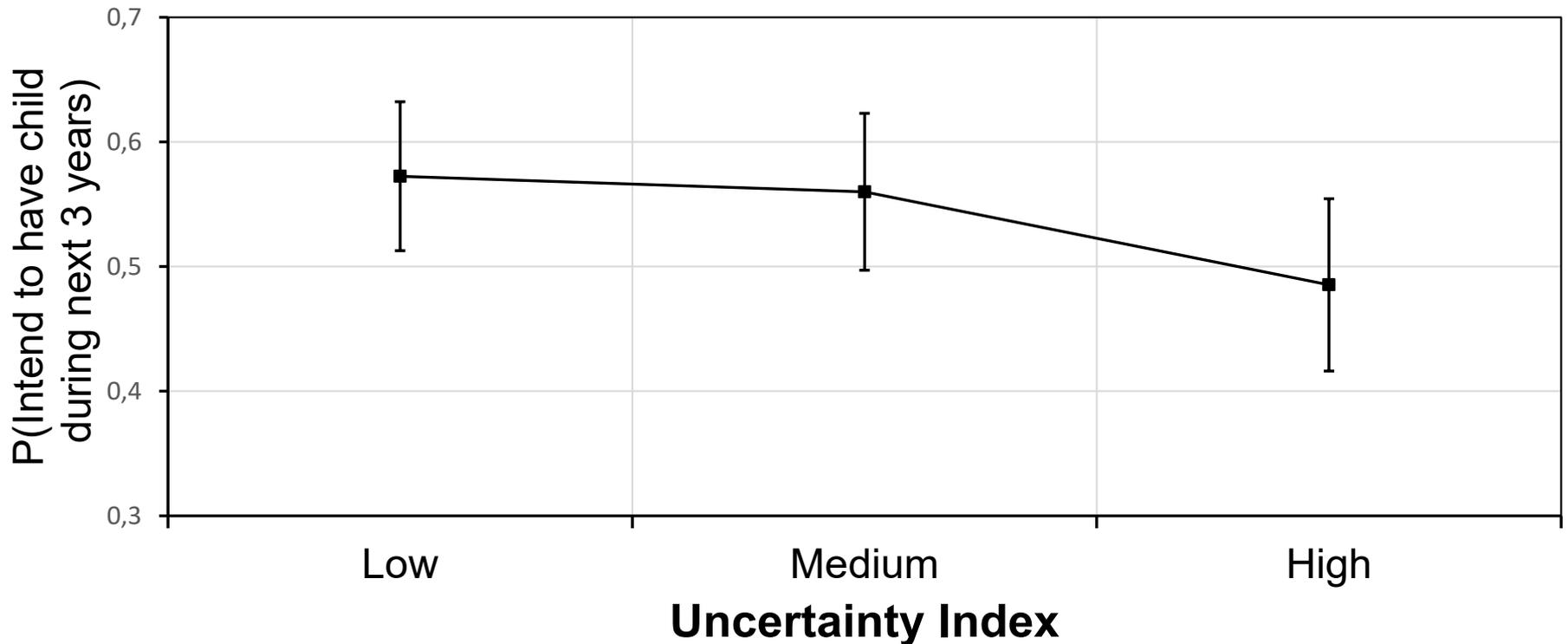
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Intentions to Have a Child in the Next 3 Years? Global Uncertainty

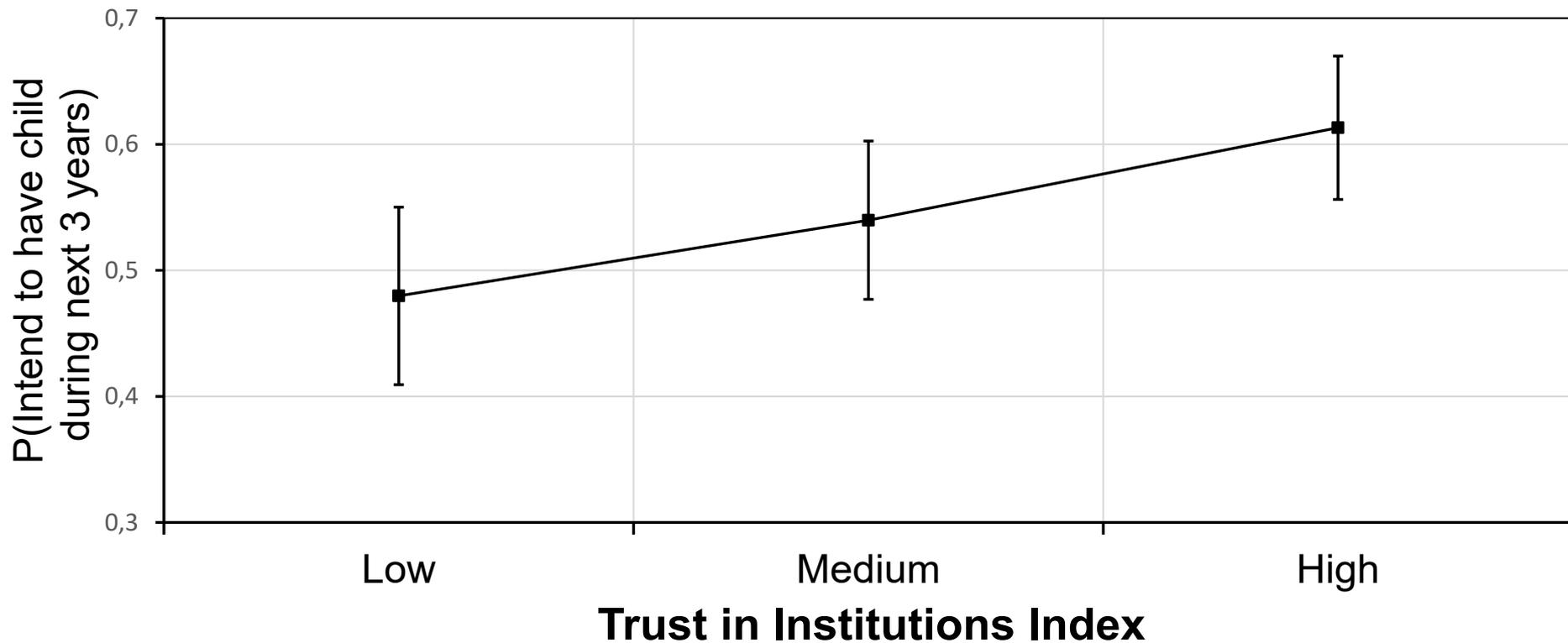
Childless respondents living in a relationship (incl. LAT), aged 20-40;
controlled for sex, age, education



How much do you worry about the following: terrorism, climate change, overpopulation, economic crises, increased number of refugees, high unemployment, organized crime, military conflicts, global epidemics, weakened democracy, increased social inequality, political extremism, prospect of coming generations

Intentions to Have a Child in the Next 3 Years? Trust in Institutions

Childless respondents living in a relationship (incl. LAT), aged 20-40;
controlled for sex, age, education



Institutions: government, police, medical services, civil service, news and media, EU. Underlined: tendency to lower intentions with decreasing trust in police, civil service, EU.

Intentions to Have a Child in the Next 3 Years?

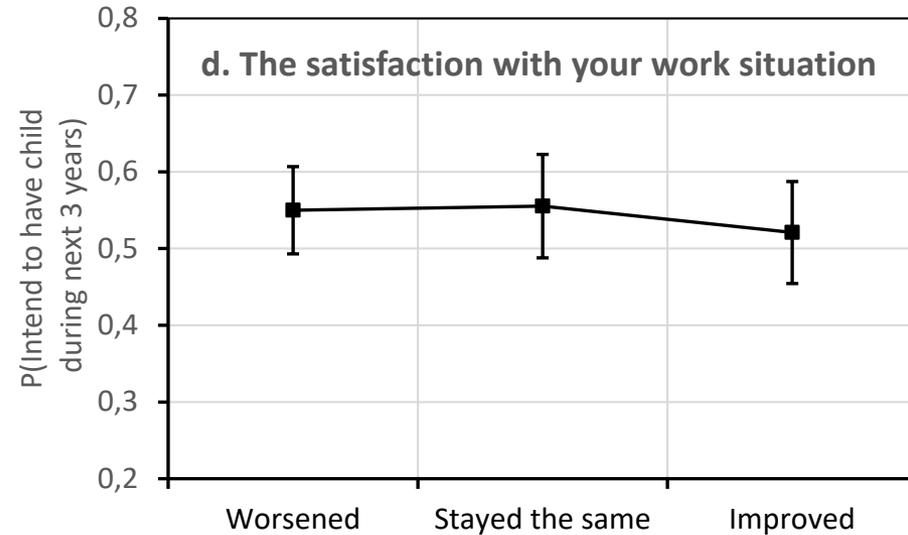
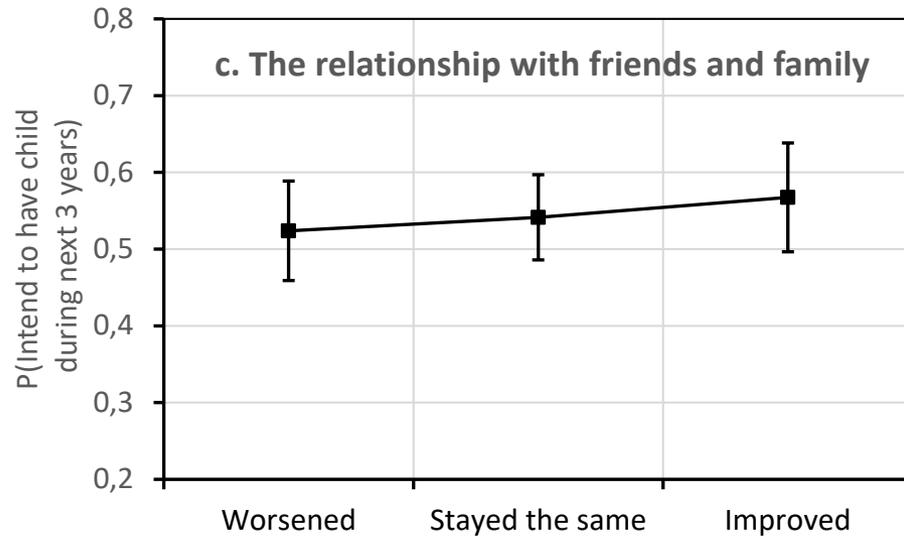
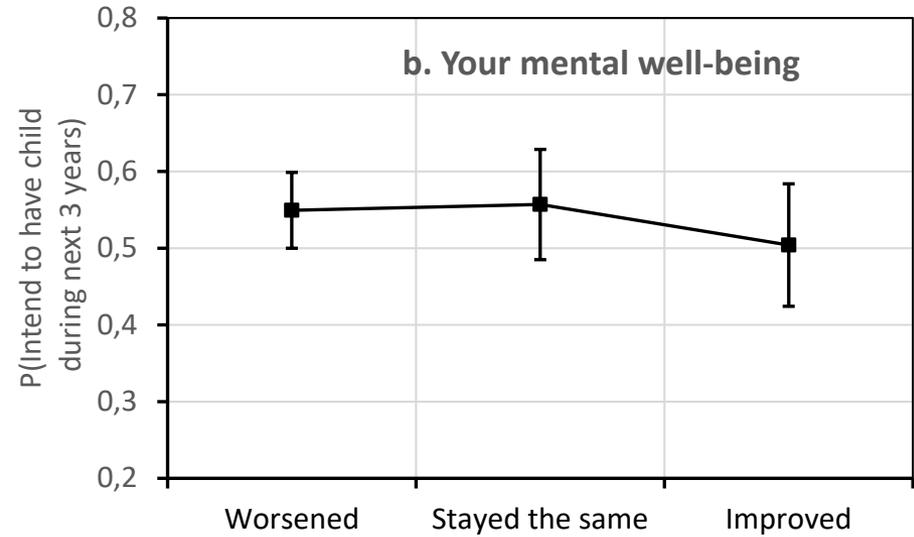
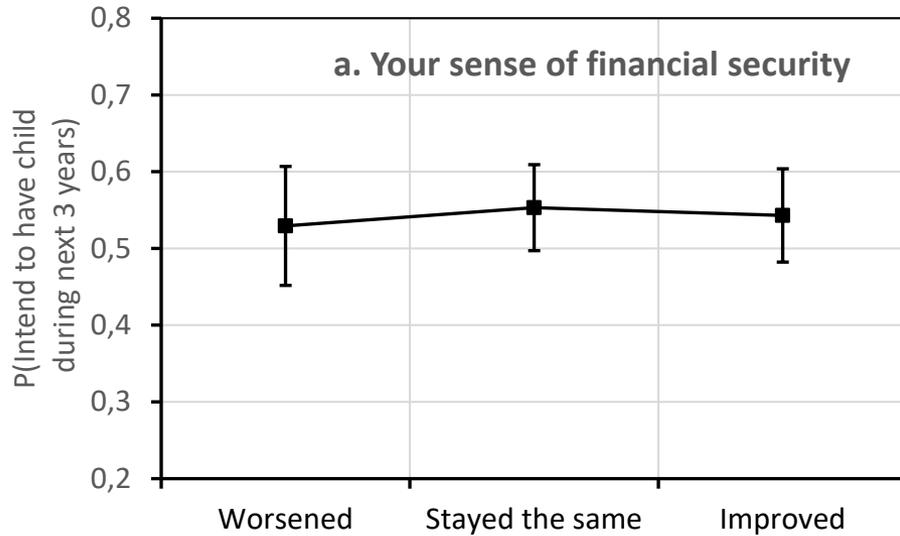
Covid-related aspects

Comparing your current situation with your situation just before the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, would you say that the following aspects of your life have improved, worsened or stayed the same?

| | Worsened | Stayed the same | Improved |
|--|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| a. Your sense of financial security | 22% | 54% | 24% (35%) |
| b. Your mental well-being | 47% (54%) | 38% | 15% |
| c. The relationship with friends and family | 28% | 52% | 20% |
| d. The satisfaction with your work situation | 41% | 36% | 23% |

Red: Childless respondents in a relationship, aged 20-40.

Intentions to Have a Child in the Next 3 Years? Covid-related aspects



Conclusion

What matters for fertility intentions/having first child?

- (1) factual circumstances less important
 - homogenous overall decline
 - improvement of current situational aspects - no increase of intention
 - (2) perceived uncertainties / worries – lower intention
 - uncertainty of own (or partner's) future
 - uncertainty about global developments
 - (3) trust – increase intentions
 - trust in institution
 - trust/confidence in future outcome
- “subjective turn” in fertility? = subjective assessment, perception of realities, imaginations and interpretations of the future more widespread and influential in childbearing decisions than assumed so far?



Thanks!



**Comments welcomed – emails of authors:
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