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Employment and financial uncertainty and couple instability. Family transitions during the Covid-19 pandemic

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Motivation and hypotheses

- COVID-19 pandemic affected demographic behaviours. Fertility decline observed in European countries, then partial recover (Sobotka et al 2021);
- Little evidence about divorce: no changes in Sweden (Fallesen 2020); fewer divorces in US (Manning and Payne 2021) during the first months of pandemic;
- Opposite potential effects of the pandemic for couple stability:
 - Economic crisis and uncertainty might lead to higher levels of stress, and lower stability (Amato & Beattie 2011, Vignoli et al. 2020; Pietromonaco et al. 2021)
 - Long times spent at home and reallocation of duties during lockdown might increase conflict, thus lower couple stability (Ruppner et al. 2018)
 - Living in couple allow to better face uncertainty, and couple might stay together in moments of crisis
 - *Cocooning effect*: more good time (possible leisure) together might improve quality of relationship (Settersen 2020)

Data and method

- *Epidemiology and living conditions* nationally representative survey (*Epicov INSERM, DREES*), which followed 135,000 individuals aged 15+ starting in May/June 2020 (1st lockdown); 2nd wave in October/November 2020; 3rd wave in May 2021
- Information about couple separation from household grid at waves 1 and 2; change in financial / employment situation at wave 1 since the beginning of first lockdown
- Logistic models on probability to separate
- Control variables: age, number of children, education, household income (deciles) and employment status before the first lockdown
- Individuals 20+ who lived with a partner at wave 1 (N=69,365)

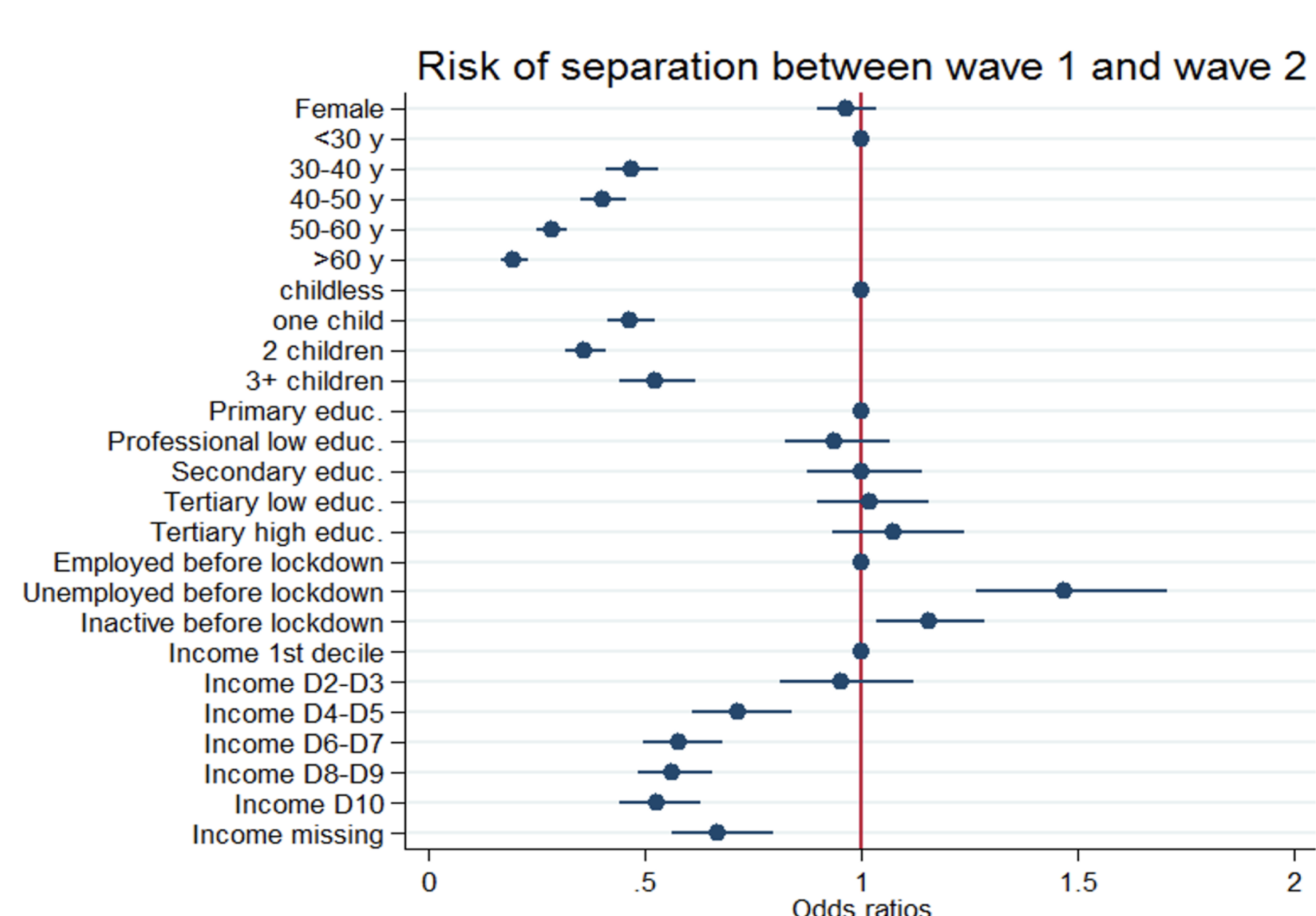
Research questions

- How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected couple stability during the first months of crisis?
- Are potential changes linked with increased levels of economic and job insecurity?
- Are the consequences different depending on individuals' sociodemographic characteristics?

Results

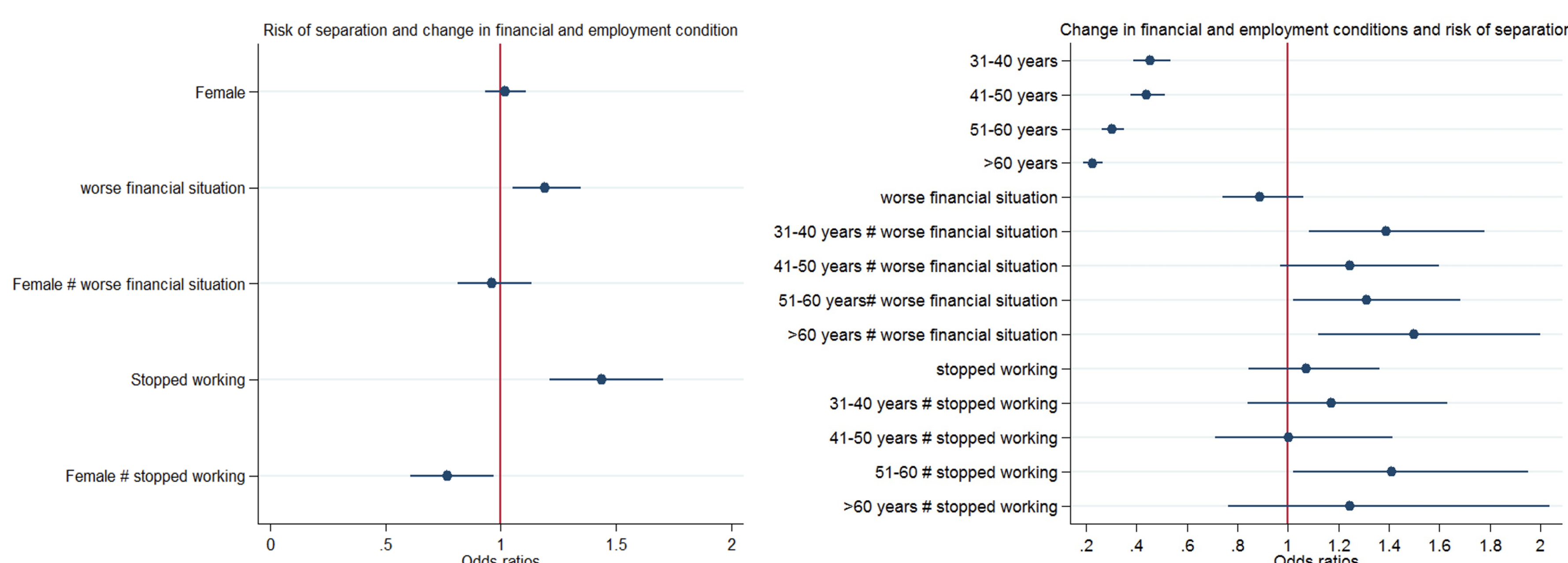
	21-30 y	31-40 y	41-50 y	51-60 y	60+ y	Total
Not cohabiting anymore at wave 2	581 (13.46%)	575 (4.64%)	594 (3.94%)	636 (4.24%)	866 (3.83%)	3,252 (4.69%)
Total	4,318	12,390	15,084	14,985	22,588	69,365

Figure 1: Individual socio-demographic determinants of separating between wave 1 and wave 2



Note: Results from logistic model (N=69,365). All controls refer to wave 1

Figure 2: Change in financial and employment situation and risk of separation, interactions by gender and age



Note: Results from logistic models (N=69,365). The model includes all controls shown in Figure 1

Highlights

- Around 4.7% of individuals stopped living with the partner within 5-6 months
- Younger and childless individuals, with lower income and who were unemployed before the lockdown were substantially more likely to separate
- Net of actual income and employment status, worsening financial situation and becoming unemployed or inactive was significantly related with the probability to separate - for men, but not for women; for women, stopping to work during the lockdown was negatively associated with separation

Conclusions

- The observed rate of separation is consistently higher compared to those observed in other years, suggesting that many couples have had difficulties coping with the pandemic-related crisis
- Deterioration in financial and employment condition is a significant predictor of couple separation for men after the age of 30, net of socio-economic status and income level
- These results seem to confirm the hypothesis that higher levels of uncertainty negatively affect couple stability but the effect is gender specific