

Social inequality, Lone Parenthood and Welfare Dependency in Germany

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Abstract

The topic of fatherhood has amassed considerable scholarly attention in recent decades. Most research on fathers' involvement has either focused on fathers in “intact families” or addressed the behavior and attitudes of non-residential fathers. Lone fatherhood -despite its growing significance in many countries of Europe- has not been explored much. This paper sheds new lights on the prevalence and characteristics of lone fathers in Germany. Using large scale survey data from the microcensus for the period 1996 to 2011, we describe the socio-economic correlates of lone fatherhood. In particular, we investigate the economic foundation of lone fatherhood by examining fathers' dependence on social welfare benefits. We compare lone fathers with their female counterparts. First results confirm earlier findings that show that lone fathers are more likely than lone mothers to live with older children. They are more often highly educated than comparable women. Characteristics of lone fathers have changed over time. In particular, we observe a declining share of lone fathers being widowed in recent years. Compared to lone mothers, lone fathers are at lower risk of welfare dependency. However, some of the differences between lone mothers and fathers can be attributed to socio-economic characteristics of the two groups, in particular in respect to the number and age of children and their higher educational attainment.

1 Introduction

The topic of fatherhood has amassed considerable scholarly attention in recent decades. Most research on fathers' involvement has focused on fathers in "intact families" or addressed the behavior and attitudes of non-residential fathers. Only recently, some few studies evolved that examined the prevalence and characteristics of the growing group of lone fathers. These studies have mainly been conducted for the US (Bures 2009; Coles 2015). For Germany, there are only a few studies –either qualitative or with a very limited number of cases- that investigated lone fathers (Matzner 1998; Stiehler 2001; Schneider et al. 2001). Furthermore, the German Statistical Office provides some basic measures on the prevalence of lone fatherhood. These figures show that lone fathers made up about 10 percent of all lone parents in 2009 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010). However, little is known on the evolution and characteristics of lone fatherhood across time. This paper seeks to close parts of this research gap by relying on large scale survey data that covers the period 1996-2012. We describe the socio-economic correlates of lone fatherhood, how they have changed across time and how they compare to the characteristics of lone mothers. Moreover, we explore the economic foundation of lone fatherhood by investigating lone fathers' likelihood of being on social welfare.

2 Data and Method

For this initial analysis presented in this extended abstract, we have restricted the investigation to the years 1996 and 2011. The microcensus is a one per cent sample of households in Germany. It has been conducted since 1957 in western Germany and 1991 in eastern Germany. For our analysis, we use the Scientific Use File of the data which is a 70 per cent sub-sample of the original. Our analytical sample contains women and men aged 18 to 64 who live with at least one child under the age of 18 in private households at the family's place of residence. We distinguish (a) lone fathers who are

defined as men who live with their minor child(ren) in the same family, and (b) lone mothers who are defined as women who live with their minor child(ren) in the same family. Note that the microcensus collects information only on persons living in the same household. Thus, we do not have any information on whether the lone parents in our sample have a partner who is living in another household unit. Note furthermore, that the microcensus does not collect any information on the affiliations of the respondents and the co-residential children. The children in the household could, thus, be step-, foster- or adopted children.

Our key dependent variable is a binary variable that measures the welfare dependency of the respondent. We assume that a person is on social welfare if the main source of income comes from unemployment benefit¹ or social assistance. If the respondent does not receive any of these benefits, he or she is coded as “not being on social welfare”. In principle, a person who is not on welfare may live on transfers from relatives, assets, stipends or pensions. However the overwhelming majority of our respondents who were not on welfare (73%) were gainfully employed. Socio-economic correlates that we take into account are the *age of the youngest child* (0-2, 3-5, 6-9, 10-13, 14-17 years of age) and the *number of children* (1, 2, 3 or more children). Also the *marital status* of the respondent (single, divorced/married but separated or widowed) is considered in our investigation. The multivariate analysis, furthermore, controls for *age* (18-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64 years of age), *region* (eastern/western Germany), the nationality (German/Non-German) and the *size of place of residence* (less than 20,000; between 20,000 and less than 500,000; 500,000 and more inhabitants).

¹ Since there have been major changes in the unemployment benefit system for long-term unemployed persons in 2005 which also affected the recording in the microcensus we decided to have a category which collapses unemployment benefit and unemployment assistance (existed until 2004 and were not recorded in separate categories), unemployment benefit I and II (exist since 2005), and social assistance which played a major role for lone parents until 2004.

In a first step, we describe the socio-economic characteristics of lone fatherhood and their changes across time by means of standard cross tables. In a next step, we employ a binary logistic regression that explores the determinants of welfare dependency among our two comparison groups (lone fathers and lone mothers).

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive Results

As already mentioned and been shown by previous studies lone fathers represent only a small group of lone parents. In 1996, about 12 per cent of lone parents in our sample were man; in 2011 the share was 9.4 per cent.

The results in table 1 show considerable differences between male and female lone parents in Germany. Lone fathers are on average about five to six years older than lone mothers and we see a rise in the mean age between 1996 and 2011 among both groups. The majority of lone fathers lived with children in teenage while most of the single mothers had children under the age of ten. Lone fathers lived with fewer children. Almost three quarters of them had only one child, while among the lone mothers this proportion was only two thirds. Lone fathers held also, on average, higher levels of education. About three quarters of them had at least a medium level of education in 1996 while among the mothers this share was only about 68 per cent. Among the lone fathers we also found a lower proportion of those who were still in education. Among mothers and fathers qualification had increased between the years under observation. Another fundamental difference which has also been shown in previous studies is the marital status. Although divorce was the main reason for being a lone parent among men (about 69 per cent) and women (1996: 62 per cent, 2011: 55 per cent) in

both years, there was a considerably higher share of widowers among men. In 1996 about 18 per cent of lone fathers were widowers while among their female counterparts the proportion was only about 9 per cent. Although the share had decreased among both groups until 2011, there were still about 12 per cent of widowers among the lone fathers and only about 4 per cent among the women. Another outstanding difference is the much lower proportion of never married men among the lone fathers in comparison to the lone mothers. In 2011, the proportion of never married mothers was more than twice as high as among the lone fathers. Our dependent variable, in addition, shows a quite high social inequality among lone mothers and lone fathers. While in both years only about 16 per cent of fathers declared that their main source of income consisted of welfare benefits, more than one quarter of female lone parents was dependent on social welfare. Among the lone mothers this proportion had also increased between 1996 and 2011 while among men it stayed stable. In the next step of our investigation, we aim at examining the reasons for this difference in welfare dependency.

Table 1: Characteristics of lone fathers and lone mothers, column percentages

	Lone fathers		Lone mothers	
	1996	2011	1996	2011
Region				
Western Germany	79.0	82.4	73.0	78.7
Eastern Germany	21.0	17.6	27.0	21.4
Nationality				
German	90.9	89.7	92.2	87.7
Non-German	9.1	10.3	7.8	12.3
Size of place of residence				
<20,000	40.8	36.2	33.5	34.5
20,000-<500,000	43.7	45.6	46.3	45.2
500,000 or more	15.5	18.2	20.2	20.3
Age				
18-24	2.9	1.2	6.2	5.8
25-29	6.5	2.1	14.6	10.9
30-34	11.5	7.3	23.7	15.2
35-39	23.1	12.5	24.1	18.2
40-44	24.1	24.9	18.3	24.5
45-49	17.9	24.9	8.7	17.6
50-54	8.4	18.2	2.9	6.5
55-59	4.2	6.8	1.0	1.2
60-64	1.5	2.1	0.5	0.2
Mean age	40.72	44.54	35.93	38.50
Std.	0.52	0.51	0.18	0.17
Marital status				
never married	12.7	18.9	29.8	40.5
divorced/married & separated	69.1	69.2	61.7	55.1
widow ed	18.3	11.9	8.5	4.4
Number of children				
1	73.8	73.0	66.0	66.0
2	20.9	22.7	26.9	26.7
3+	5.3	4.3	7.1	7.3
Age of youngest child				
0-2	5.3	4.8	14.7	15.3
3-5	9.7	7.8	17.8	16.0
6-9	19.8	17.6	24.4	21.0
10-13	26.4	28.6	22.4	23.6
14-17	38.8	41.3	20.7	24.1
Education				
No/low education	16.9	13.4	22.8	23.1
Medium education	61.5	66.0	57.5	61.2
High education	14.3	19.9	10.1	12.4
In education	2.6	0.6	3.7	3.0
N/a	4.7	0.1	6.1	0.4
Welfare dependency				
No	83.5	83.9	73.1	71.3
Yes	16.5	16.1	26.9	28.7
N (Sample size)	980	903	6,907	8,697

Source: SUF of the German microcensus 1996 and 2011

3.2 Multivariate Results

Our multivariate analyses (table 2) confirmed our descriptive finding of a lower welfare dependency among lone fathers. *Model 1* further showed that in general, welfare benefit receipt had slightly increased in 2011, was higher in eastern Germany, among non-Germans and in bigger cities. Controlling for additional socio-demographic characteristics as the age of the respondent as well as number and age of children in *model 2* revealed that some of these characteristics explain lone fathers lower welfare dependency as the difference between lone mothers and fathers slightly decreased. Welfare benefit receipt was higher among young respondents; it decreased with the age of the youngest child and increased with the number of children. Furthermore, we found that never married lone parents are the most likely to receive unemployment benefit or social assistance. The reason can be found in the maintenance regulations and the regulations on widows' and widowers' pensions which provide another source of income for these groups of lone parents. Adding the educational level to *model 3* further reduces the difference between lone fathers and lone mothers. In general, welfare dependency decreased with education. However, there were still distinguishing differences between men and women in their welfare dependency that obviously cannot only be explained by lone fathers' higher level of education, the higher age of the children as well as the lower number of children fathers live with in comparison to single mothers.

To further investigate the underlying mechanisms of welfare dependency among lone fathers and lone mothers we estimated separated models for both groups (*model 4* and *model 5*). The model for lone mothers showed similar results as in model 3. However, the model estimated for lone fathers showed that some of the results, as for age, the number of children, and the results for the youngest age groups of the child were not significant. In addition, there were also no significant differences between never married and divorced fathers.

Table 2: Results from binary logistic regression, determinants of welfare dependency (1=yes; 0=no), odds ratios

	Model 1		All Model 2		Model 3		Lone fathers Model 4		Lone mothers Model 5	
	Exp(b)	Sig.	Exp(b)	Sig.	Exp(b)	Sig.	Exp(b)	Sig.	Exp(b)	Sig.
Sex										
Men	0.52 ***		0.74 ***		0.80 ***					
Women	1		1		1					
Calendar year										
1996	1		1		1		1		1	
2011	1.07 *		1.13 ***		1.14 ***		1.02 n.s.		1.14 ***	
Region										
Western Germany	1		1		1		1		1	
Eastern Germany	1.42 *		1.27 ***		1.59 ***		2.03 ***		1.55 ***	
Nationality										
German	1		1		1		1		1	
Non-German	2.17 ***		2.16 ***		1.64 ***		1.45 *		1.67 ***	
Size of place of residence										
<20,000	1		1		1		1		1	
20,000-<500,000	1.63 ***		1.66 ***		1.62 ***		1.84 ***		1.60 ***	
500,000 or more	1.71 ***		1.70 ***		1.72 ***		1.98 ***		1.70 ***	
Age										
18-24			2.67 ***		1.65 ***		0.47 n.s.		1.76 ***	
25-29			1.85 ***		1.43 ***		1.37 n.s.		1.46 ***	
30-34			1.33 ***		1.20 ***		0.95 n.s.		1.23 ***	
35-39			1		1		1		1	
40-44			0.82 ***		0.88 **		1.04 n.s.		0.86 **	
45-49			0.80 ***		0.92 n.s.		0.99 n.s.		0.91 n.s.	
50-54			0.98 n.s.		1.10 n.s.		0.82 n.s.		1.18 n.s.	
55-59			1.06 n.s.		1.02 n.s.		1.08 n.s.		1.01 n.s.	
60-64			1.55 n.s.		1.32 n.s.		1.55 n.s.		1.18 n.s.	
Marital status										
never married			1		1		1		1	
Divorced/married & separated			0.89 ***		0.88 ***		0.87 n.s.		0.88 ***	
Widow ed			0.41 ***		0.36 ***		0.41 ***		0.34 ***	
Number of children										
1			1		1		1		1	
2			1.39 ***		1.28 ***		0.95 n.s.		1.32 ***	
3 or more			2.69 ***		2.15 ***		1.30 n.s.		2.25 ***	
Age of youngest child										
0-2			1		1		1		1	
3-5			0.76 ***		0.75 ***		0.96 n.s.		0.75 ***	
6-9			0.62 ***		0.57 ***		0.66 n.s.		0.57 ***	
10-13			0.51 ***		0.44 ***		0.52 **		0.44 ***	
14-17			0.48 ***		0.39 ***		0.37 ***		0.40 ***	
Education										
No/low education					3.13 ***		2.54 ***		3.18 ***	
Medium education					1		1		1	
High education					0.32 ***		0.29 ***		0.33 ***	
In education					1.00 n.s.		0.78 n.s.		1.01 n.s.	
Model summary										
Log likelihood	-9849		-9120		-8592		-740		-7836	
Pseudo R ²	0.03		0.10		0.15		0.12		0.15	
Number of cases	17,487		17,487		17,487		1,883		15,604	

Source: SUF of the German microcensus 1996 and 2011

4 (Preliminary) Conclusions

This study aimed at comparing lone fathers' welfare benefit receipt to that of lone mothers. Our first results confirm results of prior studies and show that lone fathers are less likely to be dependent on welfare benefits than lone mothers. Their, from an economic point of view, more favourable socio-demographic characteristics – less and older children as well as a higher education on average – slightly decrease the differences between lone fathers and lone mothers but cannot fully explain lone fathers lower welfare benefit dependency in comparison to lone mothers. This might indicate different underlying mechanisms as gender specific attitudes towards the engagement in the labour market that play an important role.

5 References

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