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Abstract

The impact of parenthood on poverty within couples: Individual and household poverty risks by gender and education in four European countries

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This study examines how having children affects household and individual poverty risks in different-sex couples across European countries, accounting for partners' economic interdependence from a linked lives perspective. Drawing on pooled cross-sectional EU-SILC data (2016–2019) on 38,453 couple households from Austria, France, Spain and Sweden, linear probability models are used to estimate the impact of having children on household and individual poverty risk among partners by education, gender and country. The findings indicate that poverty mechanisms within couples vary by gender and country. Partners bear their household poverty risk collectively, with a greater risk observed among low-educated parents. Men have a low individual poverty risk regardless of their education and fatherhood status; their household and individual poverty risks hardly differ. Conversely, women, particularly low-educated mothers, have a higher individual poverty risk than their male counterparts. Their individual poverty risk is higher than their household poverty risk, indicating a reliance on partner income to avoid poverty. The observed variations across countries highlight that the relationship between parenthood and poverty is highly context-specific. Although high education is often promoted as a shield against poverty, in some countries, like Austria, highly-educated mothers also face a high individual poverty risk.