The Transition to Parenthood and Well-Being: The Impact of Partner Status and Work Hour Transitions

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Using data from the first two waves of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study for 338 women and 262 men, we examine the consequences of making the transition to parenthood for life satisfaction, loneliness, positive affect, negative affect, and partnership satisfaction. We extend previous work by taking transitions in partner status and work hours into account. Results show a moderate impact of becoming a parent on well-being. In so far as effects of making the transition to parenthood emerge, they are attributable to changes in partner status and work hours. First, the decrease in negative affect upon making the transition to motherhood is attributable to the group of women who increase their working hours. Second, the detrimental impact of making the transition to fatherhood on loneliness is attributable to the group of new fathers who become married. There is one exception to this pattern of partner status and work hours as mechanisms for changes in well-being. Men who become fathers remain less satisfied with their partnership, even when transitions in partner status and work hours have been taken into account. In the discussion-section, we consider the possible underestimation of negative effects because of the focus on the continuously partnered. We also reflect on our results in the light of the high incidence of part-time work in the Netherlands and Dutch policies aimed at supporting new parents.

Keywords: well-being, transition, parenthood, partner status, work hours, mechanisms

The birth of a baby brings major changes to the lives of new parents. The transition to parenthood signifies an increase in emotional ties and marks entry into a new, lifetime, role (Feeney, Hohaus, Noller, & Alexander, 2001). Early work suggested that the transition to parenthood precipitated a crisis for family members (e.g., LeMasters, 1957), but researchers found little empirical support for this view (e.g., Russell, 1974), showing that the transition to parenthood can be associated with both joys and tribulations. The findings led to a movement away from the question of whether parenthood has negative consequences to a focus on the conditions under which parenthood has negative or positive consequences. Several longitudinal studies have focused on understanding the variability in adjustment to parenthood (for reviews see Demo & Cox, 2000; Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). Belsky was one of the first to address this issue, considering individual differences in marital change across the transition to parenthood (e.g., Belsky & Rovine, 1990). Amongst others, he focused on violated expectations (Belsky, 1985) and the division of labor (Belsky & Hsieh, 1998) to explain the variability in adjustment to parenthood.

Against the backdrop of the increasing numbers of mothers who remain in the work force after childbirth, and new conceptions of fatherhood, the focus of contemporary inquiries has shifted towards the division of household labor (e.g., Helms-Erikson, 2001), and changes in personal and couple leisure time (e.g., Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008) as explanations for the variability in adaptation to parenthood. Few scholars, however, have considered the co-occurrence of changes in partner status and work hours in examining the impact of becoming a parent on well-being.

Close to the arrival of the first child, many decide to get married (Baizán, Aassve, & Billari, 2004) and many, mostly women, change their work hours when their first child is...
born (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005). Given that such changes are known to have an impact on well-being (Marks & Lambert, 1998; Rogers, 1996), they deserve attention in studies that assess the impact of becoming a parent on well-being.

Partner status transitions have received little attention because longitudinal samples tend to be based only on people who remained married between waves. We know little about the impact of transitions into cohabitation and marriage, in relation to that of becoming a parent, on well-being. Likewise, we know little about the relative impact of changes in work hours. One of the few studies focusing on the impact of new parents’ work hours and work schedules shows that working night shifts can be a risk factor for depressive symptoms and relational conflict (Perry-Jenkins, Goldberg, Pierce, & Sayer, 2007). In this paper, we take into account the impact of changes in partner status and work hours. Our research question is: What are the effects of the transition to parenthood on well-being when changes in partner status and work hours are taken into account?

As Durkheim’s work (Durkheim, 1951 [1896]) already suggested, the transition to parenthood may yield both positive and negative feelings. Focusing on a single measure of well-being may then be misleading, because it may not truly represent the complexity of emotional changes that surround the birth of a child. Given that the transition to parenthood affects people’s roles and relationships (Cast, 2004), it is very likely that different feelings will be experienced in the context of different roles and relationships. For example, the baby may provide new parents with increased life satisfaction, but simultaneously, the change to a triad may place heavy burdens on the partnership. To obtain a nuanced picture of the impact of becoming a parent, multiple facets of well-being need to be assessed. In this paper, we focus on five outcomes of well-being: four that tap into personal well-being (life satisfaction, loneliness, positive and negative affect) and one that taps into partnership well-being: partnership satisfaction.

To sum up, this paper adds to the transition to parenthood literature by taking into account the influence of changes in partner status and work hours. Multiple indicators of well-being are incorporated in the analyses. The analyses are based on a sample from the first two waves of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), a nationally representative panel study conducted between 2002 and 2007. The selected sample included 338 women and 262 men, who had one and the same (cohabiting or noncohabiting) partner during both waves, and who were childless at the time of the first interview.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Partner Status and Work Hour Transitions**

The link between marriage and childbirth has weakened during the last decades (Kiernan, 2003). In the Netherlands nowadays, 50% of children are born out of wedlock (De Graaf, 2009). However, most childbirth occurs within a union. Many marry before or soon after the birth of their first child, although these numbers have been decreasing in recent years (Van der Meulen & De Graaf, 2006). Transitions into cohabitation, and especially into marriage, are shown to benefit well-being (Brown, 2000; Kim & McKenry, 2002). As partnership transitions are affected by the transition to parenthood and have an influence on well-being, we incorporate them in our analyses.

Transitions in work hours are the second type of changes we consider. The literature shows strong relations between becoming a parent and work hours, although the direction of the effect differs between women and men. Women often scale back their work week (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005), while men continue to work the same or to increase the number of hours (Gjerdingen & Center, 2004). Both patterns are also found in the Netherlands (Mol, 2008). The number of hours people work has a strong impact on well-being. Research has consistently shown that work roles are beneficial for men’s and women’s psychological health (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001). However, combining work with family life can lead to work-family conflicts (e.g., Winslow, 2005), and to decreased well-being. Experiencing time pressure has negative repercussions for mothers’ and fathers’ well-being (Nomaguchi, Milkie, & Bianchi, 2005). Given that work hour changes are related to the transition to parenthood and also have an influence on well-being, we incorporate them in our analyses.

**Well-Being**

In this study, we focus on five measures of well-being: life satisfaction, loneliness, positive affect, negative affect, and partnership satisfaction. Becoming a parent is usually described as one of the most significant developmental tasks of adulthood. People tend to believe that they have personally grown and gained life fulfillment by having children (Baumeister, 1991). Therefore, we hypothesize that becoming a parent is beneficial for satisfaction with life. Our expectations regarding the impact on loneliness are somewhat less clear. On the one hand, one may argue that the arrival of a child connects parents to the larger family and community (Furstenberg, 2005). However, children may also isolate their parents from the outside world, and this may be especially be the case for mothers in the first months of maternity leave. Becoming a parent may thus both increase and decrease loneliness. A hypothesis is therefore not formulated, and the link between the transition to parenthood and loneliness is explored. Concerning affect, research shows that children create substantial strains on parents’ time, and on their physical and emotional energy (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981). These strains may influence affect, adults with young children tend to be less happy, worry more, and experience higher levels of anxiety and depression (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003) in comparison to adults without children. Assessments of affect often distinguish positive and negative affect, which are relatively independent feelings (Bradburn, 1969). In this paper, we separate both affects accordingly. We hypothesize that the transition to parenthood leads to a drop in positive affect and an increase in negative affect. Finally, findings generally show
that partnership satisfaction deteriorates when couples become parents (for reviews see Twenge et al., 2003). The transition to parenthood requires a reorganization of the partnership to meet new challenges, making the couple vulnerable to stress and conflict. We therefore hypothesize that becoming a parent is detrimental for partnership satisfaction.

A Separate Focus on Women and Men

In this paper, we use a gendered lens when focusing on the transition to parenthood. As men and women move through life in multiple domains, they often encounter different opportunities and restrictions, and are differentially affected by change. Research shows that women are more involved in the parenting role at the time of early parenthood (Alexander & Higgins, 1993). For women, becoming a parent is in most cases a more life changing transition than for men in terms of work hours, childcare, leisure, and housework, as well as in terms of their relationship with their partners and others (e.g., Bird, 1997). Scholars argue that the burdens of combining work, household tasks and childrearing tasks are why the transition to parenthood is more detrimental for women than for men (for reviews see Demo & Cox, 2000). This finding implies that the same transition to parenthood may yield more negative changes in well-being for women than men. In this paper, we will therefore study the impact of becoming a parent on well-being separately for women and men.

Method

Sample Selection and Characteristics

Our analyses are based on two waves of data from the public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). The NKPS is a large scale panel survey on family ties, which started in 2002 among a representative sample of adults aged 18 to 79 residing in private households in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al., 2005). The data were collected using computer assisted interview schedules. Data from the first wave were collected between 2002 and 2003. The response rate of the first wave was 45%, which is lower than in comparable surveys in other Western countries, but similar to comparable large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001). The second wave was conducted between 2006 and 2007. The response rate of the second wave was 74%. The cooperation rate for the second wave (excluding respondents who were too ill to participate, respondents who moved abroad or deceased in between the waves) was 84%. Men are somewhat underrepresented in the main sample; the same holds for individuals aged 20 up to 30. Men and women who live alone are also underrepresented, whereas married individuals and individuals with children are overrepresented. The men and women in the study form independent samples.

Our sample consists of 338 childless women under 40, and 262 childless men under 45, at the time of the first interview who had one and the same partner between the waves. We exclude older respondents because they are unlikely to make the transition to parenthood. An inclusion of childless individuals who do not make the transition to parenthood is required to find out whether changes in well-being occur even without the birth of a child, as a number of longitudinal studies on couples have shown that marital satisfaction levels change independently of the birth of a child (McHale & Huston, 1985; White & Booth, 1985). Four men and six women became parents and broke up with their partner between the two waves. They reported significantly lower psychological well-being in Wave 1 compared to new parents who stayed with their partner. Given the small number and the likelihood that the transition to parenthood is quite a different experience for these 10 individuals, we decided to exclude them from our analyses.

Measures

Life satisfaction is measured by the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993), which has been tested and used extensively (e.g., Wu, Chen, & Tsai, 2009). The scale consists of 4 items such as “My life is ideal in most respects.” Each item was measured on a 5-point scale. Summed scores range from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating greater life satisfaction (α = .85). Loneliness is measured by the scale of De Jong Gierveld and Kamphuis (1985), which has been frequently used to measure loneliness in the Netherlands and elsewhere (e.g., Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001). The scale consists of 11 items, of which five positive and six negative items. An example of a scale item is: “There is always someone I can talk to about my day-to-day problems.” The items had three response categories: no, more or less, and yes. For the positively phrased items, the scores were reversed. Summed scores range from 11 to 33, with higher scores indicating greater loneliness (α = .87).

Positive affect is the positive item from the 5-item Mental Health Index scale MHI-5 (Berwick et al., 1991). Single-item measures have commonly been used in happiness research (for an overview, see Lyubomirsky, King, & Dierer, 2005). A recent study by Abdel-Khalek (2006) with a comparable single-item measure of happiness indicated that such measures show good 1-week test–retest reliability (r = .86) and good construct validity (with the Oxford Happiness Inventory r = .69). Positive affect is measured by the question: “How often have you felt happy in the past four weeks?” Response categories ranged from 1 = not at all happy up to 6 = very happy.

Negative affect consists of the three negative items from the MHI-5 scale. A reliable reduction of the MHI-5 scale into an MHI-3 scale has been done previously (Yamazaki, Fukuhara, & Green, 2005). An example of a scale item is: “How often have you felt particularly tense in the past four weeks?” Each item was measured on a 6-point scale. Summed scores ranged from 3 to 18, with higher scores indicating greater negative affect (α = .76).

Partnership satisfaction is measured by a 4-item scale that was developed for the NKPS. An example of a scale item is: “We have a good relationship.” Each item was
measured on a 5-point scale. Summed scores ranged from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating greater partnership satisfaction (α = .76). The partnership satisfaction variable had a ceiling effect and thus a negative skew (−2.11) that is not uncommon in the relationship literature. Therefore, we completed a reflect log transformation, often used on negatively skewed employment satisfaction (e.g., Harris, Winskowski, & Engdahl, 2007) that resulted in an acceptable distribution in terms of normality (skewness = 0.81). As a greater value for the original variable will translate into a smaller value for the reflected variable, we re-reflect the variable after the log transformation for ease of interpretation.

Parental status is measured by a dichotomous variable indicating whether a respondent became the parent of a biological child (score 1) or whether he or she remained childless (score 0). Although the impact of making the transition to parenthood is not restricted to biological ties to children, research shows that becoming a parent of an adopted child or of a stepchild may have a strong impact on people’s psychological well-being (Levy-Shiff, Goldsmith, & Har-Even, 1991; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006); in this paper we only focus on the impact of becoming a biological parent. Given the low numbers, childless respondents who adopted a child between the two waves (n = 2) and childless respondents who became stepparents between the two waves (n = 33) were excluded from the analyses. Finally, 10 respondents, of whom six were pregnant and four had partners who were pregnant at the first wave interview, were excluded from the analyses, as research has shown that the nature of the relationship and well-being already have changed dramatically once the woman is pregnant (Boyce, Condon, Barton, & Corkindale, 2007); 38% of women (n = 130) and 37% of men (n = 98) in our final sample made the transition to parenthood.

We include time-varying measures of partner status and work hours. For both waves, we use a variable partner status that reflects whether respondents were in a noncohabiting partnership, cohabiting unmarried, or married. To be able to examine whether a change in partner status affects well-being, we include partner status transitions in our model. A number of transitions were rare and for that reason combined into larger categories. For example, the transition from a noncohabiting partnership to a cohabiting union and the transition from a noncohabiting partnership to being married were combined into the transition from a noncohabiting partnership to a cohabiting one. We use two dummies for partner status transitions: moving from a noncohabiting partnership to cohabitation (= noncohabiting partnership - together) and moving from unmarried cohabitation to marriage (= cohabitation - marriage).

Work hours. Work hours is measured by the question: “How many hours a week on average do you work? That is to say, actual hours worked.” When a respondent had several jobs, the work hours of these jobs were summed. Respondents, who did not have a job at the time of the interview, were assigned 0 hours of work. Women who were on maternity leave filled in the numbers of hours they worked according to their contract. To be able to examine whether a change in work hours affects well-being, we include work hour transitions in our model. We use four dummy variables indicating: becoming employed, increasing the number of hours working, decreasing the number of hours working, and stopping working. Given the low numbers of individuals who started to work, they were placed under the category increasing the number of hours working. Given the small number of men who stopped working, they were placed under the category decreasing the number of hours working. The rationale for including dummy variables rather than the number of hours is that a continuous measure is not very informative because work hours have a bimodal distribution. To keep as much information in the data as possible, we created dummy variables. In addition, by including several dummy variables, different processes, and for our interest, mechanisms can be identified.

Finally, we control for changes in educational attainment between the two waves and for duration of partnership. Information about education of the respondent was delineated via the question: “What is the highest level of education that you pursued?” Answers ranged from 1 (did not complete elementary school) to 10 (postgraduate). Duration of partnership is measured in years. As educational attainment and duration of partnership are not of central interest in this paper, we control for them in our analyses, but do not show or discuss them in the text.

Analytic Plan

The following general panel data model is applied:

\[ y_{it} = \beta_0 + X_{it}\beta + Z_i\gamma + \alpha_i + u_{it}, \]

where \( y_{it} \) is the dependent variable observed for individual \( i \) at time \( t \), \( X_{it} \) is the time-variant regressor, \( Z_i \) is the time-invariant regressor, \( \alpha_i \) is the unobserved individual effect, and \( u_{it} \) is the error term. The two main methods of dealing with \( \alpha_i \) are to make the random effects or fixed effects assumption. Where the random effects model assumes that individual specific effects are random variables drawn from a random distribution, the fixed effects model contains an individual-specific constant term that absorbs all observed or unobserved time-invariant characteristics. One of the nice features of a fixed effects model compared to a random effects model is that it is better in controlling for unobserved individual heterogeneity, because it not only controls for within-person, but also for between-person variation.

Differences between individuals that do not vary over time, such as biological or genetic differences, and also selection biases, are controlled for (Johnson, 2005). A fixed effects approach utilizes only the within variations (the over-time changes in the values of variables for an individual) but not the between variations (the differences in the levels of variables across individuals) in estimation. The disadvantage of a fixed effect model compared to a random effect model is that it is not possible to examine the impact of time-invariant characteristics. However, as we are not explicitly interested in these effects, it is not a serious disadvantage. Moreover, the potentially confounding effects of all time-invariant variables are all controlled for.
In addition to eliminating unobserved heterogeneity, the fixed effects model is also conceptually well suited for our analyses because it uses changes in the independent variables to predict changes in the dependent variable. More specifically, the purpose of the analysis is to analyze the effect of a change in parental status on changes in subjective well-being.

Our theoretical preferences for the fixed effect model matched the empirical outcomes. In preliminary analyses we ran Hausman (1978) tests to determine the plausibility of the fixed versus random effects model. The results showed that in most occasions, the estimates would suffer from omitted variables bias and that the use of fixed effects model was preferred. To be able to conduct fixed effects time series analyses, we created a person-period file, with two observations (one observation for each wave) per variable per person.

It is conceivable that parental well-being differs as a function of the age of the child. We tested this possibility by running models in which age of the child was included as an independent variable and some in which age of child was interacted with becoming a parent. Age of child did not have a significant effect in any of these models. Given these findings, and given that the age of the child was not the focus of our paper, we decided not to include the age of the child in our models.

To test whether some of the dependent variables tapped into the same underlying construct of well-being and therefore could be combined, we ran factor analyses. When all our items were included in the analyses, five factors emerged, all with eigenvalues larger than 1. Different types of rotations all revealed the same five factors that resembled the five variables used in this paper. Given these results, we decided to keep our five dependent variables.

The independent variables were entered into our analyses in two steps. The first model only includes becoming a parent. The second model also includes the variable-sets transitions in partner status and transitions in work hours, and controls for education and duration of partnership. To compare nested models and to test whether adding predictors to a model improves the model fit to the data significantly, likelihood ratio-tests were performed. The results of our analyses are first shown for women, then for men.

Results

Table 1 shows the means, SDs, and ranges for our dependent variables. Table 2 shows the number and percentages of respondents making various transitions in partner status and work hours. In addition, Table 2 shows the outcome of logistic regression analyses which were done to determine if there were significant differences between respondents who become parents and those who remain childless with respect to making partner status and work hour transitions. Regarding partner status transitions, the table shows that women who become mothers are more likely to make the transition from cohabitation to marriage, and are more likely to stay married, but are less likely to remain in a noncohabiting partnership, and less likely to remain in an unmarried cohabiting relationship compared to women who remain childless. Men who become fathers are more likely to make the transition from cohabitation to marriage, and are more likely to stay married, but are less likely to start living together with their partner compared to men who remain childless.

Regarding work hour transitions, we found that women who become mothers are more likely to decrease their number of hours of work and to stop working, and less likely to increase their hours of work compared to women who remain childless. With respect to men, we see two types of changes. First, the majority of men who make the transition to parenthood (46%) increase the number of hours they work compared to the other options they have (decreasing their work hours, stopping working, and not experiencing any changes regarding work hours). However, men in general increase their work hours over the years. Test statistics reveal that men who become fathers are less likely to increase their work hours compared to men who remain childless. Second, another substantial group of men who make the transition to parenthood decrease the number of

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Women who remain childless (n = 208)</th>
<th>Women who make the transition to parenthood (n = 130)</th>
<th>Men who remain childless (n = 164)</th>
<th>Men who make the transition to parenthood (n = 98)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with life Time 1</td>
<td>15.4 (2.6)</td>
<td>15.9 (2.4)</td>
<td>15.3 (2.6)</td>
<td>15.9 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with life Time 2</td>
<td>15.6 (2.6)</td>
<td>15.9 (2.5)</td>
<td>15.3 (2.6)</td>
<td>15.6 (2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness Time 1</td>
<td>13.6 (3.5)</td>
<td>13.3 (3.5)</td>
<td>13.2 (2.7)</td>
<td>12.8 (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness Time 2</td>
<td>13.8 (3.8)</td>
<td>13.7 (3.9)</td>
<td>13.8 (2.9)</td>
<td>13.4 (3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect Time 1</td>
<td>4.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>4.6 (0.9)</td>
<td>4.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>4.7 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect Time 2</td>
<td>4.5 (1.0)</td>
<td>4.6 (0.8)</td>
<td>4.5 (0.9)</td>
<td>4.5 (0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative affect Time 1</td>
<td>6.3 (2.3)^a</td>
<td>6.1 (1.9)^a</td>
<td>5.4 (1.9)^b</td>
<td>5.3 (1.7)^b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative affect Time 2</td>
<td>6.0 (2.2)^a</td>
<td>5.8 (2.0)</td>
<td>5.8 (2.0)</td>
<td>5.3 (1.9)^b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership satisfaction Time 1</td>
<td>3.4 (0.7)</td>
<td>3.6 (0.7)^a</td>
<td>3.3 (0.8)^b</td>
<td>3.6 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership satisfaction Time 2</td>
<td>3.3 (0.8)</td>
<td>3.4 (0.8)</td>
<td>3.2 (0.8)</td>
<td>3.3 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Group means. SDs in parentheses.
Different superscripts indicate that means differ significantly at p < .05.
hours they work (30%). Test statistics reveal that men who become fathers are indeed more likely to decrease their work hours compared to men who remain childless. The fact that men who make the transition to fatherhood are more likely to decrease their hours of work is in contrast to the existing literature. Many new fathers in our sample are born in the 1970s. Where fathers were previously expected to be breadwinners, today they also expected to exhibit nurturing behaviors and to be actively involved in childcare. It is likely that we have tapped into the group of nurturant fathers.

**Multivariate Results**

The first three sets of columns in Table 3 inform us that the transition to parenthood does not affect women’s life satisfaction, loneliness, or positive affect. The incorporation of partner status and work hour transitions leads to a better model fit only for life satisfaction. We find that women who increase their hours of work become more satisfied with their lives. Other transitions do not have a significant impact on how satisfied women report that they are.

The first significant coefficient for the transition to motherhood is found for negative affect. Becoming a mother makes women report significantly less negative affect. The likelihood ratio-test reveals that the inclusion of our partner status and work hour transition variables in Model 2 improves our model fit significantly. Women who increase their work hours in between both waves, report decreased negative affect. With the inclusion of our partner status and work hour transition variables, the coefficient for becoming a mother loses significance. In additional analyses (not shown) we entered partner status and work hour transitions in separate steps into our model. These results indicate that the decrease in negative affect upon making the transition to motherhood is attributable to the group of women who increase their working hours.

The final set of columns in Table 3 shows that becoming a mother has a significant negative impact on partnership

Table 3

**Fixed Effects Analyses for Women, Standardized Beta Coefficients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Life satisfaction</th>
<th>Loneliness</th>
<th>Positive affect</th>
<th>Negative affect</th>
<th>Partnership satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>M1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become parent</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncohabiting partnership-together</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation-marriage</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease hours of work</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase hours of work</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopped working</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood-ratio-test</td>
<td>21.79**</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>10.03</td>
<td>11.12**</td>
<td>23.42*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Changes in educational attainment and duration of partnership are controlled in all analyses; n = 338. M1 = baseline model; M2 = full model.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
satisfaction. This effect becomes insignificant when partner status and work hour transitions are taken into account in Model 2. Likelihood ratio-tests reveal that the inclusion of these variables improves the model fit significantly. Women who stop working become less satisfied with their partnership. In additional analyses (not shown) we entered partner status and work hour transitions in separate steps into our model. These results indicate that the detrimental impact of making the transition to motherhood on partnership satisfaction is attributable to the group of new mothers who quit their job. Apparently, becoming a mother decreases partnership satisfaction for those who lose their work role. The birth of a baby confines the mother, at least in the early period, to her home, and this isolation is strengthened through the loss of her work role. This situation may give tensions at home and may therefore decrease women’s partnership satisfaction.

In Table 4, we shift our attention to men. The first set of columns shows that becoming a father does not significantly affect men’s life satisfaction. In Model 2 we find that men who start living together with their partner become more satisfied with their lives. Likelihood ratio-test statistics reveal that the inclusion of our partner status and work hour transitions does not improve our model fit significantly.

In the second set of columns in Table 4, we find that men who become fathers become more lonely. In Model 2 we include our partner status and work hour transitions, leading to a significantly better model fit. Men who marry their cohabiting partner become more lonely. When our partner status and work hour transitions are included in the model, the detrimental impact of becoming a father on loneliness loses significance. In additional analyses (not shown) we entered partner status and work hour transitions in separate steps into our model. These results indicate that the detrimental impact of making the transition to parenthood on loneliness is indeed attributable to the group of new fathers who become married. The arrival of a child leads to a stronger focus on the couple relationship and the triad of husband, wife, and child. This situation may lead to isolation from friends and colleagues, which may give new fathers stronger feelings of loneliness.

As the third set of columns shows, making the transition to fatherhood decreases positive affect, but this effect is only barely significant. In Model 2 we include partner status and work hour transitions, and likelihood ratio-tests show that this addition improves the model fit significantly. However, none of these transitions has a significant impact on men’s positive affect. Nevertheless, the impact of making the transition to parenthood loses significance.

Looking at the fourth set of columns in Table 4, we find that making the transition to parenthood does not have a significant impact on men’s negative affect. The inclusion of our partner status and work hour transition variables in Model 2 improves the model fit significantly. The transition from a cohabiting relationship to a marriage increases negative affect for men.

In the last set of columns we focus on partnership satisfaction. In Model 1, we find that making the transition to parenthood significantly decreases men’s partnership satisfaction. In Model 2 we include our partner status and work hour transition variables. Likelihood ratio-tests reveal that the addition of these factors does not improve our model fit significantly. Even when these factors are taken into account, men who make the transition to parenthood become significantly less satisfied with their partnership.

Discussion

The literature on the transition to parenthood has shifted from a focus on what the consequences of becoming a parent are to a focus on the conditions under which parenthood has consequences for people’s well-being. Our analyses contribute to the literature by incorporating two specific types of changing conditions in new parents’ lives: partner status and work hour transitions.

Our results reveal an effect of the transition to parenthood for only half of our outcome measures, and in so far as effects are observed, their magnitude is small. Nevertheless, our results are noteworthy for a variety of reasons, the most important being the nature of the well-being constructs under investigation. In this study, unlike many that examine the impact of the transition to parenthood, the focus of

Table 4
Fixed Effects Analyses for Men, Standardized Beta Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Life satisfaction</th>
<th>Loneliness</th>
<th>Positive affect</th>
<th>Negative affect</th>
<th>Partnership satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>M1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become parent</td>
<td>−0.07</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncohabiting</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partnership-together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation-matrimonial</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease hours of work</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase hours of work</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.05*</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood-ratio–test</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>29.04**</td>
<td>23.30**</td>
<td>9.74*</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Changes in educational attainment and duration of partnership are controlled in all analyses; n = 262. M1 = baseline model; M2 = full model.

*p <.05. **p < .01.
inquiry is on change in well-being across the transition to parenthood. By focusing upon change in, rather than absolute levels of well-being, we greatly restricted the variance available for prediction, but, in doing so, were able to accurately document how the transition to parenthood and changes in other life domains influence well-being.

Our central premise was that changes in partner status and work hours associated with becoming a parent would be responsible for changes in well-being. In line with this idea, findings show that the loss of the work role is among the factors contributing to a decrease in new mothers’ partnership satisfaction. Furthermore, not the arrival of a child, but rather the transition from a cohabiting relationship to a marriage creates greater loneliness among men. In general, our findings reveal that partner status and work hour transitions are mechanisms of the effects of the transition to parenthood. The only exception is the effect of partnership satisfaction for men. The detrimental impact of becoming a father on satisfaction with one’s partnership remains significant when partner status and work hour transitions are taken into account.

Previous work has consistently shown that making the transition to parenthood negatively affects partnership quality (see the review of Twenge et al., 2003). The understanding in the literature is that conflict and dissatisfaction arise because of increasing gender role differentiation between partners. Recent studies have shown that changes in the division of household tasks (Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 2002) account for altered well-being of new parents. Our study adds to the literature by showing that transitions in work hours and in partner status, which often precede changes in household tasks, matter for women and men’s adaptation to first time parenthood.

With the arrival of a first child, many couples start living together or marry their cohabiting partner. Our data reveal that these rearrangements are responsible for a decrease in new parents’ well-being. Marrying one’s cohabiting partner increases loneliness among new fathers. Rearrangements in work hours also play a substantial role, but only for women, which may not come as a surprise as mainly women rather than men cut down their work hours after their first child is born. In contrast to the idea of being overloaded by combining the roles of mother, partner, friend, and coworker (Coverman, 1989), our results suggest that being employed and working a substantial number of hours is beneficial for women’s well-being. Decreased levels of partnership well-being among women are mainly because of the transition out of employment. Furthermore, decreased negative affect is observed among new mothers who increase their working hours.

Our results confirm previous findings in that the impact of becoming a parent is not uniform across well-being measures. We find that the transition to parenthood has no impact on life satisfaction, and increases feelings of loneliness for men only. The findings on affect are mixed, showing that new mothers express more negative, but not less positive affect, whereas the results are exactly opposite for men. The strongest impact of becoming a parent on well-being is found for partnership well-being, and the results reveal a detrimental impact on conjugal life.

Our focus on multiple outcomes of well-being shows that the transition to parenthood can be both a joy and a tribulation for women. For men, we only find evidence for the gloomy side of parenthood, most strongly with respect to partnership satisfaction. This finding might be related to the phase of parenthood investigated in this study. On average, the interviews with our respondents were a little over 3 years apart. Children of the respondents who became parents between waves are below two and a half years of age. The early years of parenthood are probably the most difficult ones in a parent’s life, during which most adjustments have to be made (Miller & Sollie, 1980). The literature shows that marital satisfaction often rebounds after a while (Twenge et al., 2003), and that having a partner leads to better life outcomes for fathers on the long run (Keizer, Dykstra, & Poortman, 2009). A more rosy view might have emerged if we had been able to extend our view to include primary-school age children.

In line with other recent studies (e.g., Kaitz & Katzir, 2004), but in contrast to studies from the 1980s and 1990s, we find that men are just as affected by the transition to parenthood as women. Two factors may explain these differences in findings. The first is related to changes in fathering. Compared to a few decades ago, men are more involved in the care of their child during the first couple of months after childbirth (Merens & Hermans, 2009). Second, the time frame used to study the transition to parenthood seems relevant. In general, previous studies have mostly looked at the first couple of months or the first year of parenthood. In this period, women especially experience multiple and radical role changes. The time frame of our study is expanded beyond these initial months of possible glow and trauma and our study reveals that, when applying a larger time frame, men are just as affected by the transition to parenthood as women. Studies that focus on the even longer-term consequences of fatherhood come up with the same conclusion: that having children has a substantial impact on men’s well-being (Keizer, Dykstra, & Poortman, 2009; Knoester & Eggebeen, 2006).

Besides differences in time frames, the Dutch context might account for why our results differ from previous work, which is primarily based on U.S. samples. Of all Western countries, the Netherlands has the highest share of women who work part-time. Re-entering the work force and scaling up one’s work week after the baby has been born may be easier and less stressful for women who work a limited number of hours. This might be why we find a positive impact on the well-being of new mothers when they increase the number of hours they work. Furthermore, new mothers are entitled to benefits that may alleviate some of the emotional and physical strains associated with the transition to parenthood. In the Netherlands, women are awarded 16 weeks of maternity leave. Having 16 weeks to adjust to the new baby and to prepare for re-entering the labor market helps smooth the return to work. The idea of having to go back to work when one is physically or mentally not yet ready, makes it more likely that women
will withdraw from the labor force all together. A recent U.S. study by Feldman, Sussman and Zigler (2004) showed that a short maternity leave (<12 weeks) is related to poorer adaptation during the transition to parenthood.

It is unclear whether selective attrition has affected our results. If, for example, highly distressed new parents were more likely to drop out of the study, then negative effects of parenthood are probably underestimated and positive effects are probably overestimated. Furthermore, we might be underestimating the negative consequences of the transition to parenthood, given that our analyses were restricted to those who were continuously partnered between waves. New parents who broke up between waves were not considered because their number was too small. Becoming a parent is a greater challenge and entails greater costs for those who are single in comparison to those who have a partner (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Therefore, our findings might actually underestimate the difficulties of making the transition to parenthood.

In conclusion, the transition to parenthood requires reorganization and accommodation. In this paper, we have taken a close look at the first years of parenthood, finding that transitions in partner status and work hours account for the impact—albeit modest—of becoming a parent on well-being. Given that men and women make the transition to parenthood with different starting points, they are differentially affected by the transition, at different points in time, and with different intensities. Future research should make use of longitudinal data that span a large number of years and incorporate multiple time points, to thoroughly examine the processes through which costs and benefits ebb and flow in the life courses of mothers and fathers. Furthermore, the success of the adaptation to parenthood, and with that the impact on well-being, is determined by the effectiveness of the efforts of both partners to meet the challenging changes that come with making the transition to parenthood. For a deeper understanding of how parenthood does, and does not, affect the adult lives of individuals, it is important that future research not only pays attention to individual transitions, but to those of couples.

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