

Are childless seniors lonely?

Examination of micro and macro aspects

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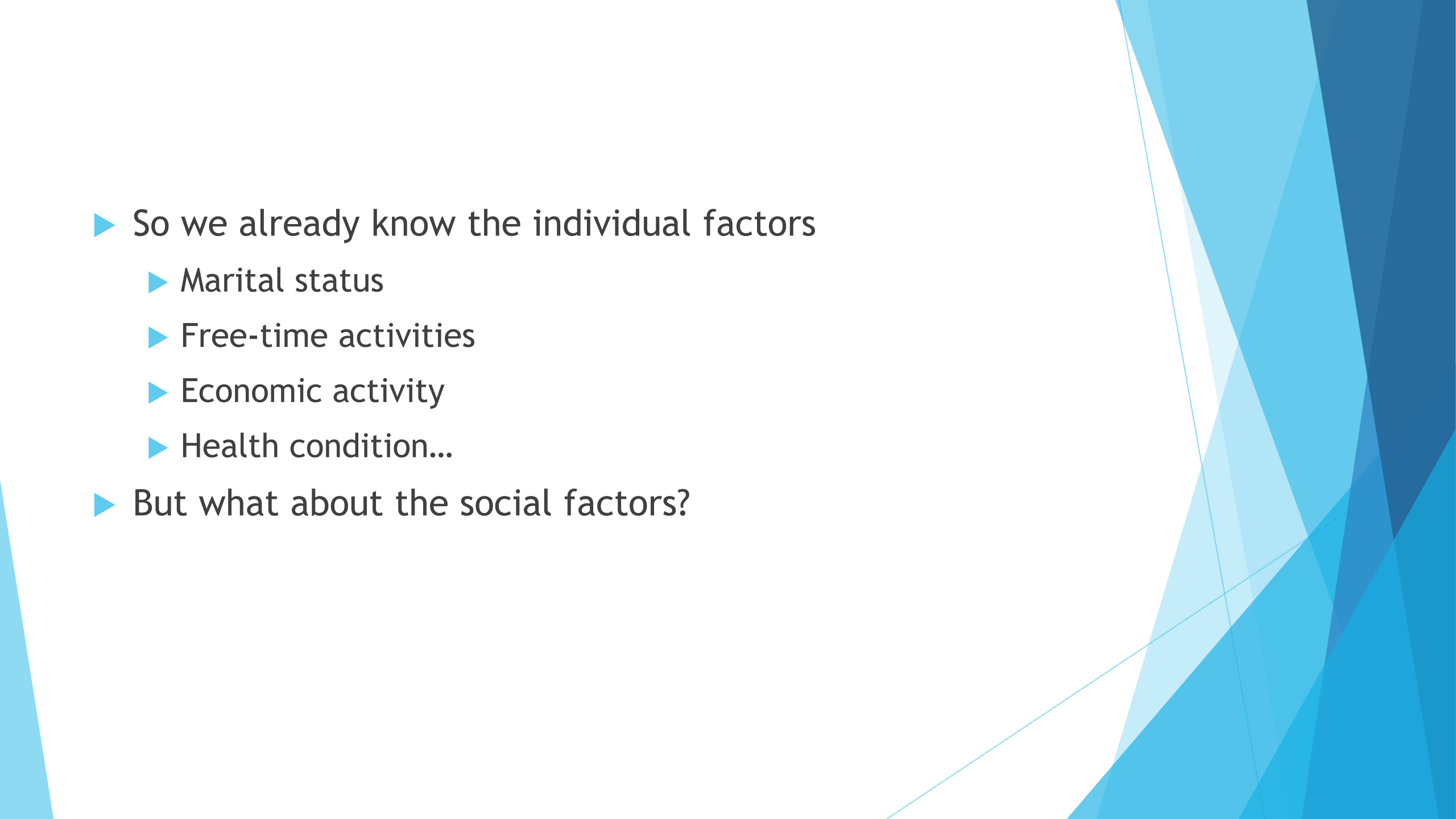
Why this topic?

- ▶ Ageing population as economic burden
- ▶ Increasing childlessness?
- ▶ Childlessness as something negative
- ▶ Lonely childless seniors - one of many stereotypes?
- ▶ Normativity of parenthood



A little bit from literature

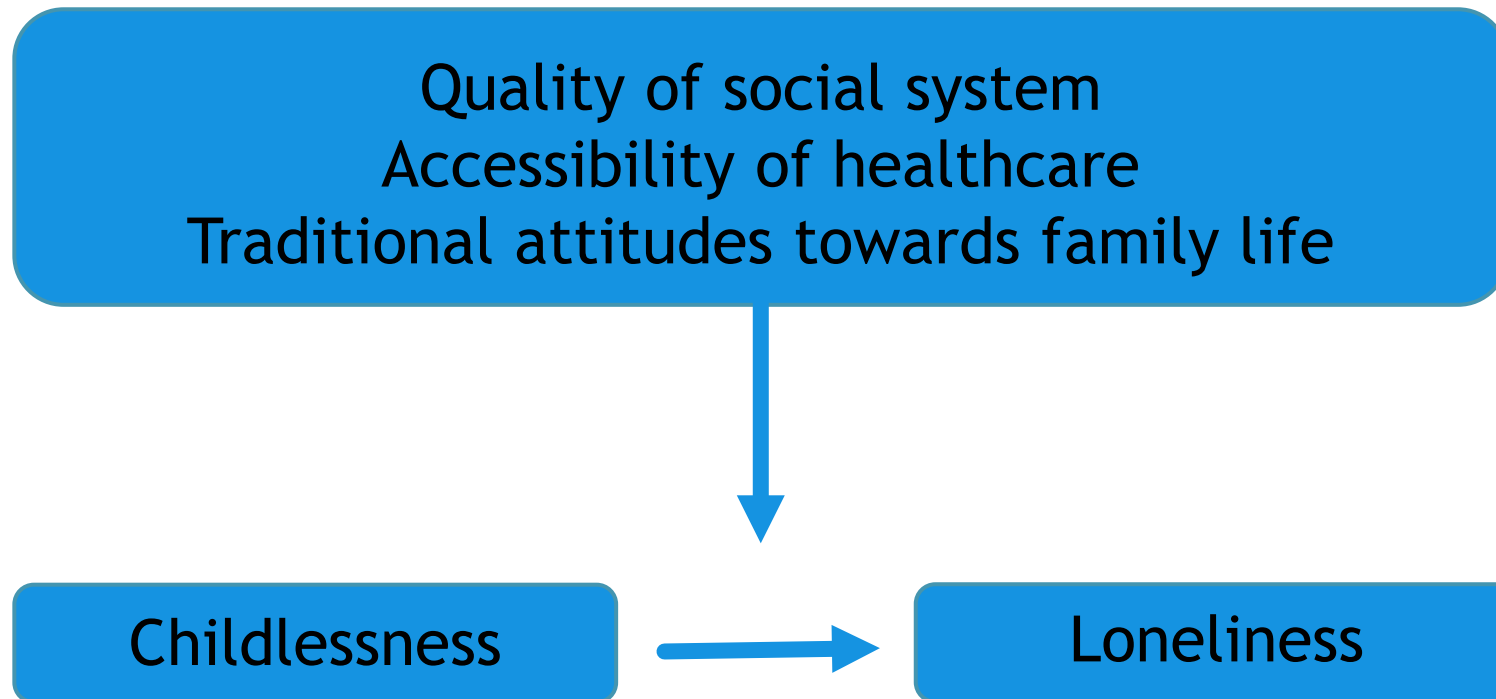
- ▶ Inconsistent results of previous research
- ▶ The childless are lonelier than parents?
- ▶ A child as the main provider of care in old age - instrumental emotional and also financial support
- ▶ Social networks of the childless - not worse, just different

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- The background of the slide features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the slide, creating a modern, dynamic aesthetic.
- ▶ So we already know the individual factors
 - ▶ Marital status
 - ▶ Free-time activities
 - ▶ Economic activity
 - ▶ Health condition...
 - ▶ But what about the social factors?

One of few exceptions

- ▶ Huijts, Tim, Gerbert Kraaykamp a S. V. Subramanian. 2011. „Childlessness and Psychological Well-Being in Context: A Multilevel Study on 24 European Countries“. *European Sociological Review* (29)1: 32-47.
- ▶ Negative attitudes towards childlessness
- ▶ Level of social contacts
- ▶ EURO-D scale
- ▶ ESS 2006 - not representative for the population 40+
- ▶ Data old 9 years

So what am I interested in? Research question



Method

- ▶ Multilevel regression analysis
- ▶ Data SHARE 5th wave (2013) - imputed data and ELSA 6th wave (2012/2013), Eurostat (2008), Eurobarometer 2014, EU-SILC 2007
- ▶ Control variables on the individual level: gender, age, marital status, economic activity, free-time activities, financial situation, health condition
- ▶ Dependent variable - short index of loneliness
 - ▶ Values 0 to 6, where 0 is the least lonely and 6 the loneliest
- ▶ Respondents 50+

Definition of key variables

- ▶ **Loneliness** is defined as a state, when the social network of a person is insufficient in some important way - in quality or quantity
- ▶ A person is lonely if his or her notion about relationships (the relationship standards) differs from the reality
- ▶ **Relationship standards** - normative part and subjective part = expectations of individuals of particular social relationships and roles
 - ▶ Non-fulfillment » feelings of loneliness
- ▶ **The childless** = those who haven't ever had any biological or social children

Normative attitudes towards family life

- ▶ % of people that agree with a statement that family life suffers when a mother has a full-time job
- ▶ Level of normativity in attitudes towards family life
- ▶ Having children = being normal
- ▶ Non-fulfillment of norms >> criticism, misunderstanding >> internalization of stereotype about necessity of having children in order to have fulfilled life >> loneliness
- ▶ Non-fulfillment of the relationship standards generally accepted in society

Quality of social system

- ▶ % GDP, that a country invests in social protection benefits
- ▶ Accessibility of formal care in case of need, social security
- ▶ Children as primary care providers in old age
- ▶ Social system as substitution for care provided by children

Inaccessibility of healthcare

- ▶ % of people 80+, that have problems with obtaining necessary healthcare
- ▶ Availability of instrumental help
- ▶ Healthcare prominent in old age
- ▶ Troubles with transportation to a doctor
- ▶ Helping children x the childless?
- ▶ Substitution of children as main care providers

Description of sample



14
countries



10 %
childless



45 %
men



65 601
respondents

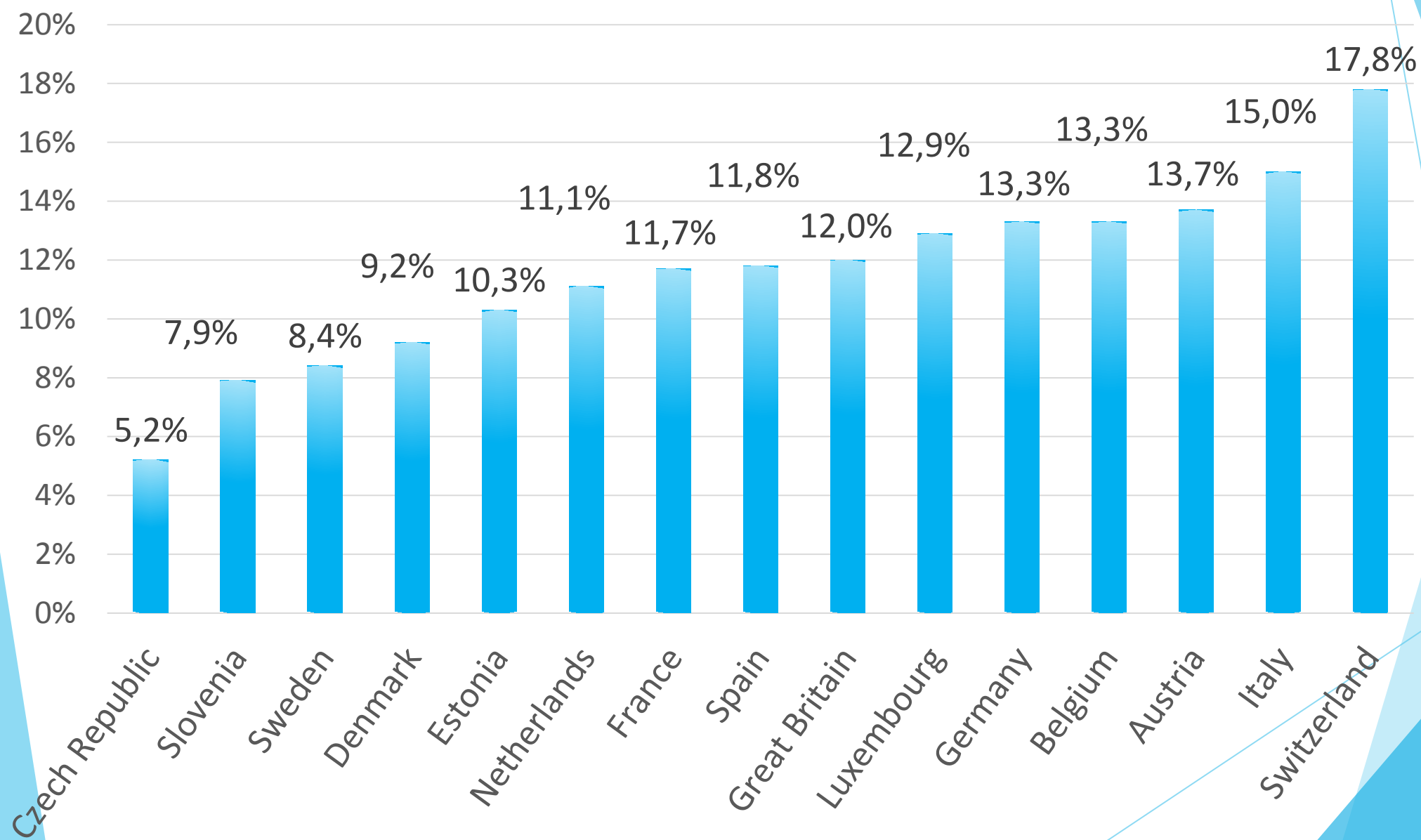


90 %
parents

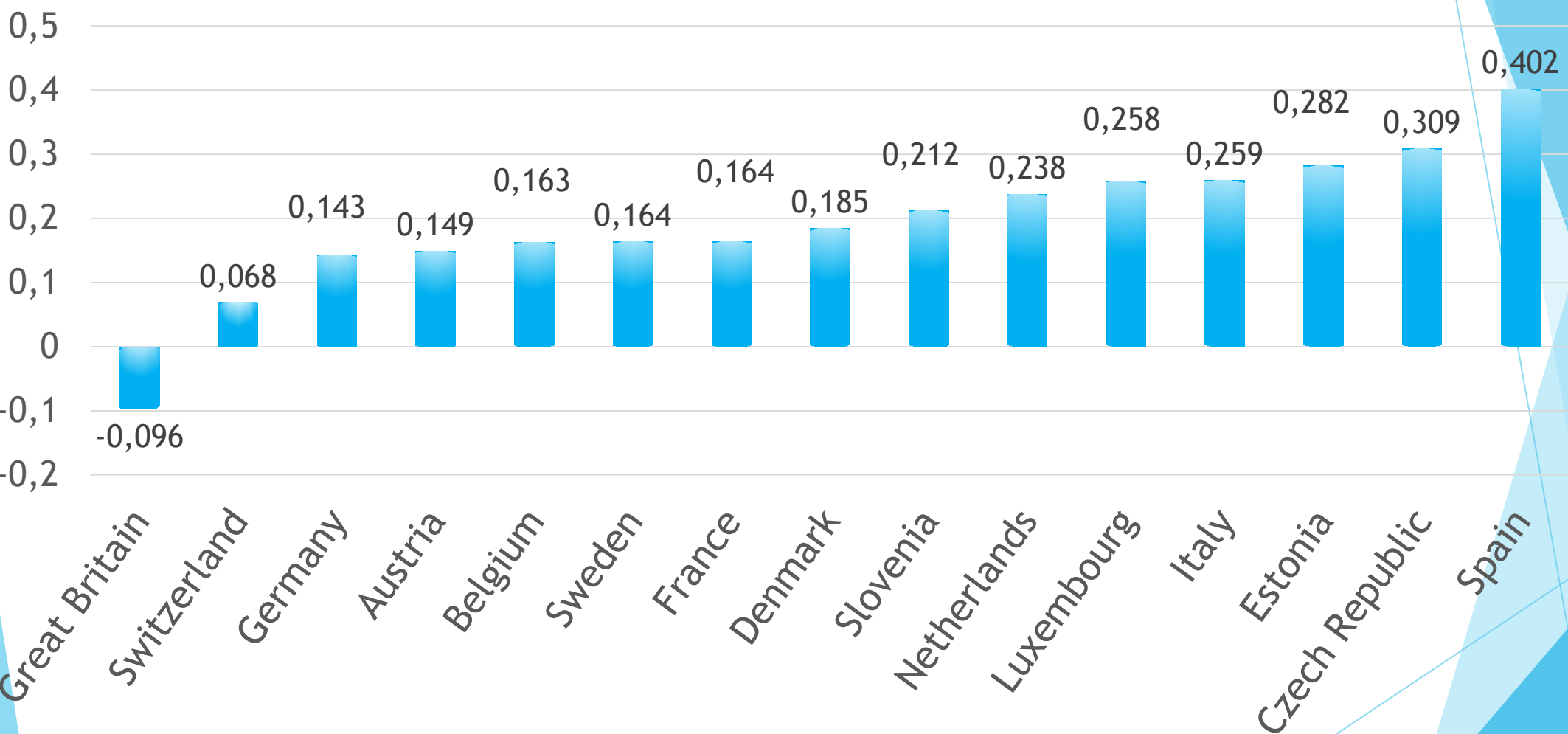


55 %
women

Rate of childlessness across Europe



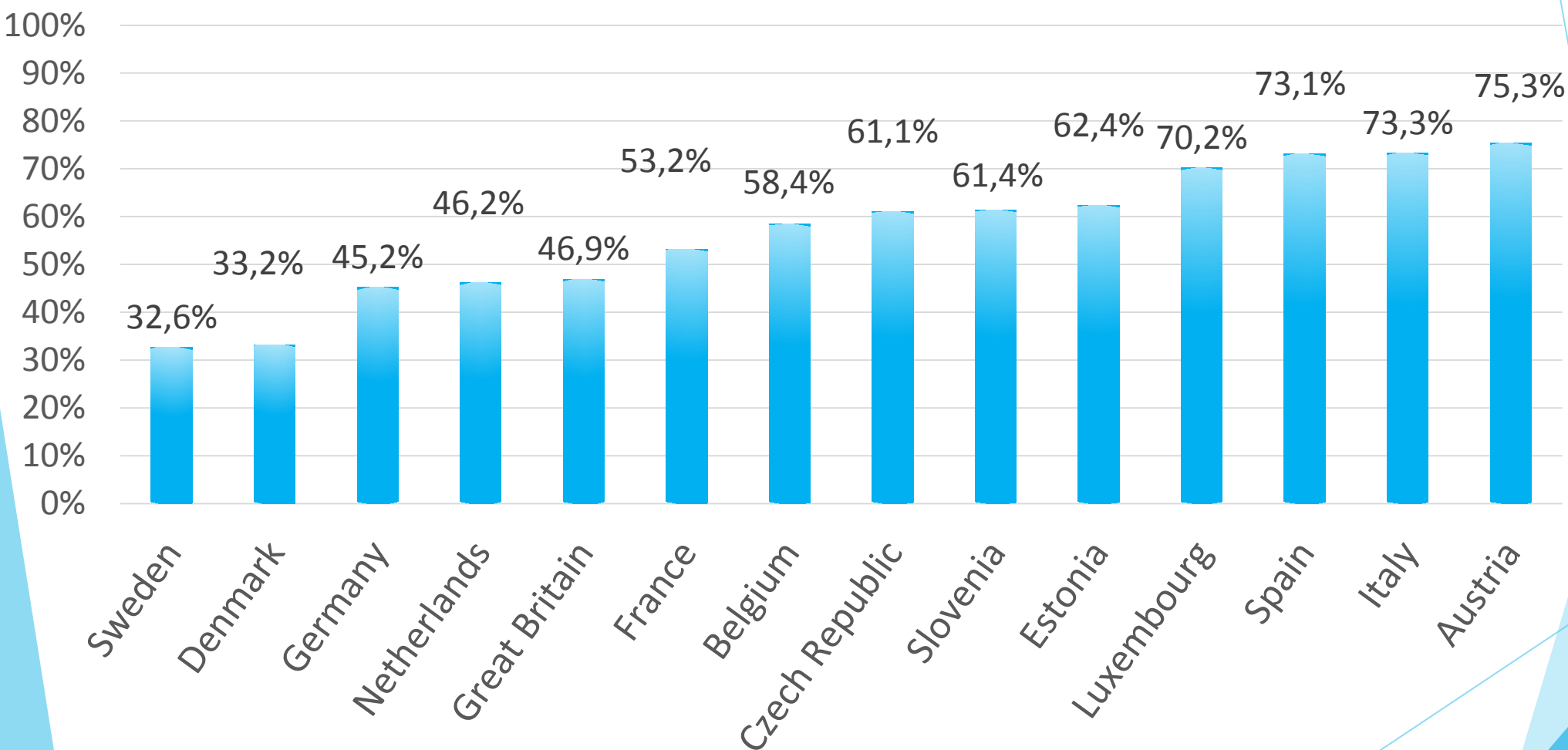
The effect of childlessness on loneliness of seniors across Europe



Regression coefficient while controlling for: gender, age, marital status, economic activity, free-time activities, financial situation and health condition

The effect of childlessness was insignificant on the confidential level 0,05 for Switzerland and Great Britain.

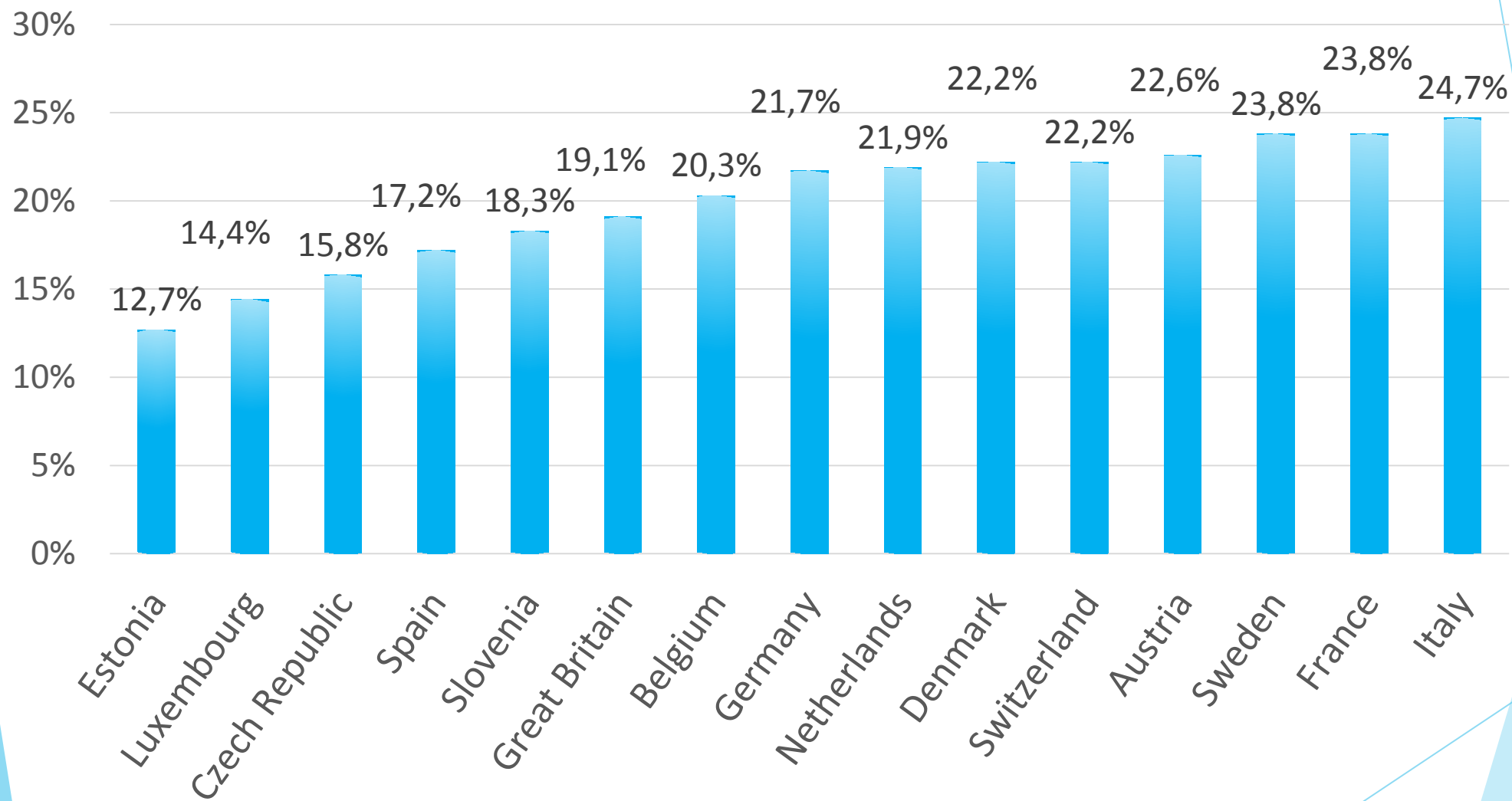
Normative attitudes towards family life across Europe



Range of values: 42,7 points

Min - average - max: 32,6 - 55,8 - 75,3

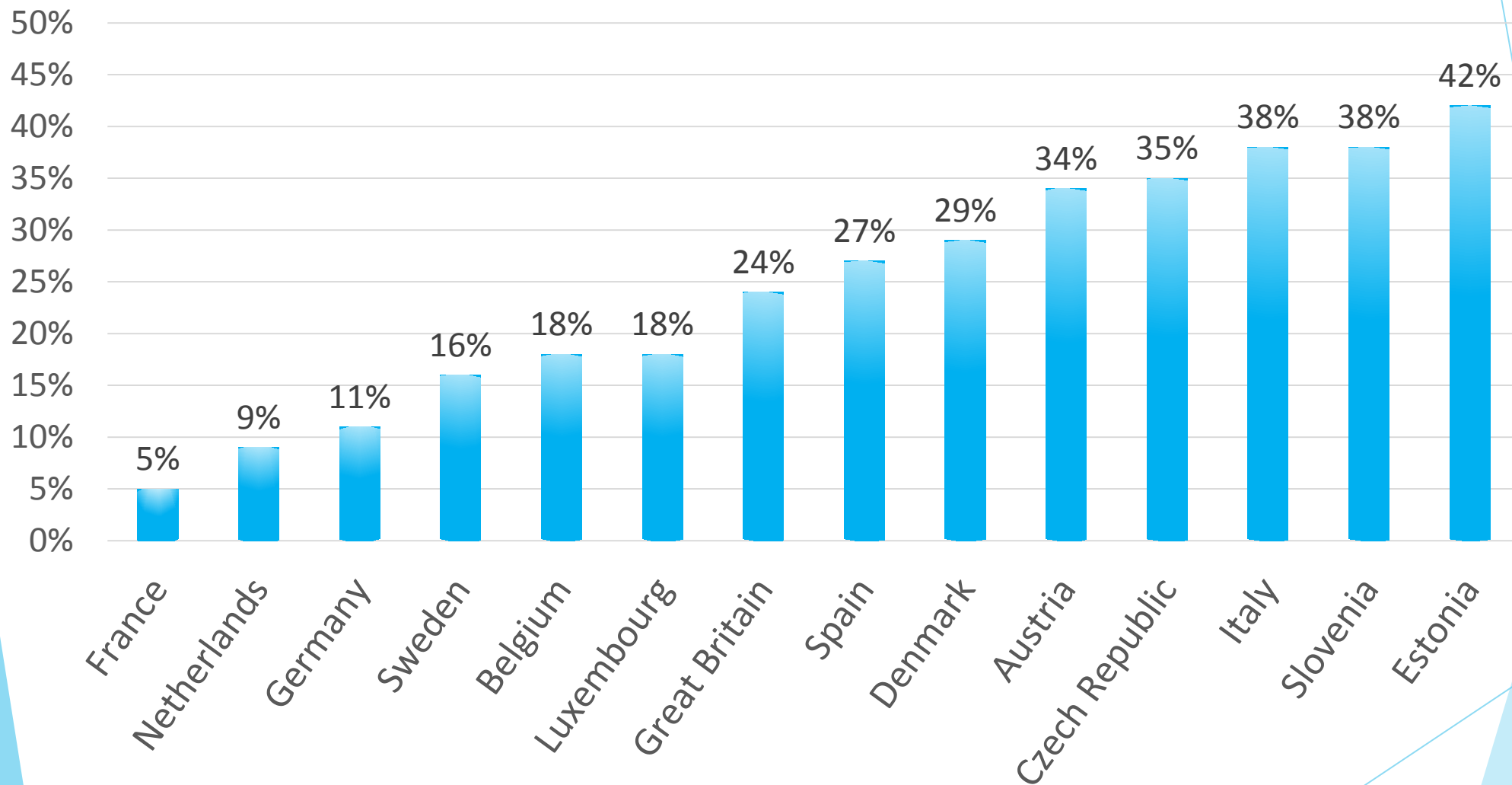
Quality of social system



Range of values: 12 points

Min - average - max: 12,7 - 19,9 - 24,7

Inaccessibility of healthcare in Europe



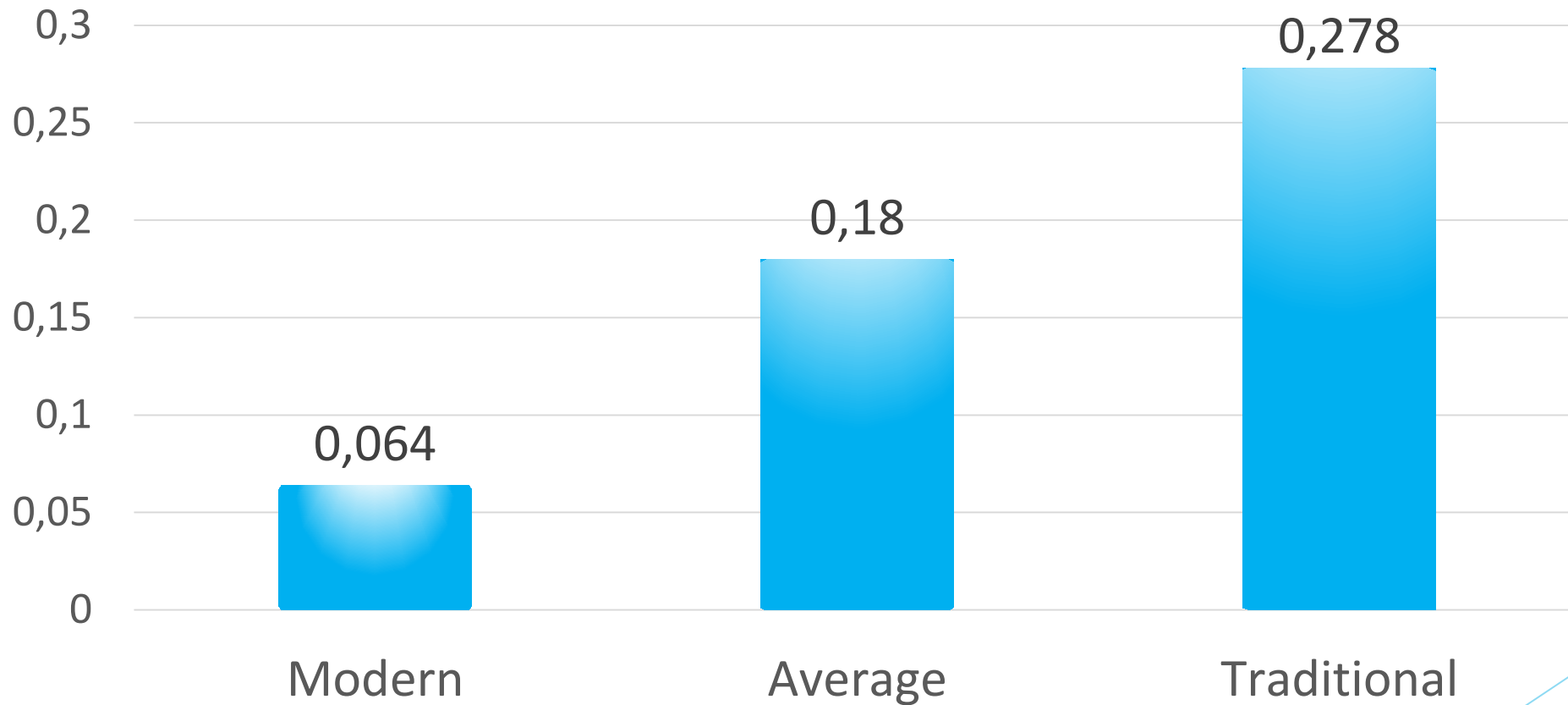
Range of values: 37 points

Min - average - max: 5 - 25 - 42

The results of analysis

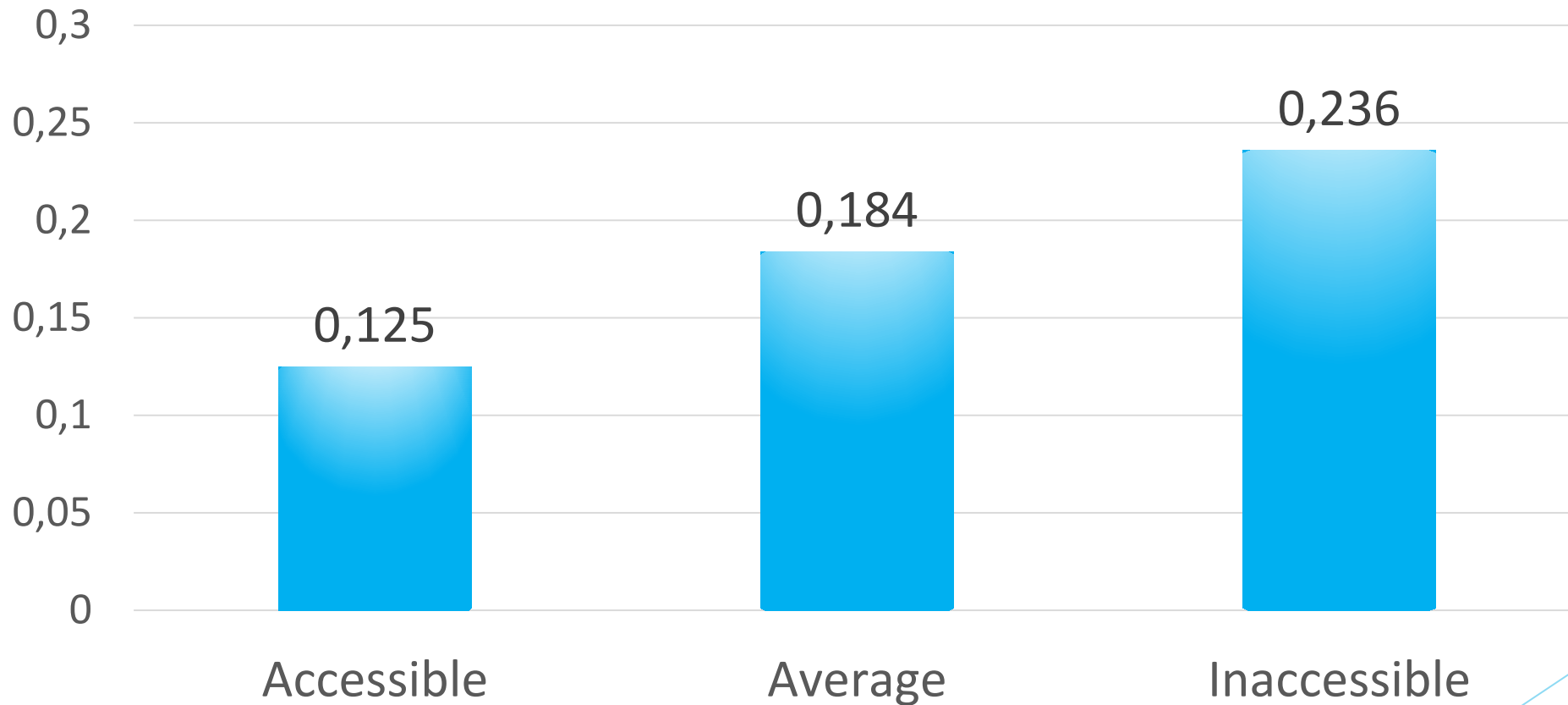
- ▶ The change of the effect of childlessness on loneliness in different societal context
- ▶ Interaction models
- ▶ The effect of childlessness for the average, minimal and maximal value of each macro variable

The effect of childlessness on loneliness according to attitudes towards family life



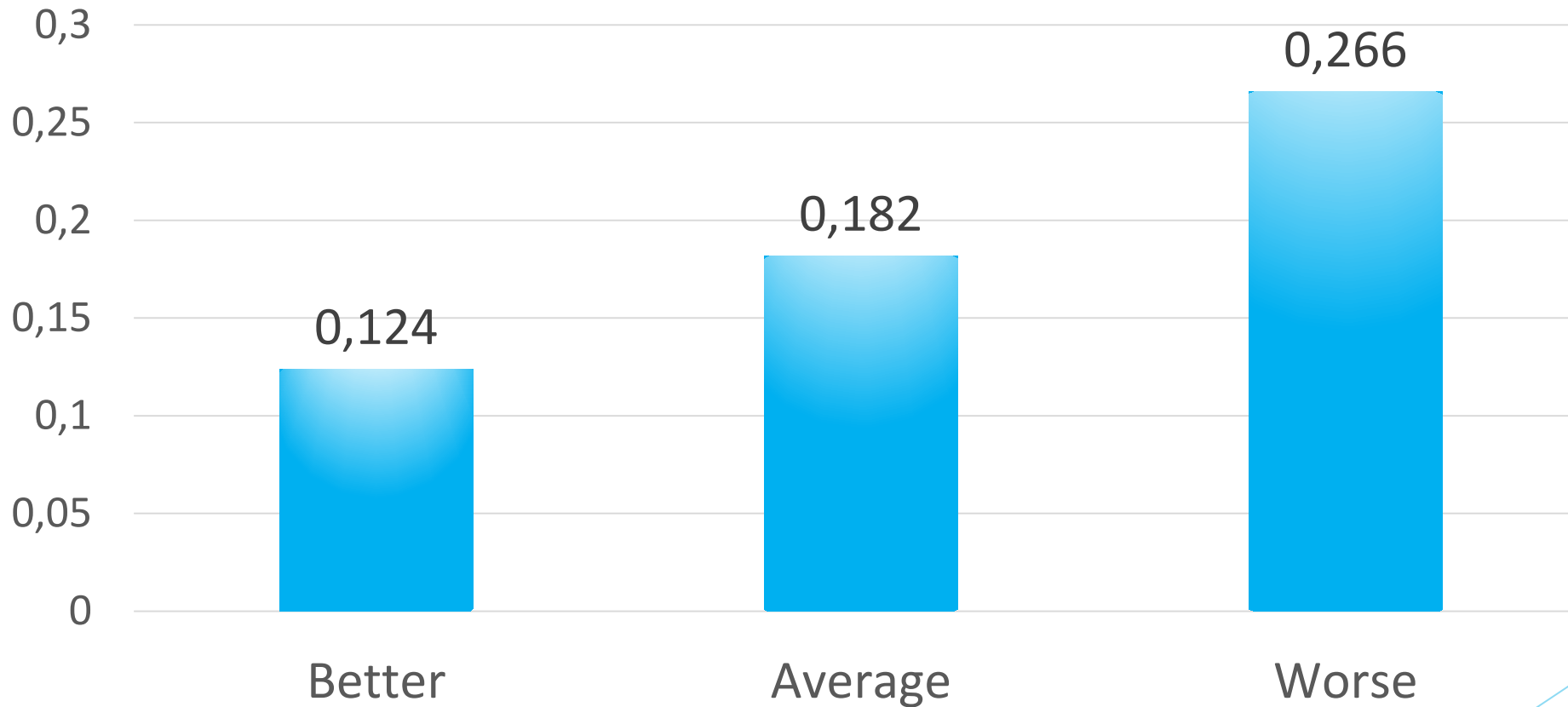
The effect of interaction between childlessness and attitudes: 0,005

The effect of childlessness on loneliness according to inaccessibility of healthcare



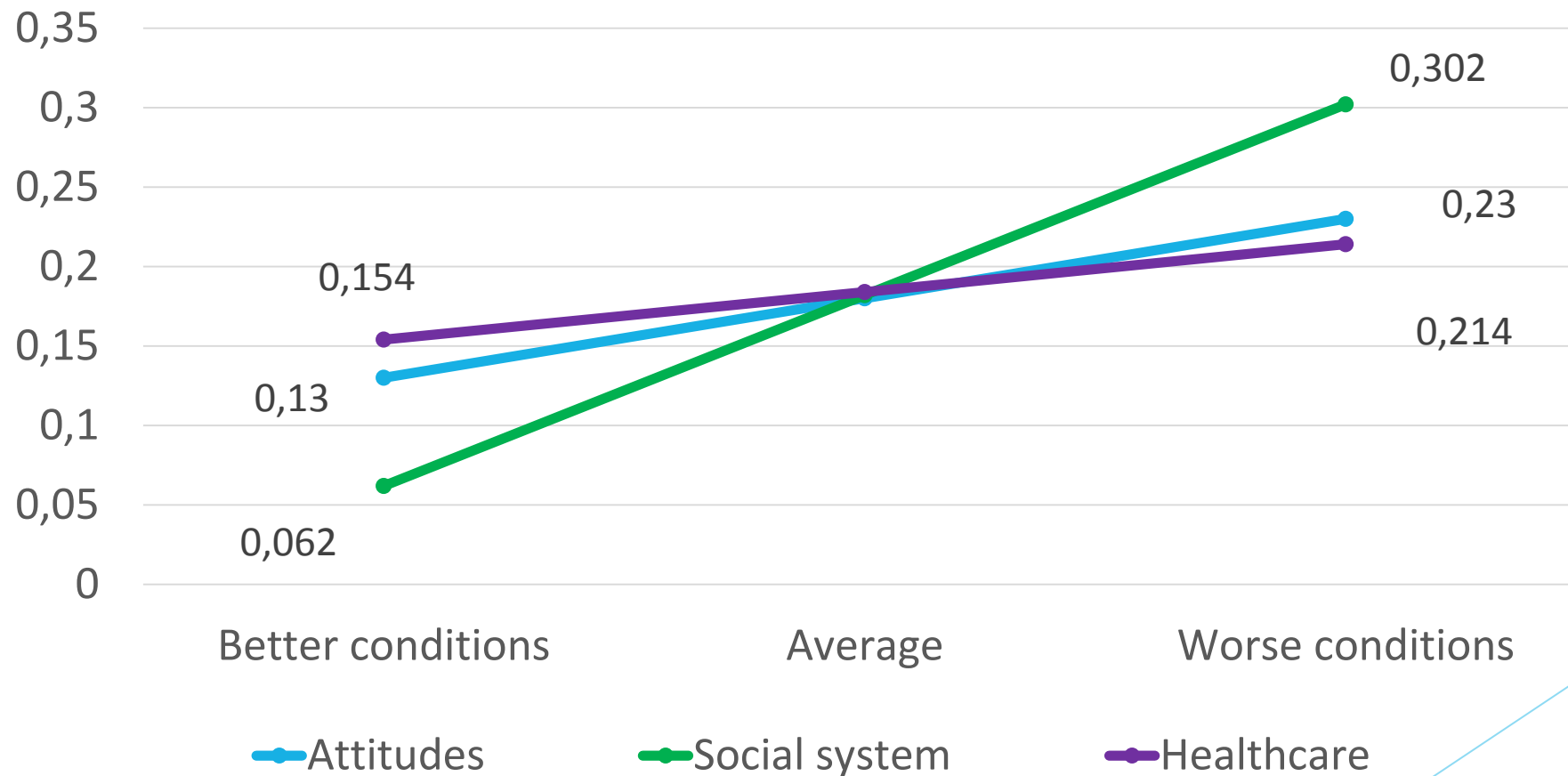
The effect of interaction between childlessness and healthcare: 0,003

The effect of childlessness on loneliness according to quality of social system



The effect of interaction between childlessness and social system: -0,019

Comparison of the effect of childlessness when considering particular macro variables - static range of mean ± 10 points



Conclusion

- ▶ The childlessness has an influence on loneliness
- ▶ The effect is changing due to social context
- ▶ Results important for social and public policy

Limitations

- ▶ Voluntary x involuntary childless
- ▶ Biologically x socially childless
- ▶ Number of macro variables
- ▶ Number of countries
- ▶ Only one interaction in a model

Directions in research

- ▶ Subpopulations
- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Marital status

- ▶ Voluntary x involuntary childless
- ▶ Biologically x socially childless

- ▶ Quality of relationship with children

Thank you for your attention!

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Basic model	Effect on loneliness	Std. error
Childless	0,181**	0,019
Men	-0,116**	0,010
Ref.: With a partner		
Divorced, separated	0,454**	0,018
Never married	0,399**	0,025
Widowed	0,556**	0,015
Ref.: Average age (67 years)		
With every additional year	-0,005**	0,001
Economically active	-0,186**	0,015
Active in free-time	-0,203**	0,015
Financial issues	0,290**	0,011
Ref.: Great health condition		
Fine health condition	0,161**	0,013
Bad health condition	0,578**	0,014
Constant	0,499**	

The effect of childlessness on loneliness according to attitudes towards family life for men and women separately

