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Relational goods and happiness: exploring the role of families

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How family size contributes to well-being

Researchers say there is a 'sweet spot' of family size and happiness

Just One Big, Happy Family?

Characteristics of a Happy Family and How to Build a Happy and Harmonious Family

Families Are Changing, But Still Key to Happiness

Extended and nontraditional families are creating new relationship models—and challenges.

My Happy Family

Happy Family, Happy Life



Chapter 4

Living with others

How household size and family bonds relate to happiness

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Family, happiness, well-being

- Among the earliest and most robust findings of **happiness studies**: strong correlation between marriage and happiness (e.g., Glenn, 1975; Myers, 2000).
- Meta-analysis: Findings confirmed across different cultures (Haring-Hidore et al., 1985; Wood et al., 1989; Diener et al., 2000).
- Panel studies have shown a causal link between marriage and cohabitation and life satisfaction (Lucas et al., 2003; Clark, 2009; Clark & Georgellis, 2013; Grover & Helliwell, 2019).

Marriage, parenthood, and religiosity

- The **cohabitation gap** remains (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Soons & Kalmijn, 2009; Stack & Eshleman, 1998), although this gap **appears** to be narrowing in some contexts (Pirani & Vignoli, 2016).
- **Parenting** has mixed effects on well-being:
 - **Positive**: greater sense of meaning and self-esteem (Stutzer & Frey, 2006; Angeles, 2010).
 - **Negatives**: lower satisfaction with financial situation and leisure time (Zimmermann & Easterlin, 2006; Stanca, 2012).
- **Religiousness** supports marital commitment and stability and is associated with greater **well-being** (Mahoney, 2010; VanderWeele, 2017; Perry, 2015).

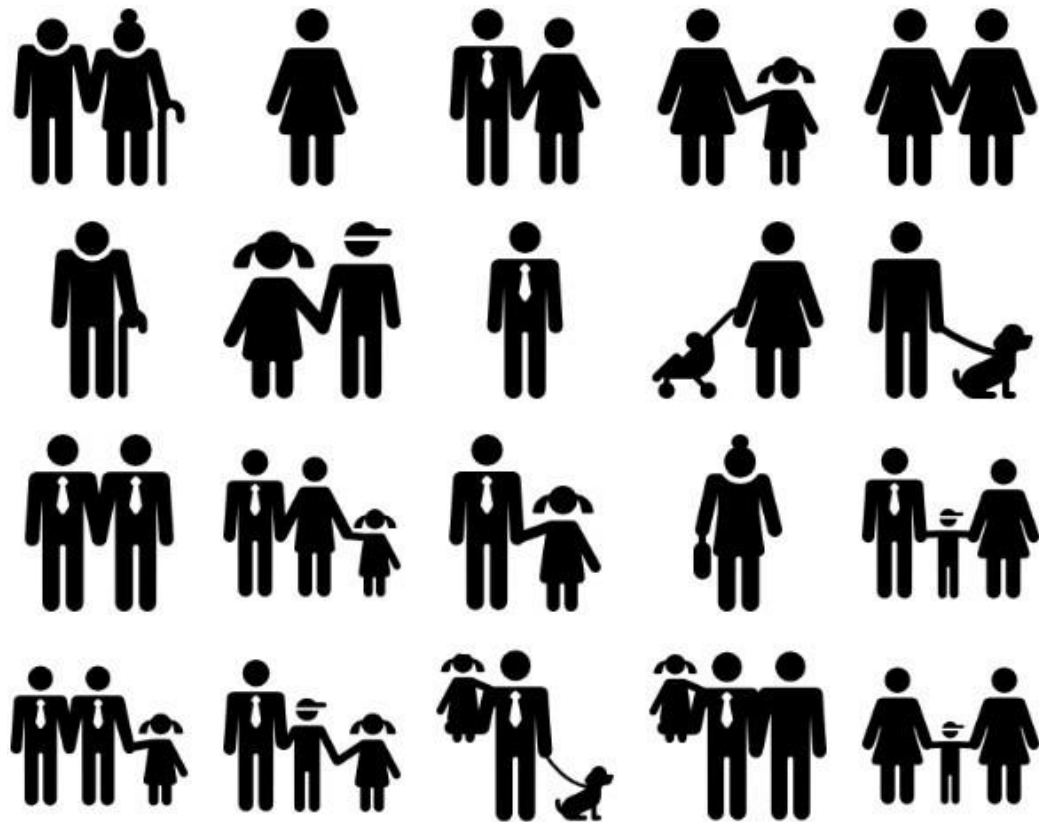
Contribution of this paper

- Most studies analyze only 1–2 areas of **well-being** (life **satisfaction** or **health**)
- Interactions between **family types** and multiple **domains of well-being** are rarely considered
- This study uses six domains (**economic, health, family, friendships, leisure time, work**) in a single dataset
- It offers a more detailed view of the link between family types (and degrees of commitment) and subjective well-being.

Dataset and Variables

- Survey: ISTAT **Multipurpose** Survey "Aspects of Daily Life" (**2000–2023**)
Sample: 50,000 individuals/year
- Information collected: Economic status, Social life, Health and lifestyles, Leisure time and work, **Personal satisfaction** (quality of life and public services)
- **Dependent** variables (scale 1–5, satisfaction with): Family economic status; Health, Family relationships, Friendships, Leisure time, Work
- **Independent** variable: type of family structure + parenthood + religiosity
Individual characteristics: age, gender, education, employment status and position, leisure activities, social interactions
Regional characteristics: divorce rate, proportion of religious/civil marriages
% of cohabiting couples

Family types as **explanatory variable**

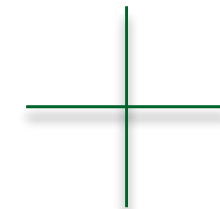


Married couples with or without children (traditional nuclear family)

Cohabiting couples with or without children (quasi-nuclear family) **Single** parents: father or mother

Single: adults living alone or with other relatives (e.g., two sisters) or with friends

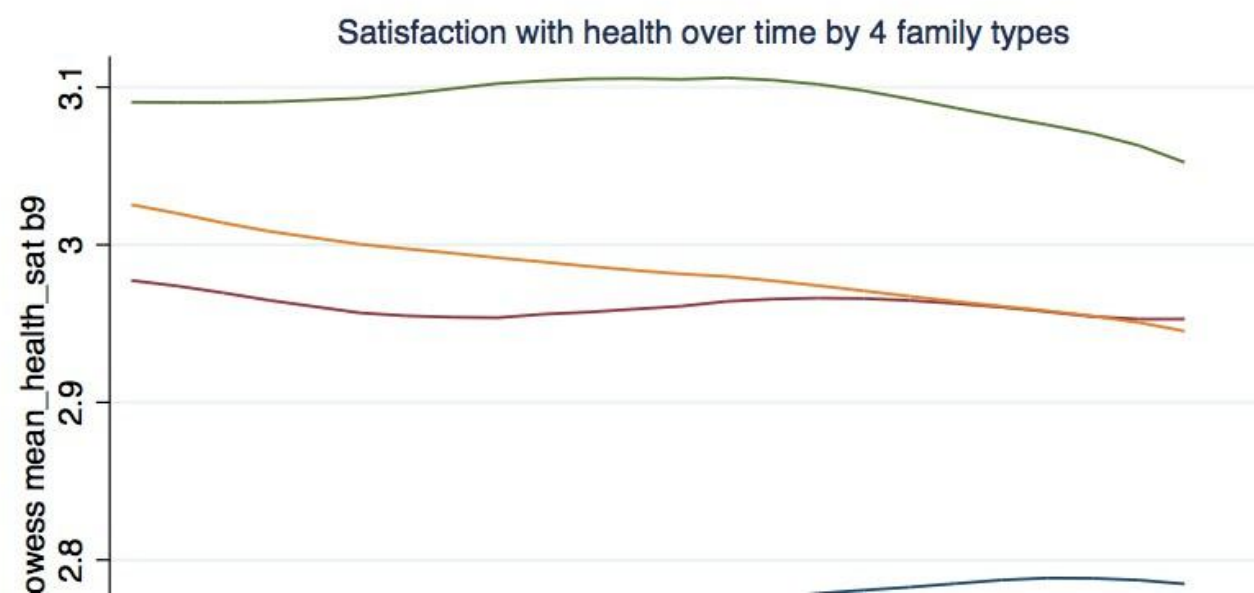
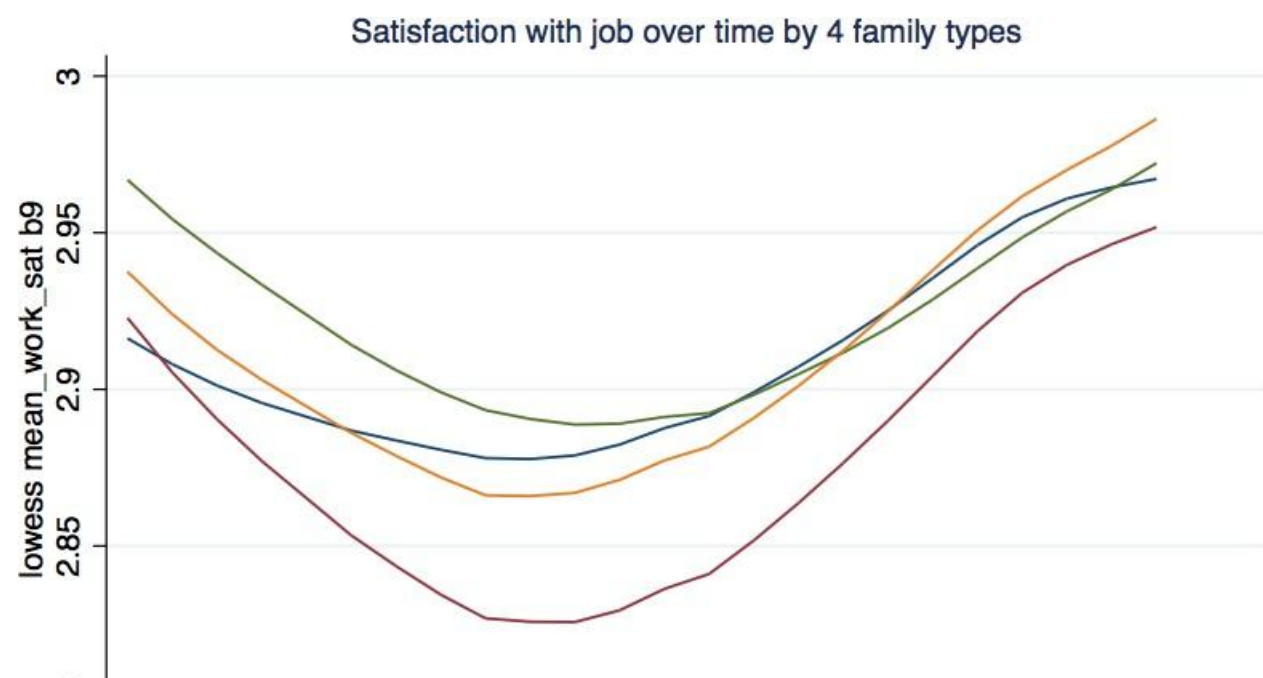
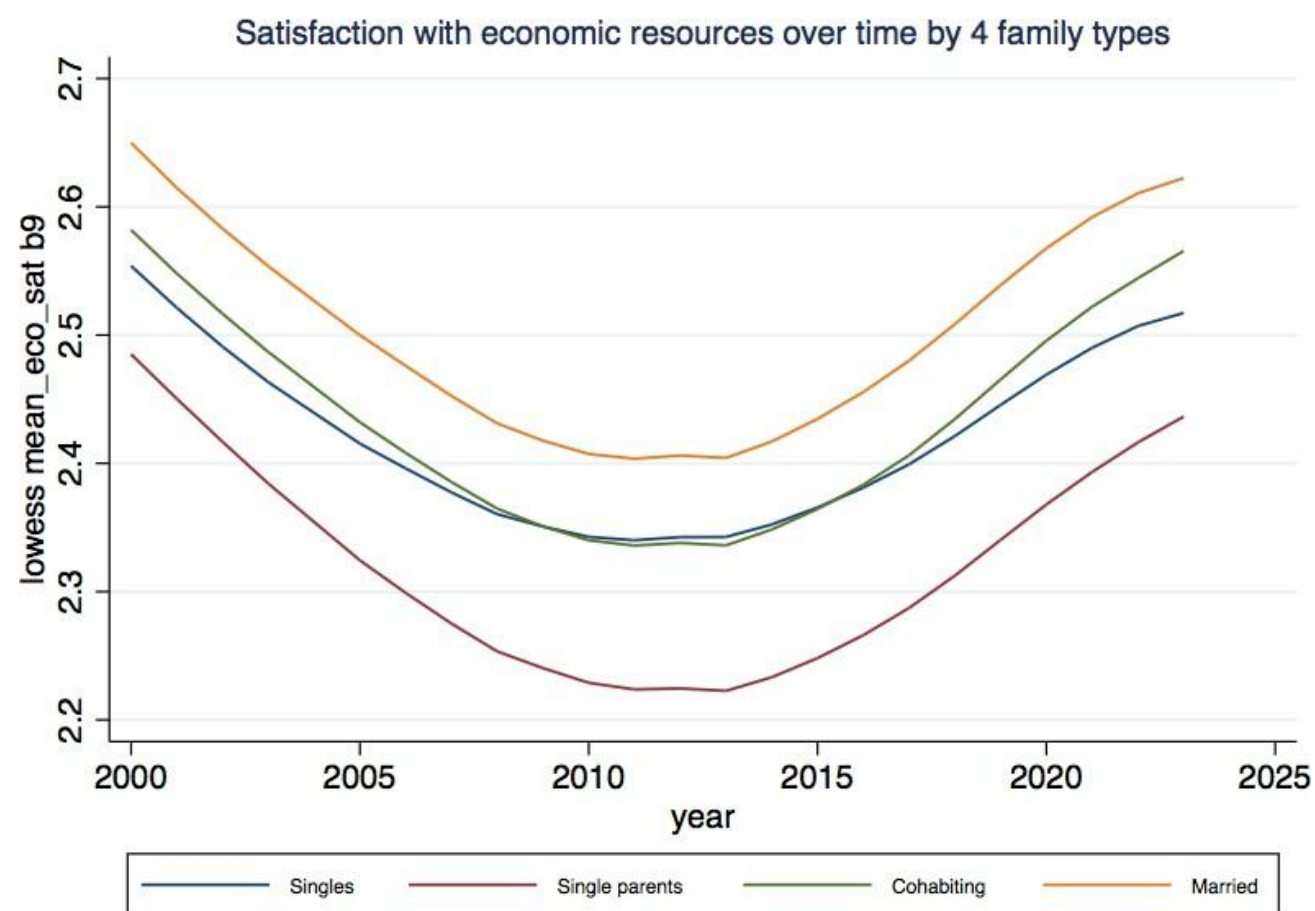
Religiousness



Results

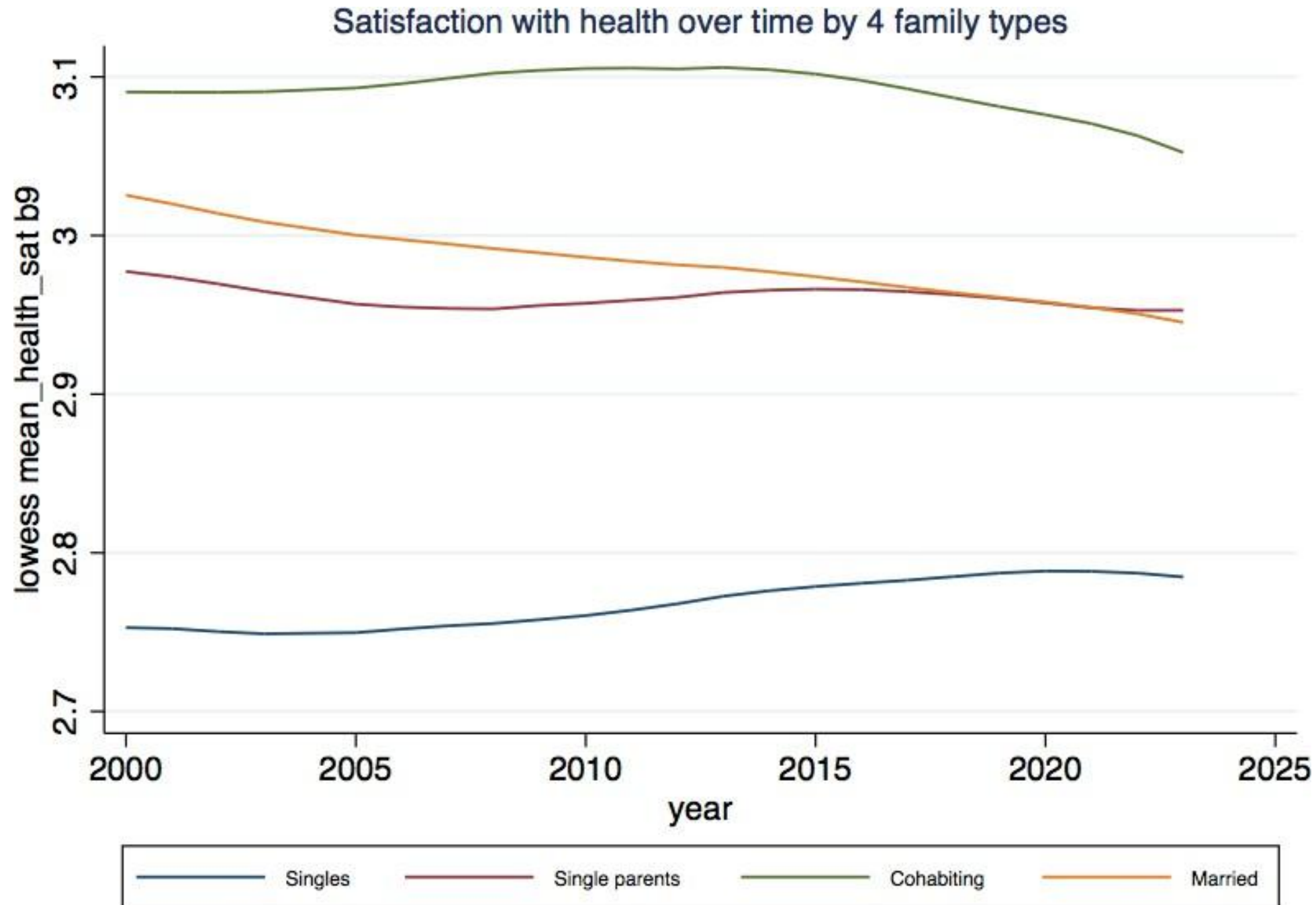
Trends in dependent variables:

Economic situation and **employment**

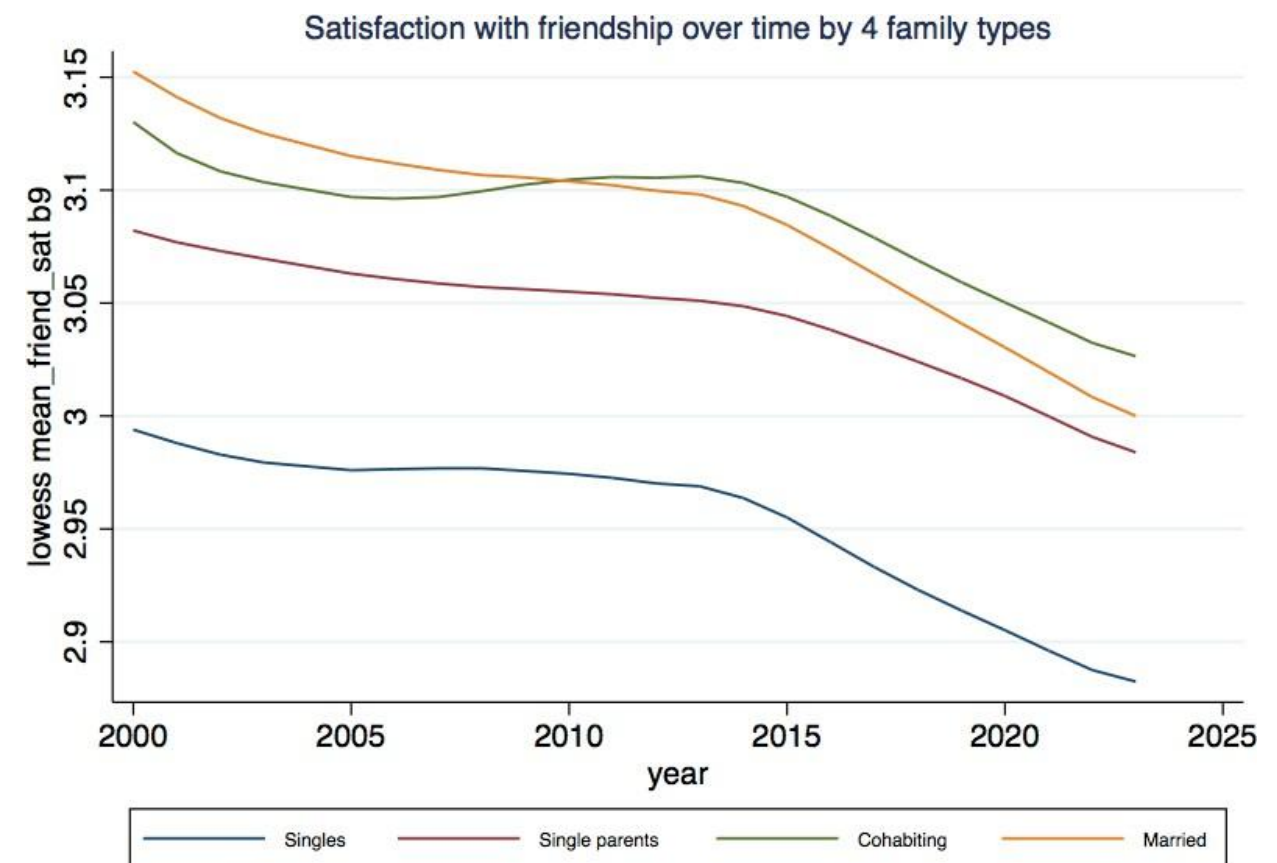
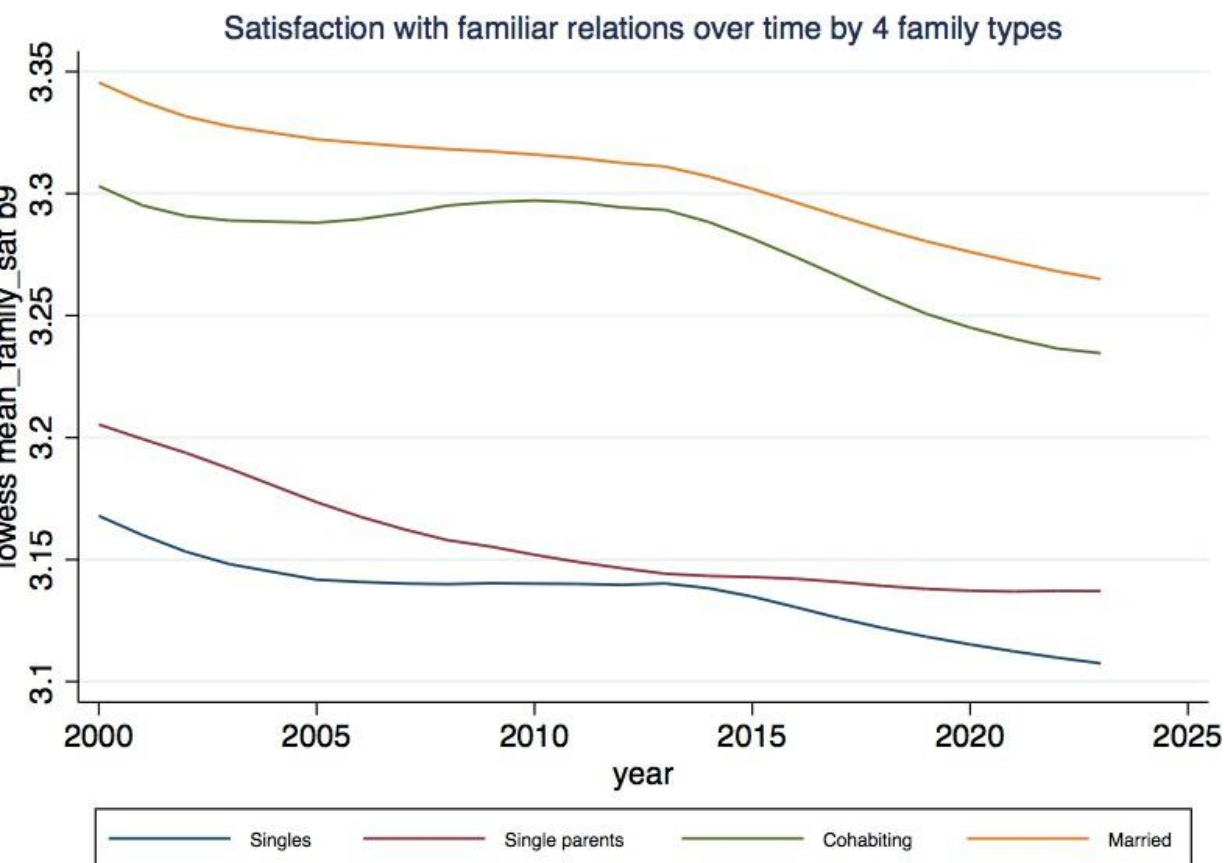


Trends in dependent variables:

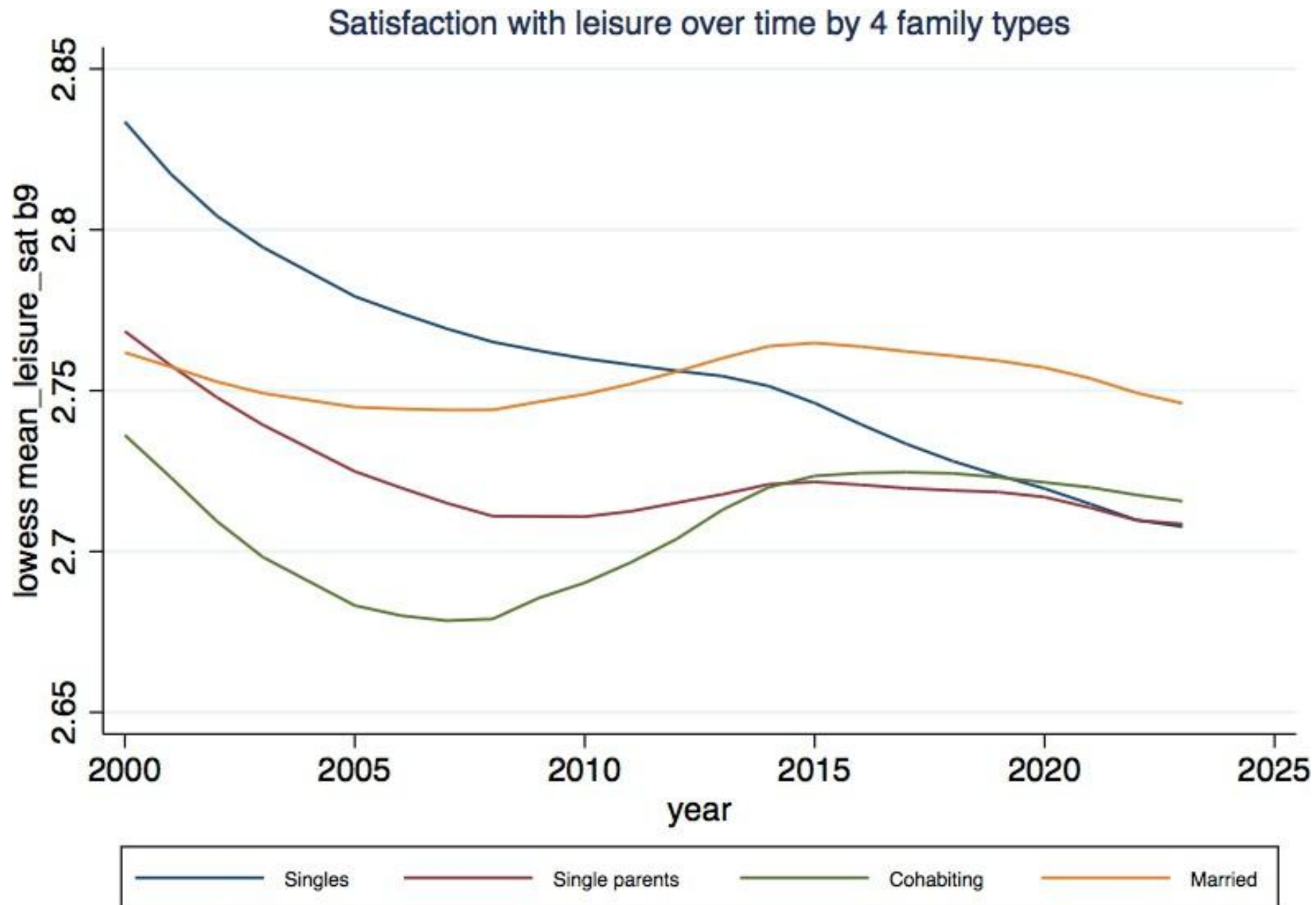
Health



Trends in dependent variables: **family** and **friendship** relationships



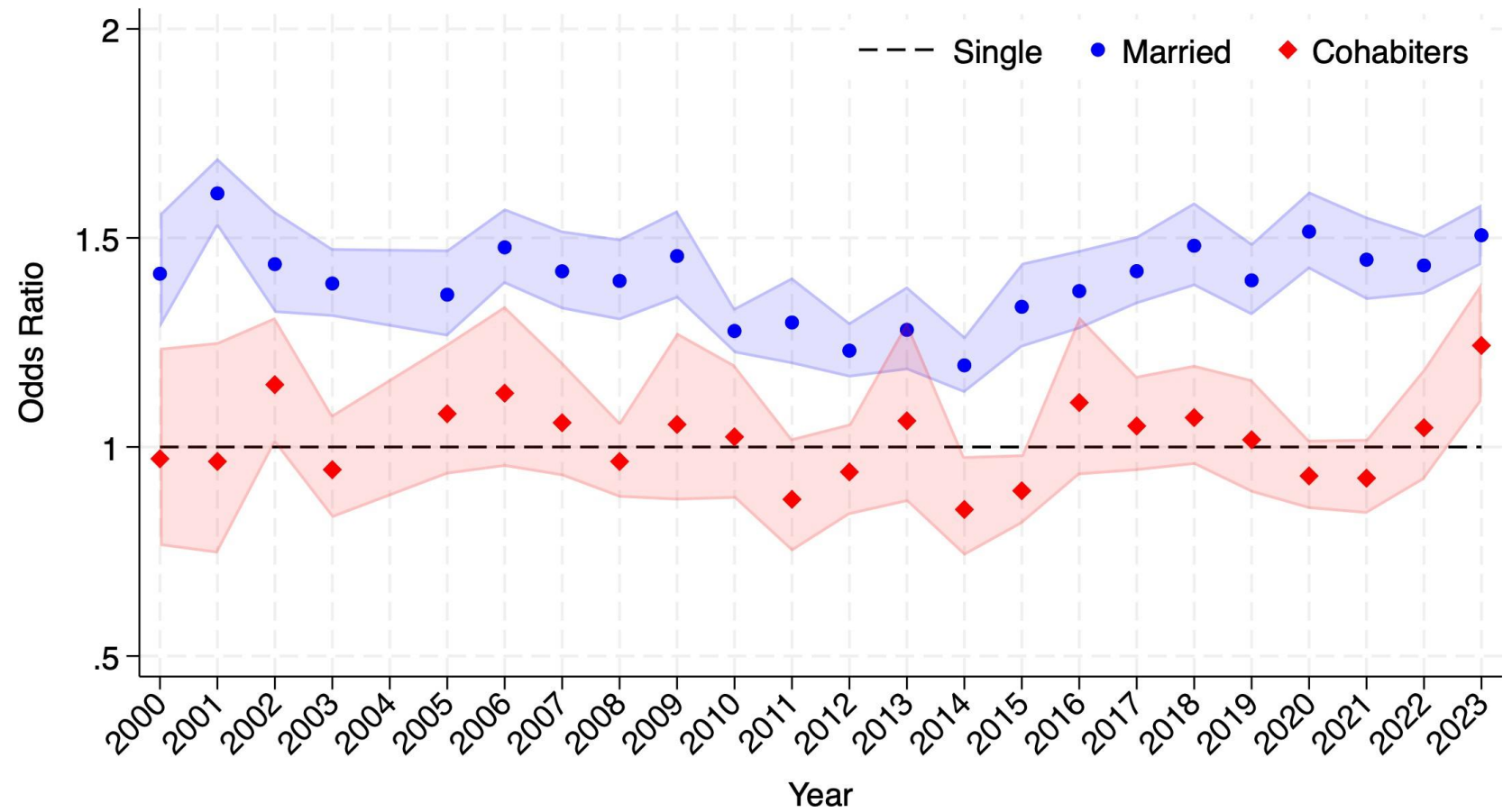
Trends in dependent variables: **leisure time** relationships



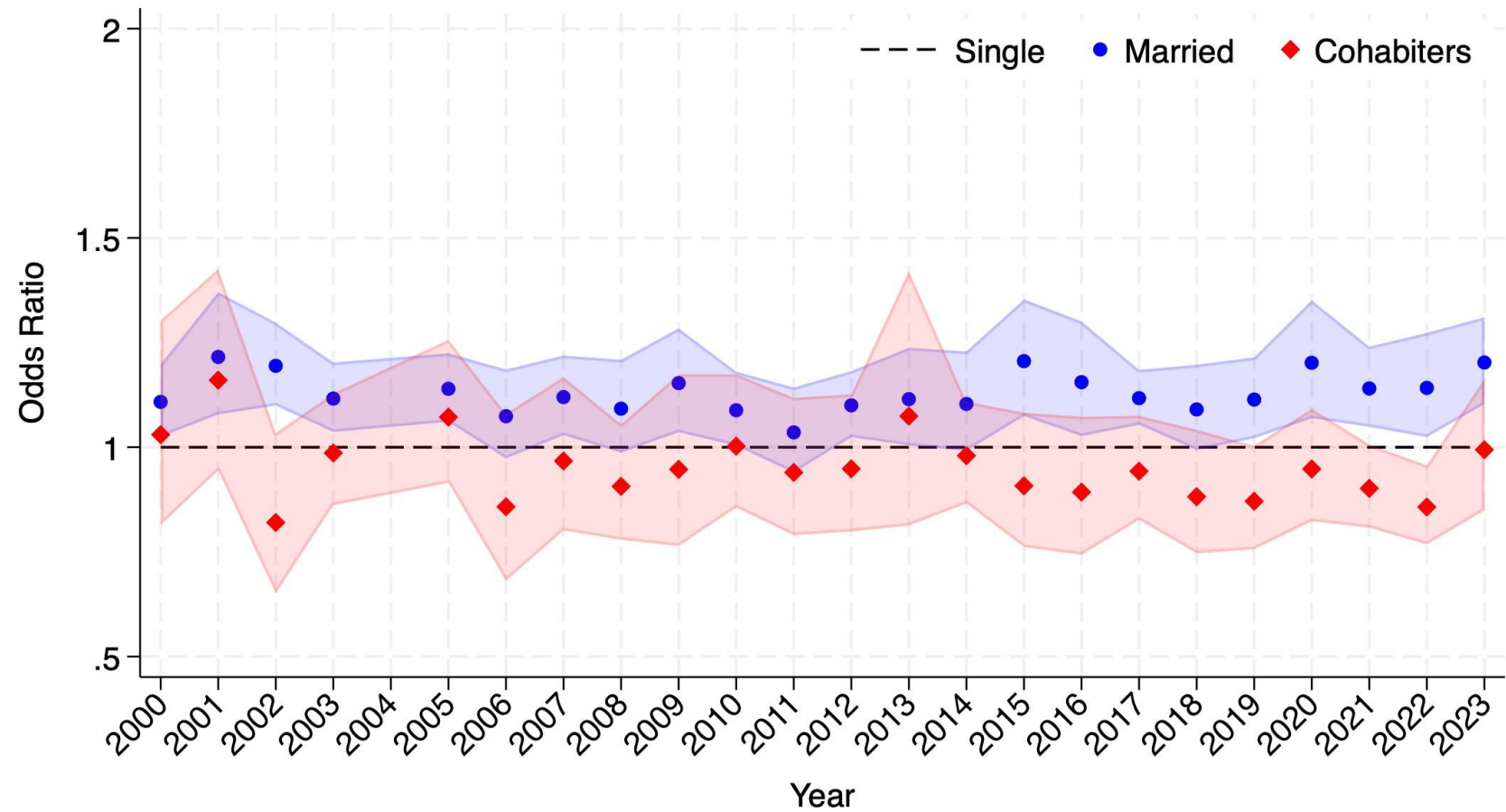
#1 Family types & wellbeing

VARIABLES	(1) eco_sat	(2) health_sat	(3) family_sat	(4) friend_sat	(5) leisure_sat	(6) work_sat
married	1.191*** (0.017)	1.102*** (0.022)	2.279*** (0.060)	1.214*** (0.016)	0.935*** (0.017)	1.039 (0.025)
cohabiters	0.992 (0.019)	1.161*** (0.042)	1.868*** (0.048)	1.114*** (0.027)	0.962** (0.019)	0.936*** (0.021)
religiosity	1.107*** (0.006)	1.116*** (0.008)	1.150*** (0.011)	1.142*** (0.009)	1.070*** (0.007)	1.107*** (0.007)
children	0.943*** (0.007)	1.388*** (0.020)	1.048** (0.022)	1.047*** (0.015)	0.795*** (0.008)	1.024** (0.010)
Observations	555,935	555,935	555,935	555,935	555,935	326,859
Pseudo R-squared	0.195	0.144	0.0611	0.122	0.0667	0.0604
chi-square test:married=cohab	62.51	2.110	23.81	7.595	1.488	24.36

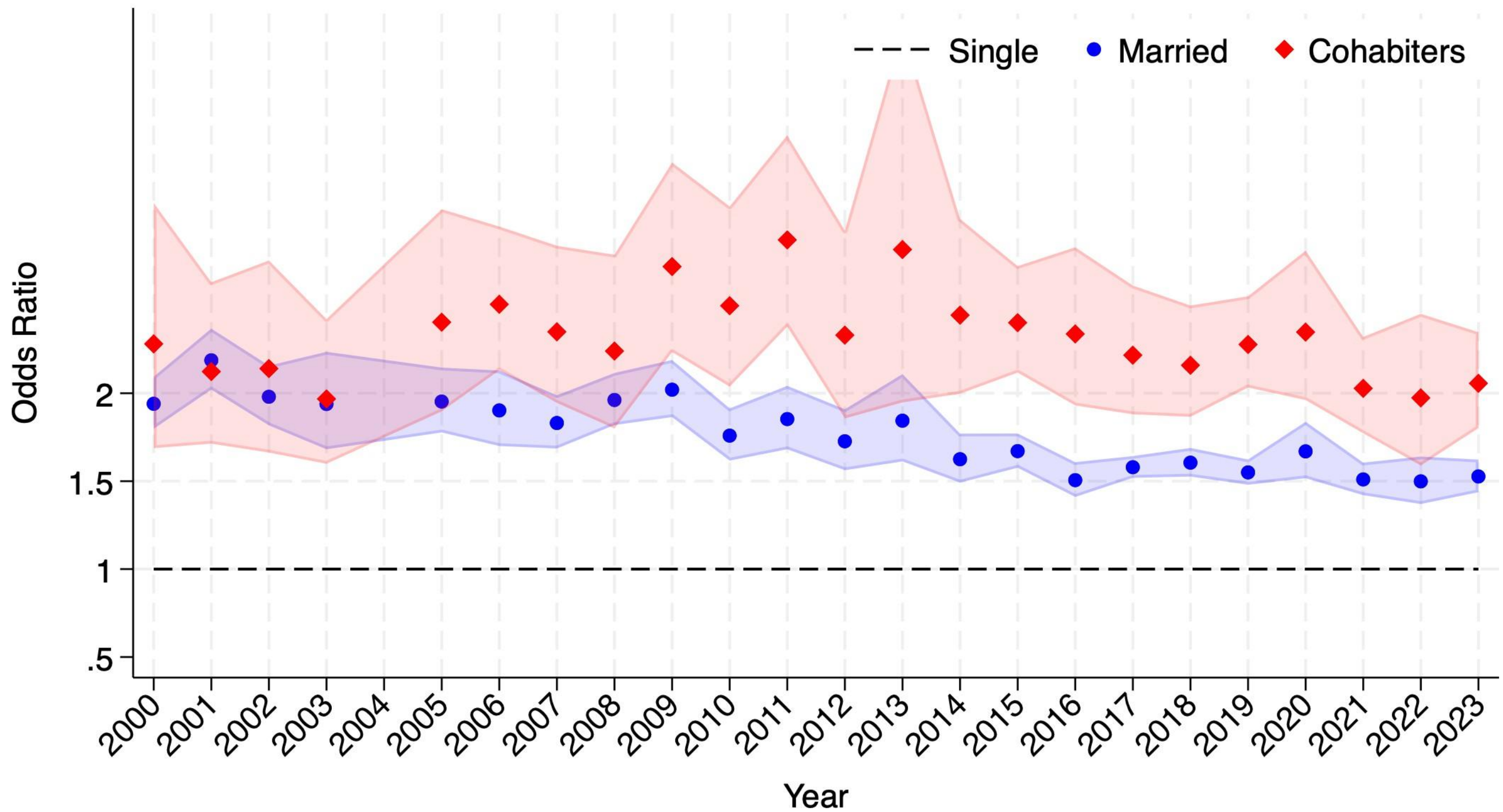
Economic Satisfaction - OR over Years



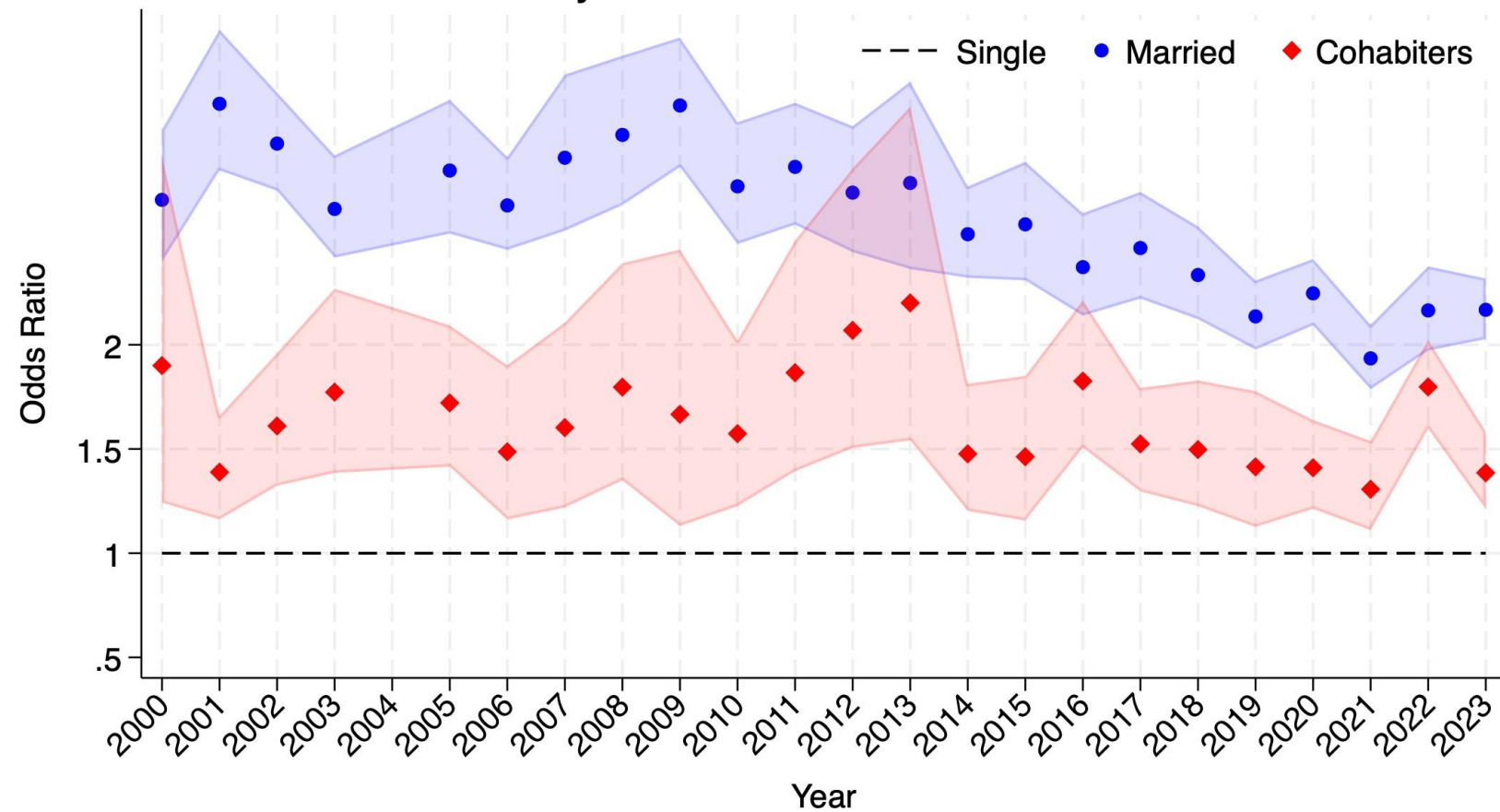
Work Satisfaction - OR over Years



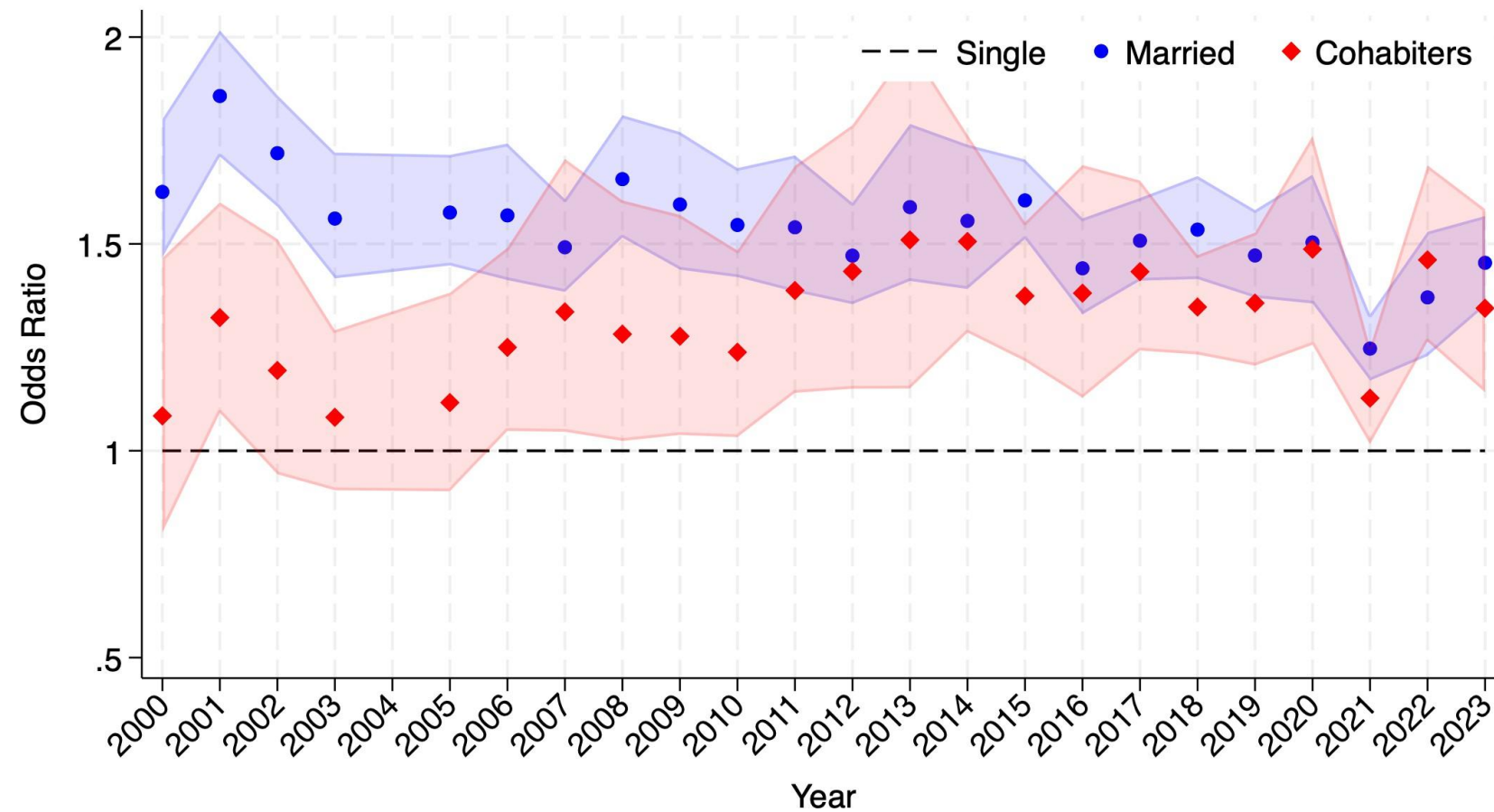
Health Satisfaction - OR over Years



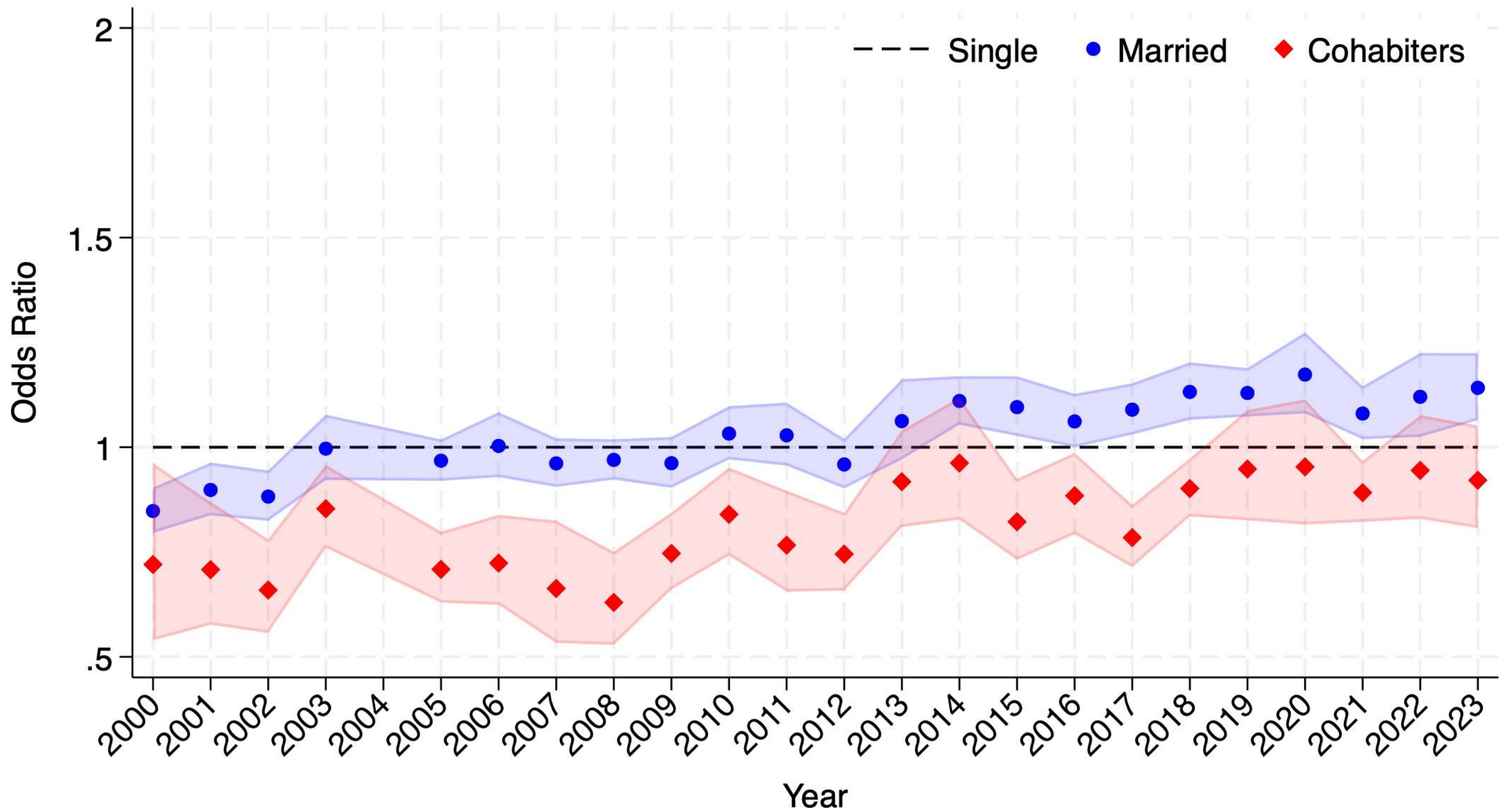
Family Satisfaction - OR over Years



Friends Satisfaction - OR over Years



Leisure Satisfaction - OR over Years



Conclusions

- Family structure and ties are still fundamental to individual **well-being**
- The hierarchy **of married > cohabiting > single** is still valid in some **areas of** well-being, with a few exceptions (work, health, leisure time).
- **Relational assets** are in a slow, long-term decline