

INTERVIEW

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Regretting parenthood? Study Alerts of Seven-Year Decline in Relationship Quality

Interview with Olatz Román

- *Negative effects mitigated by egalitarian distribution of roles*
- *Interview with Olatz Román on new research by the EPoS Economic Research Center*

Bonn, Mannheim, 11.12.2025 – **The birth of the first child leads to a sharp and lasting decrease in the quality of parents' relationship, felt equally by men and women.**

The reason: As parents, couples redistribute professional and household tasks with women often taking on a larger share of housework and men a larger share of paid work. The greater the changes of tasks among partners, the stronger the decline in relationship quality. These are results of a study by the EPoS Economic Research Center at the Universities of Bonn and Mannheim. They are published in the discussion paper "Children, Household Specialization and Relationship Quality".

Ms. Román, what happens in relationships when the first child is born?

Olatz Román: According to our research, individuals experience a substantial decline in how they evaluate the quality of their relationship after becoming parents. This decline persists for at least seven years after the first child is born. What may come as a surprise, we find that women and men are affected equally. Couples that make larger changes to how they share professional and household tasks, experience a larger decrease in relationship quality, we find. Our results are based on the answers of 1,760 individuals in the United Kingdom, interviewed every other year over a period of 13 years.

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According to your findings, why does the quality of relationships suffer after the birth of the first child?

Olatz Román: The arrival of children increases the demands on couples, with additional childcare responsibilities and housework. These new tasks are often borne by women at the expense of their jobs, while men take on a larger share of paid work. Before childbirth, couples, and especially women, underestimate these effects. Unexpected changes may place strain on relationships, our findings suggest. Having said that, children increase overall happiness. Yet, the impact on the perceived relationship quality is negative.

What can couples do to protect their relationship before and after having a child?

Olatz Román: Being aware of the necessary adjustments in advance may help couples prepare, communicate, and have a more balanced division of responsibilities in place before the child is born. Our research suggests that a more egalitarian distribution of tasks – which is upheld after the child is born – is associated with a smaller decline in relationship quality.

How can policymakers help parents to preserve the quality of their relationship?

Olatz Román: Many existing policies, such as parental leave reforms and subsidized childcare, aim to improve the career prospects, particularly for mothers. These are valuable goals on their own. Our results suggest that such policies may also help mitigate the negative impact of parenthood on relationship quality as they promote a more equitable division of household responsibilities.

The presented discussion paper is a publication without peer review of the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS. Access the full discussion paper here: <https://www.crctr224.de/research/discussion-papers/archive/dp719>

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The Collaborative Research Center (CRC) Transregio 224 EPoS

Established in 2018, [the Collaborative Research Center Transregio 224 EPoS](#), a cooperation of the universities Bonn and Mannheim, is a long-term research institution funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG). EPoS addresses three key societal challenges: how to promote equality of opportunity; how to regulate markets in light of the internationalization and digitalization of economic activity; and how to safeguard the stability of the financial system.

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