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The Impact of Marital Separation on Childbearing: A Test for the Selection Hypothesis

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Abstract The extent to which childbearing occurs within marital unions has decreased dramatically over recent decades. While a wealth of studies examined the recent patterns of childbearing out-of-wedlock and premarital childbearing, less systematic has been research on deciphering childbearing patterns after marital separation. Evidence from related research on step-families and multi-partner fertility suggests that people may also have children after first marital unions to fulfil parenthood desires and to cement new relationships. In this paper, we investigate a further mechanism on the selectivity of childbearing after marital separation. We argue that childbearing can be a function of individual-specific unobserved factors that lead people to dissolve unions, re-partner, and build or grow their families. To assess this mechanism, we use hazard regression models for first and second order childbearing episodes in the framework of multilevel multiprocess event history analysis. The sample is restricted to women aged 16 to 40 from the panel study Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. Results of this study will contribute to the understanding of contemporary fertility patterns, by shedding light on the conditions of fertility variations across partnerships over the life course.

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