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REVIEW ARTICLE

Happiness and Single Parenthood: A Literature Review Using an Online Findings Archive

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Abstract
Many isolated findings suggest that single parents report, on average, lower levels of happiness than others. These others, however, are not a single homogeneous group, and definitions vary according to the specific research question. Consequently, the picture of single parents' happiness is still scattered. Drawing on the World Database of Happiness, we review systematically described research findings in a standardised manner, aiming to provide an overview of the association between single parenthood and happiness. Conclusions are based on findings from 54 publications, which analysed quantitative data and are spread over most countries of the Global North, covering the period from 1972 to 2020. This literature review shows that in nearly all countries covered, independent of historical time and irrespective of different definitions of single parenthood, single parents are, on average, less happy than other parents but, in certain conditions, happier than other individuals living without a partner. Various forms of informal support, employment, and the use of childcare are positively associated with single parents' happiness. The review also reveals that single fathers are still not the focus of happiness research, nor are macro-level associations with single parents' happiness.

Keywords Subjective Well-Being · Family · Lone parent · World Database of Happiness · Meta-analysis

1 Introduction

The number of single parents increases in many countries (Bernardi et al., 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018), and the challenges that single parents are facing differ considerably from those in two-parent households: Juggling parental care and income provision is often more complex, and a second parent is not always available to share responsibilities.

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Compared to partnered parents, single parents are more often at risk of poverty (Kühn, 2018; Hancioglu & Hartmann, 2014; Lietzmann, 2009; Francesconi & Klaauw, 2007; Vandecasteele, 2011), they report more often work-family conflict (Reimann et al., 2019), and sometimes the organisation of day-to-day life with an ex-partner is more a burden than support (D'Ercole, 1988; Abromaviciute, 2018). These strains can lead to lower physical and mental health (Butterworth, 2004; Crosier et al., 2007; Wang, 2004) and thus reduced well-being. Furthermore, most single parents have experienced the break-up of a romantic relationship that was meant to last longer. With respect to marriage and divorce, Leopold and Kalmijn (2016) demonstrate that this critical experience itself causes dips in well-being, and even deeper dips when the couple has children. On the other hand, single parents develop and employ a variety of coping strategies, like strict financial planning and maintenance of robust support networks (D'Ercole, 1988; Abromaviciute, 2018).

Self-evaluations of one's life take into account both hardship and successful coping, such that they can provide useful information in addition to research on objective measures of each isolated aspect. Moreover, subjective evaluations are part of the individuals' definition of the situation and thereby shape their behaviour (Esser, 1993; Tversky & Kahnemann, 1981). First findings from empirical research on subjective well-being in the sense of happiness emerged in the 1970 s, and the yearly output of research findings thereon is still increasing, in particular since the advent of happiness economics and positive psychology at the turn of the millennium. However, research that focuses on the happiness of single parents is still rare, perhaps because single parenthood is still predominantly associated with objective hardship and strains. Some studies address the happiness of single parents, showing that they report on average lower life satisfaction (which is one measure of happiness) than the rest of the population (e.g., Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2014; Ifcher, 2011; Ifcher & Zarghamee, 2014; Pollmann-Schult, 2018; Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015). Other studies control for the type of family and thereby yield partial associations between single parenthood and happiness (e.g., Brewer & Nandi, 2014; Jenkinson et al., 2020; Schober & Schmitt, 2017; Schober & Stahl, 2016). And finally, the last group of studies explicitly analyse associations of single parents' happiness (Bull and Mittelmark 2009; Dierker et al. 2023; Hetherington et al. 1976; Huss and Pollmann-Schult 2020; Jackson 1993; Kalmuss et al. 1992a; Kühn 2018; Sodermans et al. 2015; Wells Gladow and Ray 1986).

Our aim with this review is to make all these isolated findings about single parents' happiness easily accessible. We therefore present the available knowledge about the average happiness of single parents and how the association between single parenthood and happiness is shaped by various confounding and mediating factors, e.g., informal support, availability of day-care facilities, or employment. Using the World Database of Happiness[1] collection of research findings on single parenthood and happiness, we scrutinised the available data on the relationship between single parenthood and happiness, addressing the following questions:

- How happy are single parents compared to others?
- What confounds or mediates the association between happiness and single parenthood?

[1] While we finalised the manuscript, Ruut Veenhoven, the founder and director of the World Database of Happiness, passed away. As a result, the archive will not be expanded any further. However, the existing body of knowledge will be conserved and maintained by the EHERO group at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

However, this review cannot identify the causal effect of single parenthood on happiness, nor the causes of single parents' happiness, for several reasons. Most people are selected or self-select into and out of single parenthood, and factors that increase the likelihood of becoming a single parent might impact other causes of (un-)happiness. Furthermore, people who remain in single parenthood for longer are more likely to be included in any single-parent sample than those who leave this situation quickly. Therefore, analyses based on samples of single parents are prone to survivor bias. As the reviewed studies made no attempts to address these sorts of endogeneity explicitly, their results cannot identify causal effects in an econometric sense.

Knowledge about single parents' happiness and its correlates could nevertheless be a valuable bit of information for practitioners when designing parent education and counselling programs, for politicians when deciding about, e.g., the availability of family planning measures or about family benefits and supporting infrastructure. For the scientific community, finally, this literature review provides an overview of the body of knowledge on single parents' happiness, and its contribution therewith is twofold. First, we use all available material about single parents' happiness, meaning not only studies that explicitly focus on single parents' happiness but also side results from other research questions, which broadens the basis for this literature review. We not only compare single parents to partnered parents, which is the focus of most studies in family sociology, but also show comparisons to childless singles. We further collected and report findings on correlates of single parents' happiness and living conditions across micro and macro dimensions. Second, in reporting the available findings about single parents' happiness, we reveal where knowledge is still lacking and where future research could step in.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Single Parents

Up to the 1990 s, the majority of single parents in the Global North were either widowed or single mothers due to childbirth out of wedlock. Hence, people and society reacted bipolarly: with compassion towards widows and orphans and with stigmatisation towards unmarried mothers, punishing their 'immoral behaviour' (Letablier & Wall, 2018). Nowadays, single parenthood is more common, often preceded by a union dissolution or divorce (Bernardi et al., 2018; Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018), and very recently, solo parenting emerges, i.e., parenting that has begun intentionally without a partner. This pluralisation of single parenthood also diversifies the socio-economic situation of single parents and the challenges they face. Most single parents before the 1990 s were severely burdened by the absence of a second adult who could contribute to the household's economic resources. A single parent nowadays, after a union dissolution or divorce, is often not the only parent who takes over financial and care responsibilities for the children. The existence of another parent can increase both economic and care resources, but also the organisational effort or burden.

Nowadays, single parents are still more often mothers than fathers (OECD, 2025, SF1.1); they tend to have fewer children than partnered parents (OECD, 2025, SF1.2), and most partnerships that end in single parenthood split up after the first child (Bernardi et al., 2018). The duration of single parenthood episodes varies across birth cohorts; older cohorts stay

longer in single parenthood than younger cohorts (Bernardi et al., 2018). On average, the first episode of single parenthood begins around the age of 30, with a variation from 26 in the US to 34 in France (Bernardi et al., 2018). The prevalence of single parenthood also varies regionally: In Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the US, about 20% of all households with minor children are single-parent households. For Greece, Israel, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Luxembourg, comparatively low rates (about 10% single-parent households among all households with minor children) are reported (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018).

Being a single parent typically comes with distinct challenges in daily life that strongly depend on norms and policies (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015). Compared to partnered parents as well as to childless singles, single parents often face economic hardship because only one adult in the household is responsible for earning income, maintaining, and caring, while the consumptive needs of at least two persons in the household must be met. Even when a former partner takes over financial responsibility for a common child, costs for two parental households are c.p. higher than for one shared household. Further, single parents face difficulties on the labour market, whether due to higher care obligations compared to partnered parents or singles, or due to inflexible working conditions that are not adaptable to the custody arrangements of single parents and the opening hours of childcare facilities. Single parents, therefore, suffer more often from work-family conflict (Reimann et al., 2019). This can be either working conditions that harm their family life (working obligations that impair familial engagement also occur in two-parent families, but in single-parent households, no second parent can compensate) or family obligations that hinder professional career. And even if ex-partners are involved in care and financial responsibilities, bargaining and organisation of arrangements can be especially challenging (D'Ercole, 1988; Abromaviciute, 2018).

Welfare states, finally, are facing budget constraints and adapt their social policies with more reliance on employment; if these policies do not explicitly consider the situation of single parents, single parents are more than other parents confronted with the "complexities of a triple bind: the interplay between inadequate resources, inadequate employment and inadequate policies." (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado, 2018, p. 2). As a consequence, single parents suffer more often from, e.g., health problems than partnered parents (Esser, 2017; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2000) and live more often than partnered parents at risk of poverty (Kühn, 2018; Hancioglu & Hartmann, 2014; Lietzmann, 2009; Francesconi & Klaauw, 2007; Vandecasteele, 2011).

On the other hand, many single parents develop and maintain reliable support networks, either paid, friendship- or neighbourhood-based (Abromaviciute, 2018). Abromiviciute (2018) further shows that in the US labour market, single mothers are, to a higher extent than married mothers, perceived as committed and competent (potential) employees.

2.2 Definitions of Single Parenthood

Single parenthood delineates a situation where only one parent lives with and cares for their child. This picture, though, is only vague because different pathways lead into single parenthood, and depending thereon the availability of a second parent varies from a non-existent second parent in case of death, an absent parent, a second parent for only every other weekend, up to a second parent with equally shared physical custody (Steinbach et

al., 2021; Langmeyer et al., 2022). However, the definitions of single parents often neglect custody arrangements, except when custody itself is at focus.

Several different definitions of single parenthood exist in the literature. Typically, single parenthood is understood as a combination of partnership status and parental status; most often, the term single parent describes a parent living with a child and without a romantic partner in the household. However, definitions refer to different ages of children (up to 15 years (Chapple, 2009); up to 18 years (Iacovou & Skew, 2011), or up to the age of 25 (Chambaz, 2001). Definitions also differ according to 'included' single-parent families, i.e., those sharing accommodation with another household (Chambaz, 2001). Finally, and rather rarely, some definitions refer only to biological or married parents.[2]

Given this heterogeneity of definitions, no uniform definition of single parenthood is applied for this review; some studies in this review even fail to provide an explicit definition. Available definitions in the reviewed studies differ with respect to age thresholds for children: Most often it is required that underaged children live in the household (Andreß & Bröckel, 2007; Bowen & Orthner, 1986; Dierker et al., 2023; Herbst, 2013; Huss & Pollmann-Schult, 2020; Ifcher & Zarghamee, 2014; Jenkinson et al., 2020; Kühn, 2018; Lansford et al., 2001; Mahler, 1994; Pishkin & Thorne, 1973; Pollmann-Schult, 2014, 2018; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999; Weick, 1994). Two studies in this review define single parents according to the presence of dependent children (Brewer & Nandi, 2014; Schoon et al., 2005), which is most often defined as younger than 16 or in education and not married. One reviewed study sets an age threshold for children at 21 years (Sodermans et al., 2015), another one at 16 years (Wong, 1985). Several reviewed studies focus on becoming a (single) parent or on the associations of childcare and parental well-being and therefore focus on families or women in the transition to parenthood (Aassve et al., 2012; Kalmuss et al., 1992; Myrskylä & Margolis, 2014) or families with pre-school children (Hetherington et al., 1976; Jackson, 1993; Schober & Schmitt, 2017; Schober & Stahl, 2016); the children are thus much younger, but not because of the definition of single parents but because of the specific research question.

Further heterogeneity in the reviewed single-parent samples is related to the partnership biographies: Some studies focus on divorcees (Andreß & Bröckel, 2007; Brewer & Nandi, 2014; Hetherington et al., 1976; Jenkinson et al., 2020; Shapiro & Lambert, 1999), others refer to never-married single mothers (DeVries, 1994; Kalmuss et al., 1992). This review hence blends findings that refer to single parents, post-separation single parents, and widowed parents, who live with their children and without a partner. Even though it makes a difference if parents are single parents due to separation, the death of their partner or choosing parenthood without partnership, we ignore the trajectories that led to single parenthood for this literature review. Inclusion of single-parent households in larger households was mentioned only in Vignoli et al. (2014).

[2] This implies that a new partner not married to the parent but living in the same household is disregarded, and that such a household with two caring adults would be identified as a single-parent household (Nöthen, 2005).

2.3 Concept and Measurement of Happiness

Following Veenhoven (1984), we define happiness as the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of their own life-as-a-whole favourably. In other words: how much does one like the life one leads.

This concept of happiness is also referred to by other names, such as 'subjective well-being', 'perceivedquality of life', and 'life satisfaction'. These labels are, however, also used to denote slightly differing phenomena. In positive psychology, for example, happiness is conceptually divided into hedonic happiness in contrast to eudaemonic happiness. Happiness, as it is defined here, is a stable judgment of one's life as a whole, and thereby neither restricted to hedonic happiness, which is often understood as short-lived superficial pleasure, nor to eudaimonia, which typically encompasses objective criteria for a good life. Further elaborations about the relation to other and wider notions of well-being are provided in Veenhoven (2020a).

In this review of research findings, we did not select on the labels other researchers used in their studies, but on the measured phenomenon. Hence, we included only results of studies that analyse happiness defined as satisfaction with life as a whole and therefore use measures that fit this specific concept.

Satisfaction with life as a whole or in general denotes a judgment that integrates all appreciation criteria an individual uses and all individually relevant life domains. Singular domain satisfactions, like job satisfaction or satisfaction with family life, cannot capture happiness. The judgment about the degree of favourability of one's own life requires assessing past experiences and forecasting future ones, and evaluating these experiences with reference to subjective expectations. A noteworthy implication of this conceptualisation is that it excludes individuals who are unable to reflect on aspirations, achievements, and projections for the future, like small children or individuals with cognitive impairment.

Happiness is something people are aware of and can express; it thus can be measured using self-reports, and in this review, we draw on the World Database of Happiness (WDH), which includes only results of studies that measure happiness using questions that fit the above-defined concept of happiness. Conceptual fit was assessed through close reading of questions and comparison with the definition of happiness described in the manual of the WDH (Veenhoven 2020c). A common survey question on happiness reads: "In conclusion, we would like to ask you about your satisfaction with your life in general. Please answer on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means completely dissatisfied, and 10 means completely satisfied." In the German SOEP questionnaire, for example, this verbal explanation is complemented with a visualised scale (see Fig. 1, Kantar Public, 2020).

The WDH collection is not restricted to measures on a 0 to 10 scale, even though this is the most frequently used measure in this review: 21 out of the 54 studies measure happi-

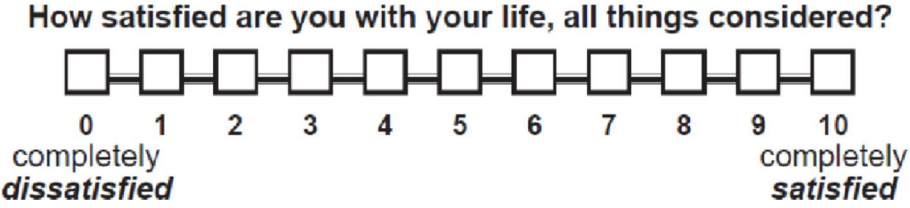

Fig. 1 Scale visualisation for the life satisfaction question in the SOEP questionnaire

ness on a scale from 0 to 10; seven studies use a 5-step and six studies a 6-step scale. The least differentiated measure is a binary one; this, however, appears in only one study. Effect sizes and level differences from these differently measured happiness data are not numerically comparable without further assumptions. This literature review, however, does not aim at numerical comparison but at a complete overview of findings and therefore refrains from reporting effect sizes or differences in satisfaction levels. What looks like a waste of information is yet in accordance with recent debates about how respondents use satisfaction scales to report their happiness. Bond and Lang (2019) profoundly questioned the stability of research findings from satisfaction data, arguing that assumptions about the individuals' underlying reporting function are crucial but unmeasurable. The problem was reassessed by Kaiser (2022), who confirmed its existence, yet demonstrated that the direction of significant findings is often robust to reasonable variations of the reporting function. In this review, we therefore rely only on the direction and significance of associations, avoiding problems of comparability of differently measured and reported happiness.

3 Material and Method of this Review

3.1 The World Database of Happiness

The number of research findings on happiness has grown too big to oversee, even for specialists. For this reason, the World Database of Happiness (WDH) has been established as a freely accessible online findings archive, in which quantitative outcomes are sorted by subject and presented in a uniform format (worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur/). Its structure is shown in Fig. A1, and a detailed description is found in Veenhoven (2020d). Continuously since 1980, the WDH team has gathered scientific publications on happiness, referring to well-defined criteria described in detail in Veenhoven (2020d). This means that not all publications on the well-being of single parents are included in this selection, but only those that report results of quantitative empirical investigations; qualitative studies, theoretical treatises, or literature reviews are not included in the findings archive. Over the years, many publications have been entered in the Bibliography of Happiness, among them several studies that contained information on the empirical relationship between happiness and single parenthood, sometimes as side results of studies that aimed at other things. In 2024, we completed the collection in this subject category with a focused literature search on this subject, using different keywords and combining several bibliographical sources.

3.2 Reviewed Studies

In May 2024, the WDH Bibliography of Happiness included 54 scientific publications that report empirical findings on the happiness of single parents. All suitable findings from these studies are then included in the WDH collection of correlational findings (Veenhoven 2020b), in the subject categories *happiness and single parents*, *happiness and custody of divorced parents*, *happiness and separation/divorce*, *and happiness and having children*.

The studies refer to 2.5 million people spread over many countries and years. Regional coverage of the studies is very much centred in Europe (29 of 54 studies), and the majority therein (15) refers to Germany or the UK. 17 studies are conducted in the US, six in

Australia or New Zealand; other studies use multinational datasets, one study refers to three Scandinavian countries, and five studies are based on samples of the European population. Two studies were based on samples of the world population, and only these include data from countries in South America, Africa, and Asia. Ten studies were conducted in subnational regional areas.

25 of the 54 studies use samples of the general population and apply some restrictions (referring to age range, partnership biography or status, and employment status), eleven studies focus on parents, partly further restricted according to children's age, parity, or employment status. Two studies explicitly analyse samples of single parents only, though one of them studies a very unusual group of single parents: those in the US Air Force in 1980. Some studies are restricted to women or mothers (four and six studies, respectively), and five studies explicitly focus on single mothers. These studies specify their samples further, e.g., according to age, employment status, or children's age.

The earliest data refers back to 1972, the latest to 2020. The bulk of studies (36) report cross-sectional correlations, 25 of them from single points in time, and 11 studies use data from repeated cross sections; 18 studies are based on longitudinal data; even though not all of those studies report findings that are generated from panel data methods, but for instance from ordered logit regressions with individual-level clustered standard errors. Such findings are not classified as longitudinal findings because they do not exclusively focus on within-person changes over time but blend the latter with information from between-person differences.

Table A1 in the appendix lists all studies that are part of this review, with relevant characteristics like place and time of the observation and the studied (sub-)population.

3.3 Format of this Review

Since most of the studies report several findings on single parents, this review is based on 272 different findings with linked findings pages in the WDH. Further findings not linked to the WDH are presented in the maps (Figs. 2 and 3). The technique of an online findings archive allows a new way of displaying research results, the link-facilitated literature review. Research findings are straightforwardly presented using a positive/negative sign, which is linked to the online findings page at the WDH. This allows the presentation of numerous findings in a few tabular overviews. We report all statistical relations observed, irrespective of their size. Positive relations are indicated using a +, negative correlations using a – sign. If a reviewed study reports an association of numerically zero, we use 0 in our tables. Statistical significance is reported using a bold sign: + or −. Results that differ across subpopulations or model specifications are presented using a string of symbols, -- for example, when negative correlations from two different specifications are reported. Each of the signs, single or in a string, links to a particular findings page in the WDH. Each findings page contains bibliographic information and, if possible, a link to the research article. Information is provided on the data used, i.e., which population was considered, how many observations were taken into account, and information on the sample design. Furthermore, it is reported how both happiness and the variable of interest, here single parenthood, were operationalised in the study. The methods used and eventual control variables are specified, and the results are presented in the form of statistical indicators.

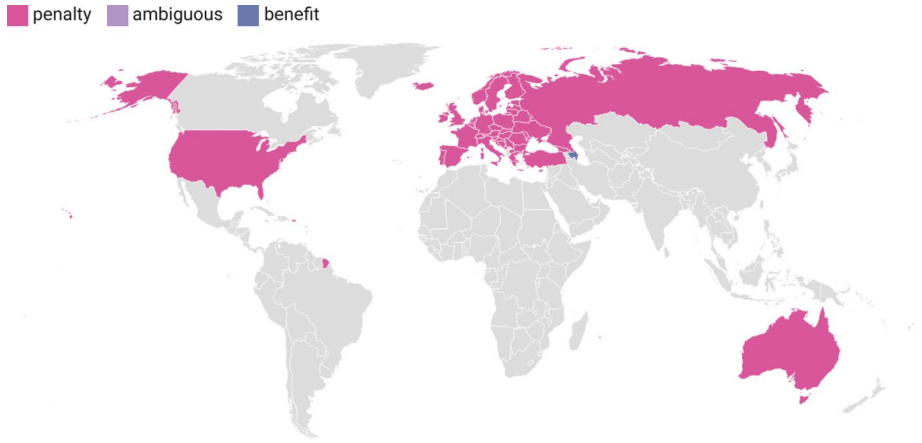

Fig. 2 Happiness penalty/benefit when parents live without a partner.Source: Findings in Table 1, Pollmann-Schult (2018) and Stavrova and Fetchenhauer (2015). Map data from OpenStreatMap.

Note: Happiness differences between single parents and partnered parents are trivariate: 'penalty' when all findings indicate that single parents are less happy than partnered parents, 'ambiguous' when findings contradict, and 'benefit' when all findings indicate that single parents are happier than partnered parents. The assigned codes can result from one or more studies and from partial and/or total differences.

Intending to collect all available knowledge about happiness and single parenthood, this review presents much information in a limited space. With its database-related presentation in overview tables, it reduces the risk of (a) 'cherry-picking' and (b) of condensation up to an over-simplification of the diverse results for the purpose of verbal presentation. Furthermore, this review does not rely on other authors' interpretations, which are typically advanced in the context of a specific research question, but only on the data and findings. The advantages of this way of presenting the findings are (a) an easy overview of the main trend in the findings, in this case many '−' signs for comparisons of single parents with other groups; (b) access to the full details behind the links; (c) coverage of all available findings; (d) an easy overview of the white spots, i.e. the empty cells in the tables.

An important drawback is that many details are not directly visible in the + and − signs, particularly not the effect size and the control variables used. In this review, we purposely neglect information on the size of the statistical relationships even though it is available in the database; hence, we also do not apply common methods of meta-analysis to this numerical information, such as presenting observed correlations in a stem-leaf diagram, computing average effect sizes, or estimating the publication bias. The reason is that comparable effect sizes can only be computed for the total correlations (without further controls), which make up only a part of the available information. Especially, information about factors that influence single parents' happiness could not be used for such an analysis. With our aim of presenting an overview of all findings about happiness and single parenthood, it was no option to limit the available information to only a few comparable findings.

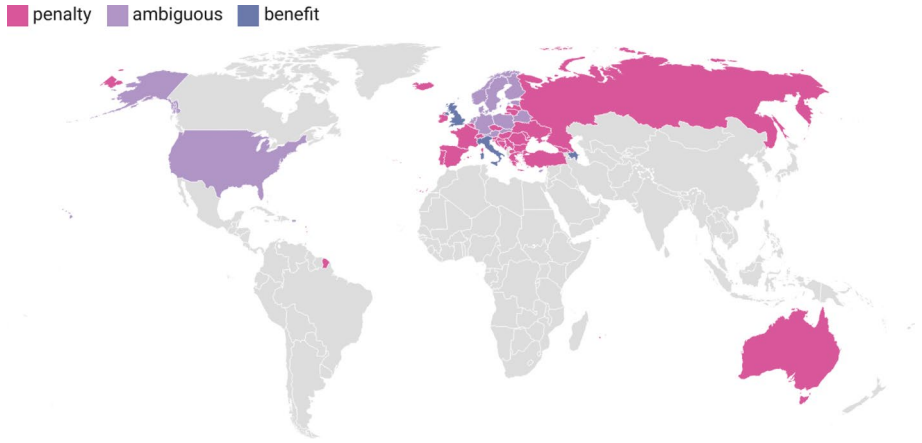

Fig. 3 Happiness penalty/benefit when singles live with children.Source: Findings in Table 1, Pollmann-Schult (2018) and Stavrova and Fetchenhauer (2015). Map data from OpenStreatMap.

Note: Happiness differences between unpartnered parents and unpartnered non-parent individuals are trivariate: 'penalty' when all findings indicate that non-partnered parents are less happy than childless non-partnered individuals, 'ambiguous' when findings contradict, and 'benefit' when findings indicate that non-partnered parents are happier than childless non-partnered individuals. The assigned codes can result from one or more studies and from partial and/or total differences.

4 Results

The results section of this review contains atypical tables that present findings of the reviewed studies using symbols, grouped into theoretically and methodologically relevant categories. These tables are informative in both the filled and the blank cells, since blank cells indicate that no findings were available for the very specification. This may be the case either because a certain group is too small for quantitative analysis (difficult to observe or in the early stages of development) or because it is underexplored. The tables show, for example, that little evidence exists on the determinants of single fathers' happiness. This is probably due to the group still being comparatively small (OECD, 2025, SF1.1) and thus not numerous enough in population samples.

Population samples come with a further difficulty: risks and potentials accumulate differently in different socio-demographic groups, which affects mean happiness in the samples and subsamples, hence confounds the estimated mean happiness differences between groups. A straightforward attempt to mitigate this sort of endogeneity is the inclusion of control variables. We therefore present the findings in all tables differentiated according to whether the estimations included controls. If longitudinal data is available, analyses draw on intra-personal comparisons or changes over time, to mitigate endogeneity that results from unobservable heterogeneity between groups or individuals. Findings are, thus, further cat-

egorised according to the temporal dimension of the analyses: Findings from cross-sectional analyses between individuals and longitudinal[3] analyses that rely on intrapersonal changes are presented separately within each table. However, longitudinal analyses cannot prevent selection and survivor bias, which none of the reviewed studies explicitly addressed.

In the following, we first present comparisons between single parents and parents in other family constellations and non-parents (Table 1). Next, we depict the correlates of single parents' happiness to see which attributes contribute to the happiness penalty of single parents (Tables 2 and 3). Within each table, findings for single mothers and single fathers are presented separately when possible, because their pathways into single parenthood slightly differ, as their socio-demographics do.

4.1 Single Parents are on Average Less Happy

Table 1 provides a comprehensive comparison between single parents and individuals in other family/household situations.

The first row contains an overwhelming amount of findings (88), suggesting that single parents of either gender are, on average, less happy than parents who live with their partner. The only exception to this pattern comes from a comparison of single parents who are neither divorced/separated nor widowed nor cohabiting, but who are strictly single and non-cohabiting (Blanchflower & Clark, 2021), and from a comparison of the unconditional mean life satisfaction of single and partnered parents in Azerbaijan (Stavrova & Fetchenhauer, 2015)[4]. The regional spread of some of these findings and additional findings from two other sources are shown in Fig. 2.

Results are more mixed when single parents are compared to childless individuals living without a partner. Most findings still report an average happiness penalty of parenthood for singles. Some studies, though, report that single parents are on average happier than childless individuals (Baranowska-Rataj et al., 2014; Ifcher, 2011; Schoon et al., 2005; Stanca, 2012, 2016). Yet, for some of these findings, the reported parenthood benefit for non-partnered individuals is blended with other potential drivers of happiness or unhappiness. In one study, the parenthood benefit for singles is observed in only one of 19 years and only for single mothers versus single childless men (Ifcher, 2011). This comparison of women to men, with the latter typically reporting lower levels of happiness than women (Arrosa & Gandelman, 2016; Montgomery, 2022), is likely reflecting more than the parenthood benefit for singles. Second, Stanca (2012; 2016) finds that widowed parents are happier than childless singles and childless widows. These findings are based on the World Values Survey, covering 94 (Stanca, 2012) and 100 (Stanca,2016) countries. This regionally and therefore culturally, socially, and economically diverse sample is further diverse with respect to respondents' and their children's age: the respondent must be older than 15, but no upper age threshold for children is defined. Because of this manifold heterogeneity, it remains unclear in what conditions widowed parents are happier than childless singles.

[3] Only findings from analyses that explicitly consider changes or stability within units of observations over time are listed as findings from longitudinal data; findings that do not exploit the longitudinal dimension of the data for parameter estimation are listed as cross-sectional.

[4] This finding is remarkable but not further addressed by Stavrova and Fetchenhauer (2015). Using other, freely available data for Azerbaijan from the World Values Survey 2010 to 2014, we cannot confirm this finding, but instead see that single parents (including divorced, separated, and widowed parents) are less happy than partnered parents.

Table 1 Single parents compared to others

Gender of single parents	Female				Male and female				Male			
Type of comparison	Cross-sectional, interpersonal		Longitudinal, Intrapersonal		Cross-sectional, interpersonal		Longitudinal, Intrapersonal		Cross-sectional, interpersonal		Longitudinal, Intrapersonal	
Type of correlation	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	Partial	Total
Compared to…												
… partnered or married parents (f/m&f/m), including step parents	–, –, – –, – – –, – –, – –, – –, –, –	–, –, –, – –, –, –, –, – –, – –, –, – –, –	–, –	–, –, –	–, – – –	–, –, –, –, – – – – – – – –, –, –, –, –, +, –, –, +– – – – – – –, –	–, –	–	–, –, – –, – –, – ––, – –, –	–, – –, –	–	–, –
… childless singles (f/m&f/m)	– +, –, –, –	–, –, –, – –, –	–, ++	–	–, –, – – +	–, –, –, –, –, –	–, 0			0		
Childless widows					+, +							
Childless separated/divorced	–, –, –	–, –, +		+, –	– –, –, –, – –				+, –, –	+, –, –		–
… non parents[1)] (f/m&f/m)	–	–, –			–, –, –	–, –, –, – – – – – –			–	–		
… all others (f/m&f/m)	–, –, ——, –	–, –, –		–	–, –	–			–			
Several deviant groups[2)]		+										

Note: symbols +,–,0 indicate positive, negative, and no correlation, bold symbols indicate statistical significance. Strings of symbols (–– or ++ or – +) indicate findings from one study but two different specifications. Each sign is linked to the findings page in the World Database of Happiness that provides full details.

1) Non-parents are not identifiable as one of the other groups without children in the household.

2) Deviant groups: incarcerated felons, alcoholics, students (philosophy/psychology), psychiatric patients (Pishkin & Thorne, 1973)

Table 2 Macro-level correlates of single parents' happiness

	Female				Male
	Cross-sectional		Longitudinal		
	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	
County full-day care rate			0+, +		
Childcare availability in the nation	+				
Family benefits in the nation	0				
Gender equality in the nation	+				
Acceptance of single motherhood in the nation	+				

Note: symbols +,-,0 indicate positive, negative, and no correlation, bold symbols indicate statistical significance. Strings of symbols (- - or ++ or - +) indicate findings from one study but two different specifications. Each sign is linked to the finding page in the World Database of Happiness that provides full details

Two studies report happiness benefits of parenthood for single and separated parents: Schoon et al. (2005) find that divorced employed men in Finland are on average happier with than without children. Similarly, in Estonia, divorced employed women with children are on average happier than divorced employed women without children; this latter difference, however, flips when the estimation controls for age (Schoon et al., 2005). A second set of findings on average happiness benefits of parenthood for non-partnered individuals is independent of control variables: Analysing a large Polish survey, Baranowska-Rataj et al. (2014) find that separated single mothers are on average happier than separated women without children (unconditional). They confirm this finding in ordered probit estimations with control variables, and further extend it by showing that separated single mothers in Poland are, on average, also happier than childless singles.

Most other findings, though, that compare single parents of either gender to non-parent non-partnered individuals report an average happiness penalty of parenthood. Some more broadly defined comparison groups appear, especially when single parenthood is a control variable of minor interest. Compared to non-parents or simply all who are not single parents, the average happiness penalty for single parents re-emerges very clearly. Only one study from 1973 (Pishkin & Thorne, 1973), using data from the 1960 s, reports that single mothers are, on average, happier than the comparison groups; these, however, were incarcerated felons, alcoholics, students of philosophy or psychology or psychiatric patients. The very choice of control groups, however, sheds some light on social attitudes towards single mothers in the US up to the 1970s.

Comparing the findings about single mothers with those about single fathers reveals two important points: First, the number of studies on single fathers' happiness is still small, and second, the happiness of single fathers in comparison to other groups does not show different patterns, even though single mothers and single fathers may differ demographically. This is in line with the findings from Defrain and Eirick (1981), who asked post-separation single parents of each gender about the history of their divorce, feelings as a single parent, child-rearing issues, relations with the ex-spouse, and forming new social relationships. They found nearly no significant differences between the answers of the genders. Likewise, Leopold and Kalmijn (2016) demonstrate that with respect to overall life satisfaction, male and female divorcees with children do not differ significantly, even though a close look into domain satisfactions, which relate to the sociodemographic differences between male and

Table 3 Micro-level correlates of single parents' happiness

	Gender of single parents	Female				Male and female				Male			
	Type of analysis	Cross-sectional		Longitudinal		Cross-sect.		Longit.		Cross-sect.		Longit.	
	Type of correlation	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	P.	T.	P.	T.	P.	Total	P.	Total
Social ties	Informal support	+[1)]	—, ++,+++++[1)]										
	Emotional support from confidants	+, +[1)]	+[1)]										
	Satisfaction with family		++, ++										
	Resentment		–+,—										
	Romantic involvement		+[1)]										
	Sexual activity		+++——								+++——		
	Church attendance	–[1)]											
	Loneliness, Isolation		—[1)]										
Childcare	Half-day use (vs. no use)			+–, –									
	Full-day use (vs. no use)			++, +									
	Support from relatives			+–									
Employment	Part-time, full-time (vs. unempl.)			++, ++, +,+									
	Working hours	+	+										
	Preference for work (vs. stay home)	+	+										
	Job satisfaction, job strain		++,—										
	Work-family conflict	—, –+	–, —										
Time and transitions	Years after union dissolution			+, +	++, +, ++				+				++
	Re-partnering			+, +	+, +				+				
	Placing the child for adoption	+											
Socio-demographics	Age		+–										
	Gender: female					–+,	0, 0[2)]						
	Gender of child: male	–	–										
	Education (completed, in education)	+	+, +–	++									
	Financial stress, Income	—		++									
	Health		++, ++	++									

Table 3 (continued)

	Gender of single parents	Female				Male and female				Male			
	Type of analysis	Cross-sectional		Longitudinal		Cross-sect.		Longit.		Cross-sect.		Longit.	
	Type of correlation	Partial	Total	Partial	Total	P.	T.	P.	T.	P.	Total	P.	Total
	Officer (vs. other Air Force member)						+						
Problems	Bunch of problems		–[1)]										

Note: symbols +,-,0 indicate positive, negative, and no correlation, bold symbols indicate statistical significance. Strings of symbols (- - or ++or - +) indicate findings from one study but two different specifications. Each sign is linked to the finding page in the World Database of Happiness that provides full details

[1)]At the time of submission, the findings page for the study of Wells Gladow and Ray (1986) was not online due to technical issues

[2)]At the time of submission, the findings page for the study of Buehler (1988) was not online due to technical issues

female divorcees (financial and family life satisfaction), reveals major differences between the genders. In the findings we report here, the only gender specific difference appears in the comparison of single parents to childless singles, indicating that single mothers are, under certain circumstances, better off than childless singles, where no such finding exists for single fathers. Yet, only four studies provide findings on the comparisons of single fathers with childless singles, whereas 14 studies compare single mothers to childless singles.

In essence, Table 1 emphasises a consistent and robust relationship between single parenthood and average happiness across different comparison groups and study designs. Despite some opposite findings, the overarching trend remains clear: single parents report on average lower levels of happiness than individuals in other family constellations, and the described patterns appear independently of the time dimension of the analyses and the inclusion of control variables (partial vs. total correlation).

4.2 Regional Differences

Some studies describe regional differences in both happiness and happiness penalties for single parents. In the European Values Study, for example, Pollmann-Schult (2018) finds that happiness penalties for single mothers (compared to childless single women as well as to partnered mothers) are smaller in the Scandinavian countries, Estonia, the Netherlands, the UK and Ireland, Slovenia, Austria, Hungary, and Portugal. The happiness penalty, however, refers to within-country comparisons; it does not indicate where single parents are happier. This very question is addressed in Vignoli et al. (2014): In Nordic countries, the share of happy single parents (those who state at least 7 on the life satisfaction scale from 0 to 10) is higher than in Continental, Mediterranean, and Eastern states, 80% compared to shares below 55%. This, however, reflects the overall higher level of happiness in the Nordic states and is not true for single parents under the age of 50 who live in extended households.

Referring to the findings in Table 1, further regional information about them in the WDH, and results from Pollmann-Schult (2018) and Stavrova and Fetchenhauer (2015), we map the happiness penalty for single parents compared to partnered parents (Fig. 2) and to individuals living without a partner and without children (Fig. 3). The code 'penalty' is assigned when all available findings indicate that single parents are on average less happy than partnered parents (Fig. 2) or than individuals living without a partner and without children (Fig. 3), 'ambiguous' when different findings contradict each other, and 'benefit' when results indicate that single parents are on average happier than the respective comparison group. It must be mentioned that the map does not show the number of findings on which the assigned code is based. There may be several different findings, or just one, as for Azerbaijan.

The average happiness penalties experienced by single parents compared to partnered parents (Fig. 2) are striking and correspond to the first row in Table 1. The average happiness penalties of single parents compared to singles who live without children are not that unanimous, especially in Europe, where more studies are available.

4.3 Correlates of Happiness at the Macro Level

The observed regional differences in single parents' happiness are often related to differences in policies and societal attitudes. Table 2 offers insight into the macro-level factors that have been found to be associated with single parents' happiness. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies show weak positive associations with the share of children in formal childcare (Pollmann-Schult, 2018; Schober & Schmitt, 2017; Schober & Stahl, 2016). Schober and Stahl (2016) and Schober and Schmitt (2017), though, suggest that variations in work-care cultures moderate between maternal employment and satisfaction, more than short-term regional expansions of childcare services. In line with this, Pollmann-Schult (2018) finds that gender equality (measured by the UNDP Gender Empowerment Index) in a nation is significantly and positively associated with single mothers' happiness, yet less so the nation-specific acceptance of single motherhood (Pollmann-Schult, 2018). However, the number of findings about macro-level correlates of single parents' happiness is very small, and such findings only exist for single mothers.

4.4 Correlates of Happiness at the Micro Level

Macro-level correlates are still rarely analysed, but studies that analyse associations of single parents' happiness at the micro level are more numerous and at least some findings also provide information about single fathers (Table 3).

4.4.1 Social ties

Informal support and positive social embeddedness are, on average, associated with higher life satisfaction of single mothers (Wells Gladow & Ray, 1986; Wong, 1985). Accordingly, romantic involvement and sexual activity are, on average, associated with higher levels of happiness for single parents (Wells Gladow & Ray, 1986; Hetherington et al., 1976). On the other hand, single mothers who feel lonely or isolated report on average lower levels of happiness (Wells Gladow & Ray, 1986), as do those who experience resentment from family, friends and neighbours (Wong, 1985). There are, however, some exceptions: for both divorced single fathers and mothers who report difficulties in establishing intimate relationships, higher sexual activity is associated with, on average, lower happiness (Hetherington et al., 1976). Also, support from co-workers is negatively associated with single mothers' happiness (Wong, 1985), as is church attendance (Wells Gladow & Ray, 1986). It must yet be noted that neither of the findings controls for any sort of endogeneity.

4.4.2 Childcare

Another explicitly examined factor in single mothers' happiness was childcare usage. It emerges as an ambiguous correlate: West German single mothers' happiness increases, on average, with the usage of any form of childcare (full-day, half-day, and informal childcare of relatives). Single mothers in East Germany, however, are on average less happy with half-day or informal childcare. Given very different childcare traditions in East and West Germany, these findings suggest that the cultural context shapes expectations, also those towards childcare usage. (Schober & Schmitt, 2017; Schober & Stahl, 2016)

4.4.3 Employment

Compared to unemployment, both part-time and full-time employment are, on average, associated with higher levels of happiness among single mothers in Germany (Schober & Schmitt, 2017; Schober & Stahl, 2016). And even though these associations are not statistically significant, they stem from fixed effects regressions, which capture heterogeneity issues that are caused by time-invariant omitted variables, and align with findings from the US showing a significantly positive association of working hours and happiness (Jackson, 1993). This positive association may come at a cost; work-to-family conflict is more common for single parents than for partnered parents and is, on average, negatively associated with well-being (Le & Miller, 2013; Reimann et al., 2019) and single mothers' happiness (Bull & Mittelmark, 2009; Wong, 1985).

4.4.4 Time and Transitions into and out of single parenthood

Time plays a role in the well-being of single parents. In most cases, single parenthood begins with a couple's separation, and on average, as more years pass after this event, the happiness of single parents increases again (Brewer & Nandi, 2014; Dierker et al., 2023; Hetherington et al., 1976; Huss & Pollmann-Schult, 2020; Kühn, 2018). Those who quit single parenthood by re-partnering are, on average, happier than before (Dierker et al., 2023; Hetherington et al., 1976), which underscores the role of shared resources and companionship in fostering well-being. Another way to leave single parenthood is to place the child for adoption. One study among very young pregnant single women in the US in 1990 finds that, over the course of a year, those who placed the child for adoption are happier than those who kept it (Kalmuss et al., 1992).

4.4.5 Sociodemographics

Only a few studies examine the association between gender and single parents' happiness. Findings indicate zero or insignificant associations (Jenkinson et al., 2020; Buehler, 1988; Sodermans et al., 2015). Additionally, one study reports that having a male child compared to having a female child is, on average, associated with lower levels of happiness (Jackson, 1993).

Both completed education and entering education are, on average, positively associated with single mothers' happiness (Jackson, 1993; Kalmuss et al., 1992; Schober & Stahl, 2016).

Interestingly, only one study focuses on the association of income and happiness for single parents (Schober & Stahl, 2016) and one study on financial stress and happiness (Bull & Mittelmark, 2009). Findings on income and financial stress align with the respective expectations: higher income correlates positively (Schober & Stahl, 2016) and financial stress negatively (Bull & Mittelmark, 2009) with single mothers' happiness. Findings for health are also in line with expectations, i.e. significantly positive (Schober & Stahl, 2016; Wong, 1985).

Higher occupational status, though in a very unique professional environment, the US Air Force, is on average positively associated with single parents' happiness (Bowen & Orthner, 1986).

5 Summary and Discussion

This literature review provides an overview of social science findings on the happiness of single parents. The material of the literature review is restricted to findings from empirical research on happiness that have been entered and systematically described in the World Database of Happiness. This review compiles the available knowledge from empirical research with quantitative data about single parents' happiness, which is thereby easily accessible and saves other researchers the time of reviewing the whole body of literature. In presenting the available findings in overview tables, the review also clearly indicates where findings are still lacking and where future research could step in.

Most findings show that single parents are, on average, worse off in terms of happiness than other demographic groups – with few exceptions and some regional variation. However, when compared to other parents, single parents are on average strictly worse off – with almost no exception. This happiness penalty for single parents emerges consistently, even though the reviewed studies use different methods, and findings refer to different countries and historical times. Associations with single mothers' happiness underscore the pivotal role of social ties and informal support. And while paid work and full-day childcare are positively associated with single mothers' happiness, work-family conflict correlates negatively.

5.1 Challenges

When happiness research addresses single parenthood, the latter is often taken as a necessary control variable of minor interest, and happiness itself is rarely a primary focus in research about single parents. Consequently, this literature review offers more comparisons between single parents and other demographic groups than insights into the factors associated with single parents' happiness. And as a second consequence, the review is less rigorous in its definition of single parenthood than it is in its definition of happiness, because definitions of single parents vary between the different happiness studies and are sometimes not even provided. We therefore could not account for most of the heterogeneity among single parents when compiling findings for this literature review.

Furthermore, the scope of this literature review is limited by the typical constraints of research on single parents. First, representative in-depth analyses of transitions into and out of single parenthood are scarce because the different transition pathways do not occur frequently enough in an individual's life nor within society to ensure a sufficient number of observations for each transition pathway in representative population studies. This lack of information also limits the insights into single parents' happiness. Second, events like divorce or the death of a partner, especially when followed by moving into a new dwelling, increase observation drop-outs in longitudinal panel studies and thus survivor bias in the estimation results.

Finally, even the large number of findings that report happiness penalties for single parents cannot serve for causal interpretation, since the reviewed studies themselves did not identify causal effects.

5.2 Missing Findings and Lines for Future Research

Given the studies we found, their focus and thus the findings they provide, some blank cells remain in our review tables and maps. For instance, research about micro-level correlates with single fathers' happiness is still very limited. As a result, we can only hypothesise similarity with single mothers' correlates of happiness, supported by the fact that the available findings do not reveal major differences between single fathers and mothers. On the other hand, this support relies only on a small number of findings. Correlates at the macro level are only analysed for single mothers, and policy analyses with respect to single mothers' happiness focus only on the expansion of childcare availability, even though, for example, divorce laws could be very influential for single parents' happiness. More internationally comparative research could widen the range of macro-level correlates, like societal and normative contexts that promote or hamper single parents' well-being, and longitudinal analyses could examine social policies, family laws or reproductive rights with respect to single parents' happiness.

Future research should also address the heterogeneity among single parents with respect to their path into single parenthood and the involvement of the other parent, which is very likely relevant to single parents' happiness. Analysing how both selection and survivor effects shape single-parent samples could contribute a lot, also to the understanding of existing findings. Finally, research that properly identifies the causes of single parents' happiness or unhappiness would constitute a valuable contribution.

Appendix

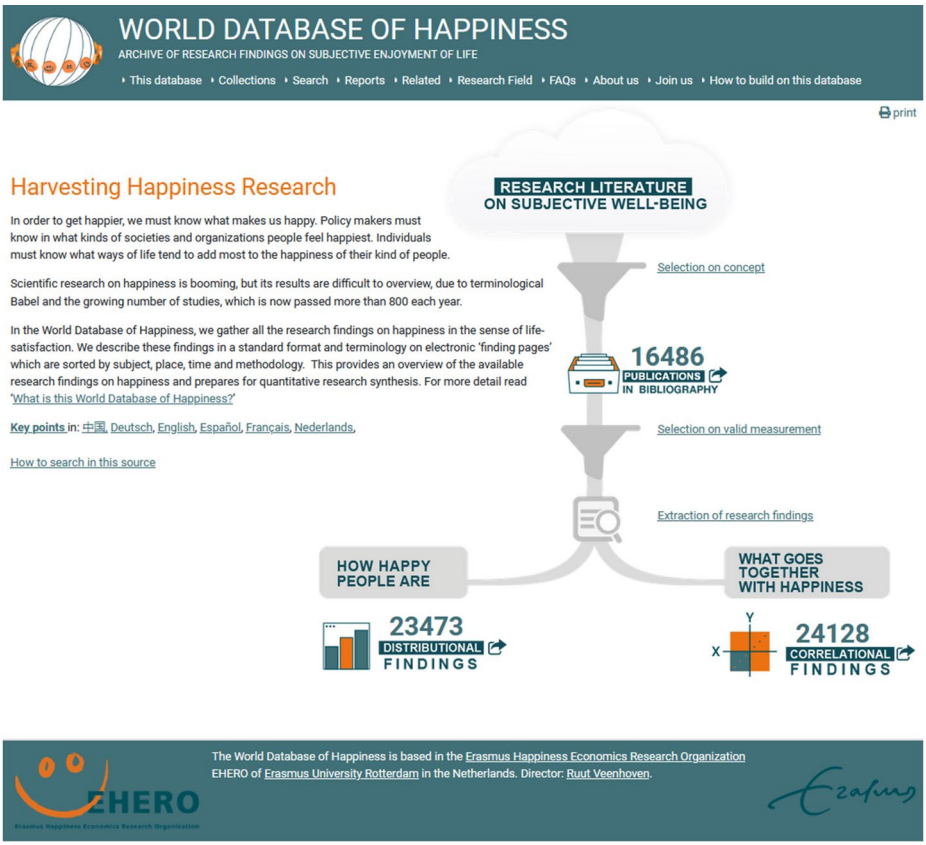

Fig. A1 Start page of the WDH, showing the structure of the findings archive

Table 4 List of reviewed studies, with potentially more than one study per publication, according to the dataset used

Source	Place	First observed year	Last observed year	N	People	Findings included in this review	
						Estimation strategy	Table number
Aassve et al. (2012)	Europe (19 nations)	2006	2006	14.419	General public, aged 20–50	Ordered probit regression	1
Ambrey et al. (2014)	Australia, Queensland	2000	2001	923	General public, aged 45+	Ordered probit regression	1
Andreß and Bröckel (2007)	Germany	1984	1999	837	General public, divorced/separated, age < 55	Random and fixed effects regressions	1
Baranowska-Rataj et al. (2014)	Poland	2003	2011	27.251	Women, aged 18–35	Correlated random effects regressions, ordered probit regression with Mundlak term, regressions with BUC estimator.	1
Biddle (2014)	Australia	2008	2008	11.082	General public, aged 15 +	OLS regression	1
Biddle (2014)	Australia	2008	2008	7.717	Indigenous, aged 15 +	OLS regression	1
Blanchflower and Clark(2021)	Europe (35 nations)	2009	2019	1.246.028	General public, aged 15+	Comparison of means	1
Boelhouwer (2009)	Netherlands	2006	2006	9.607	General public, aged 18+	Comparison of means	1
Bowen and Orthner (1986)	USA	1981	1981	157	Parents, single, in the US Air Force	Comparison of percentages	1
Brewer and Nandi (2014)	UK	1991	2008	1.560	General public, divorced	Comparison of means	1, 3
Buehler (1988)	USA, Minnesota	1981	1981	177	Parents, divorced	Comparison of means	3
Bull and Mittelmark (2009)	Scandinavian countries	2004	2004	505	Mothers, employed	Comparison of means, OLS regression	1, 3
Cummins et al. (2004)	Australia	2004	2004	2.000	General public, aged 18 +	Comparison of means, OLS regression	1
DeVries et al. (1994)	Netherlands	1992	1992	460	Singles, 30–65	Comparison of percentages	1
Dierker et al. (2023), DE	Germany	1984	2020	1.119	Mothers, single	Comparison of means, fixed effects regression	1, 3
Dierker et al. (2023), GB	UK	1996	2020	1.963	Mothers, single	Comparison of means, fixed effects regression	1, 3
Fleming et al. (2016)	New Zealand	2008	2012	22.727	General public, aged 15 +	Ordered logit regression	3
Geschwandtner et al. (2015)	UK	2012	2012	31.946	General public, aged 16+	OLS regression	1
Herbst (2013)	USA	1986	2005	4.000	Women, aged 18–60 with less than college degree	Comparison of percentages	1
Hetherington et al. (1976)	USA	.	.	96	Parents	Comparison of means, bivariate correlations	1, 3

Table 4 (continued)

Source	Place	First observed year	Last observed year	N	People	Findings included in this review	
						Estimation strategy	Table number
Huss and Pollmann-Schult (2020)	Germany	1994	2016	1.919	Women, aged 18–65 & separated	Comparison of means, fixed effects regression	1, 3
Ifcher and Zarghamee (2014)	USA	1972	2008	26.005	General public, aged 18–45	Comparison of means, ordered probit regression	1
Ifcher (2011)	USA	1988	2006	15.713	Mothers, childbearing age	Comparison of means, ordered probit regression	1
Jackson (1993)	USA, City in Ohio	1989	1989	111	Mothers, single, working, receiving subsidizing childcare	Bivariate correlations, OLS regression	3
Jenkinson et al. (2020)	Belgium, Flanders	2009	2009	6.470	Parents	Comparison of means, OLS regression	1, 3
Kainulainen, S. (1998)	Finnland, Kuopio	1991	1991	2.682	General public, aged 18+	Comparison of means	1
Kalmuss et al. (1992)	USA	1989	1990	527	Mothers/pregnants, unmarried aged < 21	OLS regression	3
Kühn (2018)	Germany	1984	2011	2.006	Mothers	Comparison of means, fixed effects regression	1, 3
Lansford et al. (2001)	USA	1994	1994	799	Parents, with child < 10 in household	Comparison of adjusted means, MANOVA	1
Mahler (1994)	USA	1994	1994	227	Parents, working	Comparison of means	1
Margolis & Myrskylä (2011)	World (86 nations)	1981	2005	201.988	General public, aged 15 +	OLS regression	1
McCullough & Zick (1992)	USA, Utah	1987	1988	268	Mothers	Comparison of means, ordered logit regression	1
Myrskylä and Margolis (2014), DE	Germany	1984	2009	4.513	Parents, after first birth	Fixed effects regression	1
Myrskylä and Margolis (2014), GB	UK	1991	2008	2.698	Parents, after first birth	Fixed effects regression	1
Pishkin & Thorne (1973)	US	196?	196?	1.309	General public and deviants	Comparison of percentages	1
Pollmann-Schult (2014)	Germany	1994	2010	16.021	General public, aged 18–60, partnered in at least 1 survey year	Fixed effects regression	1
Pollmann-Schult (2018)	Europe (24 nations)	2002	2012	56.431	Women, aged 18–59	Comparison of means, OLS regression	1, 2
Schober and Schmitt (2017)	Germany	2007	2012	2.378	Parents	Fixed effects regression	2, 3

Table 4 (continued)

Source	Place	First observed year	Last observed year	N	People	Findings included in this review	
						Estimation strategy	Table number
Schober and Stahl (2016)	Germany	2007	2012	3.203	Mothers with < 6 aged children	Comparison of means, fixed effects regression	1, 2, 3
Schoon et al. (2005)	Finland	2000	2000	1.750	General public, employed	Comparison of adjusted means	1
Schoon et al. (2005)	UK	2000	2000	10.280	General public, aged 42	Comparison of adjusted means	1
Schoon et al. (2005)	Estonia	2003	2003	1.556	General public, married or divorced	Comparison of adjusted means	1
Shapiro and Lambert (1999)	USA	1987	1994	844	Fathers	Comparison of means, OLS regression	1
Shields et al. (2009)	Australia	2001	2001	13.903	General public, aged 15 +	Ordered probit regression	1
Sodermans et al. (2015)	Belgium, Flanders	2009	2010	1.506	Parents, divorced	Comparison of means	3
Stanca (2012)	World (54 nations)	1980	2008	345.000	General public, aged 15 +	OLS and ordered probit regression	1
Stanca (2016)	USA, New York	1994	2008	400.894	General public, aged 15 +	OLS regression	1
Statistisches Bundesamt (2006)	Germany	2000	2000	.	Mothers	Comparison of percentages	1
Stavrova and Fetchenhauer (2015)	Europe (43 nations)	2010	2010	32.553	Parents	Comparison of means	1
Taylor et al. (2006)	USA	2005	2005	3.014	General public, aged 18 +	Comparison of percentages	1
Vignoli et al. (2014)	Europe (28 nations)	2007	2008	17.000	General public, aged 18 +	Comparison of percentages, logit regression	1
Weick (1994)	Germany	1993	1993	3.062	General public, aged 18+	Comparison of means	1
Wells Gladow and Ray (1986)	USA, Washington	1983	1983	63	Mothers, single	Bivariate correlation, OLS regression	3
Wong (1985)	USA	1984	1984	651	Parents, working, child < 16	Bivariate correlation, comparison of means.	1, 3

Each listed source is linked to the studies' page at the World Database of Happiness

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Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing financial or non-financial interests that are directly or indirectly related to this work.

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