

Singlehood by choice – mostly a transient status

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Living without a partner is becoming more common in the western world and specifically in Germany (Federal Statistical Office Germany, 2013) and an increasing number of studies tries to shed light on the phenomenon of singlehood. Lately, researchers have suggested that there is a distinction between *Singles by Choice*, those who do not want to have a partner, and *Singles by Circumstance*, those who would like to have a partner, but are currently not coupled (Slonim, Gur-Yaish & Katz, 2015; Morris, Slonim & Osburn, 2016). It has been found that singles by choice differ from singles by circumstance in well-being, and also in their values and beliefs about family and romantic relationships (Slonim & Schütz, 2015a; Slonim & Schütz, 2015b).

To the best of our knowledge, there has been no investigation into whether singlehood by choice is a relatively stable status or more a period of transition between relationships. In the current study we explored fluctuation and stability in the desire for a romantic relationship. We used data from the first six waves of pairfam (including DemoDiff) (Huinink et al., 2011), i.e. 3900 individuals who described themselves as single at a minimum of two points of measurement.

To assess the desire for a romantic relationship, we used the item "To what extent would you like to have a partner?", which on a 5-point scale ranges from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very much"). Overall, the desire for a relationship was strong: only approx. 2 % of the singles scored 1 consistently for all waves in which they were single, indicating that they would not want a partner. Approx. one fifth of the singles provided a consistent response over all waves in which they were single, i.e. their reported desire for a romantic relationship was stable, and approx. two fifth diverged by at least 2 points in their responses over the time of being single.

The findings show that stable singlehood by choice is very rare. In most single participants the desire for a romantic relationship changed over the course of being single. Since most self-ascribed singles by choice were rather young, i.e. in the youngest birth cohort, it seems that finding a partner for them is a possible option. In other words, not wanting a partner might not be a permanent or ideologically motivated decision but a statement that is based on a specific life situation that can be rooted in factors such as past experiences or present obligations.

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