Unemployment and the well-being of couples
The mediating role of relationship quality and the financial situation
Jonas Voßemer & Anna Baranowska-Rataj (Umeå University)

Motivation
• The negative effects of unemployment on the well-being of individuals may extend to partners.
• We test the two most discussed mechanisms for spillover effects: relationship quality and financial situation.
• We examine transitions into unemployment, as entering and leaving unemployment are different experiences.

Research questions
• How large are the spillover effects of unemployment on the well-being of partners?
• Are spillover effects explained by changes in the relationship quality or the financial situation?
• How do these effects differ for women and men?

Theoretical expectations
• Psychological family stress models: “family crisis”
• Economic health capital models: “compensation”

Data and measures
• Data: German Family Panel (pairfam), 10 waves
• Employment spells: E-U (treatment), E-E (control)
• IV: Partner unemployed (1) vs. employed (0) (PEU)
• DV: Anchor’s life satisfaction (0-10) (ALS)
• Mediators: relationship satisfaction (0-10), relationship quality, conflict styles and behavior; financial satisfaction (0-10), household income (M)

Methods
• Linear fixed-effects regression models (clustered SE)
• Mediation analyses (normal theory SE)

Unemployment Actor

Relationship quality

Well-being Partner

Financial situation

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Results
Total and indirect effects of partner’s transition into unemployment on anchor's life satisfaction (95% confidence intervals).

• The effects are more negative for women than men.
• For women, relationship but especially financial satisfaction partially explain the spillover effects.
• Men’s relationship and financial satisfaction are unaffected by their partners becoming unemployed.
• Other measurements of relationship quality confirm the findings for relationship satisfaction.
• Household income does not explain the spillover effects, as it only has small effects on life satisfaction.

Conclusions
• The negative effects of unemployment on well-being extend to partners, especially women.
• For women, relationship but especially financial satisfaction partially explain the spillover effects.
• Men’s relationship and financial satisfaction are unaffected by their partners becoming unemployed.
• Other measurements of relationship quality confirm the findings for relationship satisfaction.
• Household income does not explain the spillover effects, as it only has small effects on life satisfaction.

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