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Behind every successful (wo)man is a successful parent-in-law? The association between resources of the partner's parents and individual's occupational attainment

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ABSTRACT

Parents-in-law tend to form an important part of individuals' social capital and thus can be expected to have an influence on occupational mobility. With Finnish Census Panel data of almost 100,000 individuals born between 1970 and 1979, followed from the age of 18 to their late thirties, we study whether the resources of the parents-in-law are associated with status attainment. We find that an increase in the resources of parents-in-law is positively associated with a change in one's own status even after the resources of own parents and those of the partner have been taken into account. Moreover, high parent-in-law resources are more beneficial for individuals from higher social origins than lower origins. Being married and having children is associated with a stronger positive influence of parents-in-law. These findings indicate that parents-in-law can improve socioeconomic success but the effect tends to vary by socioeconomic factors and family structure.

1. Introduction

There is consistent evidence showing that parental resources are associated with their children's eventual socioeconomic success even conditional on educational attainment (e.g., Björklund & Jäntti, 2009; Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992). On the other hand, research on the influence of extended family members such as grandparents and aunts and uncles, which has gained momentum more recently, has provided somewhat mixed results on the importance of their resources, yet typically showing a positive influence(T. Chan & Boliver, 2013; Erola, Kilpi-Jakonen, Prix, & Lehti, 2018; Jæger, 2012). In addition to these biological (and adoptive) kin, individuals often also have access to the resources of their spouse, which have been found to be positively associated with individuals' own socioeconomic outcomes (Bernardi, 1999; Bernasco, de Graaf, & Ultee, 1998; Komter, Keizer, & Dykstra, 2012). However, among these resources such as networks of immediate and extended family members, the influence of parents-in-law on their children-in-law's socioeconomic success has so far been neglected (for a partial exception, see Raaum et al., 2007). To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have examined how the resources of parents-in-law are associated with individuals' socioeconomic success in a longitudinal manner, considering all relationships, both cohabiting and marital, that an individual has starting from maturity.

Family background tends to influence how assortative mating takes place (Erola, Härkönen, & Dronkers, 2012; Kalmijn, 1991a; Mäenpää, 2015; Rözer & Brashears, 2018). In addition to contributing to homogamy, parental resources have been found to assist in making a more beneficial match in terms of marrying a more highly educated spouse (Blackwell, 1998). Own education and social origin may to some extent be interchangeable on the partner market: individuals coming from low social origins may require higher own education in order to attract a spouse of higher social origins – and they may need to accept a spouse of lower education – in a process termed status exchange (Davis, 1941; Schwartz, Zeng, & Xie, 2016). What we know, therefore, is that family of origin continues to have an influence on marital choices, in particular in promoting homogamy in terms of family background. However, what we do not know is whether the resources of the parents-in-law actually matter for their children-in-law. Are individuals who have 'married-in' to advantaged families able to benefit from their parents-in-law's resources to achieve more highly in the labor market? Can individuals who are 'marrying-up' compensate for their own disadvantaged backgrounds with their parents-in-law's resources?

While individuals' incentives to take advantage of their parents-in-law's resources may depend on the resources that are more immediately available to them – namely resources of their own, their parents and

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their spouse – the incentives of parents-in-law to invest in their children-in-law may depend on the amount of commitment that they see their daughter- or son-in-law displaying toward their own children as well as on their own commitment toward their children. These may be related to the legal status of the partnership, the presence of (grand) children, and the length of the relationship.

In this study, we investigate the association between resources of parents-in-law and individuals' occupational attainment. In the next section, we go into more depth about why we expect this association to arise and why it may differ depending on social origin and relationship characteristics. We then present our data and methods. This is followed by the results of individual-level fixed effects models of occupational attainment. We conclude with a discussion of the results.

2. Background and hypotheses

Different forms of capital, social, human and economic, are positively associated with individuals' outcomes. In the case of status development, in particular the resources received from one's social network, i.e. one's social capital, has been found to benefit status development (Lin, 1999; Verbakel & de Graaf, 2007a, 2007b). Based on existing studies, it is evident that both the size of the social network and the social status of the network members is positively related to socioeconomic attainment, including finding a job, prestige, upward mobility and income (Bernasco et al., 1998; Calvó-Armengol & Zenou, 2005; Graaf & Flap, 1988; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981; Marsden & Hurlbert, 1988; Rözer & Brashears, 2018). For instance, finding a job though friends and relatives helps in obtaining a higher wage and higher income jobs (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Mortensen & Vishwanath, 1994) as it reduces uncertainty about the quality of the match between worker and employer (Loury, 2006).

Parents-in-law are often an important part of an individual's social capital (Bernasco et al., 1998; Burton-Chellew & Dunbar, 2011; Graaf & Flap, 1988; Marsden & Hurlbert, 1988). Emotional closeness between children-in-law and parents-in-law is quite similar to that of biological kin and significantly closer than between non-kin friends or acquaintances (Burton-Chellew & Dunbar, 2011). Parents-in-law are important social ties for younger and middle-aged adults, particularly when there are (grand)children involved (Danielsbacka, Tanskanen, & Rotkirch, 2015).

Parents-in-law can contribute to social capital in various ways. Their emotional closeness suggests that high status parents-in-law may purposefully want to introduce children-in-law to their own social networks. On the other hand, just having high-status parents-in-laws may provide an access to those networks, without any contribution of the parents-in-law themselves. Other members of the network may simply take the parents-in-law as a signal for the value of the children-in-law, without any active action or intention of parents-in-law. The in-law relationship may be considered as a positive signal even if the children-in-law do not intend to benefit from it at all.

Similarly to social capital, the parents-in-law may also contribute to the human capital of the children-in-law in ways that help them to succeed. For instance, parents-in-law may offer more concrete guidance to benefit individuals' career development or they may provide a positive role model, similar to the other members of the extended family network (Lehti & Erola, 2017). The same applies to the economic resources that may become helpful at times of economic loss and hardship, even if the target of the economic support of the parents-in-law would be the spouse or the shared children. Parents-in-law do not necessarily help by providing economic resources themselves but by enabling their children-in-law to acquire them: many parents-in-law help with childcare which enables children-in-law to focus on their career (e.g., Gray, 2005).

There are three important and closely related phenomena that should be taken into account when analyzing the potential influence of parents-in-law. First, assortative mating occurs in terms of both achieved and ascribed characteristics (e.g., Kalmijn, 1991b; Mäenpää, 2015), second, spouses tend to have an impact on each other (e.g., Komter et al., 2012), and third, they are both influenced by their own family background. As a result, the resources of both spouses and their respective parents tend to correlate with each other. What we aim to study is whether the partner's parents have an influence *over and above* the influence of the partner and the individual's own parents. Compared to one's own parents, the influence of parents-in-law on an individual's socioeconomic status can be predicted to be weaker. This is because the influence of one's own parents continues over the entire life course and is practically unavoidable due to genetic inheritance. This has also been found by Raaum et al. (2007), who examined the correlation between individuals' earnings and those of their partner's parents, finding them to be correlated but weaker than own parents. Overall, based on the assumption that parents-in-law provide important social capital, we hypothesize that:

H1. There is a positive association between the occupational status of parents-in-law and an individual's own occupational status, net of the status of own parents and of the spouse (*general parent-in-law hypothesis*).

The potential parent-in-law effect may differ between individuals coming from different family backgrounds. There are two types of mechanism that may lead to differential effects according to family background: compensation and multiplication (or boosting). The general idea of compensation is that it is possible to compensate for low resources with other or others' resources (Erola & Kilpi-Jakonen, 2017). In our case, we would observe compensation if individuals gaining access to resources that are missing from their own family backgrounds by "marrying up" would benefit the most from their parents-in-law's resources. This could occur if the individuals who are disadvantaged in their family background have stronger incentives to take advantage of their parent-in-law resources, but also if those who are already advantaged by their own family background do not acquire anything extra from their parents-in-law due to ceiling effects. Therefore, our hypothesis is that:

H2. The resources of parents-in-law compensate for missing resources of one's own parents by being more strongly associated with occupational attainment for individuals from low social origins than for those from high social origins (*compensation hypothesis*).

In contrast, it may be the case that the resources of one's own parents and those of parents-in-law enhance each other, acting as social multipliers (Dickens & Flynn, 2001; Erola & Kilpi-Jakonen, 2017). This would mean that the more advantaged one's own family of origin, the more effectively the parents-in-law can improve career mobility. At the opposite end of the social spectrum, this would mean that individuals from low social origins would not be in a position to take advantage of the resources of even very advantaged parents-in-law. One potential reason for this could be that the social worlds of the individual and their parents-in-law would be so distant from each other that the labor market networks and other resources of parents-in-law would be entirely irrelevant. As a competing hypothesis to the one presented above, this would lead us to hypothesize:

H3. The influence of parents-in-law's resources is enhanced by the individual's own social origin and thus these resources are more strongly associated with occupational attainment for individuals with high parental resources than for those with low parental resources (*multiplication hypothesis*).

The strength of the tie between children-in-law and parents-in-law may depend on the quality and length of the relationship between the children and their partners (Tanskanen & Danielsbacka, 2018). The tie should be stronger when the partners signal stronger commitment towards one another, such as through formal marriage. Previous research has found that relationships tend to be more stable if the couple is

married rather than cohabiting (Jalovaara & Kulu, 2018; Jalovaara, 2013; Steele, Kallis, Goldstein, & Joshi, 2005), and this stability may also improve relations with parents-in-law. Another signal of a stronger relationship between spouses is relationship duration (Jalovaara & Kulu, 2018): the longer the relationship has lasted for, the stronger we can assume the tie between in-laws to be. When the relationship between romantic partners is stronger, the parental generation tends to invest more in their descendants (Eggebeen, 2005). In addition to signaling a stronger relationship, a longer relationship duration also gives more time for parents-in-law to influence their children-in-law. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H4. Parents-in-law's resources are more strongly associated with occupational attainment the longer the relationship between spouses has lasted for (*relationship length hypothesis*).

H5. Parents-in-law's resources are more strongly associated with occupational attainment when the couple is married than when they cohabit without marriage (*marriage hypothesis*).

The presence of children may also influence relations between children-in-law and parents-in-law (Hughes, 1988). While genetically related parents and children are linked together via common ancestors, parents-in-law and children-in-law can become "inversely genetically related to each other" via common descendants (Danielsbacka et al., 2015). Thus, one may assume that the link with parents-in-law should be stronger when children-in-law have children compared to childless children-in-law. Moreover, parents-in-law may have particular incentives to invest in the labor market success of their children-in-law in order to increase the general well-being of their own children and grandchildren. It has also been suggested that having children increases contact frequency with parents-in-law even more than marriage does (Wiik & Bernhardt, 2017). Hence, our hypothesis is that:

H6. Parents-in-law's resources are more strongly associated with occupational attainment when the couple has children than when they do not (*grandchild hypothesis*).

Finally, the potential parent-in-law effect may also vary between women and men. Existing studies have found gender differences for the spouse effect, with the general conclusion that having a wife and the wife's resources are beneficial for men's labor market success (Verbakel & de Graaf, 2009) but the same does not necessarily hold for women and their husbands. Although partner's high human capital (education) has been found to be positively associated with occupational attainment for both men and women (Bernasco et al., 1998; and specifically for women, Bernardi, 1999), the husband's resources (education and occupational status) have been found to be negatively associated with women's labor force participation (Bernardi, 1999). The financial resources of the male partner have also been found to hinder the occupational attainment of women (Bernasco et al., 1998). Additionally, having a partner per se has not been found to have an effect on women's career mobility although a positive effect has been found for men (Verbakel & de Graaf, 2007a, 2007b). It is also commonly found that married men have higher earnings than unmarried men (e.g., Ribar, 2004), but for women the evidence is mixed. Although some have found that married women have higher incomes (Neumark & Korenman, 1994; Waldfogel, 1997), the opposite has also been found (e.g., Korenman & Neumark, 1992).

These differential spousal effects could also extend to parents-in-law and lead us to expect that men are more influenced by the resources of their parents-in-law than are women. Furthermore, women tend to bring men closer to her own parents than do men, since women more often act as "kin keepers" and tend to be in more frequent contact with relatives (Chan & Elder, 2000; Moore, 1990). This would imply greater contact frequencies between men and their parents-in-law (through the wives) than between women and their parents-in-law. Thus, based on previous results regarding the influence of the spouse and women's kin-keeping role, we predict that:

H7. Parents-in-law's resources are more strongly associated with occupational attainment for men than for women (*gender hypothesis*).

3. Data and methods

3.1. Data

To test our hypotheses, we use high-quality Finnish register-based data from 1987–2014. The Finnish Growth Environment Panel (FinGEP) is based on a 10 % sample of individuals living permanently in Finland in 1980. They have been linked to all their biological children and our focus is on the children born between 1970–1979, who we follow from the age of 18 to the age of 35–44. In each year, the children are recorded as being either single or partnered. If partnered, they are matched with their cohabiting or marital spouse. The spouses are further linked to their own biological parents, providing us with information about parents-in-law in each year.

The advantage of this type of register-based data is that, in contrast to survey data, it does not suffer from non-response or response bias. In principle, all cohabiting and marital partners are included in the data giving us a representative sample of relationships on a yearly basis. Thus, we have practically the whole relationship history of the individual. Some cohabitations of short duration are excluded however, as changes in partnership status are only recorded at the end of each calendar year. Further, in some cases (1.9%) information on both of the partner's parents is missing. This is almost solely due to foreign-born spouses. These cases are excluded from our data. The analytical sample consists of 784,027 person-years from 48,168 women and 824,376 person-years from 50,110 men.

3.1.1. Dependent variable

Our main interest is the change in socioeconomic attainment over time, which we measure using the International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI). The ISEI is a continuous index based on the scaling of occupational titles according to average levels of education and income and it can take values from 16 to 90 (Ganzeboom, de Graaf, & Treiman, 1992). We have adjusted the ISEI scale to Finnish context: it is derived from a Finnish occupational coding variable which is converted to ISCO88 and then coded to ISEI using Ganzeboom's coding strategy which is adjusted to the Finnish context using Erola's coding strategy (Erola, 2011).

The fact that the ISEI is continuous means that it is more sensitive to career mobility than nominal measures such as social class. It is also more likely that parents-in-law influence career mobility than educational attainment simply because they tend to enter into individuals' lives at too late a stage to influence key educational choices. In Finnish register data, occupational information (and thus the ISEI) is only available for the years 1990, 1993, 1995, 2000 and yearly from 2004 to 2014 and only when individuals are employed at the end of the calendar year (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

3.1.2. Independent and moderating variables

Our main independent variable of interest is the ISEI of the partner's parents. We include this in our models as fully time-varying using the higher of the two parent-in-law ISEI scores. We fill in missing information by using the latest information available (and control for non-employment, see below). In order to keep years spent as single in our analysis, we set the level of in-law resources for singles at the grand mean and control for relationship status.

As described in more detail below, we test hypotheses 2–6 by adding interactions between parents-in-law's ISEI and various moderating variables to our models. Our first moderating variable relates to social origin, which we measure with own parents' ISEI constructed in the same way as for the partner's parents (H2 & H3). The second moderating variable is the relationship length (H4), which increases

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for continuous variables (1,608,403 person-years).

Variables	M	SD	Range
ISEI	43	16	16–90
Partner's parents' ISEI[a]	44	17	16–90
Parents' ISEI	45	17	16–90
Partner's ISEI[b]	43	12	16–90
Relationship length[c]	14	6	1–27
Age[d]	32	6	18–44

[a] descriptives apply to person-years in a relationship, centered at the grand mean in the analyses.
[b] descriptives apply to person-years in a relationship.
[c] descriptives apply to person-years in a relationship.
[d] centered at 18 in the analyses.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for categorical variables (1,608,403 person-years).

Variable		%
Family structure	married + children	25
	married	11
	cohabiting + children	5
	cohabiting	8
	single	23
	separated	28
Partner's parents employed[a]		13
Education	basic	11
	secondary	61
	tertiary	28
Partner's education[a]	basic	10
	secondary	59
	tertiary	31
Student		11

[a] descriptives apply to person-years in a relationship.

with every year that the couple stays together (i.e. it is fully-time varying). For singles, we hold the relationship length constant at 1. Our final moderating variables relate to relationship status and the presence of children. Only shared children are considered, more specifically a child is considered as being shared from the time when a child under 1-year-old is registered as living with the couple. In our preliminary analysis, we found an interaction between these two variables, meaning that the effect of children differs for married and cohabiting couples (or the effect of marriage differs for couples with children and the childless). Therefore, we have combined these two variables into one with the following categories: marriage and children, childless marriage, cohabitation and children, and childless cohabitation (H5 & H6). In addition, the variable has two categories referring to individuals who are not in a partnership: single and separated, where the first refers to individuals who have never been in a (cohabiting or marital) relationship (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

3.1.3. Control variables

In order to model the general development of ISEI during an individual's adult life course, we control for age and age squared. In addition, we control for the individual's level of education and student status (both time-varying). To control for the resources of the spouse, we use their education level and ISEI (both time-varying). Finally, to control for the labor market attachment of parents-in-law, we use the employment status of the partner's parents, which is defined as 1 if at least one of the partner's parents was employed and 0 if neither were employed (time-varying).

3.2. Methods

The data are analyzed with a linear (individual) fixed effects models that are designed to reduce omitted variable bias. Theoretically all unobserved but time-invariant (unchanging) individual characteristics are controlled for in these models. These unobserved constant factors are for example personality and temperament. Thus, fixed effects models provide a stronger test of causality in the association between the status of parents-in-law and that of children-in-law than those based on cross-sectional analyses or random effects models. Because fixed effects models estimate the effect of change, all variables that can change over time (e.g., spousal characteristics, family structure) must be included in the model or the results will be biased (Allison, 2009). What is left in the fixed effects model is individual-level change over time. It is nevertheless possible that effects of parents-in-law may still reflect some omitted factors changing at the same time or some aspects of selection into partnerships.

We test hypotheses 2–6 by adding interactions between the moderating variables of interest (own parents' ISEI, relationship length and family structure) and partner's parents' ISEI to the full model with all other independent and control variables. We visualize these results and display both predicted ISEI scores for specified levels of the two independent variables included in the interactions as well as average marginal effects of partner's parents' ISEI at specified levels of the moderating variable.

We run our analyses separately for men and women in order to consider gender-specific occupational trajectories and to observe the potentially gender-specific parent-in-law effects. The analyses were performed using Stata 15 and do-files are available on request from the first author.

4. Results

4.1. The association between change in ISEI of the partner's parents and individual's ISEI

First, we present results related to hypothesis 1. Tables 3 and 4 (Model 1) show that change in the ISEI of the partner's parents is positively associated with one's own ISEI. It should be noted that although this model does not include time-varying partner's characteristics or own education, it does already implicitly control for time-invariant characteristics such as parental education. We also find that changes in partner's parents' employment status are associated with individuals' ISEI, and the association is stronger for men than for women.

When partner's characteristics and own education are controlled (Model 2), the association between the change in ISEI of the parents-in-law and one's own ISEI is reduced but remains significant, and the association remains stable when we further account for family structure and relationship length (Model 3). In these final models, we find that, net of all other factors, a unit increase in partner's parents' ISEI is associated with a 0.02 increase in men's ISEI and a 0.03 increase in women's ISEI. In comparison with the size of the coefficient for parental ISEI, the coefficient for parents-in-law is twice as high for men (the parental coefficient is 0.01) and three times as high for women (0.01). Although the coefficients for parents-in-law may seem rather large when compared to those of own parents, it should be remembered that in these fixed effects models, the influence of own parents tends to be captured to a large extent in the fixed part of the model. In the full model, the variable measuring change in partner's parents' employment status remains significant. Overall, we find a positive, though relatively small, association between the socioeconomic status of individuals and their partner's parents net of various controls, thus supporting our *hypothesis 1* (the general parent-in-law effect hypothesis).

4.2. Differential effects by relationship characteristics

In the interaction models, we first investigate whether the impact of the partner's parents varies by the resources of own parents. The upper panel of Fig. 1 shows the predicted ISEI scores estimated at low (20), medium (50) and high (80) values of ISEI for both own and partner's parents, whereas the lower panel shows the average marginal effect of

Table 3
Fixed effects models of ISEI status for men.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variable	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age[a]	0.65***	0.00	0.50***	0.00	0.44***	0.00
Age squared	−0.01***	0.00	−0.01***	0.00	−0.01***	0.00
ISEI of the partner's parents[b]	0.05***	0.00	0.02***	0.00	0.02***	0.00
Partner's parents employed	0.49***	0.04	0.28***	0.04	0.22***	0.04
In a relationship	0.36***	0.03	−0.15***	0.03		
Student	−5.68***	0.04	−3.07***	0.04	−3.03***	0.04
Partner's ISEI			0.07***	0.00	0.06***	0.00
Partner's education (ref.: primary)						
secondary			−0.16*	0.07	−0.18*	0.07
tertiary			0.86***	0.08	0.75***	0.08
Parents' ISEI[b]			0.01***	0.00	0.01***	0.00
Education (ref.: primary)						
secondary			0.29**	0.09	0.34***	0.09
tertiary			10.89***	0.11	10.91***	0.11
Family structure (ref.: married + children)						
married					−0.77***	0.04
cohabiting + children					−0.60	0.08
cohabiting					−0.90***	0.07
single					−0.61***	0.09
separated					−0.10	0.08
Relationship length					0.02***	0.00
Constant	36.47***	0.05	32.45***	0.17	33.17***	0.15
BIC	5784194		5741434		5740909	
Person-years	824,376		824,376		824,376	
N	50,110		50,110		50,110	

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses. ref. = reference.
[a] Centered at 18.
[b] Centered at mean.
* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4
Fixed effects models of ISEI status for women.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variable	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age[a]	0.75***	0.00	0.53***	0.00	0.51***	0.00
Age squared	−0.01***	0.00	−0.01***	0.00	−0.01***	0.00
ISEI of the partner's parents[b]	0.06***	0.00	0.03***	0.00	0.03***	0.00
Partner's parents employed	0.19***	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.09*	0.04
In a relationship	0.41***	0.04	0.02	0.04		
Student	−4.71***	0.04	−2.76***	0.04	−2.74***	0.04
Partner's ISEI			0.07***	0.00	0.07***	0.00
Partner's education (ref.: primary)						
secondary			0.04	0.07	0.01	0.07
tertiary			0.63***	0.09	0.56***	0.09
Parents' ISEI[b]			0.01***	0.00	0.01***	0.00
Education (ref.: primary)						
secondary			−1.22**	0.09	−1.22***	0.09
tertiary			7.41***	0.10	7.38***	0.10
Family structure (ref.: married + children)						
married					−0.04	0.05
cohabiting + children					−0.24**	0.09
cohabiting					−0.21**	0.08
single					−0.44***	0.10
separated					−0.19*	0.08
Relationship length					0.01	0.00
Constant	36.21***	0.05	33.05***	0.14	33.42***	0.16
BIC	5564283		5528055		5527964	
Person-years	784,027		784,027		784,027	
N	48,168		48,168		48,168	

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses. ref. = reference.
[a] Centered at 18.
[b] Centered at mean.
* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

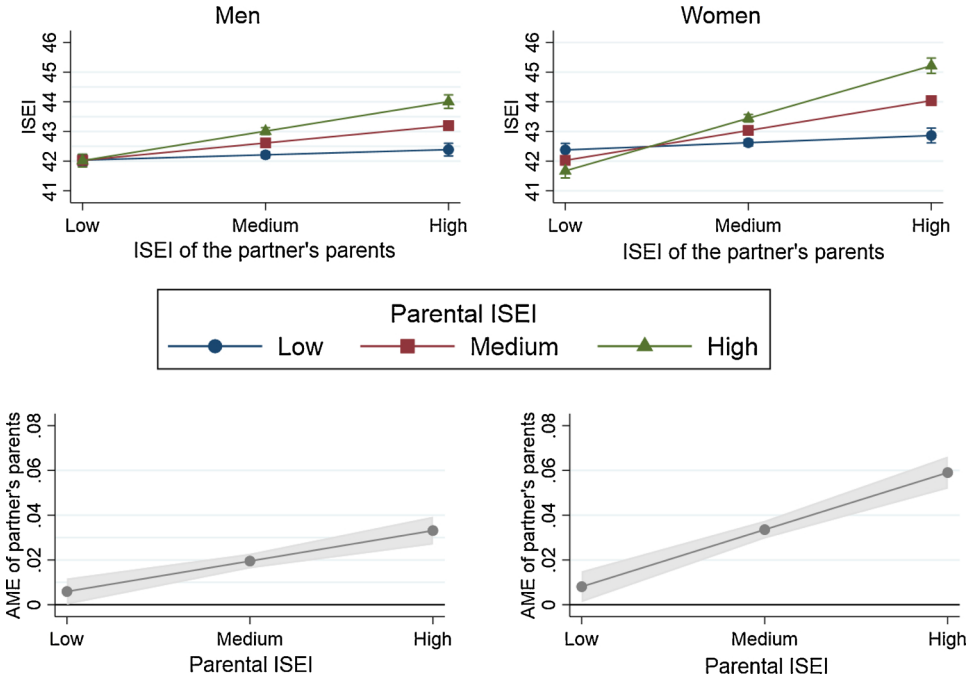

Fig. 1. Interaction between the ISEI of the partner's parents and own parents for men and women. Predicted ISEI in the upper panel, average marginal effect of partner's parents' ISEI in the lower panel. 95% confidence intervals around estimates.

in-laws' ISEI at these three values of own parents' ISEI. The figure confirms the positive association between change in partner's parents ISEI and individual's ISEI. Nevertheless, this association is not constant across own social origin. We do not find support for *hypothesis 2* (the compensation hypothesis), but we do find for *hypothesis 3* (the multiplication hypothesis). More specifically, the higher own parental ISEI is, the stronger the association of own occupational attainment with that of the partner's parents. The interaction is similar for both genders, albeit slightly stronger for women than for men.

With regard to relationship length, Fig. 2 shows that for men relationship length does not influence the strength of the association, whereas for women change in the ISEI of the partner's parents has a less strong association with occupational attainment the longer the relationship has lasted for. This can be seen most clearly in the bottom right graph of the figure, which shows the average marginal effects of in-laws' ISEI for women. Looking at this the other way around, we can see in the top right graph, that their relationship length is not associated with occupational attainment when in-laws' resources are high (no difference in predicted ISEIs) and there is a small positive association when in-law's resources are low (significant, though small, differences in ISEIs). Thus

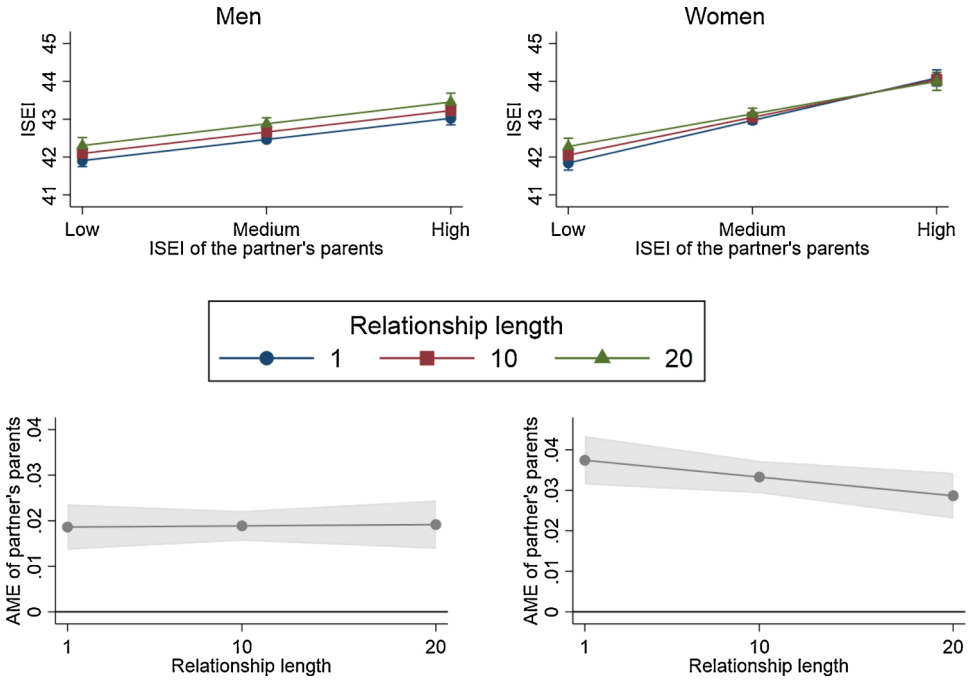

Fig. 2. Interaction between the ISEI of the partner's parents and relationship length for men and women. Predicted ISEI in the upper panel, average marginal effect of partner's parents' ISEI in the lower panel. 95% confidence intervals around estimates.

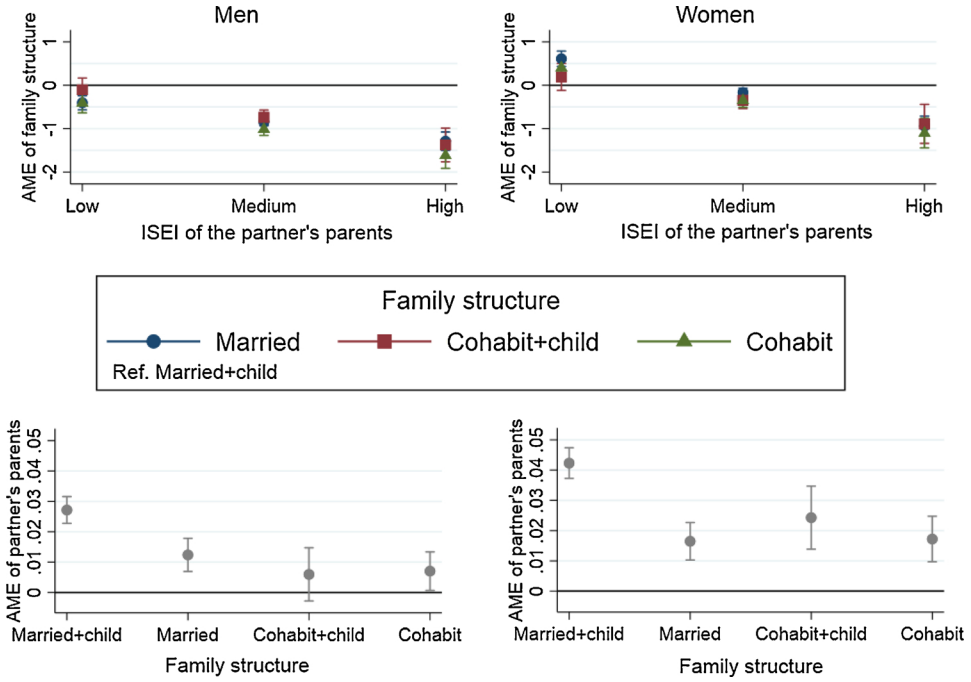

Fig. 3. Interaction between ISEI of the partner's parents and family structure for men and women. Average marginal effects of family structure in the upper panel, average marginal effect of partner's parents' ISEI in the lower panel. 95% confidence intervals around estimates.

hypothesis 4 (the relationship length hypothesis) is not supported.

We show the results studying the moderating effect of family structure in Fig. 3 in a slightly different way to those above. Starting from the lower panel in Fig. 3, we see that partner's parents' ISEI has the strongest association with occupational attainment when individuals are married and have a child with their partner. For men, this is followed by being married and for women by cohabiting and having a child with one's partner. However, these latter results tend not to differ significantly from the other two relationship categories. Thus *hypotheses 5* (the marriage hypothesis) and *hypothesis 6* (the grandchild hypothesis) are partly supported and for men the marriage hypothesis gains slightly more support whereas for women the grandchild hypothesis gains slightly more support. Overall, being married to one's partner and having a child with them increases the association between partner's parents' ISEI and own ISEI in comparison with other relationship types approximately twofold for women and even more than this for men. It is also interesting to look at the upper panel of Fig. 3 where we show the predicted difference in ISEI between being married with children and the three other family structures by partner's parents' ISEI. This indicates that when in-laws have high resources, men in particular gain from being married and having a child with their spouse, whereas at the other end of the spectrum, when in-laws have low resources, women tend to be disadvantaged by being married and having a child with their spouse.

Lastly, returning to our gender hypothesis, we can see that the association between parents-in-law and an individual appears stronger for women than for men (Tables 3 & 4, all figures). Thus, we do not find support for *hypothesis 7* (gender hypothesis) which stated that the association would be stronger for men.

4.3. Robustness analysis

In addition to the analyses reported in detail above, we also performed a number of robustness analyses in order to obtain a better picture of the link between resources of the partner's parents and individuals' career development.

Earnings is an alternative continuous measure of socioeconomic attainment. We focused on occupation rather than earnings because we believe that the primary route to influencing earnings is through occupational attainment. Earnings are also subject to more fluctuation, in particular for women due to family formation. However, as a robustness check, we also investigated the potential influence of parents-in-law on earnings. In these analyses we are also able to use yearly information from 1987–2014. We have inflated all earnings to the year 2014 to make incomes from different years comparable. By and large, the results are robust to this alternative measurement and we report the main models in the Appendix (Appendix, Table A1).

We also investigated whether the gender of the parent-in-law matters. We found that the father-in-law seems to be the one that transmits the social status to the next generation (results can be obtained from the first author). This is not surprising because in the studied parents-in-law cohorts men tend to often have higher status than women. We also found that the ISEI of the mother-in-law is not statistically significantly associated with men's ISEI, but it is positively associated with women's ISEI. However, the association is still stronger for father-in-law's ISEI than mother-in-law's ISEI.

For methodological sensitivity purposes, we also ran growth curve models and between-individuals models on the same data, which are both essentially random-effects models. The results were consistent with those obtained from the fixed effects models and they can be found in the Appendix (Appendix, Table A2 for growth curve models and Table A3 for between-individual models). As expected, estimates from these models were slightly larger than from the fixed effects. What do these results really mean? Is the association that we catch mainly due to change of partners and parents-in-law? In order to investigate this more carefully, we conducted additional analysis only for first marriages (Appendix, Table A4). The estimates were very similar to FE estimates which indicates that the influence of parents-in-law we catch is mainly due to an interaction between other time-varying variables, for instance, the change of partner's ISEI over time and family structure. Thus, we can conclude that the association found in the fixed effects models is not only due to change of partner and partner's parents.

5. Discussion

In this study we have examined the potential parents-in-law effect on individuals' socioeconomic status. Our study has taken a

longitudinal view of this by considering all cohabiting and marital relationships from when individuals reach maturity until they are approximately 40 years old and studying their occupational attainment trajectories over this time. Using fixed effects models that exploit this individual-level variation in both the independent and the dependent variables, we can come closer than cross-sectional studies to estimating the causal effect of parents-in-law – in contrast to Raaum et al. (2007), the only previous study that we are aware of estimating the effect of in-laws. Our study also exploits two sources of variation in the key independent variable of interest: changes in in-laws' occupations while the in-laws stay the same as well as changes in the in-laws themselves through new partnerships. The results suggest that increased in-law resources are associated with improved occupational status even after the resources of one's own parents and those of the partner (in addition to several other factors) have been controlled for.

As robustness checks, we also ran our analyses with a different independent variable (earnings), different methods of estimation (growth curve models, between individual models), only first marriage, and also without those years when an individual is single – with no substantial changes to the results. Overall, our results are in line with social capital theory: the resources of parents-in-law may significantly improve the social status of adults (see e.g., Rözer & Brashears, 2018). Our study also shows that resources of the partner's parents matter even in an egalitarian and individualistic country like Finland. It is likely that the association would be stronger in more collective countries where family and relatives play an even greater role.

This association between the socioeconomic status of parents-in-law and that of their daughter- or son-in-law is not the same for all, however. We found a number of theoretically meaningful factors that moderated this relationship. To begin with, social origin moderates this relationship in such a way that the higher the social origin of an individual, the stronger the association between in-laws' ISEI and their own. In other words, high status in-laws improve occupational attainment the most for individuals coming from high status families. This supports our multiplication hypothesis, indicating that in-laws' resources can even reinforce the accumulation of status and wealth among those individuals who come from advantaged family backgrounds. It is possible that individuals from advantaged backgrounds are in a better position to utilize the social networks that high status in-laws may be able to provide and that they are more relevant for their careers than for individuals who are not already advantaged. It is also possible that this works from the in-laws' point of view: they are better able to relate to, and thus more willing to help, their daughter- or son-in-law when the latter comes from a similar socioeconomic background as they themselves are. Previous research has found educationally homogamous relationships to be more stable than heterogamous ones (Goldstein & Harknett, 2006; Schwartz, 2010), and it is possible that it is also this stability and strength of commitment which drives the greater in-law effect when both partners come from high status families.

Some aspects of the strength of the tie between the partners were also found to moderate the association of interest. In particular, we found the association to be the strongest when the partners are married and have a child together and that it is only when these two are combined that we see a substantial increase in the strength of the association. Merely being married is not more beneficial than cohabiting if there are no children involved (albeit very slightly for men), and merely having children is not more beneficial than not having them if the couple is cohabiting (albeit very slightly for women). Even in a country such as Finland, where cohabitations are a culturally accepted form of intimate relationships, where it is common that younger adults cohabit for long periods before they marry (if they ever marry) and it is normal that children are born into cohabiting relationships (Jalovaara, 2013), being married and having a child with one's spouse seems to signal stronger commitment to one's spouse than other relationship types. This reflects findings that show that cohabiting relationships tend to be less stable in Finland, even when there are children involved (Jalovaara & Kulu, 2018; Nikander, 1996). We would expect these differences according to family structure to be even greater in countries where cohabiting is not as widely accepted.

We did not find relationship length to moderate the association between the ISEI of parents-in-law and their children-in-law. In this regard, our results are similar to those on partnership stability in Finland, showing that after some years, partnership duration dos not reduce separation risk any more (Jalovaara & Kulu, 2018). Thus, it seems natural that the tie to the parents-in-law does not grow any stronger either. For women, we even found the opposite to what we hypothesized: the association grew weaker the longer the relationship had lasted for.

Our results suggest that the influence of parents-in-law is stronger for women than for men. The moderating influence of family structure was also found to be stronger for women than for men, although when the resources of the partner's parents were high, being married and having children gave additional benefits over other family structures for men more than for women. This goes against our hypothesis that there would be a stronger association between the ISEI of in-laws and that of sons-in-law due to women tending to be kin-keepers and thus there being more contact between men and their in-laws than between women and theirs. One possible explanation is that women act as kin-keepers even with their in-laws and not just their own relatives, and thus direct contact between women and their in-laws is greater than for men – in contrast with contact mediated through the partner. Another possible explanation may come from different labor market opportunities for men and women, and how social capital influences these. For example, Rözer and Brashears (2018) suggest that the reason why partner's socioeconomic status has a stronger effect for women's labor market attainment than for men's may be due to women's generally lower position in the labor market, which high status husbands (and by extension, high status in-laws) can help to overcome.

But do partner's parents' resources really matter? The estimate sizes are small, but on the other hand, they also should be because our analysis takes into account both own parents' resources and partner's resources which also already include some of the influence of partner's parents. These more immediately available resources have a greater importance than the resources of the partner's parents. Our results are also comparable to the estimates that have been found in studies of extended family influences in Finland (Erola et al., 2018; Lehti & Erola, 2017) and one study that looked at the correlation between partner's parents' earnings and individuals' earnings (Raaum et al., 2007).

The main strength of our study is the data that allows us to study all marital and cohabiting relationships that individuals have over their early and middle life course. The register data does not suffer from non-response or from response bias which are typical for survey data. The limitation of our study is that our data does not allow us to measure the quality or frequency of contact with parents-in-law. In the future, it would be interesting to study whether the influence of parents-in-law varies in these respects.

To conclude, we have found that the resources of the partner's parents are positively associated with individuals' occupational attainment. However, to best reap the benefits of high-status parents-in-law, it seems that one should come from a high-status family and get married as well as have a child with one's partner.

Notes

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Appendix A

Table A1
Linear fixed effects models of income.

	Men			Women		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age[a]	5.22***	4.81***	4.38***	3.19***	2.33***	2.33***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age squared	−0.13***	−0.12***	−0.11***	−0.06***	−0.04***	−0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Income of the partner's parents[b]	0.06***	0.03***	0.03***	0.05***	0.03***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Partner's parents employed	1.64***	0.52***	0.22***	0.23***	−0.18**	0.67***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
In a relationship	5.02***	4.50***		2.40***	1.42***	
	(0.04)	(0.05)		(0.04)	(0.04)	
Student	−15.94***	−12.31***	−12.11***	−15.63***	−13.00***	−13.29***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Partner's income		0.05***	0.08***		0.04***	0.07***
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Partner's education (ref: elementary)						
secondary		1.81***	1.11***		0.28**	−0.09
		(0.10)	(0.10)		(0.09)	(0.09)
tertiary		3.32***	1.74***		0.49***	0.56***
		(0.12)	(0.12)		(0.11)	(0.11)
Parents' income[b]		0.03***	0.03***		0.01***	0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Education (ref: elementary)						
secondary		3.02***	3.45***		7.29***	6.52***
		(0.07)	(0.07)		(0.07)	(0.07)
tertiary		19.57***	19.68***		21.45***	20.29***
		(0.01)	(0.01)		(0.09)	(0.09)
Family structure (ref: married + children)						
married			−2.51***			8.45***
			(0.07)			(0.06)
cohabiting + children			−1.47***			−0.15
			(0.12)			(0.11)
cohabiting			−2.87***			7.94***
			(0.10)			(0.09)
single			−7.42***			3.61***
			(0.12)			(0.11)
separated			−1.38***			5.90***
			(0.11)			(0.10)
Relationship length			0.28***			0.08***
			(0.01)			(0.01)
Constant	17.43***	10.76***	17.66***	21.90***	16.03***	11.30***
	(0.07)	(0.14)	(0.18)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.17)
BIC	10801735	10719331	10705775	10293437	10212014	10183308
N (person-years)	1,297,436	1,297,436	1,297,436	1,252,340	1,252,340	1,252,340

Note. Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < 0.05$.
[a] Centered at 18.
[b] Centered at mean.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

Table A2
Linear growth curve models of ISEI.

	Men			Women		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age[a]	0.68***	0.44***	0.40***	0.77***	0.51***	0.49***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age squared	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.02***	−0.01***	−0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
ISEI of the partner's parents[b]	0.06***	0.03***	0.03***	0.08***	0.04***	0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Student	−5.39***	−2.37***	−2.34***	−4.53***	−2.35***	−2.35***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Partner's parents employed	0.53***	0.26***	0.21***	0.21***	0.08	0.10*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.4)
In a relationship	0.46***	−0.62***		0.42***	−0.11*	
	(0.03)	(0.05)		(0.03)	(0.05)	
Partner's ISEI		0.07***	0.07***		0.09***	0.09***
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Partner's education (ref: elementary)						
secondary		0.02	0.04		0.20**	0.18*
		(0.07)	(0.07)		(0.07)	(0.07)
tertiary		1.22***	1.15***		1.09***	1.03***
		(0.08)	(0.08)		(0.09)	(0.09)
Parent's ISEI[b]		0.07***	0.07***		0.06***	0.06***
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Education (ref: elementary)						
secondary		2.09***	2.12***		−0.09	−0.10
		(0.08)	(0.08)		(0.08)	(0.08)
tertiary		14.58***	14.59***		9.83***	9.80***
		(0.09)	(0.09)		(0.09)	(0.09)
Relationship length		0.07***	0.03***		< 0.01	−0.01*
		(0.00)	(0.00)		(0.00)	(0.00)
Family structure (ref: married + children)						
married			−0.74***			0.08
			(0.04)			(0.05)
cohabiting + children			−0.80***			−0.41***
			(0.08)			(0.08)
cohabiting			−0.99***			−0.27***
			(0.07)			(0.07)
single			−0.64***			−0.36***
			(0.08)			(0.09)
separated			−0.14			−0.01
			(0.08)			(0.08)
Constant	37.05***	30.48***	31.23***	36.56***	31.34***	31.67***
	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.16)
Individual variance components						
Constant	189.37***	106.05***	105.95***	200.28***	133.45***	133.46***
	(1.23)	(0.73)	(0.73)	(1.33)	(0.92)	(0.92)
Residual variance components						
Constant	69.51***	66.21***	66.18***	75.40***	72.15***	72.14***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
ICC	0.73	0.62	0.62	0.73	0.65	0.65
BIC	6025206	5959511	5959118	5793755	5742446	5742420
N (person-years)	824,376	824,376	824,376	784,027	784,027	784,027

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.
[a] Centered at 18.
[b] Centered at mean.
* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

Table A3
Between individual models of ISEI.

	Men			Women		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	6.019***	1.457***	1.403***	5.352***	−0.013	0.067
	(0.104)	(0.085)	(0.086)	(0.114)	(0.099)	(0.101)
Age squared[a]	−0.165***	−0.033***	−0.032***	−0.154***	0.015***	0.013***
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
ISEI of the partner's parents[b]	0.178***	0.049***	0.047***	0.208***	0.053***	0.051***
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Partner's parents employed	1.938***	0.081	0.140	1.408***	0.088	0.110
	(0.301)	(0.233)	(0.233)	(0.283)	(0.229)	(0.228)
Partner	4.272***	1.497***		1.264***	−0.790***	
	(0.170)	(0.154)		(0.186)	(0.166)	
Student	23.32***	3.462***	3.469***	15.380***	−0.190	−0.377
	(0.392)	(0.322)	(0.321)	(0.403)	(0.340)	(0.340)
Partner's ISEI		0.151***	0.153***		0.193***	0.190***
		(0.005)	(0.005)		(0.006)	(0.006)
Partner's education (ref.: primary)						
secondary		2.074***	2.067***		0.600*	0.592*
		(0.344)	(0.344)		(0.281)	(0.281)
tertiary		2.923***	2.998***		1.453***	1.396***
		(0.369)	(0.369)		(0.340)	(0.341)
Parents' ISEI[b]		0.148***	0.146***		0.139***	0.139***
		(0.003)	(0.003)		(0.003)	(0.003)
Education (ref.: primary)						
secondary		3.484***	3.531***		3.530***	3.513***
		(0.143)	(0.143)		(0.226)	(0.226)
tertiary		21.090***	21.090***		19.190***	19.090***
		(0.179)	(0.179)		(0.248)	(0.248)
Family structure (ref.: married + children)						
married			0.140			3.567***
			(0.278)			(0.303)
Cohabiting + children			−1.967***			−1.131***
			(0.301)			(0.318)
cohabiting			−0.633*			2.273***
			(0.306)			(0.348)
single			−1.817***			1.587***
			(0.361)			(0.397)
separated			0.149			1.458***
			(0.376)			(0.396)
Relationship length			0.048**			0.001
			(0.018)			(0.019)
Constant	−7.374***	13.370***	14.790***	1.028	22.800***	20.590***
	(0.659)	(0.665)	(0.745)	(0.762)	(0.728)	(0.834)
BIC	396910	371010	370848	389363	368615	368482
N	820,713	820,713	820,713	782,715	782,715	782,715

Table A4
Fixed effects models of ISEI status in first marriage.

	Men			Women		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age[a]	0.630***	0.485***	0.453***	0.735***	0.550***	0.538***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Age squared	−0.010***	−0.008***	−0.007***	−0.013***	−0.010***	−0.010***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
ISEI of the partner's parents[b]	0.054***	0.023***	0.023***	0.071***	0.037***	0.036***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Partner's parents employed[b]	0.543***	0.313***	0.215***	0.183***	0.047	0.050
	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.049)	(0.048)	(0.049)
Partner	0.921***	0.050		0.875***	0.209***	
	(0.042)	(0.048)		(0.048)	(0.054)	
Student	−5.664***	−3.099***	−3.075***	−4.694***	−2.793***	−2.784***
	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Partner's ISEI		0.062***	0.062***		0.072***	0.071***
		(0.002)	(0.002)		(0.002)	(0.002)
Partner's education (ref.: primary)						
secondary		0.177	0.076		0.162	0.114
		(0.113)	(0.113)		(0.119)	(0.119)
tertiary		1.536***	1.289***		0.854***	0.753***
		(0.121)	(0.122)		(0.133)	(0.133)
Parents' ISEI		0.013***	0.013***		0.012***	0.012***
		(0.002)	(0.002)		(0.002)	(0.002)
Education (ref.: primary)						
secondary		0.269**	0.311***		−1.254***	−1.252***
		(0.091)	(0.091)		(0.085)	(0.085)
tertiary		10.940***	10.960***		7.463***	7.452***
		(0.107)	(0.107)		(0.101)	(0.101)
Family structure (ref.: married + children)						
married			−0.734***			−0.037
			(0.045)			(0.049)
single			−0.581***			−0.803***
			(0.118)			(0.136)
separated			0.510***			0.028
			(0.107)			(0.117)
Relationship length			0.023**			−0.020*
			(0.009)			(0.009)
Constant	36.490***	32.100***	32.800***	36.200***	32.800***	33.670***
	(0.048)	(0.162)	(0.194)	(0.053)	(0.167)	(0.210)
BIC	5760814	5719687	5719252	5555832	5520920	5520873
N	820,713	820,713	820,713	782,715	782,715	782,715

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses.
[a] Centered at 18.
[b] Centered at mean.
* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.01$.
*** $p < 0.001$.

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