

No time to lose?

Changes in partnership prerequisites for childbearing across ages

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MOTIVATION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The age at first parenthood has steadily increased across European countries (Neels et al., 2017), and an increasing number of women face difficulties conceiving at older ages due to age-related declines in fecundity (Leridon & Slama, 2008).

Individuals often postpone parenthood until they achieve certain milestones, such as entering a stable partnership (Mills et al., 2011). However, such delays can lead to difficulties conceiving, and women may increasingly feel that they are running out of time (Wagner et al., 2019; Yopo Díaz, 2020).

Are women more likely to adopt a flexible approach to partnership requirements with age?

If this is the case, we should observe the following situations:

1. RELATIONSHIP DURATION

Older women should be more likely than younger women to **have a child shortly after entering a co-residential partnership**.

2. UNION DISSOLUTION

Older women should be more likely than younger women to **experience union dissolution shortly after having a child**.

3. UNPARTNERED CHILDBEARING

Older women should be more likely than younger women to **have a child outside of a co-residential partnership**.

DATA AND METHODS

We use the longitudinal component of the EU-SILC, covering 32 countries for the period 2004-2022 → it allows us to observe changes in the household composition over a four-year observation window.

We select a sample of childless women aged 20-45 while avoiding over-representation of households.

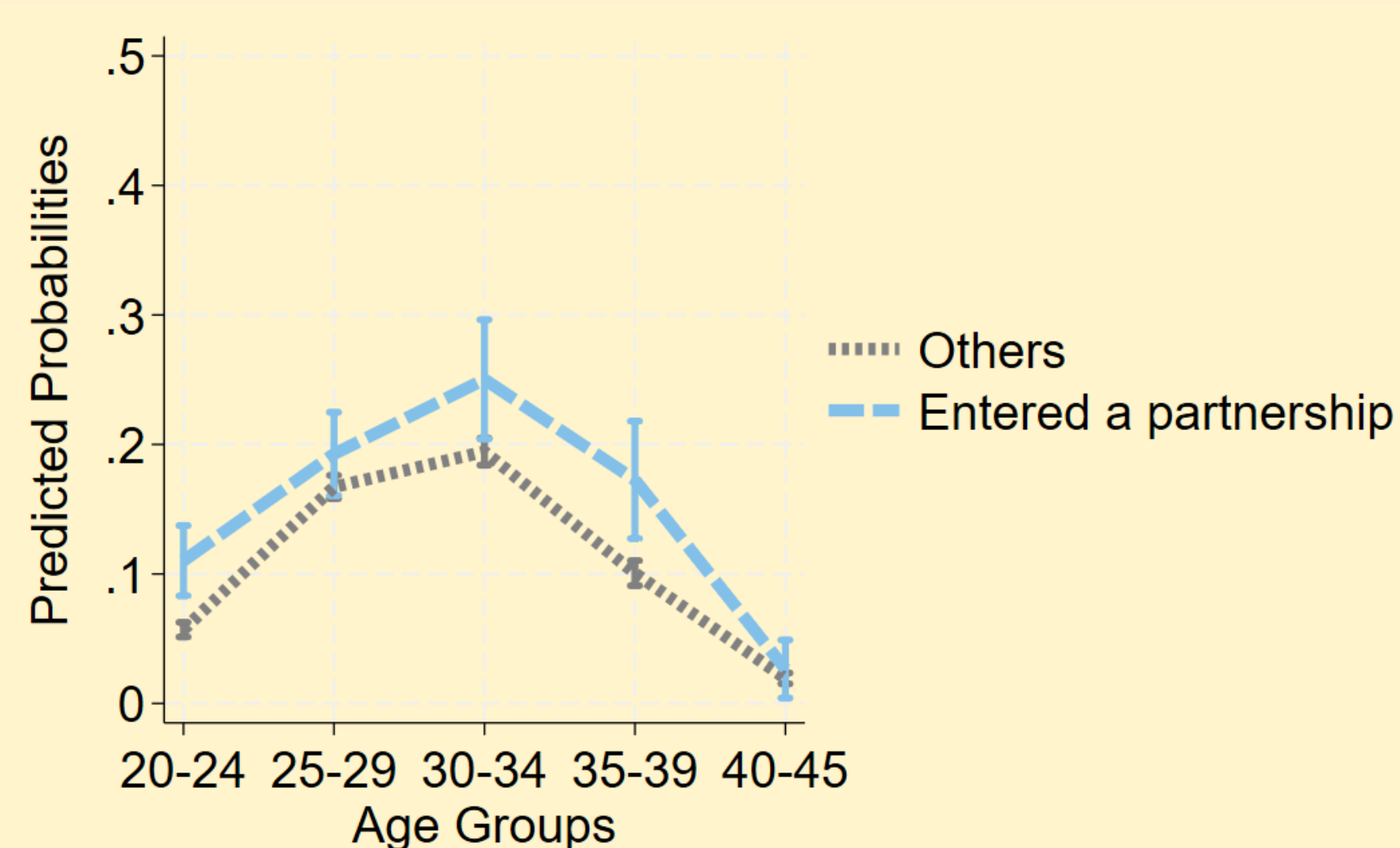
We employ linear probability models with country fixed effects analysing how individuals' status at the first observation (t1) relates to reproductive behaviours in subsequent observations (t2, t3, t4) across different age groups.

We first show graphs for all countries, then we examine variation across clusters of countries.

RESULTS

1. RELATIONSHIP DURATION

We assess the likelihood of having a child at observations t2, t3 or t4, by age, comparing single childless women who entered a co-residential union with all other childless women.



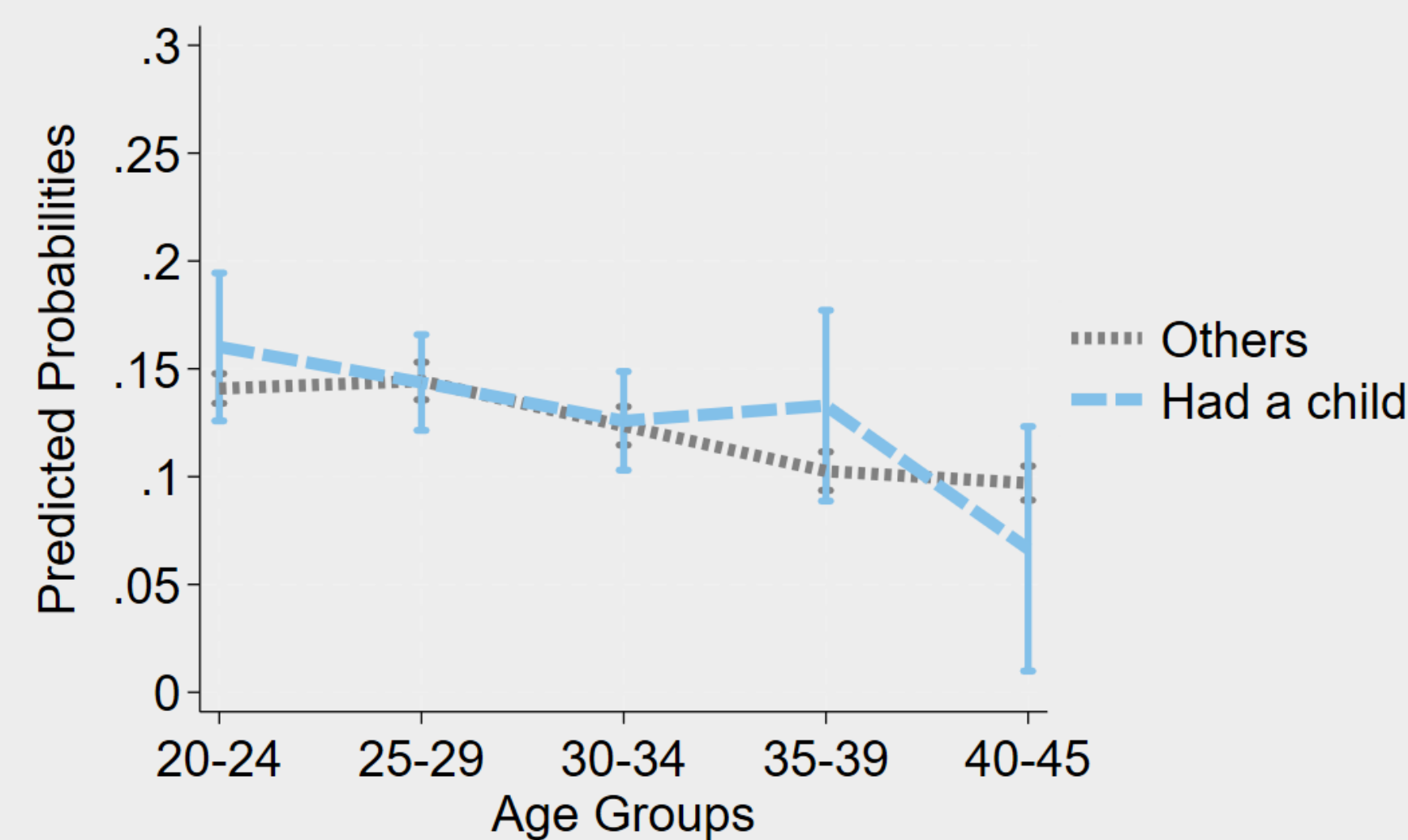
The difference between the two groups becomes particularly large at ages 35-39 (PP = 0.17 vs. 0.10, p-value = 0.002).

This suggests that initiating a co-residential partnership at these ages is particularly associated with near-term childbearing.



2. UNION DISSOLUTION

We assess the likelihood of ending a co-residential partnership shortly after the birth among those who had a first child during the observation period, compared to all other partnered childless women.

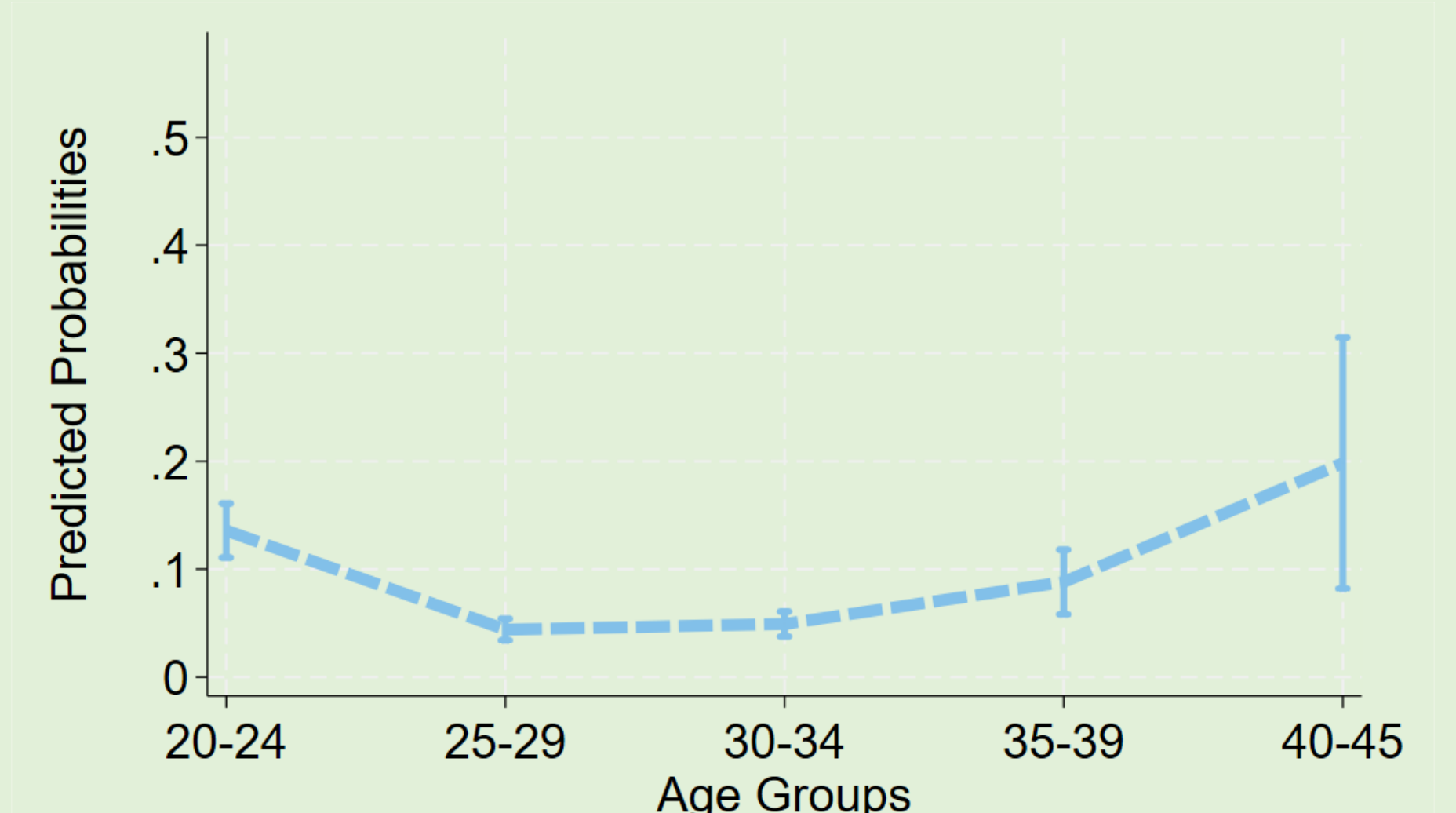


The likelihood of union dissolution decreases gradually with age and remains fairly consistent between the two groups, suggesting that women who had a child are not more likely to experience union dissolution at later ages.



3. UNPARTNERED CHILDBEARING

We assess the likelihood of not co-residing with a partner (vs. co-residing) at the time of birth among women who became mothers during the observation period.



The likelihood of having a child without a co-resident partner rises at ages 35-39 (PP = 0.09), increasing further at ages 40-45 (PP = 0.20). This suggests that older women are more likely to have a child outside a union.



VARIATION ACROSS GROUPS OF COUNTRIES

In **countries** with **higher fertility rates**, women who enter partnerships **in their 20s** generally **postpone** having children, whereas those who enter partnerships **in their late 30s** usually **do not**.

In some countries, particularly those with **low and early** and those with **high and late** fertility, women aged 40-45 who recently became mothers exhibit a **lower likelihood of partnership dissolution** than women of the same age who did not have a child.

The pattern of **late solo motherhood** is most pronounced in the countries characterized by the **latest** fertility schedules.

YES, women are more likely to adopt a flexible approach to partnership requirements with age.

In particular, older women are more likely to have a child shortly after entering a co-residential partnership and to have a child outside a co-residential partnership than younger women.

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