

Re-partnering of Resident Single parents and Non-Resident Parents

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Aim: I investigate gender differences in the likelihood and timing of repartnering among resident single parents and non-resident parents.

Background: The majority of people (re)partner after the dissolution of their first childbearing union or after a non-partnered birth. Previous research shows that the likelihood of repartnering has increased for both men and women (Elzinga, Liefbroer 2007), still, men are more likely to repartner and do repartner more quickly than women (Poortman 2007). Further differences arise when childbearing and parental status is taken into account (Beaujouan 2012), and when the actual residence of the children is considered. Whereas among women, the exposure to single motherhood tends to be long (Heuveline et al. 2003), quick repartnering has been found for single fathers (Bernhardt, Goldscheider 2002). The research on the effect of non-resident children on men's repartnering process brought mixed results (Steward et al. 2003; Vanasche et al. 2015), for women however, both resident and non-resident children seem to lower their chances for (higher order) union formation (Ivanova, Kalmijn, Uunk 2013). Using detailed measure of children's residential arrangement, Vansche et al. (2015) found that only full-time residential children decrease men's and women's chances for repartnering.

In a high divorce, high repartnering context of the Nordic countries, both single fathers and single mothers spend a relatively short time parenting alone, and recent findings suggest that the gender differences in the duration of single parenthood decrease over time (Bernardi, Mortelmans, Larenza 2017). Previous research has predominantly focused on the timing of repartnering as a driver of the duration of single parenthood. However, repartnering is one of many transitions out of single parenthood. For many single parents single parenthood ends when their child(ren) move out, with many of these children moving to the other parent.

Therefore, transitions from resident single parenthood into non-resident parenthood and vice versa shall be considered as possible competing risks in the process of repartnering. In this study I treat repartnering as one of the competing risk on the route out of single parenthood and non-resident parenthood, and focus on gender differences in repartnering of resident single parents and non-resident parents.

Data and methods:

Data: I use 11% sample of the total population from the Finnish longitudinal registers on income, employment, births, deaths and coresidential partnerships. This data allows inference of coresidential couples, and residential and non-residential children. Single parenthood is defined as having no coresidential partner and at least one (biological) child younger than 18 registered in the same dwelling as the parent. Non-resident parenthood is defined as having biological children under 18 registered in different dwelling. I employ discrete-time event-history analysis to examine gender differences in chances and timing of (re)partnering among parents defined by coresidential status of their children.

Methods: I employ competing-risk regression based on Fine & Gray's (1999) proportional subhazard model, where the cumulative incidence function indicates the probability of the event of interest happening before given time. For the (first time) single fathers and mothers, the event is repartnering and the competing event is transition into non-resident parenthood. For (first time) non-resident fathers and mothers, the event is repartnering and the competing event is single parenthood. Models further control for educational attainment, and age at the first spell of single and non-resident parenthood respectively.

Results: Contrary to the expectations from previous literature, single mothers are slightly more likely to repartner than single fathers when transition into non-resident parenthood is treated as a competing risk. The competing risks further show that fathers are more likely than mothers to exit single parenthood via transition into non-resident parenthood. Among non-resident parents, non-resident fathers are more likely to repartner, and the competing risk shows that non-resident mothers are more likely to experience the transition into resident single parenthood. The age at the first spell of both single and non-resident parenthood is negatively associated with any transition. The models did not reveal any clear educational gradients.

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