

Introduction

- Past research has found substantial differences between coupled individuals and groups of singles in terms of their perceptions of the costs and benefits of romantic relationships (Slonim & Schütz, 2015). Coupled people see more benefits and less costs in romantic relationships, while singles, especially those who are currently not looking for a relationship, perceive romantic relationships as more costly and less beneficial.

- We investigated whether the three groups (coupled individuals, singles by choice and singles by circumstance) also differ in terms of their perceptions of the costs and benefits of having children.

- We had two competing hypotheses: on the one hand, singles by choice may value having freedom and so they will try to avoid what might limit their independence. Therefore they may perceive having children as less beneficial and more costly, similar to their attitudes towards being part of a romantic couple. On the other hand, it is possible that the differences between the groups are small (if any), since wanting children and wanting a partner no longer necessarily have to be related to each other. In the past, people who wanted children had to first find a romantic partner. However, nowadays, advances in medicine offer various ways to become a parent – even without the need to have sex. In addition, sociological changes made non-traditional households and lifestyles, such as being a single parent, more acceptable (Lamana, Riedmann & Stewart, 2015).

Methods

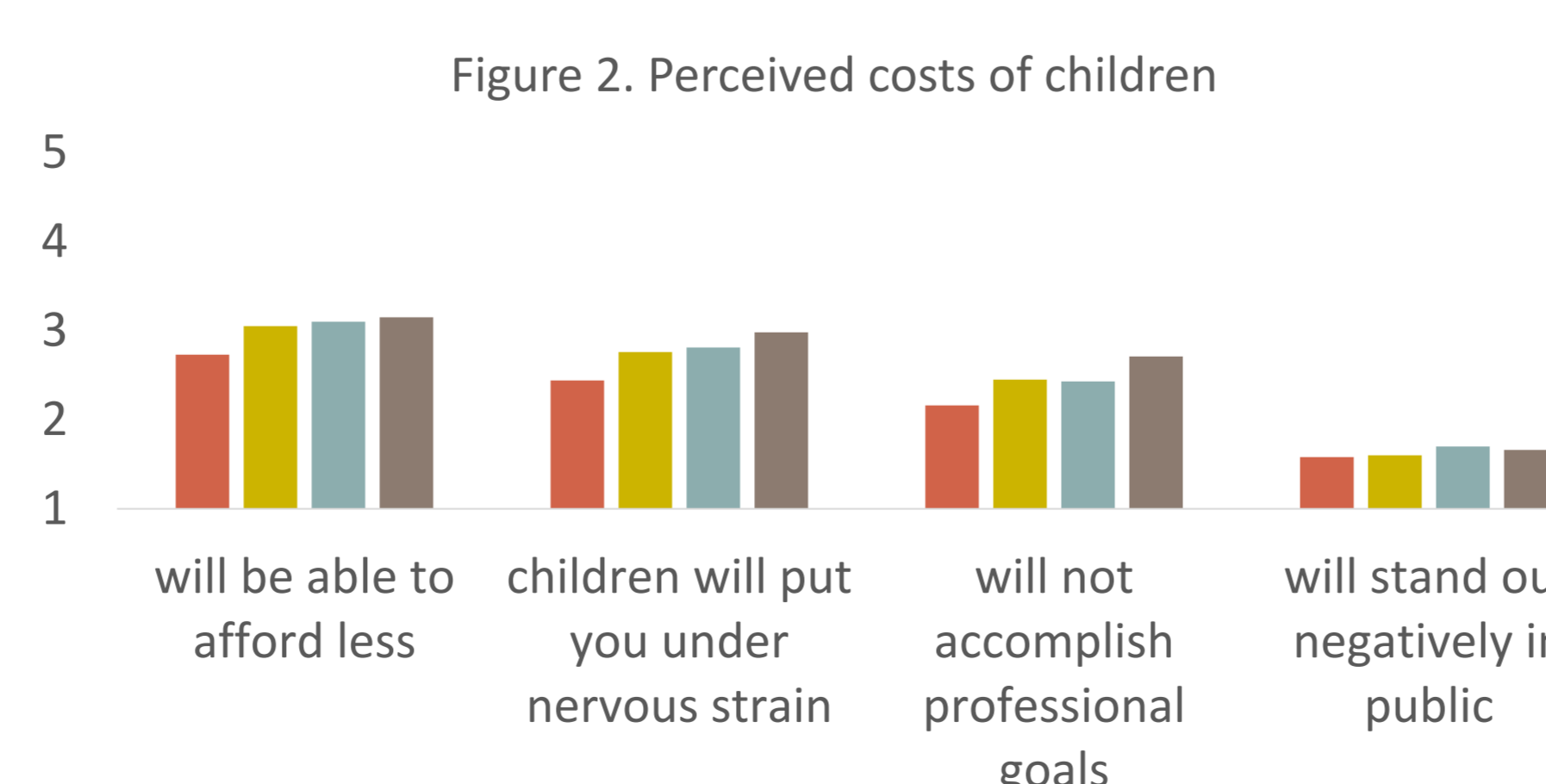
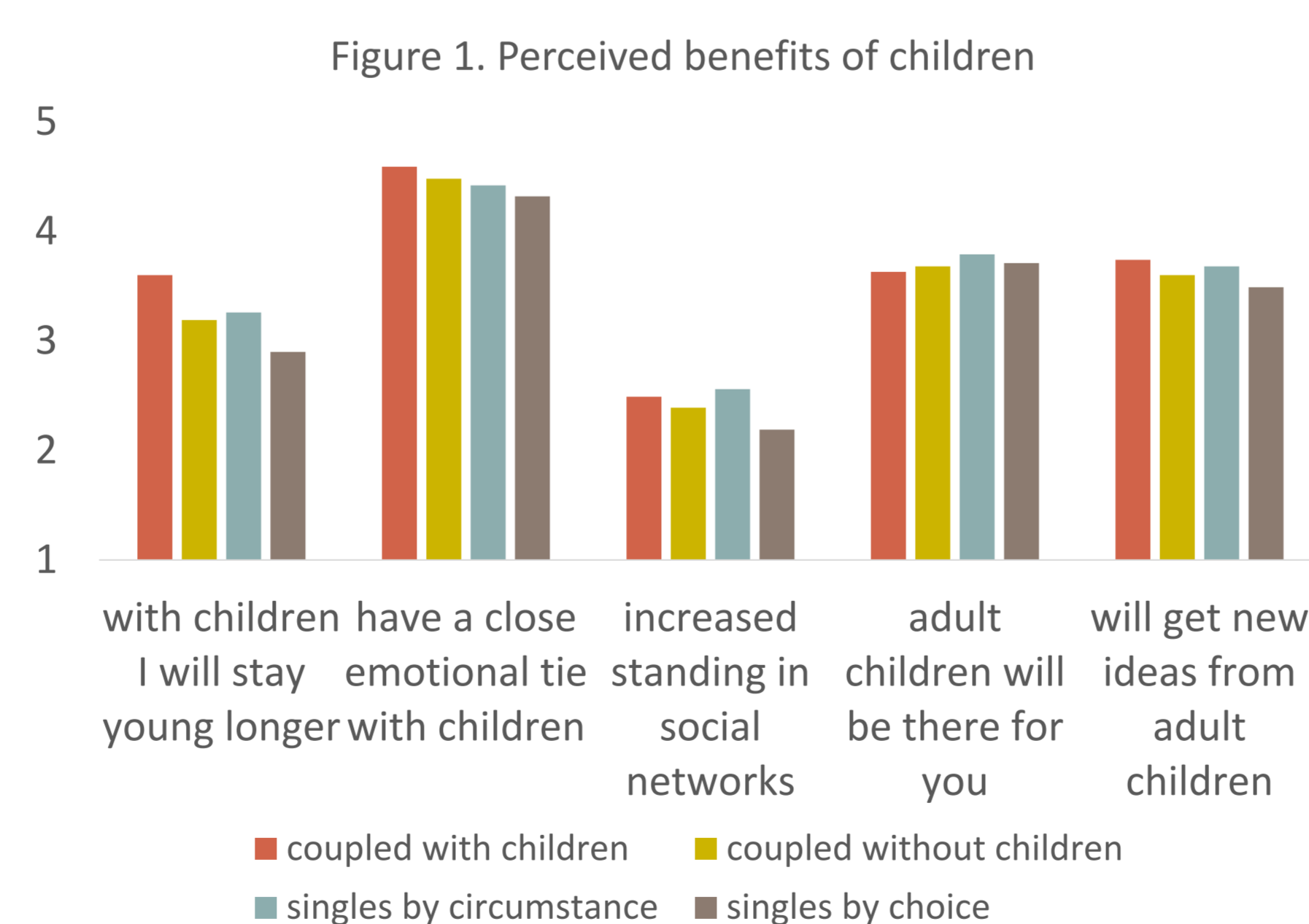
- We used data from Pairfam, a German national panel study on intimate relationships (4th wave, data from 2014).

- The distinction between the two groups of singles was based on the 5-point-scale item, “I would like to have a partner”. Only childless singles were included in the analyses. 640 men and 322 women were classified as singles by circumstance. 311 men and 279 women were classified as singles by choice. The costs and benefits of having children were measured using Pairfam’s Value of Children questionnaire.

- We performed ANCOVAs controlling for gender.

Results

- The differences in perceptions of the benefits of having children between the four groups were small (all differences < 0.5 points, see Figure 1). The largest difference was between coupled people with children and singles by choice regarding the item “with children I will stay young longer” – singles by choice believe so to a lesser extent.



- Coupled people with children generally find it less costly to have children compared to the other groups. Singles by choice are especially afraid that with children they will not accomplish their professional goals.

Discussion

- Both hypotheses were supported: with regard to most of the Value of Children items, there are no substantial differences between the groups we examined (supporting hypothesis 2). However, singles by choice specifically believe to a lesser extent that children will help them stay young longer. Singles by choice are also more afraid that children might have a negative effect on their career (supporting hypothesis 1).

- Comparing the current results with results of previous research, it seems that singles by choice perceive being in a romantic relationship more negatively than having children.

- The finding that coupled people with children do not perceive having children as costly as the other groups may be the result of dissolving a cognitive dissonance.