Report on **Master Thesis**

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Student:	**Veronika Plachá**
Advisor:	**Barbara Pertold-Gebicka**
Title of the thesis:	**Does childbirth change the gender gap in well-being within family?**

***OVERALL ASSESSMENT** (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):*

Please provide a short summary of the thesis, your assessment of each of the four key categories, and an overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion. The minimum length of the report is 300 words.

Short summary

The thesis of Veronika Plachá asks whether childbirth affects the well-being gap between parents.Veronika turns to European Union's SILC data from two cross-sectional waves (2013 and 2018) to answer this question. She first simply models the relationship between first child's age and parental well-being separately for mothers and fathers, while controling for a rich set of relevant variables. Next, she matches parents together and models the relationship between first child's age and the well-being gap between parents. She finds that fathers of babies and toddlers report higher levels of well-being than parents of older children (and than childless individuals). She also finds that the well-being gap between parents opens up during early years of their first child, while closing later on. The results, however, differ somehow between the two waves of the survey and also depend on the choice of the control group.

Contribution

While there is a rich literature on the relationship between fertility and well-being (see my recent contribution here), there has been no study that would explicityly compare the reaction of mothers and fathers to the birth of their common child. This is the gap that Veronika is addressing with her thesis. The within-parent analysis is inspired by a study by Angelov et al. „Parenthood and the gender gap in pay" published in the Journal of Labor Economics in 2016.

Methods

The methods used in this thesis are adequate given the research question and the available data. Angelov et al. (2016) use panel data to model the relationship between first child's age and the pay gap between parents. Veronika does not have access to relevant panel data that would include well-being measures, so she makes the best of cross-sectional data. This means that instead of following each couple since childbirth till, say, the year when their child reaches 15, she compares observationally similar parents whose first child is a newborn, is one-year-old, two-years-old and so on till 15 within the same calendar year.

To conduct this analysing using SILC data significant amount of data manipulation was necessary. It is not highlighted in the thesis, but Verionika had to 'decode' data organization and use the family referencing codes to match chiuldren with their parents and to match mothers and fathers between themselves. This exercise was pretty time-consuming, but made Veronika understand the data very well.

Another challenge faced by Veronika was the choice of the comparison group. To model the effect of children on parental subjective well-being one has to set the baseline. With panel data the choice of baseline is quite obvious: this is the time preceeding childbirth (and pregnancy). With cross-sectional data one has to use a group of people that is supposed to serve as the counterfactual, i.e. that would immitate the well-being of parents before they had a child. Veronika came up with two candidates for such a control group: childless individuals or parents of older children – and both are used in the thesis. What is missing is a discussion about the limitations of each of these control groups and more in-depth comparison of results based on these two comparison groups.

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Literature

The literature review presented in this thesis is well organized. It presents studies on all related topics – ranging from the general well-being literature, through the effect of children on parental well-being to the effect of children on other parental outcomes. All mentioned studies are described in detail. However, the literature review still misses some relevant papers, even though most of them are mentioned in other chapters of the thesis (e.g. Clark & Georgellis (2013)), and it does not connect clearly to the empirical work presented in the thesis. It is not clearly stated how the mentioned papers relate to the thesis, how they have inspired the author or how the presented results relate to the earlier literature. Fortunately, such discussion is included in results' presentation.

Manuscript form

The manuscript is logically organized and reads well, although there are some typos here and there. The introduction is informative, graphs and tables are nicely formatted. Maybe there could be longer descriptive notes under tables and graphs that would make then self-explanatory?

Overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

The master thesis by Veronika Plachá is a nice piece of work that asks a relevant question and logically comes to answering it. Work with SILC data was very challenging (among others Veronika had to learn Stata) and has left Veronika with limited amout of time for the main analysis. Nevertheless, she managed to complete the empirical analysis on time and meaningfully interpret the results. The thesis as a whole makes a very good impression, especially given the complicated data handling and though process that has lead to formulation of final regression models. This latter thing is not highlighted in the thesis, but should be, because we have spent long hours discussing the setup and it was not only me suggesting Veronika what to do. Rather, it was a mutual diuscussion.

Probably because of shortage of time at the end of the writing process, there are some issues with interpretation fo results. In section 5.1 one ofter reads „when compared to parents with 15-year-old" or „when compared to childless adults" in the context of inerpreting baseline regression coefficients (the ones for variables included in X or Z vectors). However, these coefficients refer to the full estimation sample, that is to all parents or to all adults, ans simply compare – for example - married with single. On the other hand, interpreting the foefficient for variable child0 is correct: „mothers who have just started a family tend to be happier than those with 15-year-old children."

All in all I believe that the presented thesis fulfills the requirements for a master thesis at IES, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, I recommend it for the defense and given some gaps in the thesis I suggest a grade B.
The results of the Urkund analysis do not indicate significant text similarity with other available sources.

Question for defense:

What conclusions can be drawn from the comparison of results presented in Fugures 5.1 and 5.3 or comparison of figures 5.2 and 5.4? In other words, when comparing results for models with different comparison groups.

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SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
Contribution *(max. 30 points)*	29
Methods *(max. 30 points)*	26
Literature *(max. 20 points)*	18
Manuscript Form *(max. 20 points)*	16
TOTAL POINTS *(max. 100 points)*	**89**
GRADE **(A – B – C – D – E – F)**	**B**

NAME OF THE REFEREE: Barbara Pertold-Gebicka

DATE OF EVALUATION: 5.9.2022

*digitally signed on 5.9.2022
by Barbara Pertold-Gebicka*

_____ _____
Referee Signature

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Overall grading:

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	**A**
81 - 90	**B**
71 - 80	**C**
61 – 70	**D**
51 – 60	**E**
0 – 50	**F**