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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines how short-term fertility intentions evolve before and after transitions between relationship stages.

Background: Prior research has primarily compared fertility intentions across partnership statuses, while giving less attention to within-person dynamics surrounding partnership transitions and the question of whether shifts reflect anticipatory selection or post-transition changes.

Method: Using longitudinal data from the German Family Panel (waves 2008–2022), we apply an event-centered fixed effects design to estimate changes in fertility intentions up to three years before and after transitions to dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Stratified analyses assess variation by gender, age, and subsequent relationship stability.

Results: Entry into dating from singlehood is followed by a within-person increase in fertility intentions, indicating that dating functions as a turning point activating fertility planning. Entry into cohabitation is associated with rising intentions prior to the transition and sustained increases thereafter, suggesting that cohabitation consolidates fertility plans. Marriage transitions are characterized by anticipatory increases in fertility intentions. Fertility intentions increase after entry into dating only in relationships that persist, underscoring the role of stability in consolidating early adjustments. Men and older individuals enter marriage with high fertility intentions, while women report higher intentions before cohabitation.

Conclusions: Different partnership stages act as distinct mechanisms for the evolution of fertility intentions over the life course. Dating is an activation stage where fertility planning emerges, while cohabitation reinforces and consolidates plans and marriage reflects anticipatory selection.

INTRODUCTION

Fertility rates have declined across most industrialized societies in recent decades, while the timing and sequencing of family formation have become increasingly diverse (Smock and Schwartz 2020). In Germany, the total fertility rate (TFR) fell from 1.47 in 2014 to 1.35 in 2024 (Destatis 2025). At the same time, partnership trajectories have diversified. Marriage has been increasingly delayed, and cohabitation has become more prevalent but remains less stable than marriage, contributing to a higher likelihood of experiencing multiple union transitions over the life course (Hiekel, Liefbroer, and Poortman 2014; Sassler 2010).

These developments, often discussed in the context of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe 2010), have reshaped the social and institutional conditions under which individuals consider whether and when to have children. In particular, trends toward delayed marriage and less stable co-residential unions suggest that individuals might spend longer periods in partnership contexts that are typically weakly aligned with childbearing. These developments indicate that contemporary fertility dynamics may increasingly depend on how individuals progress through partnership stages over the course of life, as different relationship contexts provide different opportunities and constraints for realizing fertility intentions.

Importantly, the fertility decline has not been accompanied by a comparable decline in reproductive aspirations. Across countries, individuals continue to report ideal family sizes that exceed realized fertility (Beaujouan and Berghammer 2019; Miller 2011). This gap suggests that contemporary fertility dynamics are shaped less by a declining desire for children than by the timing, sequencing, and feasibility of realizing fertility intentions within changing life course trajectories. Delayed or incomplete progression through partnership stages may play a central role in these dynamics, as individuals may postpone or revise their fertility plans when they remain in

relationship contexts that are weakly aligned with childbearing, such as prolonged singlehood or early-stage partnerships.

In this study, we focus on short-term fertility intentions (STFI). These intentions do not always translate directly into behavior, but they reflect concrete planning horizons, perceived readiness, and contraceptive decision-making. Because short-term intentions are closely linked to current opportunities and constraints, they provide a sensitive indicator of how partnership transitions shape reproductive planning (Brzozowska and Beaujouan 2021; Spéder and Bálint 2024; Spéder and Kapitány 2014).

Partnership formation is therefore a key life course process linking broader demographic change to individual reproductive planning, and a large body of research has examined its association with fertility intentions. Individuals in relationships, particularly marriage or cohabitation, tend to report stronger intentions to have children than singles (Heaton, Jacobson, and Holland 1999; Liefbroer 2009; Sturm, Koops, and Rutigliano 2023). Remaining unpartnered through early adulthood is in itself a meaningful life course status that may constrain or suppress fertility intentions (Mogi, Mugiyama, and Raybould 2025). Longitudinal studies further show that entering a union is linked to positive changes in fertility intentions, whereas separation is associated with a decline in intentions (Barker and Buber-Ennser 2024; Gray, Evans, and Reimondos 2013; Hayford 2009; Iacovou and Tavares 2011). Taken together, these findings suggest that partnership transitions are critical moments in the life course in which fertility intentions are activated, consolidated, or revised.

Despite this extensive literature, two central research gaps remain. First, previous research provides little insight into the dynamics of fertility intentions before and after union formation. Existing studies typically compare average differences between singles and people in relationships, but they do not capture how intentions evolve before and after individuals enter or progress in their

relationship trajectory. It therefore remains unclear whether intentions become more positive before union formation, which could indicate selection, or are adjusted afterward in response to new circumstances. This limitation is particularly relevant in contexts where partnership formation itself is increasingly delayed or prolonged. Second, while most research focuses on cohabitation and marriage, earlier relationship stages, such as dating or living apart together (LAT), have received little attention. These stages are increasingly common, and may represent early phases in which intentions begin to adjust or periods in which individuals with stronger fertility motivations select into more committed unions. Neglecting these stages may lead researchers to overlook the possibility of fertility planning emerging long before entry into co-residential or marital partnerships.

Building on the life course perspective (Elder 1994), we view partnership transitions as turning points at which people may adjust their fertility intentions. Our main research question is: How do short-term fertility intentions change before and after transitions to different partnership stages? Three additional questions guide our analyses. First, we examine gender differences and link them to the life course perspective. Partnership transitions may be more consequential for women's fertility intentions because biological deadlines are more critical for women than for men, and because partnership formation triggers shifts in gendered opportunity costs and social expectations associated with motherhood. Second, we examine age differences and ask whether the effects of transitions depend on when they occur in the life course. The perceived feasibility of parenthood varies across ages. Undergoing a partnership transition earlier in adulthood may signal being "on track," which may correspond to higher intentions. Moreover, experiencing a partnership transition in the late twenties or early thirties, which is the modal age of childbearing (Balbo, Billari, and Mills 2013), may be interpreted as the last chance to have a child, and might therefore produce a

larger increase in intentions. Remaining single during prime adulthood ages may, by contrast, prompt accommodation and a downward adjustment of fertility goals.

Third, we examine two related but distinct mechanisms: selection and relationship stability. The selection perspective suggests that individuals with higher baseline fertility intentions are more likely to seek and form relationships, to remain in them, and to enter into union types with higher childbearing potential such as cohabitation or marriage. We also consider how relationship stability may moderate shifts in intentions. From a life course perspective, not all partnership transitions signal the same degree of commitment to, long-term orientation toward, or social acceptance of childbearing. More stable or committed unions may provide clearer expectations about future family formation, which could amplify increases in fertility intentions.

We use longitudinal data from the German Family Panel (pairfam), which offers retrospective, month-specific partnership histories from age 16 onward, and prospective annual measures of STFI. This combination allows us to align fertility intentions relative to precise partnership transition dates across multiple birth cohorts observed for more than a decade. We align observations relative to the timing of transitions, such as entering a dating, cohabiting, or marital relationship, and compare the trajectories of intentions of those who experience transitions and those who remain single. Methodologically, we employ fixed effects models that control for time-invariant individual characteristics and trace within-person changes in STFI around transitions, while allowing baseline differences and anticipatory patterns to capture selection into partnership trajectories. This approach allows us to assess how fertility intentions adjust as people move through different relationship stages.

Our study makes several contributions. Methodologically, we apply an event-centered fixed effects framework that traces within-person changes in STFI before and after partnership transitions.

Aligning observations relative to the timing of transitions allows us to distinguish anticipatory changes in fertility intentions – consistent with selection – from adjustments that occur after entering a relationship stage. Moreover, by modeling dating, cohabitation, and marriage as distinct transitions, we provide a granular account of how partnership progression shapes fertility planning across the relationship trajectory. This perspective points to the possibility that adjustments to fertility planning often begin earlier in the partnership trajectory than is typically assumed in studies focusing only on co-residential unions.

BACKGROUND

Short-term fertility intentions

A large body of research is dedicated to understanding long-term fertility intentions, particularly those related to intended or ideal family size. These intentions typically capture individuals' long-term expectations about how many children they will have over their lifetime, and are relatively stable across adulthood (Balbo et al. 2013). A central concern in this literature is the predictive validity of such intentions, which are often assessed by comparing intended and realized fertility (Morgan and Rackin 2010; Quesnel-Vallée and Morgan 2003).

In contrast, STFI refer to individuals' plans to have a child within a relatively limited time frame, commonly the next two or three years. Because they refer to a near-term time horizon, STFI are more closely linked to individuals' current life circumstances and their assessments of the feasibility and timing of childbearing (Barker and Buber-Ennser 2024). Importantly, STFI refer to individuals' plans to have a child regardless of parity, and thus capture fertility planning related to both family formation and family extension.

In this paper, we focus on STFI, specifically intentions to have a child within the next two years. Our interest lies in how individuals revise these intentions as their partnership circumstances

change over the life course, such as when they begin dating, enter cohabitation, or marry. While STFI encompass intentions at different parities, the present study does not model parity-specific transitions or partnership dissolution. Instead, it examines how entry into different partnership stages shapes within-person changes in fertility intentions. This approach aligns with the Traits–Desires–Intentions framework (Miller and Pasta 1993, 1995), which distinguishes between relatively stable motivational dispositions toward parenthood and more flexible fertility intentions that respond to changing life circumstances. According to this framework, individuals possess underlying motivational orientations toward childbearing that are manifested in fertility desires. Intentions emerge when these desires are evaluated in light of perceived opportunities and constraints. Because individuals' intentions reflect their assessment of their current situation, they may be expected to adjust their intentions when their life circumstances change.

Partnership entry and fertility intentions

The life course perspective (Elder 1994, 1995) provides a framework for understanding how union formation transitions shape STFI. A central premise of this perspective is that transitions between social roles represent turning points that can result in the redirection of trajectories and the revision of future plans. Changes in partnership status constitute such transitions because they alter the relational and institutional context in which individuals evaluate the feasibility and desirability of childbearing (Bernardi, Huinink, and Settersten 2019; Elder 1994; Fasang, Gruijters, and Van Winkle 2024; Mayer 2009).

STFI are inherently time-bound, as upward adjustments are constrained by biological fecundity and age-related norms regarding the appropriate timing of parenthood (Carr 2018). Consequently, the impact of partnership transitions on STFI depends both on their occurrence and on their timing in the life course.

Partnership transitions modify what the Theory of Conjunctural Action (TCA) describes as the conjuncture within which STFI are formed (Johnson-Hanks et al. 2011). Intentions are shaped by constellations of material conditions, social expectations, and institutional contexts. Entry into a partnership can shift in this conjuncture by introducing shared resources, increased relational commitment, and stronger normative expectations surrounding family formation (Kuang et al. 2025; Lappegård and Noack 2015). In contrast, persistent singlehood may sustain a context in which childbearing feels less feasible, particularly in societies where parenthood remains closely linked with partnering (Mogi et al. 2025). Rather than changing their desire for children, experiencing a partnership transition may prompt individuals to reassess whether and when childbearing is realistic under their current circumstances, which may, in turn, lead them to adjust their STFI.

These adjustments can also be understood through goal regulation processes. According to the theory of assimilative and accommodative coping (Brandtstädter 2009), individuals revise their goals in response to their perceived opportunities and constraints. When experiencing a partnership transition increases individuals' perceived stability and resource security, they may adjust their STFI upward. When their conditions appear uncertain or unstable, individuals may revise their STFI downward to align with their perceived constraints (Gray et al. 2013). In this sense, experiencing a partnership transition can lead to the activation or consolidation of STFI, while persistent singlehood may be associated with making accommodative adjustments or feeling increased uncertainty about fertility plans.

Variation and selection in partnership transitions and fertility intentions

Differences by partnership type

While the mechanisms described above suggest that partnership formation generally leads to upward adjustments in fertility intentions, the magnitude and durability of these changes are likely

to vary by partnership type and individual characteristics. Therefore, we differentiate between transitions to dating, cohabitation, and marriage, given that these stages differ in terms of levels of institutionalization, commitment, and perceived feasibility of parenthood.

Historically, marriage has represented the most institutionalized and socially supported context for childbearing (Davis and Blake 1956; Hayford 2009). Because of this normative linkage between marriage and parenthood, being married has provided both the legitimacy and the material preconditions for pursuing parenthood (Davis and Blake 1956). Married individuals typically have access to greater financial and social resources, and the institution of marriage traditionally reinforces ideas about "appropriate family behavior" (Hayford 2009:768).

With the rise of cohabitation and non-marital fertility across Europe (Perelli-Harris et al. 2012), the hegemony of marriage as the sole context for family formation has diminished. Cohabitation has become a widespread and socially accepted form of partnership that increasingly serves as a setting for childbearing (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004; Hiekel et al. 2014; Perelli-Harris and Lyons-Amos 2015). Being in a cohabiting relationship often increases the feasibility of childbearing because the partners share a residence and resources and have a longer-term commitment, even though the levels of institutional and normative support for cohabitation remain lower than those for marriage.

Despite the more limited institutional support for dating and non-cohabiting relationships, such relationships may nonetheless activate fertility-related considerations or attract individuals with stronger pre-existing fertility motivations (Liefbroer 2009; Sassler 2010; Wagner, Huinink, and Liefbroer 2019). Entering a dating relationship may therefore activate individuals' fertility-related considerations by introducing a concrete partnership context. By contrast, when individuals

transition to cohabitation or marriage, it is likely that their fertility intentions are already formed, and become consolidated as the partnership becomes more established.

Previous research supports this gradient in commitment and opportunity. Studies consistently find that partnership formation is associated with an increase in fertility intentions or desires, but that the strength of this association varies by union type. Entering a partnership is generally linked to upward changes in fertility desires, and these effects are typically stronger for marriage than for cohabitation, as shown in the Australian context (Gray et al. 2013). Likewise, Heaton et al. (1999) found that in the United States, marital status was the strongest predictor of the general intention to have children, with cohabiting individuals being more likely than single people, but less likely than married people, to intend to have children. Moreover, Liefbroer (2009) found that in the Netherlands, intended family size was highest among married respondents, followed by among those who were dating, cohabiting, and single.

> *Hypothesis 1*: STFI increase after transitions to dating, cohabitation, and marriage, with the largest increases occurring after marriage and the smallest increases occurring after entry into dating.

Age and gender variation

The effect of partnership transitions is further conditioned by age. Fertility intentions typically decline with age (Sturm et al. 2023), reflecting both biological constraints and age norms regarding the socially appropriate timing of parenthood (Beaujouan et al. 2019; Billari et al. 2011). Thus, the impact of partnership transitions on fertility intentions may be larger when the transitions occur around typical childbearing ages.

> *Hypothesis 2*: Increases in STFI following partnership transitions are larger when the transitions occur at normative childbearing ages.

Gendered norms and opportunity costs may also shape these dynamics. Although both women and men tend to report higher fertility intentions when partnered compared to when single (Sturm et al. 2023), the association may be somewhat stronger for women, reflecting the gendered timing of biological and social deadlines for parenthood. Moreover, partnership status may represent different opportunity structures for women and men: women typically require either a committed partner or an alternative route such as donor conception to realize their intentions, whereas men may express childbearing intentions even without a current partner, yet ultimately require a stable relationship to pursue socially recognized fatherhood.

Partnership formation may also influence fertility intentions through changes in the economic and relational context of decision-making. From a bargaining perspective (Ott 1992), women's decisions about childbearing are linked to their relative bargaining position and economic security within relationships. Applying this logic, women with greater financial independence may delay or adjust their fertility intentions until they enter a partnership that offers sufficient stability and resource sharing. Although this framework was not originally developed to explain fertility behavior, it suggests that partnership formation may alter the perceived feasibility of parenthood by changing resource sharing and long-term commitment within the couple.

Previous research also points to age and gender as sources of variation in the relationship between partnership and fertility intentions, albeit with mixed evidence. Sturm et al. (2023) showed a generally stronger positive association between being in a partnership and fertility intentions compared to being single, and that this association increased with age. Wagner et al. (2019) found no gender differences in the direction of change. Gray et al. (2013) reported modest gender differences, showing that increases in fertility desires following marriage were slightly larger for men, whereas increases after cohabitation were more pronounced for women. Similarly, Iacovou and

Tavares (2011) found that entering a partnership was associated with an upward revision in expected fertility, whereas experiencing a separation was linked to a downward revision, particularly among men.

Hypothesis 3: Partnership transitions lead to larger increases in STFI for women than for men.

Selection and relationship stability

Finally, both selection and relationship stability shape how fertility intentions change around partnership transitions. Individuals with a stronger baseline fertility motivation may be more likely to enter a partnership in the first place, which implies that they have higher fertility intentions before union formation.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals who remain in a stable partnership have higher pre-transition STFI than those who remain unpartnered or enter a less stable union.

After individuals enter a partnership, the stability of the partnership may further shape how their fertility intentions evolve. Being in a stable and committed relationship provides clearer expectations and increases the feasibility of childbearing, which can amplify the upward adjustment of STFI. In contrast, being in an unstable union may limit such an adjustment or lead to an accommodative downward revision (Brandtstädter 2009; Gray et al. 2013).

Hypothesis 5: Increases in short-term fertility intentions after partnership transitions are larger in unions that remain stable than in unstable partnerships.

The German context

Germany is a particularly relevant context for studying how partnership transitions shape STFI. Although marriage remains the predominant setting for childbirth, cohabitation has become widespread, and a substantial minority of first births occur outside marriage (Perelli-Harris et al. 2012).

At the same time, non-marital fertility remains more selective in Germany than in some other European countries. Cohabiting parents face a more fragmented legal and social protection landscape than married parents (Perelli-Harris and Gassen 2012). This may reinforce the significance of partnership stability and commitment for family planning. Single parenthood – especially single motherhood by choice – is becoming more socially visible but remains relatively uncommon, and welfare institutions are still primarily organized around partnered parenthood (Aerts, Marx, and Parolin 2022; Nieuwenhuis, Tøge, and Palme 2018; Zagel and Hübgen 2018). Consequently, the opportunity structure for becoming a parent outside a relationship remains constrained. In this context, remaining unpartnered for longer periods of young adulthood may lower the perceived feasibility of childbearing, particularly for women. Taken together, these features position Germany in an intermediate context within Europe's diversification of partnership and fertility patterns: cohabitation and non-marital fertility are normalizing, but marriage continues to provide a stronger institutional foundation for family formation.

ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Data

We use 13 waves of the German Family Panel (pairfam), a nationally representative annual longitudinal study of three birth cohorts (1971–1973, 1981–1983, and 1991–1993). The survey provides detailed retrospective partnership histories from age 16 onward and prospective annual information since 2008.

The initial sample of all individuals surveyed in waves 1-13 consists of 18,663 respondents. We restrict the data in several steps. First, we select respondents with partnership histories that can be linked across waves, resulting in 15,005 individuals. Second, we add 469 respondents who do not appear in the partnership history file but are observed as continuously single across at least four

consecutive waves. This produces an analytic population of 15,474 respondents prior to the application of outcome restrictions. We then require valid information on STFI, which leaves us with a sample of 14,595 individuals. As we follow individuals from age 18 until age 50, we exclude all individuals with information only before age 18 (N=13) as well as individuals without information on their gender (N=2), yielding a sample of 14,580 individuals. After excluding cases with missing values on covariates, the final estimation sample contains 14,560 respondents contributing 74,759 person-years. We do not restrict the sample to childless individuals, but conduct several sensitivity analyses (presented below) to address potential issues related to realized fertility.

Variables

Short-term fertility intentions

STFI are measured with the survey question: "Do you intend to have [another] child within the next two years?" The response categories range from "Yes, definitely" to "No, definitely not," with an additional category for the response: "I haven't thought about that." We construct a binary indicator coded one for "Yes, definitely" and "Yes, perhaps," and coded zero for "No, probably not," "No, definitely not," and "I haven't thought about that." Furthermore, we include individuals who respond to the question: "When you think realistically about having additional children: do you think you will have more biological or adoptive children in addition to [current children/child you are currently expecting]" (for parents); or to the question: "When you think realistically about having children: how many biological or adoptive children do you think you will have?" (for childless individuals); with "No"/"No more" responses being assigned to the zero category, signaling no STFI.

This coding captures whether respondents currently express a positive intention to have a child within the next two years, while treating both explicit non-intentions and intentions to not have a

child as indicating no STFI. This approach follows previous research using a binary fertility intention outcome variable, with only positive intentions being clustered into the "Yes" category, and negative intentions, including responses such as "Don't know," being clustered into the "No" category (Brzozowska and Beaujouan 2021; Dommermuth, Lyngstad, and Wiik 2025).

Partnership formation

Information on partnership episodes is taken from the pairfam partnership history file (biopart). These histories collect prospective information about the start and end dates of the respondents' marriages, cohabitations, and non-residential relationships, including information about the partners. In the pairfam partnership histories, non-residential relationships correspond to romantic partnerships without shared residence, often referred to as dating or living apart together relationships. For reasons of readability, we refer to these relationships as dating throughout the paper. Using month-specific episode information, we identify transitions from being single to dating, from dating to cohabitation, and from cohabitation to marriage. To ensure that the transitions refer to a continuous relationship with the same partner, spells are censored when the partner's identity changes. For example, if a respondent reports dating two different partners in successive months, the episode is treated as terminating once the initial partner is no longer reported.

Control variables

Age in years is included as a time-varying covariate and is also used to define one dimension of the fixed effects structure. Education is measured using the ISCED-97 classification and includes the following categories: currently enrolled, no upper secondary, upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary, and tertiary education.

Method

We use an event-centered fixed effects design to estimate changes in STFI before and after partnership transitions. Individuals may experience more than one partnership transition over the observation period, for example, when moving from singlehood to dating and subsequently from dating to cohabitation. We therefore treat each partnership transition as a distinct life course episode and construct a separate event window for each transition. Observations are indexed by person-transition rather than by person alone, such that changes in fertility intentions are estimated relative to the timing of a specific transition.

To ensure that transitions reflect continuous relationship trajectories, episodes are censored when the partner's identity changes. This approach allows us to examine within-person changes in fertility intentions conditional on reaching a given partnership stage, while accounting for the fact that the same individual may contribute information to multiple transition types. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level to account for non-independence of repeated transitions within respondents.

Event time is defined in months relative to the transition month and grouped into eight five-month intervals: 24-19, 18-13, 12-7, and 6-1 months before and 0-5, 6-11, 12-17, and 18-23 months after the union transition. These intervals enter the model as categorical indicators, with the interval of 6-1 months before the transition serving as the reference category, as it captures the immediate pre-transition baseline. This design does not eliminate selection into partnerships, but it allows us to distinguish between anticipatory changes, immediate adjustments, and longer-term stabilization of fertility intentions around partnership transitions.

We estimate linear probability models with two sets of fixed effects (two-way fixed effects, TWFE). Transition fixed effects absorb all time-invariant characteristics of each person-transition,

including stable features of respondents and of the specific relationship episode. Age and education vary at the individual-time level and enter the model as time-varying covariates. Age fixed effects capture non-linear differences in fertility intentions across the life course, while education adjusts for changes in respondents' educational attainment over time. The model is written as:

$$STFI_{itk} = \alpha_k + \theta_{-24,-19}B_{-24,-19,itk} + \theta_{-18,-13}B_{-18,-13,itk} + \theta_{-12,-7}B_{-12,-7,itk} + \theta_{0,5}A_{0,5,itk}$$
$$+ \theta_{6,11}A_{6,11,itk} + \theta_{12,17}A_{12,17,itk} + \theta_{18,23}A_{18,23,itk} + \mathbf{X_{it}} + \varepsilon_{itk}$$

Where *i* represents individuals, *k* represents the transitions experienced by the same individual, and *t* represents person-time. The indicator *B* assigns each observation before the event and the indicator *A* assigns each observation after the event. The reference category is the interval of 6-1 months before the transition. The coefficient θ therefore represents changes in STFI relative to this pre-transition period baseline.

The term α_k denotes transition fixed effects that absorb all time-invariant characteristics of each person-transition, including stable attributes of respondents and of the specific relationship episode. The vector $\mathbf{X_{it}}$ contains covariates measured at the individual-time level, specifically age and educational attainment. The error term ε_{itk} captures remaining within-transition variation. For all models, we apply panel weights that correct for different inclusion probabilities of the cohorts, i.e., under- or overrepresentation in the gross sample compared to in the population.

RESULTS

Descriptive results

Table 1 presents descriptive characteristics by partnership transition type and for continuously single individuals, based on person-transition-time observations. The share of individuals reporting positive STFI increases across partnership stages, from 6.4% among continuously single individuals to 16.8% at the transition from single to dating, 31.4% at the transition from dating to

cohabitation, and 50.4% at the transition from cohabitation to marriage. The mean age at transition increases systematically across stages, from 26.6 years at the transition from single to dating to 32.0 years at the transition from cohabitation to marriage. The continuously single group is male-dominated (70.2%), whereas the transition groups have roughly balanced gender distributions. Relationship stability also increases across stages: 40.1% of dating transitions result in a relationship that remains intact after five years, compared with 72.5% of cohabiting transitions and 88.3% of marital transitions. Educational attainment varies across transition types, with the share of individuals currently enrolled in education being largest among the continuously single and decreasing across stages, and the share of individuals with tertiary education increasing toward the transition to marriage.

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of person-transition-time observations by partnership transition type

	Continuously single		Single to dating		Dating to co-habiting		Cohabiting to marriage	
	Mean/%	SD	Mean/%	SD	Mean/%	SD	Mean/%	SD
Individuals with fertility intentions at transition (%)	6.4		16.8		31.4		50.4	
Mean age at transition	26.6	8.7	26.6	7.5	28.0	6.7	32.0	5.8
Gender								
Men (%)	70.2		49.4		46.4		47.4	
Women (%)	29.8		50.6		53.6		52.6	
Relationship stability								
Not in same relationship after 5 years (%)			59.9		27.5		11.7	
Still in same relationship after 5 years (%)			40.1		72.5		88.3	
Education								
Currently enrolled	39.8		35.3		20.9		4.7	
No upper secondary	10.5		6.9		6.0		6.1	
Upper secondary	28.7		28.7		34.1		37.4	
Post-secondary non-tertiary	9.9		11.5		11.7		12.9	
Tertiary	11.1		17.6		27.2		38.9	
N (transitions)	370		4607		2575		1602	
N (individuals)	370		3544		2345		1579	

Fixed effects estimates

Main models

Figure 1 displays TWFE (two-way fixed effects) coefficients (left panel) and the predicted probabilities (right panel) of reporting positive STFI around partnership transitions, relative to the six months preceding each transition. Detailed regression coefficients are reported in Table A1 in the online supplementary materials. Overall, fertility intentions change gradually around partnership

transitions, with distinct patterns being observed across transition types. The results indicate both within-person adjustments over time and substantial differences in baseline intention levels across transitions, pointing to selection into different partnership trajectories.

Transition from single to dating. Prior to entering a dating relationship, fertility intentions remain largely stable, even though there is a weak and non-significant decline until the six months before the transition. In the first six months following this transition, positive STFI increase by approximately four percentage points compared to in the six months before dating. This increasing trend continues over time: among individuals who remain in the same dating relationship, STFI are about 6-7 percentage points higher one to two years after entry than in the pre-transition reference period.

Transition from dating to cohabitation. For this transition, positive STFI begin to intensify before cohabitation. Two years prior to entering cohabitation, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI are about seven percentage points lower than in the six months before the transition. At the transition to cohabitation, STFI increase by roughly seven additional percentage points, and among those who remain in the same cohabiting relationship, intentions are approximately 11 percentage points higher two years after the transition.

Transition from cohabitation to marriage. In contrast, the increase in positive STFI associated with marriage primarily occurs before the transition. In the six months preceding marriage, positive STFI are five percentage points higher than in the two years prior to marriage. However, positive STFI remain close to pre-transition levels in the two years after marriage, with none of the post-transition differences reaching statistical significance.

Continuously single individuals. Among individuals who are continuously single, fertility intentions remain consistently low throughout the observation window.

Baseline differences and selection. The right panel highlights substantial differences in baseline levels of fertility intentions across groups. Continuously single individuals report the lowest positive STFI, with their predicted probabilities being lower than 10% throughout the observation window. Individuals transitioning from single to dating or from dating to cohabitation display moderately higher baseline fertility intentions, but their predicted probabilities remain below 20% in the pre-transition period. In contrast, individuals transitioning from cohabitation to marriage exhibit the highest positive STFI long before the transition: two years prior to marriage, their predicted probability of reporting positive STFI is around 50%. The predicted probabilities among individuals transitioning to dating or to cohabitation increase as the transition approaches and unfolds, but remain substantially lower than those observed for the transition to marriage. These baseline differences indicate strong selection into more committed partnership trajectories by individuals with higher pre-existing positive fertility intentions.

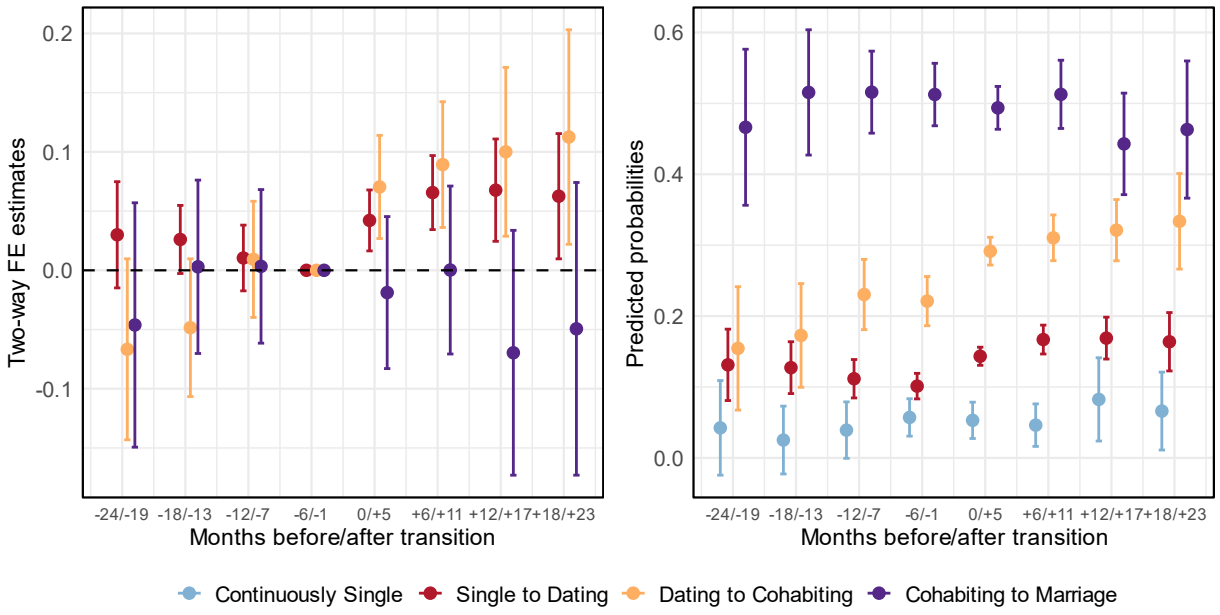

Figure 1: Two-way fixed effects estimates and predicted probabilities of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage

Gender

Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI around partnership transitions, shown separately for men (left panel) and women (right panel). Detailed regression coefficients from the TWFE models are reported in Table A2 in the online supplementary materials.

Gender differences are small for the transition from single to dating, as the baseline levels of fertility intentions prior to this transition are similar for men and women, with predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI of around 10 to 13%. At the time of entry into a dating relationship, STFI increase for both genders. Among men, the predicted probabilities rise from about 10% in the six months before the transition to roughly 13% immediately after the transition, and continue to increase to around 16 to 18% within two years. Among women, STFI increase from just under 10% before the transition to about 16% at the transition, and reach approximately 17 to 18% within two years. Overall, post-transition increases in STFI are slightly larger among women, but gender differences remain modest.

Gender differences are more pronounced for the transition from dating to cohabitation. Among men, fertility intentions rise steadily across the transitions. The predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI increase from around 4-7% two years before the transition to cohabitation to roughly 20% in the six months prior to the transition, and then to about 40-44% in the two years after the transition. Among women, baseline fertility intentions are substantially higher throughout these stages. Two years before the transition to cohabitation, the predicted probabilities already exceed 20 to 25% among women, but are below 10% among men. However, within-person changes among women are comparatively limited, as women's predicted probabilities increase to just under 30% around the transition and remain relatively stable thereafter. This pattern indicates strong gender differences in baseline levels, but larger transition-related increases among men.

For the transition from cohabitation to marriage, the gender pattern reverses. Among men, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI remain around 55 to 58% in the two years prior to marriage and do not increase thereafter, fluctuating between roughly 39% and 55% in the post-transition period. Among women, fertility intentions increase prior to marriage. Two years before the transition to marriage, women's predicted probabilities are around 40%, and rise to approximately 50% in the months immediately preceding the transition. In the two years after the transition, women's predicted probabilities remain similar or are slightly lower, ranging from about 43 to 48%. Despite this increase in positive STFI among women, baseline differences persist, with men reporting higher fertility intentions than women throughout the pre-marital period.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that gender differences in STFI reflect both persistent baseline differences prior to union transitions and gender-specific adjustment processes across partnership stages. Women tend to exhibit higher positive STFI in earlier partnership stages, particularly prior to cohabitation, whereas men show higher baseline intentions prior to marriage, with comparatively limited changes around the transition itself.

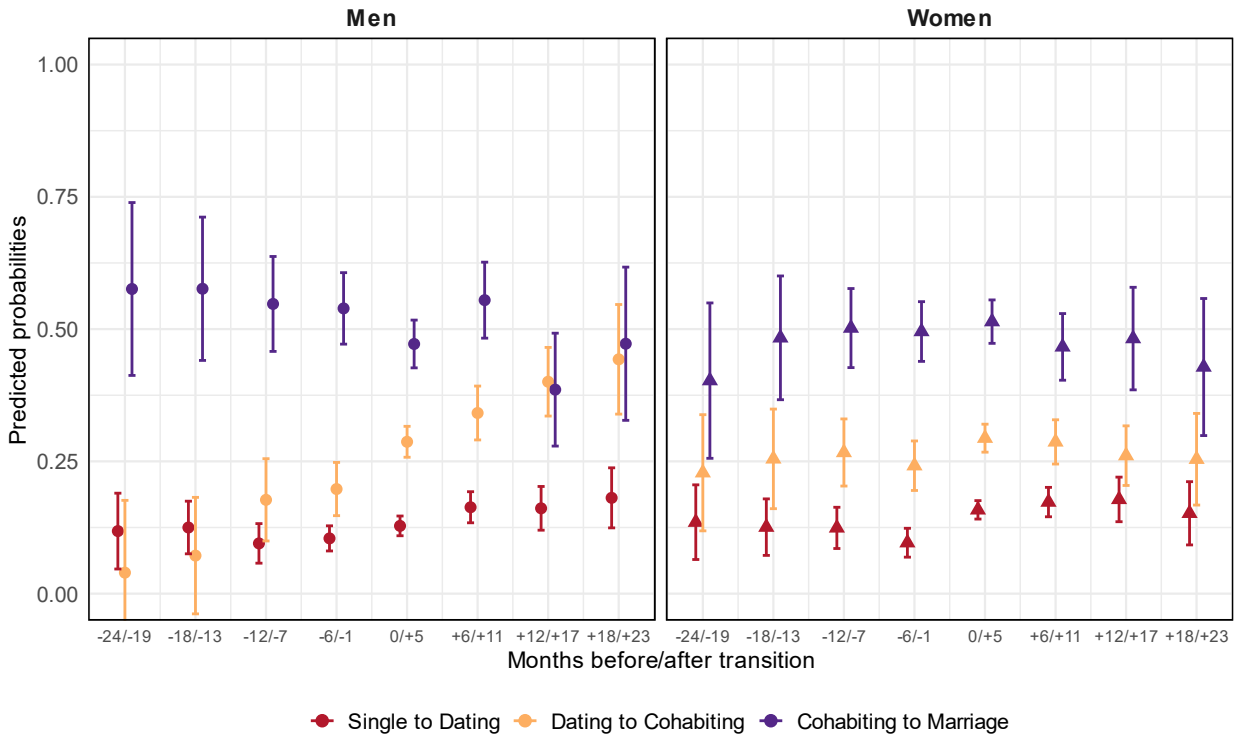

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage, stratified by gender

Age

Figure 3 shows the TWFE-derived predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI, stratified by age at the time of transition: individuals aged 18 to 29 years (left panel) and individuals aged 30 to 39 years (right panel). Detailed regression coefficients from the TWFE models are reported in Table A3 in the online supplementary materials.

Among individuals aged 18 to 29 years at the time of transition, both baseline levels and temporal patterns of fertility intentions closely resemble those observed in the pooled models shown in Figure 1. Entry into a dating relationship is followed by a clear increase in fertility intentions: predicted probabilities rise from around 5 to 8% in the two years before the transition to about 10% at the time of entry, and increase further to roughly 14% within two years. For transitions to cohabitation and marriage, fertility intentions rise prior to the transition. In the case of marriage,

younger individuals exhibit a pronounced anticipatory increase. Two years before the transition to marriage, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI are around 37%, compared with approximately 61% in the months immediately preceding the transition, corresponding to a difference of about 23 percentage points.

By contrast, among individuals aged 30 to 39 years at the time of transition, within-person changes in fertility intentions are generally weaker or absent. An exception is the transition from dating to cohabitation, for which increases in STFI are more pronounced among this age group than among the younger group. While fertility intentions among individuals aged 18 to 29 years are about 11 percentage points higher two years after the transition to cohabitation than in the six months before the transition, the corresponding increase among those aged 30 to 39 years is roughly 24 percentage points.

Despite these differences in within-person changes, the baseline levels of fertility intentions differ strongly by age. Two years before the transition to dating, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI are below 10% among individuals aged 18 to 29 years, compared with well above 30% among those aged 30 to 39 years. Prior to the transition to cohabitation, the baseline probabilities are below 15% in the younger group and exceed 40% in the older group. In the case of marriage, the predicted probabilities two years before the transition are around 45% among individuals aged 18 to 29 years, compared with over 70% among those aged 30 to 39 years.

These findings indicate that age differences in STFI primarily reflect differences in baseline levels rather than differences in responsiveness to partnership transitions. Younger individuals show clearer anticipatory and post-transition adjustments, whereas older individuals enter partnerships with already elevated fertility intentions, leaving less room for further increases around the transition itself.

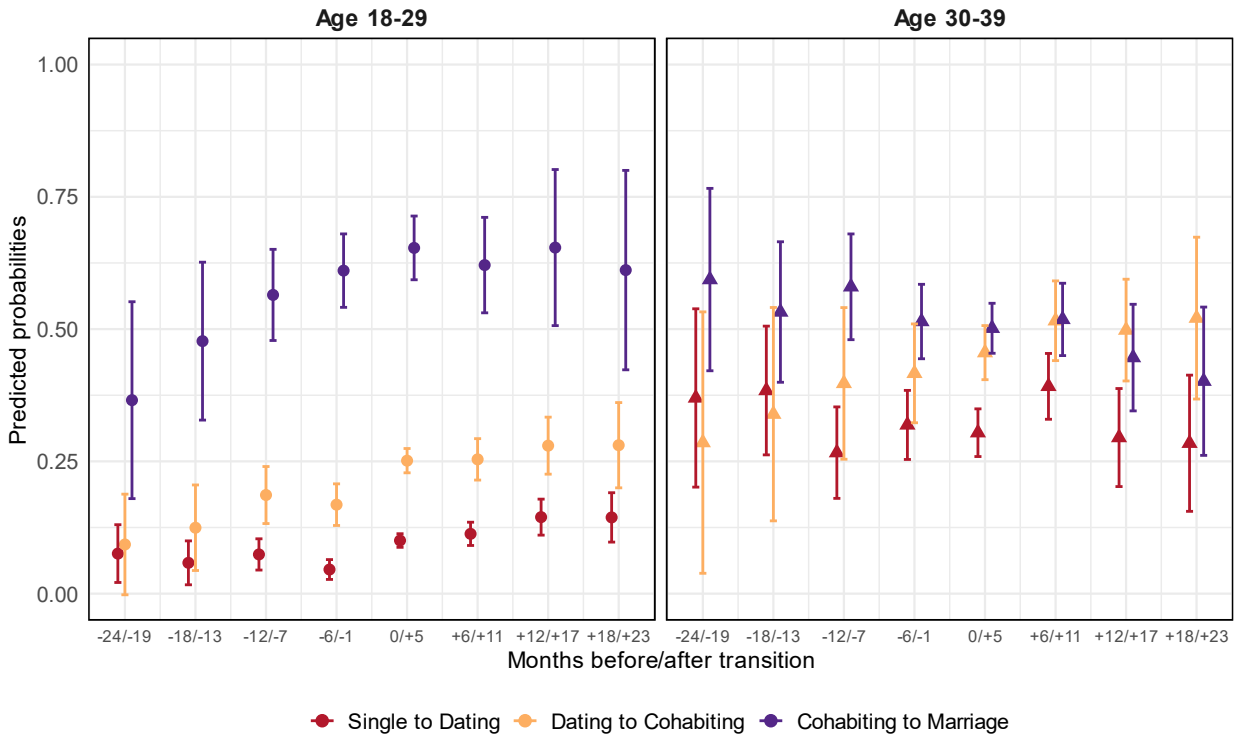

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage, stratified by age

Stability

Figure 4 presents the TWFE-derived predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI, stratified by subsequent relationship stability. The left panel shows individuals whose relationship lasts at least five years after the transition, while the right panel shows individuals whose relationship ends within five years. Detailed regression results are reported in Table A4 in the online supplementary materials.

For the transition to dating, fertility intentions evolve differently depending on the subsequent relationship stability. Among individuals whose dating relationship ends within five years, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI show no clear change in the two years before and after the transition. By contrast, among individuals whose dating relationship lasts at least five years, fertility intentions increase following entry into the relationship. For the transition from

dating to cohabitation, no substantial within-person changes in fertility intentions are observed, regardless of subsequent relationship stability. The predicted probabilities remain relatively flat before and after the transition both among individuals whose cohabiting relationship later dissolves and among those whose relationship remains stable.

For the transition from cohabitation to marriage, the patterns among individuals in a stable marriage closely resemble those observed in the pooled model shown in Figure 1. Fertility intentions increase prior to marriage: two years before the transition to marriage, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI are around 20 percentage points lower than in the six months immediately preceding the transition. Estimates for individuals whose marriage ends within five years are highly imprecise due to the small number of separations, and should therefore not be interpreted substantively. The very low number of divorced individuals also explains the wide confidence intervals for this group shown in Figure 4.

Baseline levels of fertility intentions differ by subsequent relationship stability. Two years before entering a dating relationship, the predicted probabilities of reporting positive STFI are similar for both groups, at around 15 to 20%. In contrast, prior to the transition to cohabitation, baseline fertility intentions are substantially higher among individuals who enter a stable cohabiting relationship, with predicted probabilities of about 30%, compared with roughly 18 to 22% among those whose relationship later dissolves. For the transition to marriage, the baseline probabilities two years before the transition are also higher among those who remain married, exceeding 55%, compared with around 20% among those whose marriage later ends, although these estimates are subject to considerable uncertainty.

These patterns indicate that relationship stability is associated primarily with differences in baseline fertility intentions, rather than with consistent differences in short-term adjustments around

partnership transitions. Stable relationships are more common among individuals with higher pre-existing fertility intentions, while evidence that post-transition changes in fertility intentions differ by relationship stability is limited and transition-specific.

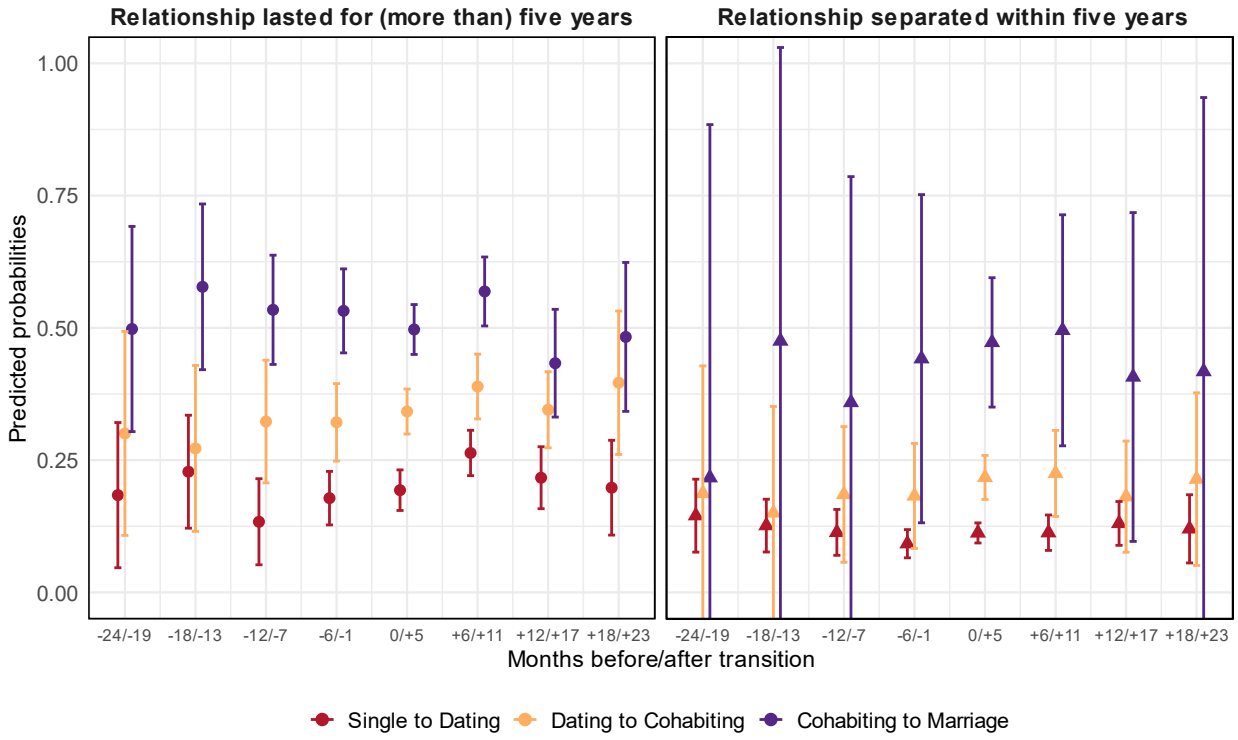

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage, stratified by relationship stability

Sensitivity analyses

We have conducted a series of sensitivity analyses. Detailed results are reported in the online supplementary materials. These analyses address three potential concerns: (1) selection related to duration in the pre-transition state, (2) the role of realized fertility, and (3) the measurement of fertility intentions. Across all specifications, the substantive patterns closely mirror the main analyses, suggesting that our results are not driven by these factors.

Duration in pre-transition state

To assess whether the observed pre-transition patterns might reflect other, unobserved transitions rather than anticipatory changes in STFI, we stratify the sample by duration in the pre-transition state. Specifically, we distinguish between individuals who have been in the pre-transition state (e.g., single when dating) for more and for less than five years. Results are shown in Figure A1 in the online supplementary materials. Across all transitions, the pre- and post-transition trajectories of STFI are highly similar between the two duration groups. While minor differences in baseline levels and patterns are observable, the confidence intervals largely overlap, and no systematic differences in trends emerge. These findings suggest that the anticipatory patterns observed in the main analyses are not driven by differential duration in the pre-transition state.

Role of realized fertility

In the main analysis, we do not condition on realized fertility. This choice reflects the concern that realized fertility may act as a collider (Rohrer 2018). Conditioning on realized fertility – either by controlling for births or by censoring observations after childbirth – could therefore introduce bias. Nevertheless, to assess whether alternative treatments of realized fertility affect our results, we have conducted several additional analyses. First, we estimate models in which we censor observations after the birth of the first child (online supplementary materials Figure A2). Second, we restrict the sample to individuals who are childless prior to the transition (online supplementary materials Figure A3), and separately, to those who already have at least one child before the transition (online supplementary materials Figure A4). Finally, we estimate models in which fertility intentions are coded as one once a child is born (online supplementary materials Figure A5). Across all transitions and sensitivity analyses, the estimated trajectories of STFI are very similar

to those in the main analyses (Figure 1). These results indicate that our findings are robust to alternative treatments of realized fertility, and are unlikely to be driven by collider-related bias.

Measurement of fertility intentions

In the main analyses, STFI are coded as a binary indicator, combining respondents who report definite or probable intentions and treating explicit non-intentions and uncertainty ("I haven't thought about that") as indicating no current positive short-term intention. This choice allows us to retain respondents who have not yet actively formed intentions. To assess whether this simplification affects the results, we estimate additional models that treat fertility intentions as a continuous outcome ranging from one to four, while excluding the "I haven't thought about that" category. The resulting STFI trajectories (online supplementary materials Figure A6) closely replicate those of the main model (Figure 1). We therefore conclude that our results are also robust to alternative operationalizations of fertility intentions.

DISCUSSION

Guided by the life course perspective and research on partnership dynamics and reproductive planning, this study examines how short-term fertility intentions (STFI) evolve before and after transitions between partnership stages using a time-to-event fixed effects design. By aligning observations relative to the timing of partnership transitions, we distinguish anticipatory changes from post-transition adjustments, and center the role of selection into partnerships by separating within-person dynamics from baseline differences across partnership trajectories. A central contribution of this study is the explicit inclusion of dating relationships as an early stage of partnership formation, which allows us to observe how fertility intentions evolve at the beginning of relationship trajectories.

Across all analyses, fertility intentions evolve differently across partnership stages, reflecting both anticipatory processes and adjustments following relationship transitions. The findings suggest that partnership stages differ not only in their institutionalization, but also in how fertility planning unfolds across the relationship trajectory.

The most distinctive post-transition pattern is observed for entry into dating. Unlike the transition to cohabitation or marriage, this transition is not preceded by rising STFI. Instead, STFI increase only after the transition has occurred. This pattern suggests that dating does not primarily reflect prior fertility planning, but may activate fertility-related considerations by introducing a relational context as a proximate determinant in which parenthood becomes salient. In this sense, dating appears to function as an activation stage in which STFI respond to new relational circumstances. The role of dating becomes clearer when considering subsequent relationship stability. Among individuals whose dating relationship dissolves within five years, STFI remain largely unchanged before and after the transition. In contrast, among those whose dating relationship persists, STFI increase following the transition and remain elevated. This pattern indicates that while dating may trigger initial adjustments, these adjustments remain tentative and consolidate only when the relationship becomes durable. Dating thus functions as an early stage in which fertility-related considerations emerge, whereas later partnership stages provide the institutional and normative context in which these intentions stabilize. This interpretation aligns with qualitative and longitudinal research describing dating as an exploratory or "testing" phase in which future plans are negotiated rather than firmly established (Sassler 2010), and extends this literature by demonstrating how such negotiations are reflected in dynamic changes in STFI.

In contrast, transitions to cohabitation and marriage are characterized primarily by anticipatory increases in STFI. For these stages, positive intentions rise well before the transition, indicating

that fertility planning often precedes entry into a more institutionalized union. Cohabitation marks a stage at which STFI are already elevated and are subsequently maintained rather than newly activated. Marriage shows an even stronger anticipatory pattern, with STFI reaching very high levels prior to the transition and changing little afterward. While ceiling effects may partly account for the absence of post-marital increases, the results suggest that marriage primarily formalizes existing reproductive plans. These patterns are consistent with research showing that fertility expectations often stabilize prior to marriage, and that union formation and fertility planning are closely intertwined well before a formal commitment is made (Gray et al. 2013; Hayford 2009). However, the present study advances this literature by demonstrating stage-specific differences in the timing of STFI changes, and by documenting that anticipatory processes dominate for cohabitation and marriage, whereas post-transition activation characterizes dating.

These findings provide only partial support for Hypothesis 1. STFI increase following entry into dating, consistent with the hypothesis. However, for cohabitation and marriage, increases in STFI primarily occur before the transition rather than after it, and the largest post-transition increases are not observed for marriage. Instead, marriage is characterized by high pre-transition STFI and limited subsequent changes. The relationship progression gradient operates more strongly through selection and anticipatory dynamics than through immediate post-transition adjustments.

Stratified analyses by age and gender further underscore the importance of life course timing. Age-stratified results show that STFI are more responsive to partnership transitions at younger ages, whereas baseline STFI are already high and more stable among individuals in their thirties. This pattern supports Hypothesis 2 and indicates that later transitions primarily confirm rather than reshape fertility plans (Dommermuth et al. 2025; Sturm et al. 2023).

Gender differences vary by stage. For the transition to dating, women and men display broadly similar increases in STFI at the transition. For transitions to cohabitation and marriage, gender differences are more pronounced, particularly at older ages. Women's STFI appear to be more responsive to these transitions, consistent with the gendered timing and opportunity structures surrounding parenthood (Mussino and Uggla 2025; Ott 1992). These patterns provide partial support for Hypothesis 3, and suggest that gender differences in fertility intentions become more pronounced in later, more institutionalized partnership stages.

Relationship stability further differentiates selection from adjustment processes. In line with Hypothesis 4, we find that individuals entering a stable partnership, especially cohabitation or marriage, exhibit substantially higher pre-transition STFI than those entering an unstable union or remaining single. This supports a strong selection interpretation. Evidence for Hypothesis 5 is more limited. Differences in post-transition changes by relationship stability are clearest for dating, whereas for cohabitation and marriage, these differences are primarily reflected in the baseline levels, rather than in consistent divergence in post-transition trajectories. These findings therefore indicate that relationship stability primarily shapes who progresses to more committed stages with elevated STFI, rather than uniformly amplifying post-transition changes in intentions.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, although the event-study design captures within-person change, observational data cannot fully disentangle causal effects from anticipatory adjustments or unmeasured time-varying factors. While the parallel pre-transition trends observed for the transition from single to dating reduce this concern for that transition, they represent a stronger caveat for transitions to cohabitation and marriage. Second, the analyses do not incorporate partner-specific information or joint decision-making processes, which are central to understanding how couples coordinate their reproductive plans. Third, although relationship stability is

considered, we do not explicitly model transitions out of dating, cohabitation, or marriage. While these transitions are likely to shape STFI in distinct ways, modeling them would require additional, highly stratified event studies that are beyond the scope of this paper.

Further research is also needed to fully understand how individuals anticipate, negotiate, and adjust their fertility intentions within different partnership contexts. Incorporating partner-specific characteristics, such as joint planning, perceived compatibility, and expectations about relationship stability, would help us identify the mechanisms underlying anticipatory and post-transition changes. Cross-national analyses are also essential. In more egalitarian contexts with stronger institutional support for childbearing outside marriage, marriage may function less as a selective consolidation of already high STFI and more as one of several contexts for parenthood. Comparative research could therefore assess whether the strong anticipatory pattern observed for marriage in Germany can be generalized to contexts where cohabitation and marriage are more institutionally equivalent. Finally, linking stage-specific STFI changes to subsequent fertility outcomes would clarify how anticipatory and activation dynamics translate into realized childbearing.

Nonetheless, by documenting within-person changes in STFI before and after transitions to dating, cohabitation, and marriage, as well as considering long-term singlehood, this study demonstrates that partnership transitions operate as meaningful junctures in the formation and revision of fertility intentions. More broadly, the findings illustrate how examining partnership transitions in fine-grained temporal detail helps illuminate how fertility planning unfolds within evolving relationship trajectories.

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From Dating to Marriage: Changes in Short-Term Fertility Intentions Across Partnership Transitions

Online supplementary materials

Contents

MAIN ANALYSES

Table A1 shows the coefficients derived from two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models that are presented in Figure 1 in the main manuscript both as coefficients as well as predicted values of fertility intentions.

Table A 1: Main results

	(1) Always single	(2) Single to dating	(3) Dating to Cohabitation	(4) Cohabitation to Marriage
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Months before/after transition				
-24/-19	-0.01	0.03	-0.07^{+}	-0.05
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.05)
-18/-13	-0.03	0.03^{+}	-0.05	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.04)
-12/-7	-0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)
-6/-1	REF	REF	REF	REF
0/+5	-0.00	0.04**	-0.07^{+}	-0.02
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.03)
+6/+11	-0.01	0.07***	-0.05	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.04)
+12/+17	0.03	0.07**	0.01	-0.07
	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.05)
+18/+23	0.01	0.06*	-0.07^{+}	-0.05
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Education (Ref.: currently enrolled)				
Low	-0.04	0.05	-0.01	0.02
	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.18)
Upper secondary	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.12)
Post-sec non-tertiary	-0.12	0.01	-0.02	-0.03
	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.15)
Tertiary	0.07	0.03	-0.03	0.22**
	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.08)
Age fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (individuals)	370	4607	2575	1602
N (person-transitions)		3544	2345	1579

N (person-periods)	1181	12711	7235	4960

HETEROGENEITY ANALYSES

By gender

Table A2 shows the coefficients derived from TWFE models stratified by gender that are presented in Figure 2 in the main manuscript both as coefficients as well as predicted values of fertility intentions.

Table A 2: By gender

	(1) Single to dating (men) b/se	(2) Single to dating (women) b/se	(3) Dating to cohabitation (men) b/se	(4) Dating to cohabitation (women) b/se	(5) Cohabitation to Marriage (men) b/se	(6) Cohabitation to marriage (women) b/se
Months before/after transition						
-24/-19	0.01	0.04	-0.16*	-0.01	0.04	-0.09
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.07)
-18/-13	0.02	0.03	-0.13**	0.01	0.04	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)
-12/-7	-0.01	0.03	-0.02	0.03	0.01	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)
-6/-1	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
0/+5	0.02	0.06***	0.09**	0.05+	-0.07	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)
+6/+11	0.06**	0.08***	0.14***	0.04	0.02	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
+12/+17	0.06+	0.08*	0.20***	0.02	-0.15+	-0.01
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.07)
+18/+23	0.08*	0.06	0.25***	0.01	-0.07	-0.07
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.08)
Education (Ref.: currently enrolled)						
Low	0.04	0.06	-0.11+	0.04	-0.07	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.46)	(0.21)
Upper secondary	0.02	0.01	0.05	-0.00	0.27*	-0.16
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.13)	(0.17)
Post-sec non-	0.00	0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.07	-0.05

tertiary						
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.19)	(0.18)
Tertiary	0.01	0.04	-0.02	-0.04	0.23	0.18+
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.15)	(0.10)
Age fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (individuals)	1786	1758	1086	1259	729	850
N (person-transitions)	2321	2286	1180	1395	739	863
N (person-periods)	6446	6265	3300	3935	2305	2653

By age

Table A3 shows the coefficients derived from TWFE models stratified by age that are presented in Figure 3 in the main manuscript both as coefficients as well as predicted values of fertility intentions.

Table A 3: By age

	(1) Single to dating (18-29) b/se	(2) Single to dating (30-39) b/se	(3) Dating to cohabitation (18-29) b/se	(4) Dating to cohabitation (30-39) b/se	(5) Cohabitation to Marriage (18-29) b/se	(6) Cohabitation to marriage (30-39) b/se
Months before/after transition						
-24/-19	0.03	0.05	-0.08+	-0.13	-0.24**	0.08
	(0.02)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.08)
-18/-13	0.01	0.07	-0.04	-0.08	-0.13*	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.05)
-12/-7	0.03*	-0.05	0.02	-0.02	-0.05	0.07
	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.05)
-6/-1	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
0/+5	0.05***	-0.01	0.08**	0.04	0.04	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)
+6/+11	0.07***	0.07	0.09**	0.10	0.01	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.05)
+12/+17	0.10***	-0.02	0.11*	0.08	0.04	-0.07
	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)

+18/+23	0.10**	-0.03	0.11*	0.10	0.00	-0.11
	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.09)
Education (Ref.: currently enrolled)						
Low	0.05+	-0.10*	-0.01	0.07	0.01	0.00
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.17)	(.)
Upper secondary	0.02	0.05	0.02	-0.00	0.04	0.10
	(0.01)	(0.12)	(0.03)	(0.29)	(0.14)	(0.19)
Post-sec non-tertiary	-0.00	0.24	-0.03	0.03	-0.16	0.26
	(0.03)	(0.26)	(0.04)	(0.37)	(0.17)	(0.28)
Tertiary	0.01	0.12	-0.05+	0.21	0.21*	0.34+
	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.03)	(0.28)	(0.09)	(0.19)
Age fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (individuals)	2604	840	1601	609	725	745
N (person-transitions)	3267	951	1732	629	727	748
N (person-periods)	8715	2504	4766	1642	1952	2163

By stability

Table A4 shows the coefficients derived from TWFE models stratified by gender that are presented in Figure 4 in the main manuscript both as coefficients as well as predicted values of fertility intentions.

Table A 4: By stability

	(1) Single to dating (unstable) b/se	(2) Single to dating (stable) b/se	(3) Dating to cohabitation (unstable) b/se	(4) Dating to cohabitation (stable) b/se	(5) Cohabitation to Marriage (unstable) b/se	(6) Cohabitation to marriage (stable) b/se
Months before/after transition						
-24/-19	0.05	0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.22	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.27)	(0.09)

-18/-13	0.03	0.05	-0.03	-0.05	0.03	0.05
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.16)	(0.06)
-12/-7	0.02	-0.04	0.00	0.00	-0.08	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.20)	(0.05)
-6/-1	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
0/+5	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03	-0.04
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.19)	(0.05)
+6/+11	0.02	0.09*	0.04	0.07	0.05	0.04
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.21)	(0.06)
+12/+17	0.04	0.04	-0.00	0.02	-0.03	-0.10
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.31)	(0.08)
+18/+23	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.07	-0.02	-0.05
	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.39)	(0.10)
Education (Ref.: currently enrolled)						
Low	-0.04	0.01	-0.23	0.16+	0.00	-0.24+
	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.17)	(0.10)	(.)	(0.14)
Upper secondary	0.01	0.00	-0.01	-0.00	0.13	0.18
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.21)	(0.18)
Post-sec non-tertiary	0.03	0.05	-0.20+	-0.01	-0.19	-0.12
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.06)	(0.56)	(0.22)
Tertiary	0.11+	-0.01	0.05	-0.04	0.94***	0.15
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.23)	(0.14)
Age fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Individual fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (individuals)	1037	933	364	769	83	674
N (person-transitions)	1257	935	379	769	84	675
N (person-periods)	3410	2736	1034	2315	255	2163

SENSITIVITY ANALYSES

Duration in pre-transition state

Figure A1 presents STFI trajectories around each family transition, estimated separately for individuals who have been in the pre-transition state for more and for fewer than five years. This figure is referenced in the sensitivity analyses section of the main manuscript.

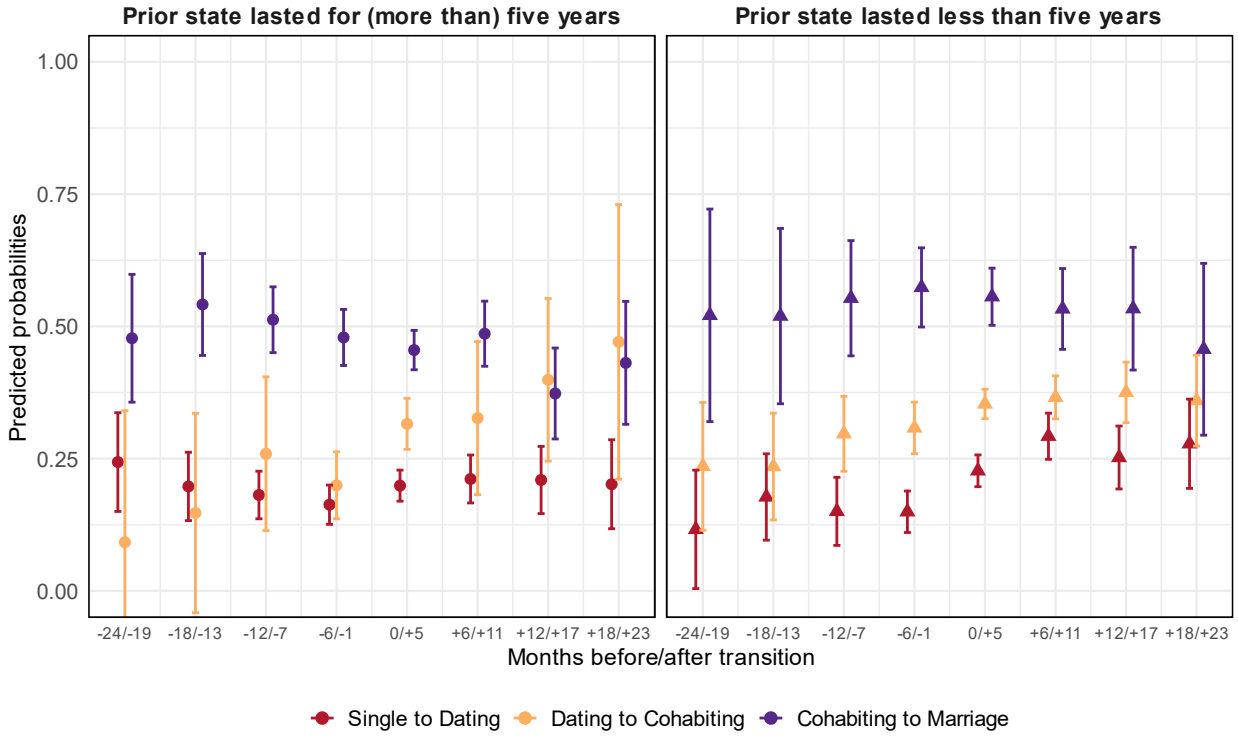

Figure A 1: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage, stratified by duration of the relationship state before the transition

Role of realized fertility

Censored after childbirth

Figure A2 presents STFI trajectories around each family transition, estimated on a sample censored at the birth of the first child. This figure is referenced in the sensitivity analyses section of the main manuscript.

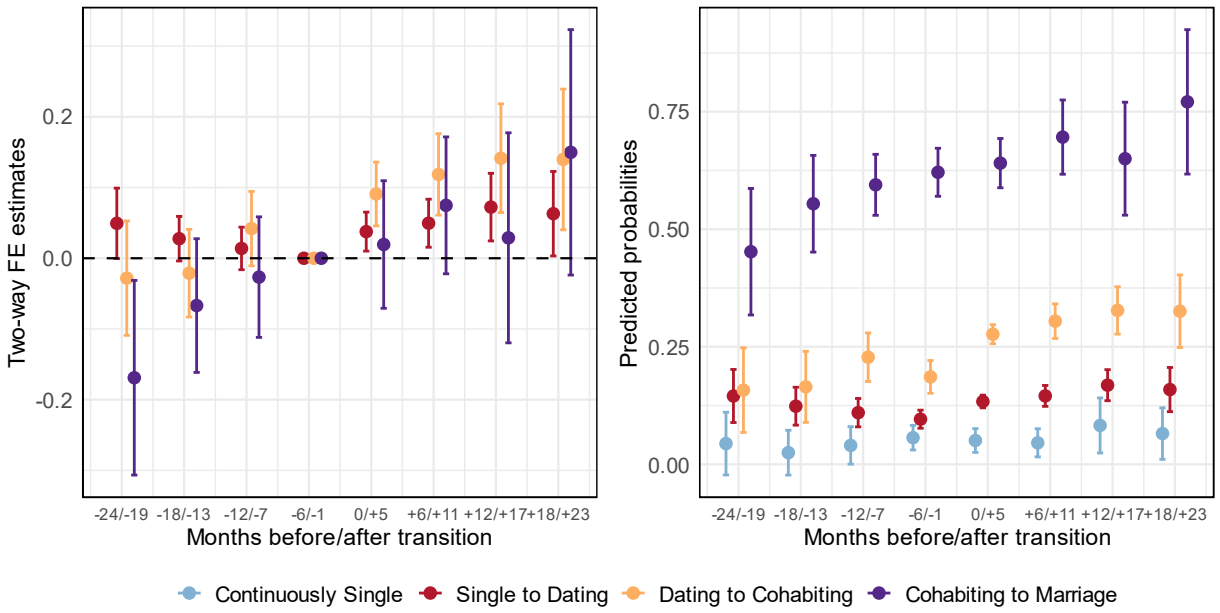

Figure A 2: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Based on sample of individuals who are censored after childbirth.

No child before transition

Figure A3 presents STFI trajectories around each family transition, estimated for the subsample of individuals who are childless prior to the transition. This figure is referenced in the sensitivity analyses section of the main manuscript.

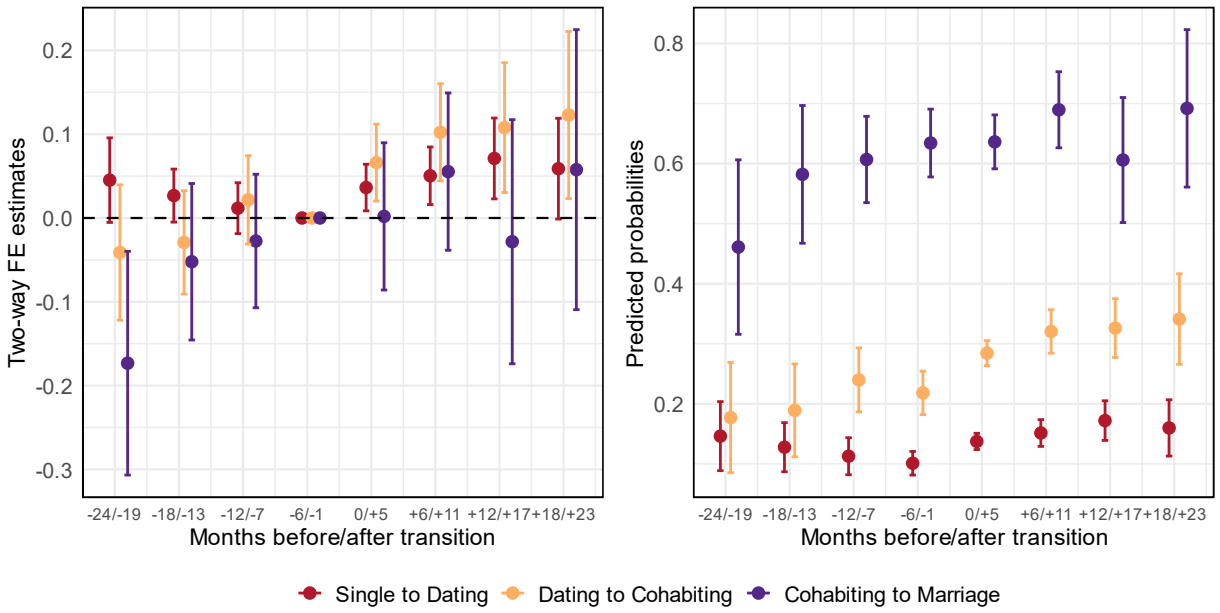

Figure A 3: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Based on sample of individuals who were childless at the time of the transition.

Child before transition

Figure A4 presents STFI trajectories around each family transition, estimated for the subsample of individuals who already have at least one child before the transition. This figure is referenced in the sensitivity analyses section of the main manuscript.

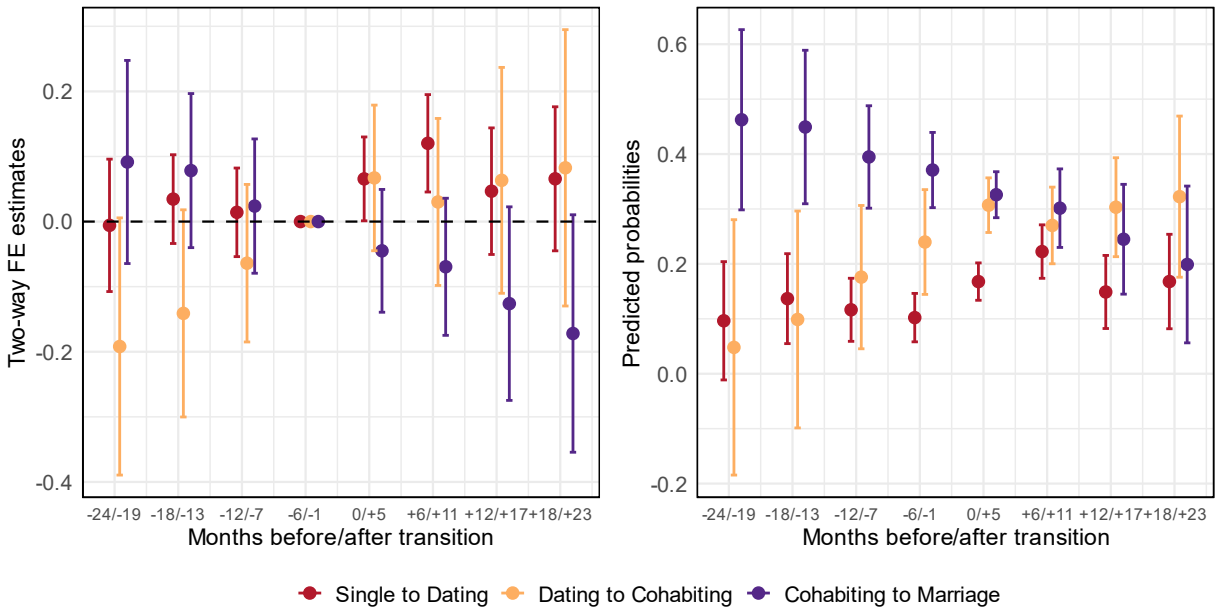

Figure A 4: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Based on sample of individuals who already had a child at the time of the transition.

Fertility intentions coded to "1" if child is born

Figure A5 presents STFI trajectories around each family transition, estimated with fertility intentions coded as one once a child is born. This figure is referenced in the sensitivity analyses section of the main manuscript.

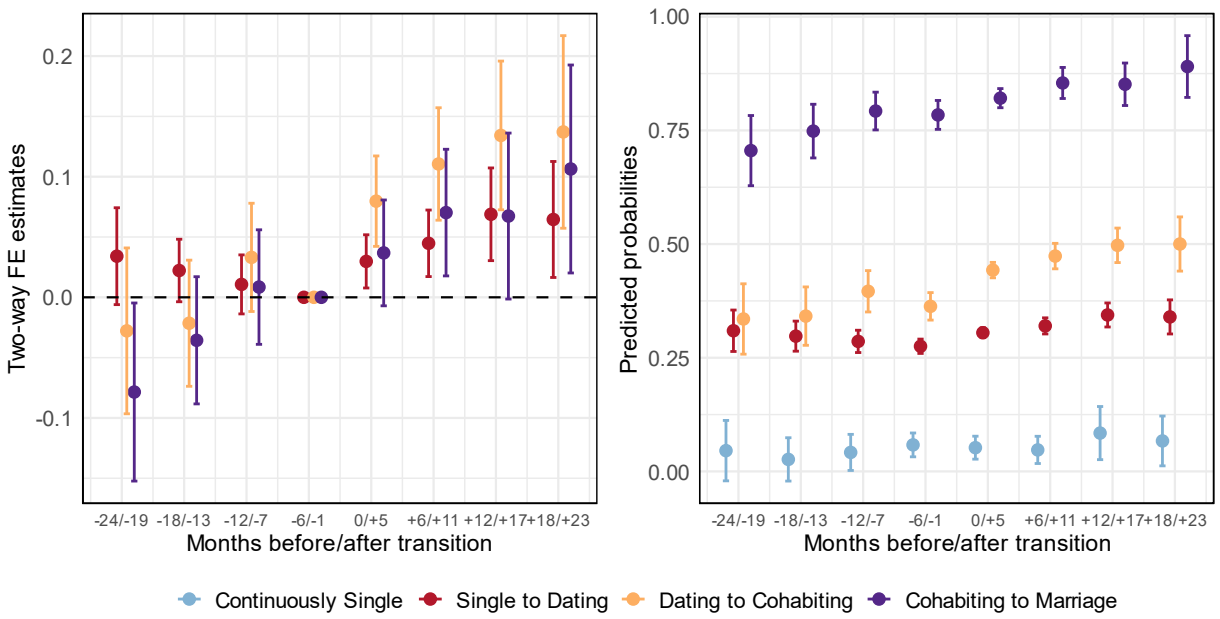

Figure A 5: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Fertility intentions are coded as "1" as soon as a child was born.

Continuous fertility intentions indicator

Figure A6 presents STFI trajectories around each family transition, estimated using a continuous four-point intention scale and excluding respondents who report not having thought about having children. This figure is referenced in the sensitivity analyses section of the main manuscript.

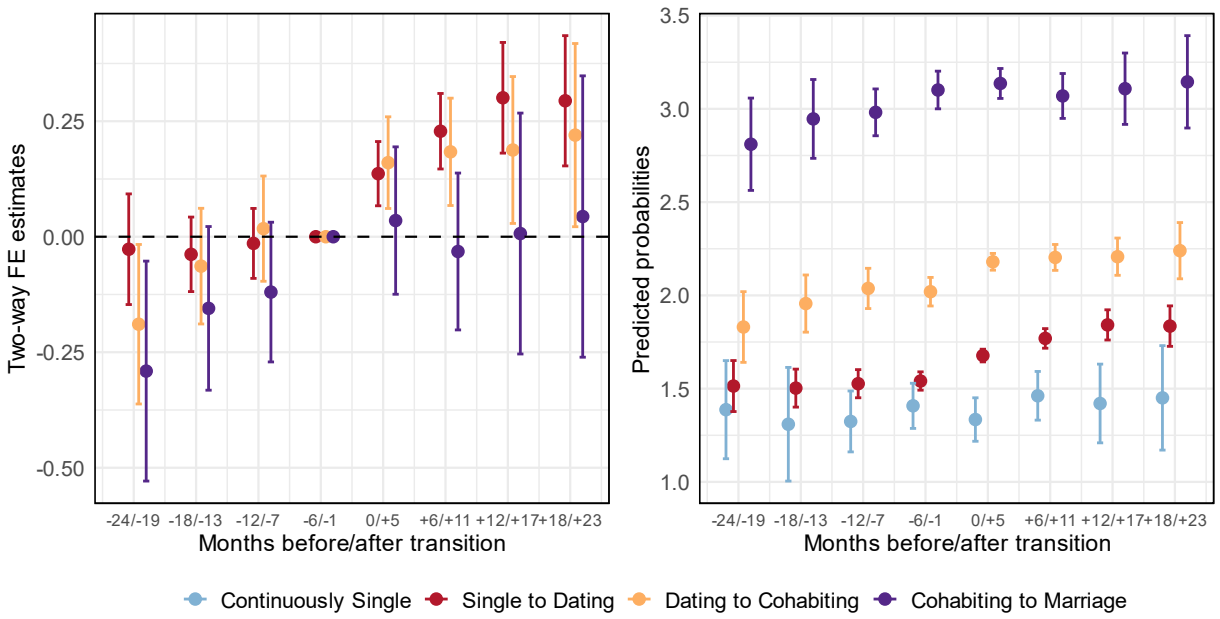

Figure A 6: Predicted probabilities derived from two-way fixed effects models of reporting positive fertility intentions before and after entering dating, cohabitation, and marriage. Based on a continuous fertility intentions indicator instead of a dummy variable.