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Both partnership history and current relationship quality are associated with life satisfaction in old age

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Keywords:	Partnership histories, relationship quality, Finland, wellbeing, sex differences
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Both partnership history and current relationship quality are associated with life satisfaction in old age

Abstract

Romantic relationships significantly impact physical and mental wellbeing. While both partnership history and current relationship quality influence wellbeing in later life, they are seldom investigated together. This study examines the long-term effects of partnership history on wellbeing, exploring whether current relationship quality can mitigate the impact of past experiences. Using data from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) Finland, we categorize partnership histories and examine if relationship quality mediates their effect on life satisfaction. The analysis identifies five partnership history clusters, revealing that continuous relationships lead to the highest life satisfaction, while unstable histories are linked to lower wellbeing. High relationship satisfaction and fewer conflicts are associated with greater wellbeing for both sexes. Relationship quality mediates the negative associations between unstable partnership histories and subjective wellbeing for both men and women but does not alter the wellbeing associations for those with a continuous partnership history.

Keywords: Partnership histories, relationship quality, Finland, wellbeing, healthy ageing, sex differences.

Introduction

Being in a romantic relationship - defined here as either marriage or cohabitation - is a fundamental aspect of the life course. Having a partner is one of the most influential factors affecting overall wellbeing (e.g., Jung, 2023; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003), and couples often serve as the primary unit for exchanging resources and fulfilling personal needs (Hansen, 2010; XXXX, 2021). Extensive research has explored the correlation between health and romantic relationships, consistently finding positive associations between partnership and both physical and mental health (Rapp & Stauder, 2020; Soons, Liefbroer & Kalmijn, 2009; Zella, 2017).

The life course perspective (Elder, 1994) suggests that not only does current partnership status impact wellbeing, but the entire trajectory of romantic partnerships may play a crucial role as well. The benefits of living with a partner are expected to accumulate over time (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006). Consequently, lifelong singlehood, experiencing unstable relationships, or maintaining a stable long-term partnership may affect wellbeing differently (Jung, 2023). This underscores the importance of longitudinally analysing partnership histories, focusing on transitions and long-term trajectories rather than isolated events (Comolli et al., 2021; Piccarreta & Studer, 2019).

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3 The current quality of a romantic relationship also significantly influences each partner's life
4 context, affecting their physical and mental health (Carr et al., 2016; Umberson et al., 2006;
5 Liu et al., 2021), not least later in life. However, it is unclear whether relationship satisfaction
6 can mediate the long-term effects of partnership history (Rapp & Klein, 2015). On the one hand,
7 partnership trajectories may have enduring effects on well-being. **Partners** who have been
8 together for decades often share a long history and are deeply attached to each other, suggesting
9 that being in a very long-term relationship with the same partner can enhance relationship
10 quality. On the other hand, having a new partner can obviously also signal an exceptionally
11 happy period of life (see Bildtgård & Öberg, 2017; Temkina et al, 2024). We are therefore
12 interested if individuals can overcome the impact of their past partnership experiences within
13 their current relationship context (Jung, 2023). Emphasizing the potential influence of current
14 relationship quality, rather than focusing only on the relationship status, is also important also
15 from a methodological perspective. Few studies have detailed data on both partnerships over
16 the life course and relationship satisfaction, making it useful to know how these relate to each
17 other.
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19 Utilizing previously unanalysed data from the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in
20 Europe (SHARE) Finland, this research advances the literature on partnership trajectories and
21 wellbeing by addressing two main objectives: Firstly, it categorizes partnership typologies for
22 both men and women using sequence analysis and investigates how partnership trajectories
23 impact psychological wellbeing after age 60 in Finland. Secondly, it examines how current
24 relationship quality is associated with wellbeing among partnered individuals and whether
25 positive and negative aspects of marital quality mediate the association between partnership
26 history and wellbeing.
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28 Given the extensive literature on sex differences in the relationship between romantic
29 relationship and overall health and wellbeing (Liu et al., 2021; Carr & Springer, 2010; Hughes
30 & Waite, 2009; Liu & Waite, 2014; Zhang & Hayward, 2006), our study also explores whether
31 these associations vary by sex. We focus on Finland since the Finnish SHARE drop-off
32 questionnaire includes relationship satisfaction indicators not available from other SHARE
33 countries. Finland is also of interest due to its historically high proportions of never married
34 and single men and women. Also, the divorce rates in Finland have been high in a global scale
35 since the 1970 (Lindgren, 1986), and cohabitation is widespread (Coleman, 2013). Hence
36 partnership histories among the population aged 50+ in Finland are more varied compared to
37 most other SHARE countries (XXX & XXX, 2021), facilitating the comparison of different
38 relationship histories and their associations with wellbeing.
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Theoretical background

The life course perspective

The life course perspective offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how past experiences shape present and future outcomes (Elder, 1994; Elder et al., 2003; Huinink & Kohli, 2014). Early life conditions significantly impact later outcomes, as decisions made during this stage can set individuals on divergent life paths (Thornton et al., 2008; Jung, 2023). Within this framework, having a romantic partner, along with the quality of that relationship, plays a pivotal role in shaping one's life course (Umberson et al., 2006). The stress and support that arise from romantic relationships deeply affect a person's overall life context, influencing their health and wellbeing across the lifespan (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003; Liu & Waite, 2014).

Additionally, the life course perspective aligns closely with the concept of cumulative advantage and disadvantage (CAD), which posits that advantages or disadvantages accumulate over time, leading to widening inequalities (Dannefer, 2003; DiPrete & Eirich, 2006). In the context of romantic relationships, the stability or instability of partnership histories can have a cumulative effect on wellbeing. For instance, the benefits of being in a stable relationship tend to accumulate over time, leading to greater long-term wellbeing, whereas unstable partnerships or permanent singlehood may have a negative impact (Zimmermann & Hameister, 2019). This suggests that partnership trajectories have a lasting influence, not just at the time of partnership formation but throughout the life course (Jung, 2023).

Furthermore, the life course perspective emphasizes that individual actions and behaviours are shaped by unique social, cultural, and economic contexts (Mayer, 2009). In Finland, this context is profoundly shaped by its status within the Nordic region, which is considered a pioneer of demographic and societal transformations in post-industrial societies (XXX & XXX, 2021). Early policies promoting social equality and dual earner/dual carer arrangements have played a significant role in shaping life course trajectories (Andersson et al., 2017; Jalovaara et al., 2019). Finnish baby boomers and subsequent generations experienced rapid economic shifts, transitioning from an agricultural to an industrial, and eventually post-industrial economy (Karisto, 2007). During this time, progressive family policies—such as support for maternal employment—were also implemented (XXX & XXX, 2021). These historical developments are key to understanding the evolution of partnerships dynamics in Finland. The shift toward more diverse relationship forms occurred earlier in the Nordic countries than in many other regions, driven by robust policies supporting social and gender equality, and a strong welfare

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3 state that provides alternatives to traditional marriage while mitigating the impacts of union
4 dissolution (XXX & XXX, 2021; Andersson et al., 2017).
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8 *Partnership history*

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10 The positive effects of marriage on wellbeing compared to other civil status categories (never
11 married, widowed, or divorced/separated) have been extensively studied (e.g., Mroczek &
12 Spiro III, 2005; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). Cohabitation has also been shown to positively affect
13 well-being, though some research suggests that marriage generally provides greater well-being
14 benefits compared to cohabitation (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Brown, 2000; Soons &
15 Kalmijn, 2009). However, these findings are often shaped by the cultural context, and the well-
16 being gap between married and cohabiting couples varies across countries (e.g., Perelli-Harris
17 et al., 2019; Lee & Ono, 2012). Indeed, marriage tends to be more institutionalized than
18 cohabitation in many societies (Soons & Kalmijn, 2009), and this institutionalization affects
19 well-being through factors like social acceptance, relationship stability, and legal protections.
20 In contexts where cohabitation is less institutionalized, cohabitants may experience lower social
21 approval, greater relationship instability, and poorer relationship quality, all of which can
22 negatively impact their well-being (Cherlin, 2004; Cherlin, 2020). On the other hand, in settings
23 in which cohabitation is more institutionalized, these differences are minimized as cohabiting
24 and married couples are granted similar legal rights and benefits (Waaldijk, 2005). In
25 contemporary societies—particularly in the Nordic countries—cohabitation is increasingly
26 accepted, leading to fewer well-being disparities between married and cohabiting couples. In
27 Finland specifically, we choose not to differentiate between marriage and cohabitation, given
28 the growing normalization of cohabitation and the declining differences between these forms
29 of union. As cohabitation has become a widely accepted family structure with similar
30 recognition to marriage, both can be treated equivalently in terms of their impact on well-being.
31 It is important to note that the benefits of marriage and cohabitation may persist into old age,
32 with partnered individuals reporting greater happiness, better mental health, increased life
33 satisfaction, and lower feelings of loneliness (Dush et al., 2008; Kansky, 2018; Helliwell, 2003).
34 While selection effects also play a role, indicating that happier and healthier people are more
35 likely to find and keep partners (Koball et al., 2010), research shows that relationship status
36 independently contributes to health and wellbeing (Dush & Amato, 2005; Fu & Noguchi, 2018).
37 To provide more in-depth insight, a handful of recent studies (e.g., XXXX et al., 2022;
38 Zimmermann & Hameister, 2019; Roberson et al., 2018; O'Flaherty et al., 2016) have adopted
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3 a life course perspective, highlighting the dynamic and interdependent nature of the process by
4 which relationship turning points unfold throughout life.

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6 As described in the previous section, couples benefit from increased social, emotional, and
7 practical support, crucial for an individual's quality of life, as romantic partners often combine
8 resources and share caregiving duties. Although relatives and friends can also be important,
9 most partnered people claim that their partner is their most significant source of support
10 (Kalmijn, 2013; Soons et al., 2009). These benefits should accumulate over time, positively
11 influencing individual wellbeing. Conversely, partnership dissolution is known to increase
12 negative outcomes due to the loss of important resources (Soons et al., 2009). Therefore, a
13 partnership history marked by breakups can be expected to have long-lasting negative effects
14 on individual wellbeing (Jung, 2023; Barban, 2013; Zella, 2017).

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16 In sum, previous results indicate that stable unions tend to be associated with less loneliness
17 (Peters & Liefbroer, 1997) and higher life satisfaction in old age (Thomson et al., 2001). Life
18 histories characterized by union dissolutions and the absence of a partner tend to be linked to
19 lower subjective wellbeing (Demey et al., 2014; Zimmermann & Hameister, 2019). Of course,
20 long-partnered people are highly heterogeneous (Kamp Dush & Taylor, 2012), and the
21 relationship quality can vary between long-term couples despite the stability of their
22 relationships (Duba et al., 2012; Margelisch et al., 2017). Since studies in the field have almost
23 exclusively used samples of married adults, it remains unclear how relationship quality within
24 other types of romantic relationships is associated with subjective wellbeing in later life
25 (Whitton & Kuryluk, 2012).

26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 ***Current partnership quality***

42 The protective effects of romantic relationships may largely depend on the quality of the
43 relationship itself (Carr et al., 2014; Dush & Amato, 2005). Romantic relationship quality refers
44 to the overall assessment of one's relationship, encompassing both positive and negative
45 perceptions of interactions and emotional experiences with a partner (Morry et al., 2010).
46 Factors such as interaction frequency, emotional sharing, and thoughts about the relationship
47 influence these perceptions (Farooqi, 2014). High-quality relationships are characterized by
48 intimacy, interest, and emotional satisfaction (Gallagher & Bentley, 2010; Yam, 2023). Negative
49 perceptions often stem from external stressors like work or finances. In contrast, internal stress
50 arises from conflicts and disagreements within the couple, such as differing values, goals, or
51 habits related to childrearing, intimacy, or personal boundaries (Falconier et al., 2015).

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3 The perceived quality of romantic relationships is an important factor for psychological health
4 (Kansky, 2018). with a significant effect on overall wellbeing (Hudson et al., 2020). People
5 who are in high-quality relationships have better mental health than those who are unhappily
6 married or cohabiting (e.g., Love & Holder, 2016; Williams, 2003), better subjective wellbeing
7 (Gustavson et al., 2016; Hudson et al., 2020), and life satisfaction (Proulx et al., 2007).
8 Conversely, low perceived relationship quality is linked to lower life satisfaction, worsened
9 self-perceived health (Hawkins & Booth, 2005; Umberson et al., 2006), and a higher prevalence
10 of depressive symptoms (Margelisch et al., 2017; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007).

11 An underexplored aspect is whether a high-quality current relationship can mitigate the
12 negative impact of an unstable relational history on wellbeing, or if good relationship quality
13 explains the high wellbeing observed in people with stable and long-term relationship histories.
14 Indeed, given robust evidence on the importance of relationship quality in predicting the
15 psychological wellbeing of older adults (Carr et al., 2014; Dush & Amato, 2005), it is plausible
16 that current relationship quality mediates the impact of relationship history on wellbeing,
17 enhancing feelings of belonging, support, and fulfillment (Rapp & Stauder, 2020; Soons et al.,
18 2009; Zella, 2017). Hughes and Waite (2009) examined the impact of marital history on health,
19 considering factors like current partnership status and previous partnership transitions. They
20 showed that marital disruptions have lasting negative effects on physical health, whereas mental
21 health is more closely linked to current marital status. In summary, it remains underexplored
22 whether new partnerships can help individuals recover from the negative effects of an unstable
23 relational history or whether these negative effects persist despite a high-quality current
24 relationship (Jung, 2023).

25 *Sex differences*

26 According to the life course perspective, marital experiences impact men's and women's
27 wellbeing differently due to varying life course roles and experiences. In contemporary high-
28 income societies, men typically benefit from living in a stable union more than women
29 (Coombs, 1991; Metsä-Simola & Martikainen, 2013). Partnered men tend to have healthier
30 lifestyles and greater levels of social integration compared to single men (see Uhlenberg &
31 Mueller, 2003). Single men often have a greater domestic burden than partnered men, whereas
32 single women typically spend less time at home than married or cohabiting women (Fahlén,
33 2016; Aassve et al., 2014). Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that single women are
34 more successful in coping with the lack of support left by a partner's absence (Zimmermann &
35 Hameister, 2019) by enjoying their independence more and cultivating larger networks of
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3 friends and relatives (Baumbusch, 2004). This implies that the advantages of a stable
4 relationship are more pronounced for men, while a lack of long-term relationships or more
5 unstable ones could be less detrimental to women (O'Flaherty et al., 2016; Zimmermann &
6 Hameister, 2019; XXXX et al., 2022).
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10 The impact of relationship quality on wellbeing may also vary between sexes. However,
11 evidence to date is quite mixed. Some research suggests that personal relationship quality is
12 more significant for women than men (Davila et al., 2003). This is attributed to women's greater
13 commitment and maintenance behaviours in relationships (Be et al., 2013) and their higher
14 investment of time and emotional effort. Consequently, women's wellbeing is often more
15 closely tied to emotional satisfaction in relationships, and they find relationship conflicts more
16 distressing (Thompson & Walker, 1989; Allen & Walker, 2013; Dehle & Weiss, 1998).
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20 However, other studies indicate that gender differences in the importance of romantic
21 relationships for wellbeing may diminish in older age. First, older couples are usually beyond
22 reproductive age and retired, reducing conflicts related to work, childbearing, and parenting
23 (Buckle et al., 1996). As couples age, their relationship becomes a more significant source of
24 satisfaction due to changes in social networks (Carr et al., 2014). Men, in particular, may shift
25 away from full-time jobs, engage less in social activities, and spend more time with their **partner**
26 (Kulik, 2002). Second, older couples have typically been together longer and have navigated
27 various life challenges, such as raising children and managing careers and health issues. This
28 shared history of overcoming crises and building trust and commitment may make relationship
29 quality equally important for both men and women in older age.
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32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 **Aim of the study and hypotheses**

42 This study aims to enhance our understanding of the link between partnership histories and
43 psychological wellbeing by adopting a holistic perspective on life courses, focusing on
44 trajectories rather than single events (Comolli et al., 2021; Piccarreta & Studer, 2019).
45 Additionally, it examines the quality of current partnerships to investigate whether it mediates
46 the effect of partnership histories on wellbeing. Specifically, it explores whether high current
47 relationship quality can help individuals recover from the negative effects of unstable or absent
48 partnership histories by improving mental wellbeing, or whether good relationship quality
49 accounts for the high wellbeing often observed in individuals with stable and long-term
50 relationship histories (as stable partnerships enhance relationship quality, leading to improved
51 mental wellbeing).
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3 Arguing that partnership trajectories are linked to life course outcomes, with the advantages
4 and disadvantages of certain relationship histories accumulating over time, it was hypothesized
5 that *stable and continuous partnership histories are associated with higher wellbeing in old*
6 *age in contemporary Finland compared to more unstable partnership histories and partnership*
7 *biographies that are characterized by singlehood (H1)*. Second, as the association between
8 partnership trajectories and wellbeing seems to often vary by sex, the following hypotheses will
9 be tested: *unstable or absent partnership histories will be more detrimental to the wellbeing of*
10 *men compared to women (H2)*.

11 Relationship quality is a multidimensional concept encompassing both negative and positive
12 aspects. To capture the concept of relationship quality, this paper focuses on various
13 dimensions: relationship satisfaction, internal conflict, and conflicts related to both partners'
14 work spheres (external conflict). We hypothesize that current relationship quality is associated
15 with wellbeing *so that higher relationship satisfaction is related to higher levels of personal*
16 *wellbeing (H3), and higher levels of conflict are associated with lower levels of wellbeing (H4)*.
17 Regarding sex differences in this aspect, two competing hypotheses are hypothesized: *the*
18 *association between relationship quality and wellbeing is stronger for women than for men*
19 *(H5a); the association between relationship quality and wellbeing is similar for both men and*
20 *women (H5b)*.

21 Regarding the quality of the relationship (for partnered respondents), it is hypothesized that
22 *current partnership quality mediates the negative impact of unstable relationship histories on*
23 *wellbeing, so that that higher relationship satisfaction will decrease the negative association*
24 *between those relationship histories and life satisfaction (H6)*. Additionally, *H7 proposes that*
25 *higher relationship satisfaction will explain the positive association between stable relationship*
26 *history and subjective wellbeing*. As for relationship conflicts, it is hypothesized that *the*
27 *current higher level of relationship conflicts will decrease the association between stable*
28 *relationship history and subjective wellbeing (H8) and will explain the association between*
29 *lower levels of wellbeing for those with unstable relationship histories and those currently in a*
30 *new partnership (H9)*.

31 **Data and methods**

32 *Data and sample selection*

33 We utilized data from Finland's Survey of Health, Aging, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE),
34 specifically waves 7 and 8, collected in 2017 and 2019. Wave 7 includes retrospective
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3 SHARELIFE information on partnership histories, as well as a condensed set of questions from
4 the regular SHARE panel questionnaire. The empirical analysis was divided into three main
5 parts.
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8 In the first stage, we focused on life course partnership histories by selecting respondents who
9 provided complete relationship histories, covering each year from ages 20 to 60. The sample
10 selection was based on the original survey sample for Finland, which comprised 1,677
11 individuals aged 50 or over. From this sample, a subsample of individuals who were 60 years
12 of age or older at the time of the interview was selected (N=1,254). After excluding cases with
13 missing data on relationship histories (N=27) and control variables (N=34), the final analytic
14 sample consisted of 1,193 individuals, with retrospective information covering 41 years.
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17 In the second stage, the association between partnership histories and subjective wellbeing was
18 investigated, using regression analyses. Wellbeing was measured during the respondent's first
19 appearance in the survey (waves 7 or 8). If a respondent participated in both waves, the average
20 score from both waves was used for the analysis, with standard errors clustered by individual.
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23 In the third part of the analysis, the association between relationship quality and subjective
24 wellbeing for men and women was investigated, as well as the mediating role of relationship
25 quality in the link between partnership histories and wellbeing. Partnered and re-partnered
26 respondents were analysed, using data from the Finnish drop-off questionnaire in SHARE
27 waves 7 and 8. The questionnaire includes questions about the current life situation that were
28 not addressed in the SHARE interviews, notably the quality of the relationship. Here, the
29 sample consisted only of respondents who declared they were in a relationship or had a partner
30 at the time of the drop-off interview (again, if respondents participated in both waves, their
31 average scores were taken and clustered within the individual). Thus, the analytical sample
32 decreased based on how many respondents had a current partner, and available data on
33 relationship quality variables, N= 881 (all excluded participants in this stage were excluded due
34 to the lack of a current partner).
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50 *Variables*

51 The main outcome variable was subjective wellbeing. It is a comprehensive term that
52 encompasses a multi-dimensional and intricate concept (de Chavez et al., 2005; Dodge et al.,
53 2012), involving both adverse aspects (such as depression or isolation) and beneficial facets
54 (such as self-esteem or happiness) (Demey et al., 2014), as well as global judgments of life
55 satisfaction (Diener et al., 2006). In contrast to emotional responses, which are typically brief
56 and variable, domain satisfactions and overall assessments of life satisfaction are regarded as
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3 more stable elements of subjective wellbeing. As such, they are the most suitable indicators for
4 exploring individuals' life circumstances (Eid & Diener, 2004; Proctor et al., 2017). For these
5 reasons, to capture the concept of subjective wellbeing, overall life satisfaction was used,
6 measured on a 0-10 scale, with 10 being the highest satisfaction with life¹.
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10 The main explanatory variables were the partnership histories. For the construction of the
11 sequences, respondents entered the analysis at age 20, and they are followed until age 60. The
12 variables used to define the sequences collect information about yearly marital/civil status and
13 are coded into the following categories: single, partnered, divorced/separated, re-partnered, and
14 widowed. The partnered and re-partnered categories referred to both marriage and cohabitation,
15 and being single was defined as never having been married or in a cohabiting relationship.
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20 To examine the role of relationship quality on subjective wellbeing, the factors highlighted in
21 the literature that reflect different dimensions of current relationship quality were introduced:
22 (1) satisfaction, (2) internal conflicts (e.g., the division of housework, money, leisure time,
23 sexual life, relationship with friends and kin, etc.), and (3) work-related conflicts (or external
24 conflicts). These variables were all measured simultaneously with wellbeing in our linear
25 regression models.
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30 As controls, several variables related to wellbeing in later life were selected. Participants'
31 educational degrees were obtained and measured according to the 1997 International Standard
32 Classification of Education (ISCED-97), codified into four categories: ISCED 0 & 1, ISCED
33 2, ISCED 3 & 4, and ISCED 5 & 6. We also controlled for employment status, coding it as a
34 dummy variable (retired/not retired). Furthermore, since poor health has a significant negative
35 effect on subjective wellbeing among older individuals (Midanik et al., 1995; Dwyer &
36 Mitchell, 1999), and health is strongly associated with life satisfaction (von Heideken Wågert
37 et al., 2005; Xavier et al., 2003), self-reported health (very good/excellent or less than very
38 good) was included. Family and social networks are also associated with life satisfaction in old
39 age (Berg, 2008), so the number of children (zero, one, two, three, or more) as well as
40 participation in social activities (volunteering or social/sport club) as a dummy variable, were
41 included.
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51 *Methods*

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57 ¹ To further substantiate our findings, we conducted robustness checks using the CASP-12, a multi-item measure
58 of wellbeing. The results from the CASP-12 were substantially the same as those obtained using the single-item
59 life satisfaction measure, confirming the robustness and reliability of our findings.
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3 Sequence analysis (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2010; Abbott & Tsay, 2000) is used to reconstruct and
4 describe life-course partnership histories between ages 20 and 60. The distance between
5 sequences was calculated, using optimal matching with substitution costs derived from the
6 transition rates between two states (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2017; Studer et al., 2011). It was then
7 possible to perform a cluster analysis on the resulting distance matrix, allowing the creation of
8 homogeneous groups of sequences that, together, represent types of histories (Gauthier et al.,
9 2010). For this purpose, Ward's cluster analysis (Ward, 1963) was used. Several cut-off criteria
10 (Average Silhouette Width, Point Biserial Correlation, and Hubert's C) (Studer, 2013)
11 supported a grouping into five clusters. Moreover, these five clusters proved substantively
12 meaningful.

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Once the clusters of histories were identified, they were associated with the subjective
wellbeing indicator through linear regression models (H1). To investigate the association with
the main explanatory variable, only the partnership clusters were included at the beginning. In
the second step, control variables were added, to examine whether the partnership clusters
maintain an independent association. The final models are provided separately for men and
women to investigate sex differences (H2).

Finally, we delved into the association between expressed satisfaction with current partners and
the wellbeing of respondents who were partnered at the time of the interview (including those
married, remarried, or cohabiting). To achieve this, individuals who reported having a partner
during the drop-off interview were included in the analysis, even if they had predominantly
experienced trajectories marked by extended periods of separation, divorce, or absence of
partners.

Within the Finnish drop-off questionnaire, ten items assess various dimensions of relationship
quality, while fifteen items measure aspects of conflict within the couple relationship
(Appendix-Table A2). Through factor analysis and varimax rotation, these items resulted in
three factors representing relationship quality dimensions: (1) relationship satisfaction, (2)
internal conflicts, and (3) work-related conflicts (Appendix-Table A2).

In subsequent analyses, we employed these three factors to explore the potential association of
relationship quality with life satisfaction. First, a baseline model was estimated to examine the
associations between partnership clusters and life satisfaction, including covariates, for the
subsample of respondents who were partnered at the time of the interview. In a second model,
relationship quality indicators were included to see their association with life satisfaction (H3,
H4). Again, the models are provided separately for men and women to investigate sex
differences (H5a, H5b).

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3 Finally, we examined whether the positive and negative aspects of relationship quality mediate
4 the association between partnership histories and life satisfaction (H6, H7, H8). The mediation
5 analysis provided insight into the mechanisms by which partnership history affects life
6 satisfaction, exploring whether variations in relationship quality can explain the impact of
7 relationship history on life satisfaction. To formally test for mediation effects, a bootstrapping
8 technique with 5,000 repetitions was conducted. Bootstrapping is a non-parametric approach
9 for assessing indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher et al., 2007). This method is
10 particularly useful for overcoming issues related to power and distribution assumptions
11 typically present in smaller samples (Wiedemann et al., 2009).

12 The mediation analysis proceeded as follows: First, relationship quality (Me) was regressed on
13 life satisfaction (IV). Subsequently, partnership history clusters (DV) were regressed on both
14 relationship quality (Me) and life satisfaction (IV). The indirect effect was quantified by
15 multiplying the mean bootstrapped sample estimates of the regression coefficients ('Me on IV'
16 * 'DV on Me controlling for IV'). The standard deviation of this estimate, obtained from 5,000
17 bootstrapped resamples, served as the estimated standard error of the mean indirect effect
18 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Based on these estimates, bootstrap confidence intervals for the
19 indirect effect were generated. All steps of the analysis were divided by sex.

32 33 **Results**

34 Five clusters of partnership histories were identified among Finns aged 60 and older. We
35 visualize the typical union histories (Fig. 1) using state distribution plots, illustrating the
36 proportion of each partnership status for each age (Gabadinho et al., 2011). The timeline is
37 represented in years on the x-axis.

38 The first cluster, "Continuous relationship-early entry," is the largest cluster, accounting for
39 around 39 percent of the sample. It is composed of respondents who formed a continuous and
40 stable relationship around 20 years of age and remained in the same union throughout the
41 observation period. The second cluster, "Re-partnership" (9% of the sample), comprises
42 individuals who separated or divorced from their first union and entered a second union around
43 35 to 40 years old. The third cluster, "Continuous relationship-late entry" (38% of the sample),
44 involves respondents entering a stable union when they were around 30 to 35 years old. The
45 fourth cluster, "Union dissolution" (9% of the total sample), consists of individuals who
46 separated or divorced from their first partner and remained without a partner until the end of
47 the observation period. Finally, the fifth cluster, "Mostly single trajectory" (5% of the total
48 sample), consists of individuals who remained single throughout the observation period.

sample), includes individuals who never married or entered cohabitation during the observational period.

Fig. 1 Here.

Table 1 reports the main sociodemographic characteristics of each of the sub-samples defined by the identified five clusters. Across the clusters, there are differences in the distribution of sex and educational level. Cluster 1, "Continuous relationship-early entry," and cluster 4, "Union dissolution," are female-dominated, while cluster 3, "Continuous relationship-late entry," is male-dominated. The higher-educated respondents (ISCED 5 or 6) are prevalent in cluster 3, "Continuous relationship-late entry," and cluster 5, "Mostly single," while those with a lower level of education (ISCED 0, 1, or 2) are prevalent in clusters 1, "Continuous relationship-early entry," 4, "Union dissolution," and 5, "Mostly single." Average life satisfaction is lower in clusters 2, "Re-partnership," 4, "Union dissolution," and 5, "Mostly single."

Table 1. Here.

Association between partnership histories and subjective wellbeing

Next, the association between the detected partnership history clusters and life satisfaction after age 60 is shown. Results of the regression model divided by sex are presented in Figure 2, with model 2a showing results without control variables and 2b with the added control variables (the full models are presented in the Appendix, Table A1).

Fig. 2 a-b Here

In the first model without controls, all clusters scored lower on wellbeing compared to the reference cluster, which was continuous and early partnership, with statistically significant results for single and re-partnered men and divorced women. Differences between early partnered, late partnered, and mostly single women are minor. In the full regression model (Fig. 2b), the results after adding education, employment, health, number of children, and participation in social activities did not change much from the model without covariates. The direction of the coefficients remained the same as before for all the relationship histories. The

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3 only noteworthy difference was represented by cluster 5, "Mostly single trajectory," in which,
4 for women, the coefficient was now higher than the reference category value, although the
5 difference is not statistically significant. For men, the value also increases, although it remained
6 negative, and in the complete model, it was no longer statistically significant in its association
7 with life satisfaction. In other words, sociodemographic characteristics explained much of the
8 differences in wellbeing between respondents living in an early and stable marriage compared
9 to mostly single respondents, but this was not the case for the other relationship clusters.

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11 These results partially support our hypothesis H1. Indeed, stable and continuous partnerships
12 appeared not to differ statistically in the level of life satisfaction, whereas more
13 "unstandardized/unstable" partnership histories displayed a lower level of life satisfaction
14 compared to the reference category. Regarding sex differences, we notice that being mostly
15 single seemed to be associated with a lower level of life satisfaction for men but not for women.
16 In the fully controlled model, Finnish single women even reported the highest wellbeing of all
17 groups, although the result was not statistically significant, and the cluster size is small. This
18 finding partially corroborates our hypothesis H2².

30 *Relationship quality and subjective wellbeing*

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32 Finally, we examined how relationship quality is associated with life satisfaction and whether
33 it mediates the association between partnership history and wellbeing.

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35 We began by investigating the association of partnership history clusters (and covariates) with
36 wellbeing for the subsample of respondents who have a partner at the time of the drop-off
37 interview (see Appendix Table A3 for descriptive statistics). Note that clusters 4, "Union
38 dissolution," and 5, "Mostly single trajectory," are included in the analysis since some
39 respondents also in these clusters had a partner at the time of the drop-off interview (around
40 60% of respondents in the "Union dissolution" cluster and 40% of respondents in the "Mostly
41 single" cluster had a partner at the time of the SHARE interview). The decision to report these
42 associations was made despite the limited sample size because they provide valuable insights
43 into non-marital relations in older age, which remains an understudied area. Indeed, one of the
44 primary goals of this study is to explore whether a high-quality current relationship can mitigate
45 the negative effects of unstable or absent partnership histories, thereby enhancing mental
46 wellbeing.

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58 ² To further investigate this result, we tested the interaction between sex and partnership trajectories. Our analysis
59 revealed a statistically significant difference regarding Cluster 5 (Mostly Single). Specifically, we found that males
60 generally reported lower predicted life satisfaction scores compared to females within this cluster.

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3 The associations for the partnered respondent sample aligned with the findings reported earlier
4 for the entire sample (Fig. 2a-b). In other words, the negative association between life
5 satisfaction and the re-partnership cluster for men and the divorced/separated cluster for women
6 remained in the partnered sample (results not shown, see: Models 1 in Tables 2). As expected,
7 higher reported relationship satisfaction was positively associated with life satisfaction. This
8 result is in line with our research hypothesis H3, and the association seems to be similar for
9 both sexes (life satisfaction increases by 0.07 points for females vs. 0.06 for males, see Table
10 2, Model 2), supporting our hypothesis H5b, which expected sex similarities, over H5a, which
11 expected a stronger association for women.
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19 Current relationship satisfaction explained the differences in life satisfaction between those
20 with unstable partnership histories and the stably partnered, for both sexes. In other words,
21 when controlling for relationship satisfaction, the direction of the relationship cluster
22 coefficients remained the same but diminished enough to lose statistical significance.
23 Interestingly, both men and women seem to 'recover' from the negative wellbeing effects of a
24 partnership history characterized by divorce or separation (cluster 2 for men and cluster 4 for
25 women) when they report a higher level of current relationship satisfaction (H6).
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31 To test whether the mediation effect is statistically significant, bootstrapping with 5,000
32 repetitions was conducted (see Appendix Table A4). According to the results, relationship
33 satisfaction mediated the association between life satisfaction and cluster 2, "Re-partnership,"
34 for men. The bootstrapping yielded a significant mean indirect effect of -0.16 (SE 0.06) with a
35 95% confidence interval from -0.29 to -0.05. Relationship satisfaction fully mediated the
36 partnership trajectory-life satisfaction relation, as cluster 2 "Re-partnership" no longer had a
37 significant direct effect on life satisfaction.
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43 Regarding women, relationship satisfaction mediated the association between life satisfaction
44 and cluster 4, "Union dissolution." The bootstrapping yielded a significant mean indirect effect
45 of -0.15 (SE 0.07) with a 95% confidence interval from -0.28 to -0.02. Relationship satisfaction
46 fully mediated the partnership trajectory-life satisfaction relation for cluster 4 (see Appendix
47 Table A5). Results for both sexes were consistent with the expected mediating effect of
48 relationship quality on subjective wellbeing (H6).
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53 Reporting more internal conflicts in the relationship was also negatively associated with life
54 satisfaction for both men and women (hypothesis H4, see Model 3). Again, this effect seems to
55 be similar for both sexes (hypothesis H5b). When controlling for internal conflicts (Tab. 2,
56 Model 3), again the direction of the coefficients remained but differences decreased so that
57 none of the clusters have a statistically significant effect on the outcome variable. This suggests
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3 that internal conflicts could partially explain the difference in life satisfaction between clusters.
4 According to the mediation analysis, no statistically significant effects were found for men, but
5 a significant effect was found for women in cluster 4, "Union dissolution." The bootstrapping
6 results yielded a significant mean indirect effect of -0.20 (SE 0.07) with a 95% confidence
7 interval from -0.34 to -0.07 (see Appendix Table A6). Internal conflicts in the partnership fully
8 mediated the association between cluster 4 and life satisfaction, as cluster 4, "Union
9 dissolution," no longer has a significant direct effect on female life satisfaction (H9).

10 For the work-related conflicts variable, higher values were negatively associated with life
11 satisfaction, and the effect was more pronounced for women (life satisfaction decreases by
12 0.18 points for women vs. 0.07 for men, see Table 2, Model 4). After controlling for work-
13 related conflicts, the partnership history became insignificant for women, suggesting that this
14 variable could mediate the association between clusters and life satisfaction, but not for men
15 (Table 2, Model 4). However, when testing for mediation effects, we did not find any
16 significant effects.

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29 *Tab. 2. Here.*

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32 Finally, as far as clusters 1 'Continuous Partnership' and 3 'Continuous Partnership-Late Entry'
33 are concerned, we observe that the positive impacts of a stable relationship trajectory
34 remained significant irrespective of the current relationship quality. Specifically, we did not
35 detect any mediation effects from the different aspect of current relationship quality.
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41 **Discussion**

42 A substantial body of research documents the importance of couple relationships in old age.
43 This study adds to the literature by examining wellbeing in later life from two perspectives: the
44 long-term effects of partnership history and the role of current relationship quality in mediating
45 these associations. By employing a life course perspective, the study emphasizes how the
46 advantages and disadvantages of partnership histories, accumulated over time, can have lasting
47 effects on wellbeing in later life. This perspective is crucial for understanding how earlier life
48 experiences shape later life outcomes, offering insights into the cumulative impact of
49 relationship trajectories. Asking how current relationship quality mediates the effects of
50 partnership history on wellbeing is an additional novel aspect of this research. This focus
51 highlights the potential for recovery from adverse partnership histories through the formation
52 of high-quality current relationships, underscoring new opportunities to positively influence
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3 wellbeing, even after a history of partnership instability. Moreover, the study explores sex
4 differences in the effects of partnership history and current relationship quality, highlighting
5 how men and women may experience these dynamics differently. This contributes to a more
6 sex-sensitive understanding of how relationships influence wellbeing.
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10 Our results indicate that maintaining a long-term relationship across the life course is associated
11 with higher life satisfaction after age 60, whereas more unstandardized or unstable partnership
12 histories are linked to lower life satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous
13 research showing that stable marriages or long-lasting romantic unions are associated with
14 various positive wellbeing outcomes (e.g., XXXX et al., 2022; Dush et al., 2008; Kansky,
15 2018).
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18 As expected, we detected some sex differences. Many studies have documented that men in
19 high-income societies benefit more from stable partnerships than women do (e.g., Jung, 2023;
20 Aassve et al., 2014; Zimmermann & Hameister, 2019). In SHARE Finland waves 7-8, the
21 absence of a long-term partner was negatively associated with life satisfaction for men but not
22 for women, supporting our hypothesis that older men suffer more from a mostly partnerless
23 life. Indeed, single women aged 60+ in Finland score remarkably high on life satisfaction,
24 especially after accounting for sociodemographic characteristics, which may reflect advances
25 in gender equality and female socioeconomic status.
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28 Sociodemographic characteristics explained wellbeing differences among mostly single
29 individuals compared to those in early stable partnerships, but did not account for the
30 differences between clusters characterized by union dissolution or partnering. This suggests
31 that ‘inequalities in the mating market’ are not always aligned with other socioeconomic
32 inequalities. Of course, differential selection into partnerships may partly explain this result
33 (Jung, 2023), even if it is not be related to standard socioeconomic or health differences. Future
34 research is needed to explore how different individual characteristics and values relate to
35 partnership histories and their associations with wellbeing.
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38 Some of the less beneficial effects associated with certain partnership histories were related to
39 current partnership quality. Higher relationship satisfaction was positively associated with
40 better life satisfaction for both men and women. These results align with earlier research
41 showing that people in happy partnerships have better mental health and subjective wellbeing
42 compared to those in unhappy marriages or cohabitations (e.g., Love & Holder, 2016; Williams,
43 2003). Interestingly, we found that current relationship satisfaction served to mediate the
44 negative effects of unstable partnership histories for both men and women. High levels of
45 relationship satisfaction weakened the negative consequences of unstable partnership
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3 trajectories for both sexes. By contrast, current relationship quality did not mediate the
4 wellbeing associations for the early or late continuous union clusters.

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6 An increase in reported internal conflicts within the couple was associated with lower wellbeing
7 for both women and men. These conflicts included issues related to the division of housework,
8 money, sexual life, and friendships. This suggests that reducing internal conflicts is critical for
9 maintaining subjective wellbeing in older partnerships and that conflicts arising from these
10 areas can significantly impact both relationship quality and general wellbeing for long-term
11 couples. In Finland, internal conflicts mediate the negative effect of unstable partnership
12 histories on life satisfaction only for women.

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14 Work-related conflicts exhibited the most significant sex disparity: conflicts related to work or
15 retirement have a more substantial impact on lowering life satisfaction for women compared to
16 men. Work conflicts are known to influence women's personal lives more profoundly, and vice
17 versa (Noor, 2003; Hagqvist et al., 2017). Although Finnish women engage in full-time work
18 as much as their male peers, they continue to bear a larger domestic burden and assume greater
19 overall responsibilities for private life (XXX, XXX & XXX, 2011; Väänänen et al., 2005).

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21 Finally, as far as stable partnership histories are concerned, the positive impacts of a stable
22 relationship trajectory remained significant irrespective of the current relationship quality. This
23 suggests that the benefits of having a consistent and enduring partnership are robust and
24 continue to enhance wellbeing, even when the quality of the current relationship is accounted
25 for. Therefore, the stability of the relationship itself appears to be a critical determinant of
26 overall wellbeing, underscoring the importance of long-term relationship stability.

27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 **Implications**

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43 Despite a growing body of research, the importance of couple relations in old age is still often
44 sidestepped and overlooked in policies of healthy ageing. For instance, the WHO action areas
45 during the Decade of healthy ageing appear to approach humans as individuals, rather than as
46 part of a social network, as partners and family members (refer to WHO:
47 <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing//add>). Policies of healthy and active
48 ageing need to become more aware of the central contribution of having a partner, and
49 relationship quality, to ageing. This suggests that programs and interventions should not only
50 focus on individual health and lifestyle factors but also incorporate support for maintaining
51 long-term, stable partnerships. Also, opportunities to form new partnerships later in life should
52 be supported. Policymakers should consider the role of both relationship quality and stability
53 in enhancing life satisfaction and overall wellbeing among older adults. Therapeutic
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3 interventions could be tailored to address relationship conflicts and promote relationship
4 satisfaction as a means to improve mental and emotional health in older adults.

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6 The study also highlights the social value of long-term relationships and the importance of
7 reducing internal conflicts within partnerships. Community-based programs could be
8 developed to support couples in managing conflicts and enhancing relationship satisfaction,
9 which could contribute to better mental health outcomes for older adults.
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14 15 **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

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17 Our study has some limitations. First, by focusing on Finnish data, we were unable to conduct
18 a cross-country comparison. We acknowledge, however, that subjective well-being (Diener et
19 al., 1995) and relationship histories (XXXX et al., 2022) vary across national contexts. Finland,
20 however, is particularly interesting due to its unique demographic patterns and family
21 dynamics. The country has historically high proportions of never-married and single
22 individuals, as well as elevated divorce rates (Lindgren, 1986). Additionally, cohabitation is
23 widespread (Coleman, 2013), and partnership histories among the population aged 50 and older
24 are more varied compared to most other SHARE countries (XXX & XXX, 2021). This diversity
25 allows for a rich comparison of different relationship histories and their associations with well-
26 being. Moreover, Finland and other Nordic countries display more complex family trajectories,
27 with a significant share of older adults entering new relationships later in life. However, there
28 is still limited knowledge about who remarries, or cohabits in later adulthood, and how these
29 'new relationships' contribute to health, well-being, and social support (XXX & XXX, 2021).
30 While focusing on Finland may limit the broader applicability of our findings, it provides
31 valuable insights into the country's distinctive context. Future research should, therefore,
32 investigate variations across different institutional settings to gain deeper understanding of how
33 relationships impact well-being across diverse countries.
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37 Second, further research is needed to understand whether the patterns found in this study hold
38 for younger cohorts (XXXX et al., 2022). Given the significant changes in family life patterns
39 since the late 20th century (van de Kaa, 2002), it is possible that the societal repercussions of
40 adopting non-traditional family life paths may differ from what was observed among older
41 cohorts.
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45 Finally, there is a potential endogeneity bias regarding the effects of partnership pathways on
46 life satisfaction. The direction of causality between life satisfaction and relationship history
47 characteristics cannot be established using the current methodology. It is possible that
48 individuals with higher life satisfaction are more likely to find partners and have better
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3 relationship quality, rather than the reverse. This could be linked to personality traits or other
4 factors that are driving both life satisfaction and partnership histories. Identifying these traits
5 could help in understanding the pathways through which relationships impact wellbeing and in
6 developing targeted interventions. Finally, future research should conduct longitudinal studies
7 that track individuals across multiple life stages to better understand the causal relationships
8 between partnership histories, relationship quality, and wellbeing. Such studies could help
9 disentangle the direction of causality and identify potential confounding factors. Therefore, this
10 study should be interpreted as showing associations rather than causal claims.

11
12 Despite these limitations, this study offers several advances in terms of new research questions
13 and methods. First, we considered patterns of partnership status from youth to middle age.
14 Using sequence analysis, we were able to observe the differences in Finnish men and women's
15 romantic relationship histories over 30 years. Second, due to the richness of the Finnish
16 component of SHARE data, we were able to consider the importance of current relationship for
17 wellbeing using three dimensions of relationship quality. By considering these implications
18 and recommendations, future research can build upon the current study's findings and contribute
19 to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between relationship
20 dynamics and wellbeing in later life.
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34 **Conclusion**

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36 To sum up, our results stress the potential to 'recover' from specific adverse effects or events
37 in one's partnership history. For instance, finding a good partner even at an advanced age can
38 erase the detrimental effects on wellbeing due to divorce. Here, the increased variety and union
39 formation among Finns aged over 50 (see XXX et al., 2021) entails a positive dimension,
40 suggesting it is "never too late to be happy". On the other hand, our results also suggest stable
41 partnership histories have a lasting positive impact on wellbeing, even when current
42 relationship quality is accounted for. This suggests that the benefits of maintaining a consistent
43 and enduring partnership are resilient over time. Thus, long-term relationship stability is a key
44 determinant of overall wellbeing, providing a foundation of security and support. If so, the high
45 rates of never married and divorced people in Finland are more of a liability from the
46 perspective of wellbeing.
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54 We conclude that the beneficial effects of marriage or cohabitation on mental and emotional
55 health seem to depend on both relationship history and current relationship quality, factors that
56 are interrelated.
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Tables

Table 1. Descriptive information of five clusters of relationship histories.

	(1)Continuous relationship-early entry	(2)Re-partnership	(3)Continuous relationship-late entry	(4)Union dissolution	(5)Mostly single	Total
% Female	61.5	53.3	44.3	57.7	48.4	53.2
% Education						
Isced 0/1/2	38.0	27.2	28.8	36.9	37.5	33.5
Isced 3/4	31.6	41.3	27.9	32.4	21.9	29.9
Isced 5/6	30.3	31.5	43.2	30.6	40.6	36.5
% Retired	83.5	80.4	79.9	76.6	81.2	82.1
% N° of children						
0	3.5	4.4	7.1	3.2	76.5	8.5
1	16.2	17.8	21.7	32.3	5.89	19.6
2	45.7	36.4	51.1	36.1	3.0	43.7
3+	34.0	40.9	21.0	32.1	9.1	28.3
% Health: Less than very good	84.6	84.3	84.9	85.6	84.1	84.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean, Sd:						
Age	71.6 (7.1)	68.5 (6.3)	71.3 (8.0)	68.8 (6.6)	69.9(7.9)	70.9 (7.5)
Life satisfaction	8.5 (1.2)	8.1 (1.5)	8.3 (1.3)	8.2 (1.7)	8.1 (1.3)	8.3 (1.2)
Duration in each state in years						
Single	1.7 (1.4)	2.7 (3.7)	9.4 (5.5)	5.0 (4.7)	39.0(3.7)	6.9 (9.3)
Partner	39.2 (1.5)	7.7 (6.0)	30.1 (6.2)	13.4 (6.7)	1.8 (3.5)	28.9(12.7)
Re-partnered	0 (0.1)	24.9 (8.0)	0.4 (2.1)	0.9 (2.7)	0 (0)	2.2 (7.1)
Divorced/separated	0 (0)	4.6 (5.2)	0.4 (1.6)	21.5 (7.2)	0 (0)	2.5 (6.8)
Widow	0.1 (0.7)	1.1 (3.2)	1.0 (4.4)	0.1 (0.3)	0.1 (1.0)	0.5 (2.9)
N	468	92	458	111	64	1,193

Tab. 2. Linear regression models on life satisfaction. 90% C.I, unstandardized coefficients.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Partnership history cluster (ref= (1) Continuous rel.- early entry)								
(2) Re-partnership	-.37*	.16	-.21	.14	-.32	.17	-.38*	.22
(3) Continuous rel.-late entry	-.17	.10	-.16	.12	-.14	.12	-.17	.11
(4) Union dissolution	.03	-.38*	.04	-.23	.05	-.18	.03	-.33
(5) Mostly single	.05	.33	-.03	.32	.08	.34	.05	.44
Age	.05	-.13	.05	-.01	.09	.02	.06	-.08
Age2	-.00	.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00	.00
Education (ref= Isced 0/1/2)								
Isced 3&4	.04	.01	.02	.00	.03	-.03	.05	.02
Isced 5&6	.08	-.14	.06	-.15	.03	-.10	.08	-.09
Retired (ref= Not retired)	-.09	.26	-.00	.18	-.09	.24	-.11	.19
Health (ref= Very good)								
Less than very good	-.53***	-.47***	-.45***	-.38**	-.47***	-.41**	-.53***	-.46***
Children (ref=0)								
1	.82	.79	.78	.98	.92	.87	.84	.76
2	.48	.53	.42	.72	.52	.66	.49	.51
3+	.60	.76	.49	.84	.62	.89	.61	.75
Extra activities	-.01	.05	.02	.06	.04	.09	.00	.07
Relationship satisfaction	--	--	.06***	.07***	--	--	--	--
Internal conflicts	--	--	--	--	-.05***	-.06***	--	--
Work-related conflicts	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.07*	-.18***
N	451	430	451	430	451	430	451	430

Fig. 1. Partnership history in Finland (20–60 years of age). N=1193.

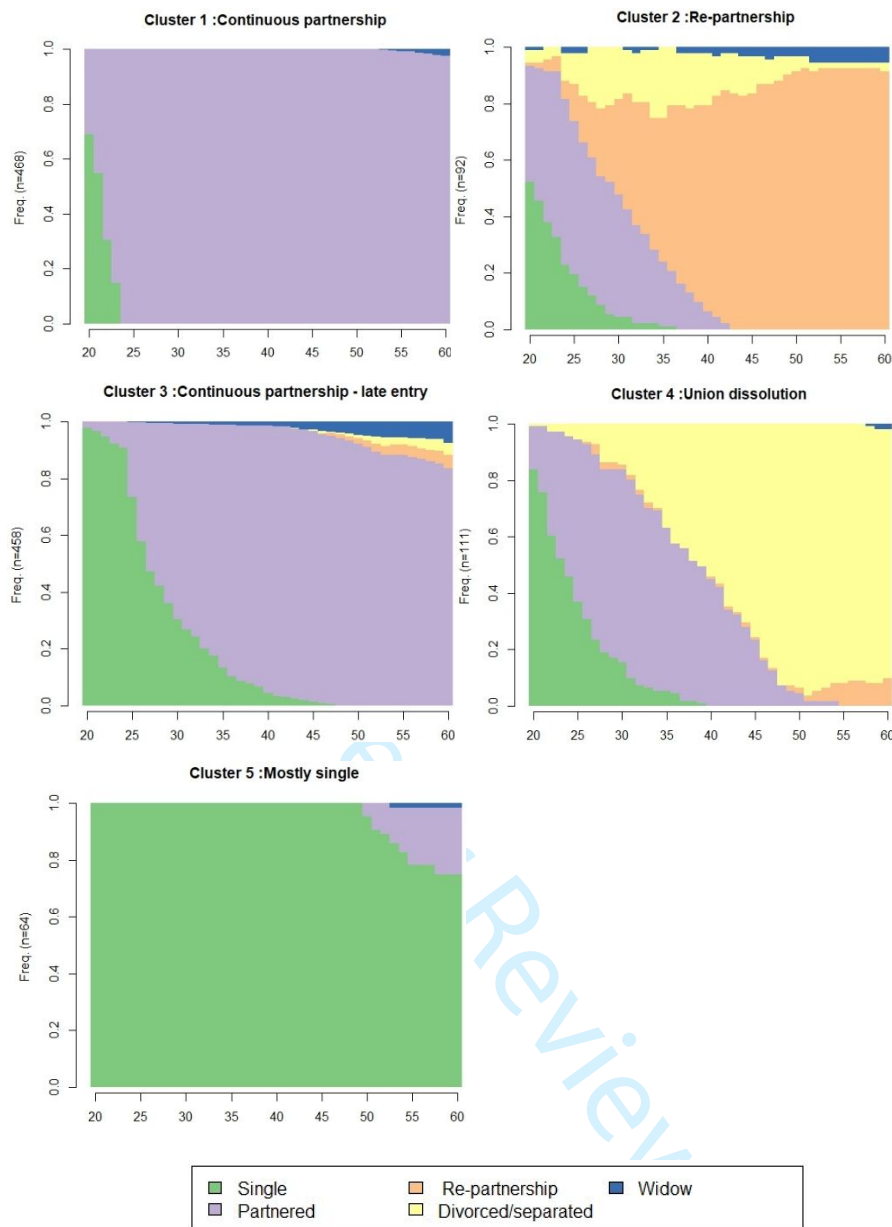
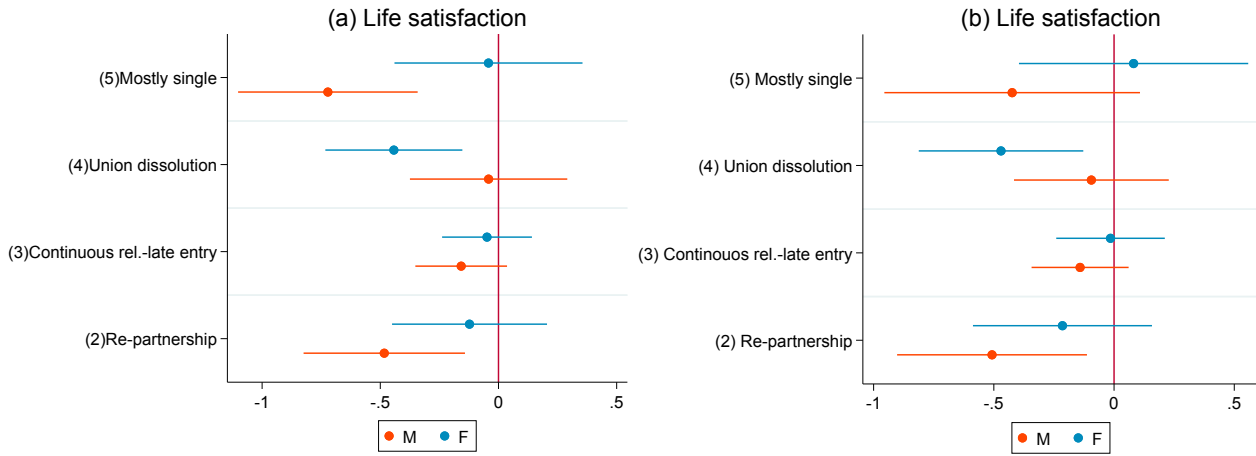


Fig.2 a-b. Partnership histories and life satisfaction by gender, 95% C.I, unstandardized coefficients (model a without and b with covariates, reference category: cluster 1 “Continuous relationship with early entry”). N=1193.



Note: Covariates in model b: education (Isced 0 & 1, Isced 2, Isced 3 & 4 and Isced 5 & 6); employment situation (retired or not); self-reported health (very good/excellent or less than very good); number of children (zero; one; two, 3+); participation in social activities (volunteering or social/sport club).

Appendix

Tab A1. Linear regression model on life satisfaction for the original sample of 1,193 individuals.

cluster	Male	Female
Partnership history cluster (ref= (1) Continuous rel.-early entry)		
(2) Re-partnership	-.51*	-.21
(3) Continuous rel.-late entry	-.14	-.01
(4) Union dissolution	-.09	-.47**
(5) Mostly single	-.42	.08
Age	.11	-.10
Age2	-.00	.00
Education (ref= Isced 0/1/2)		
Isced 3&4	.08	-.09
Isced 5&6	.14	-.12
Retired (ref= Not retired)	-.16	.17
Health Less than very good (ref= Very good)	-.60***	-.53***
Children (ref=0)		
1	.87**	.25
2	.39	.15
3+	.65*	.25
Extra activities	.11	.14
N	558	635

Tab.A2. Factor Analysis of 25 Items Measuring Relationship Quality.

Questions	Factor loading		
	1	2	3
I am satisfied with how we express things and feelings	0.811		
I am satisfied with the amount of physical closeness	0.768		
I feel that my partner respects me	0.791		
I feel that we love each other	0.826		
I feel that we belong together	0.789		
My partner fully supports me in life	0.796		
I have recently considered divorce or ending the relationship			
I am satisfied with how we decide about economic issues	0.637		
I am satisfied with the way we spend time together	0.746		
I feel that my partner understands me	0.800		
Conflict over the division of housework		0.555	
Conflict over money	-0.465	0.585	
Conflict over spending leisure time	-0.476	0.603	
Conflict over sexual life		0.419	
Conflict over infidelity or jealousy			
Conflict over friends		0.585	
Conflict over relations to our shared children or grandchildren		0.663	
Conflict over relations to my own kin		0.728	
Conflict over relations to my partner's kin		0.714	
Conflict over issues and situations related to divorce			
Conflict over alcohol or drug use			

Conflict over my own wage work			0.708
Conflict over my partner's wage work			0.795
Conflict over my own retirement			0.842
Conflict over my partner's retirement			0.791

NOTE: The extraction method was principal components factor with varimax rotation. The loadings for each factor of the structure matrix are shown, omitting all loadings that are .400 or less.

Factor 1 has been called "relationship satisfaction". It is based on nine questions and responses ranged from 0 (Strongly agree) to 3 (Strongly disagree), which resulted in total satisfaction scores between 0 to 27 (mean = 20.5, SD = 0.16). Factor 2, "internal conflict", was based on eight variables and responses ranged from 0 (never) to 4 (often), which produced scale scores between 0 and 32 (mean = 6.9, SD = 0.15). Factor 3 was based on four questions and responses ranged from 0 (never) to 4 (often), which produced scale scores between 0 and 16 (mean = 0.6, SD = 0.04). For each factor we summed the raw scores of the variable with a loading higher than 0.4 to form an additive scale.

Tab. A3. Descriptives of the subsample of individuals with a partner at the time of the drop-off interview and without missing information on the relationship quality indicators.

% Female	48.8
% Education	
Isced 0/1/2	29.9
Isced 3/4	32.5
Isced 5/6	37.5
% Retired	80.0
% N° of children	
0	6.5
1	17.7
2	44.7
3+	30.9
% Health: Less than very good	83.3
Mean, SD:	
Age	69.2 (6.6)
Life satisfaction	8.5 (1.1)
N	881

Tab A4. Bootstrapping Results for Male. IV: life satisfaction DV: Cluster 2 "Re-partnership"

Mediator: Relationship satisfaction. Number of obs= 618; Replications = 5000.

	Observed coefficient	Bias	Bootstrap std. err.	[95% conf. interval]		
Indirect effect	-.16	.00	.06	-.29	-.05	(P)
				-.30	-.06	(BC)
Direct effect	-.21	.00	.18	-.57	.15	(P)
				-.58	.14	(BC)
Total effect	-.37	.00	.19	-.75	-.00	(P)
				-.76	-.01	(BC)

P: Percentile

BC: Bias-corrected

Tab A5. Bootstrapping Results for Female. IV: life satisfaction; DV: Cluster 4 "Union dissolution"; Mediator: Relationship satisfaction. Number of obs = 577; Replications = 5000.

	Observed coefficient	Bias	Bootstrap std. err.	[95% conf. interval]	
Indirect effect	-.15	.00	.07	-.29 -.30	-.02 -.03 (P) (BC)
Direct effect	-.23	.00	.15	-.53 -.53	.06 .06 (P) (BC)
Total effect	-.38	.00	.18	-.73 -.75	-.02 -.04 (P) (BC)

P: Percentile

BC: Bias-corrected

Tab A6. Bootstrapping Results for Female. IV: life satisfaction; DV: Cluster 4 "Union dissolution"; Mediator: Internal conflicts. Number of obs = 577; Replications = 5000.

	Observed coefficient	Bootstrap Bias	std. err.	[95% conf. interval]	
Indirect effect	-.20	-.00	.07	-.34 -.34	-.07 -.08 (P) (BC)
Direct effect	-.18	.00	.17	-.51 -.50	.15 .15 (P) (BC)
Total effect	-.38	-.00	.18	-.74 -.74	-.03 -.03 (P) (BC)

P: Percentile

BC: Bias-corrected