The emergence of health inequalities across the life course: the role of partnership transitions

Families shape health by providing economic, social, and psychological resources (and strains) that protect (or threaten) the health of their members. Although it has often been reported that marriage correlates with better health and longevity, part of this association may reflect (self-)selection, which is inevitably confounded with causal marital protection effects in the large existing body of cross-sectional studies. More recent, longitudinal studies have started to consider the temporal dynamics of health effects (e.g., anticipation effects and delayed impact) as well as cohort differences in the tradition of life course research.

In my presentation, I provide first results from a DFG-funded research project on health inequalities over the life course (PI: O. Arránz Becker and C. Wolf). Using FE panel regressions that control for time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity, in combination with so-called time impact functions, we model shifts in health across the transition to first marriage and first divorce on mental and physical health (SF-12), based on SOEP data. We consider gendered patterns and distinguish between short-term fluctuations and long-term effects (until up to 6 years after the event).