Deprivation of women and men living in couple: sharing or unequal division?

Anne-Catherine Guio (LISER, Luxembourg) and Karel Van den Bosch (University of Antwerp and Federal Planning Bureau, Belgium)

LISER
LUXEMBOURG INSTITUTE OF
SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESEARCH

Introduction

- Standard assumption in empirical analyses of poverty and deprivation: all household members are supposed to share equal living conditions

- Assumption often questioned (e.g. Jenkins, 1991), but until recently empirical data to test it were largely lacking

- Assumption may lead to biased estimates of the extent and the distribution of poverty and deprivation

- Few studies on differences in deprivation within couples for the UK and Ireland (Vogler and Pahl, 1994; Cantillon and Nolan, 1998, 2001; Cantillon et al., 2015)

- This study is the first to present empirical evidence on this issue for a range of EU countries, using EU-SILC 2015

Data and method

- Items:
    - replace worn-out clothes with new ones;
    - have two pairs of properly fitting shoes;
    - spend a small amount of money each week on him/herself ;
    - have regular leisure activities;
    - get together with friends/family for a drink/meal at least monthly;
    - have an internet connection;

- Response options:
    - Have
    - Don't have because cannot afford
    - Don't have for other reasons

Data and method

- Items are collected at the individual level.
  - This excludes "Register" countries (DK, FI, NL, SE), and also the UK, where only one respondent per household was interviewed
- Analysis sample: married and cohabiting couples
  - Same-sex couples were excluded
  - Couples with missing responses by one or both partners were excluded
  - Proxy interviews (where one partner answers questions for absent partner) were retained; sensitivity analysis discussed below
- We use two concepts of deprivation, but only present the enforced lack: lacking an item because cannot afford

Descriptive results: Gender differences by item

Combinations of answers within couples, by item
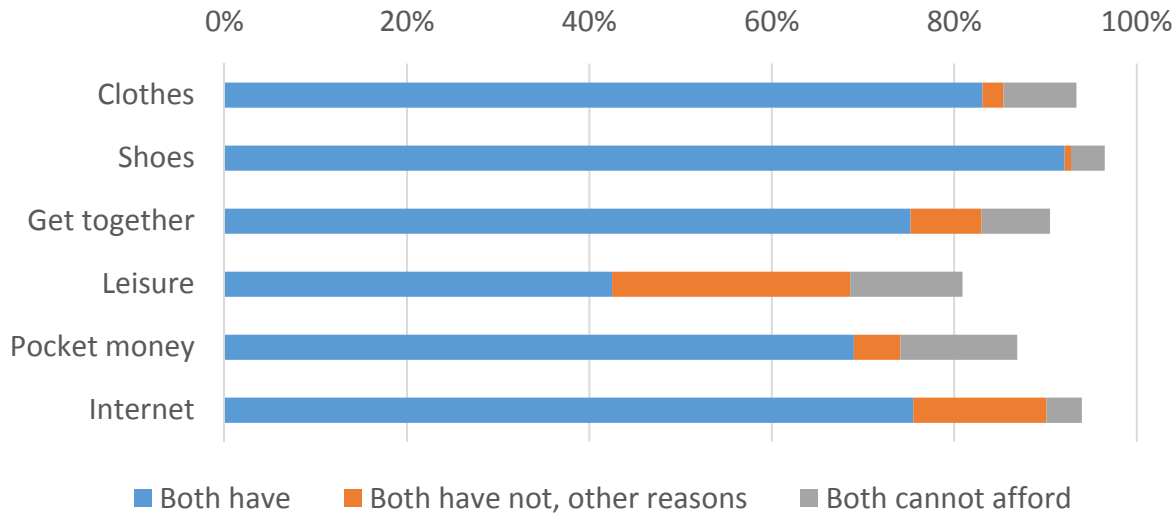
- **Concordant couples**: partners give the same answer

Legend: ■ Both have ■ Both have not, other reasons ■ Both cannot afford
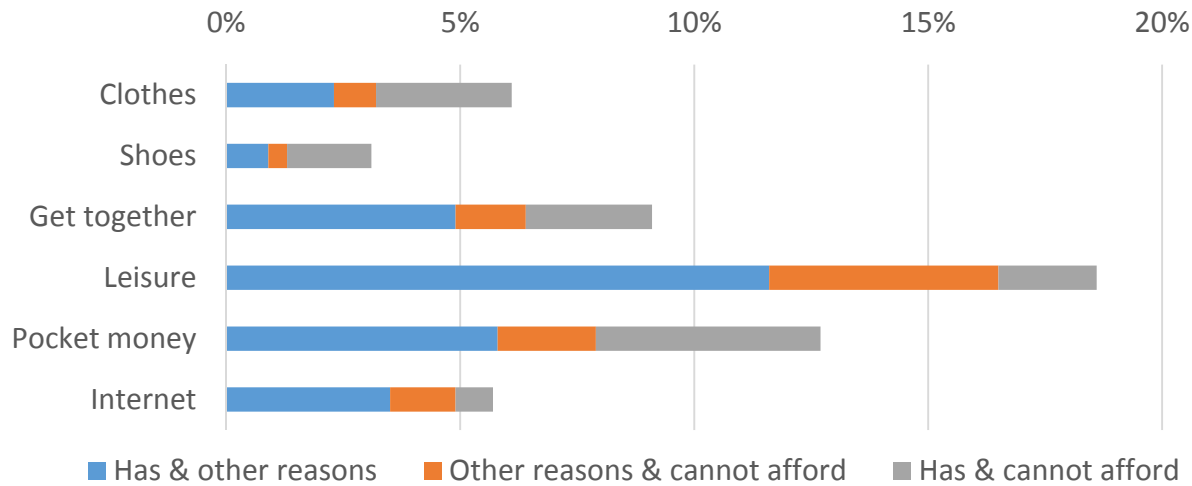
- **Diverging couples**: partners give different answers

Legend: ■ Has & other reasons ■ Other reasons & cannot afford ■ Has & cannot afford

Descriptive results: Gender differences by item

Combinations of deprivation and non-deprivation.

	Clothes	Shoes	Get together	Leisure	Pocket money	Internet
Enforced lack (M) - Non-deprived (W)	1.70%	0.90%	1.80%	3.10%	2.50%	1.00%
Enforced lack(W) - Non deprived (M)	2.10%	1.20%	2.30%	4.00%	4.40%	1.10%
difference	-0.40%	-0.20%	-0.50%	-0.90%	-1.90%	-0.10%
	[-0.6;-0.2]	[-0.4;-0.1]	[-0.7;- 0.3]	[-1.2;-0.7]	[-2.2;-1.7]	[-0.2;0.1]

95% confidence interval between square brackets; significant differences highlighted

**Descriptive results: Gender differences in number of items lacked, EU**

- When aggregating item scores (enforced lack) into a scale, and looking at the difference between partners, we find:
  - no difference for 84% of all couples
  - number of enforced lacks is higher for the woman in 9.2% of all couples
  - number of enforced lacks is higher for the man in 6.5% of all couples

Descriptive results: Gender differences in number of items lacked, country
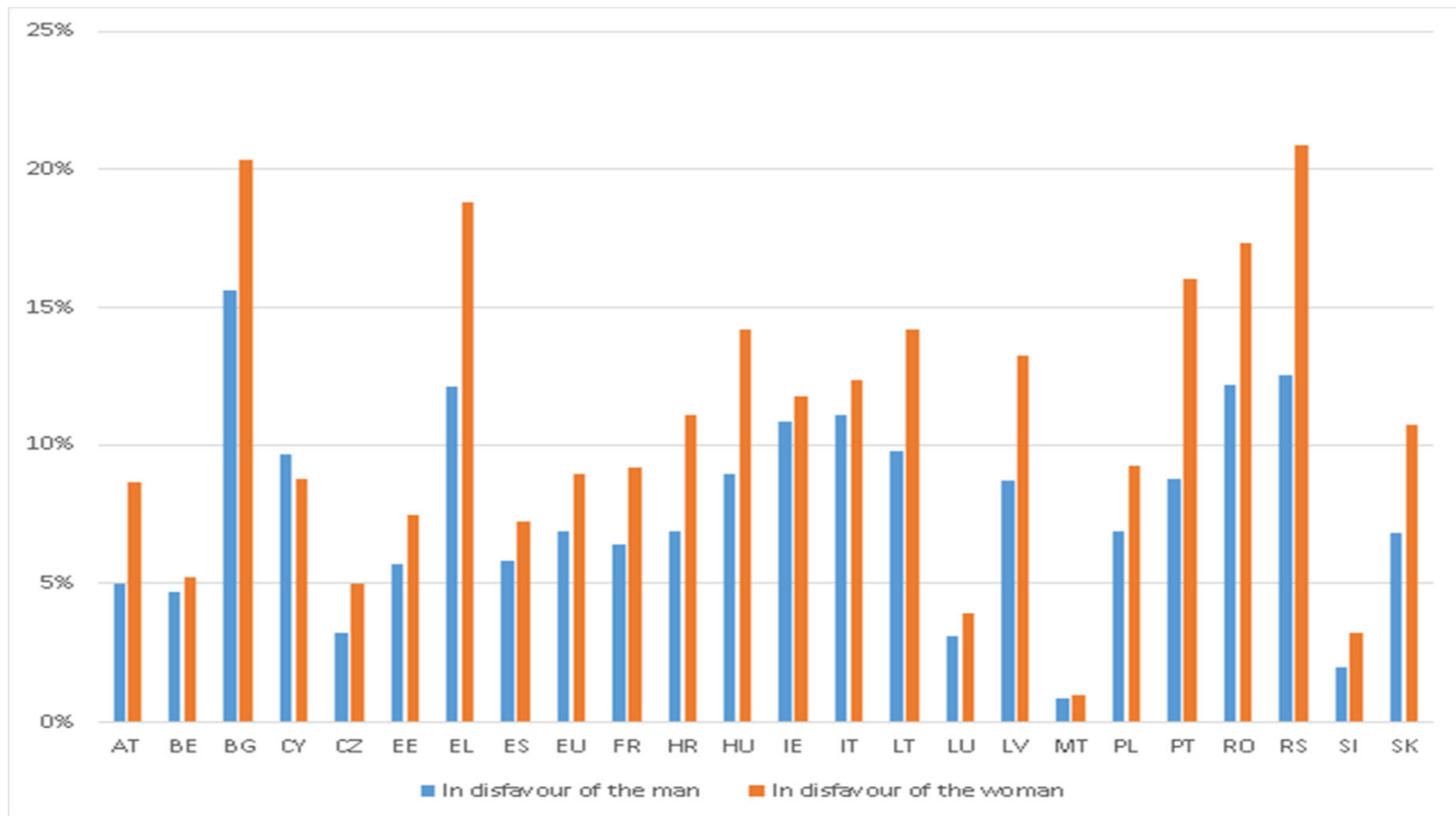
Descriptive results: diverging couples

Proportion of couples with gender deprivation gap <> 0 *among all couples*, by proportion of couples suffering from no lack, by country, enforced lack concept
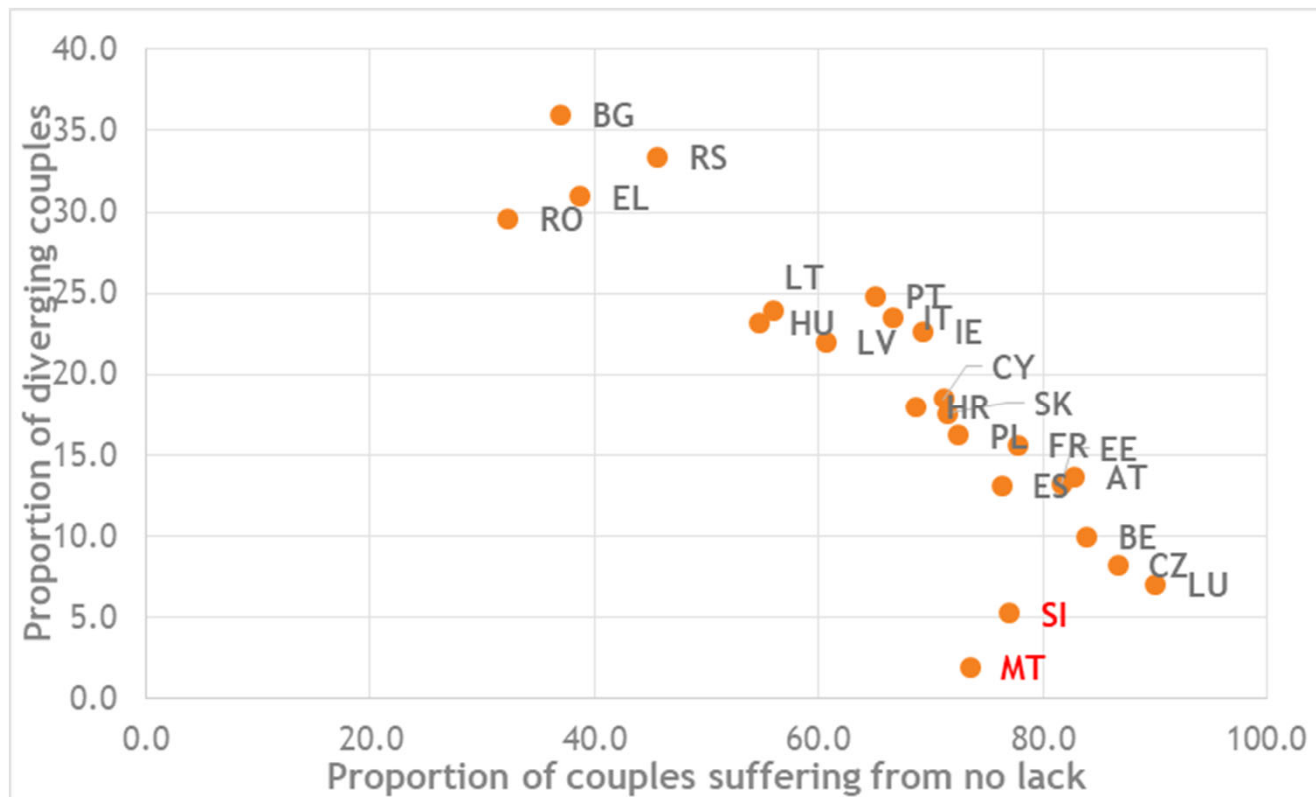
Socio-economic determinants of the gender deprivation gap

- **Heckman two-step procedure**
1. Selection probit equation estimates the probability of the couple to suffer from at least one deprivation
2. Substantive equation:
   - The number of items lacked by the woman is higher than the number of items lacked by the man
   - The number of items lacked by the man is higher than the number of items lacked by the woman

Socio-economic determinants of deprivation

Selection equation (probability that at least one partner lacks one item)

Parameter	Estimate	Pr > |t|
Intercept	2,86	<.0001
Log household income (PPS)	-0,40	<,0001
Both partners at work (ref)		
No partner at work	0,15	<,0001
Woman is the only partner at work	0,29	<,0001
Man is the only partner at work	0,20	<,0001
Average age of the two partners	-0,01	<,0001
Health problems	0,22	<,0001
Difficulties in making ends meet	0,89	<,0001
Heavy housing costs overburden	0,25	<,0001
Heavy debt overburden	0,20	<,0001
Self-employment	-0,13	<,0001
High education		
Low education	0,28	<,0001
Medium education	0,15	<,0001

Socio-economic determinants of the gender deprivation gap

**Substantive equation** (deprivation gap at the disadvantage of:)

	The woman		The man	
Intercept	0,16	<,0001	0,16	<,0001
Share of woman's income in the income of the couple	-0,16	<,0001	0,13	<,0001
Proxy interview for the woman	-0,08	<,0001	0,04	<,0001
Proxy interview for the man	0,00	0,688	-0,08	<,0001
Average age of the two partners	0,00	0,066	0,00	0,2831
Age difference between partners	0,00	<,0001	0,00	0,2677
Both partners at work (ref)				
Woman is the only partner at work	-0,01	0,244	0,08	<,0001
Man is the only partner at work	0,07	<,0001	-0,02	0,0011
No partner at work	0,00	0,669	-0,01	0,2501
Two adults no child (ref)				
Two adults one child	-0,01	0,179	0,01	0,3192
Two adults two children	-0,02	0,018	-0,02	0,0308
Two adults three children or more	-0,03	0,006	-0,02	0,082
More than two adults with children	0,00	0,807	0,00	0,7196
CAWI or self-administered (ref)				
PAPI	-0,02	0,192	-0,05	<,0001
CAPI	-0,03	0,002	-0,05	<,0001
CATI	0,02	0,101	-0,02	0,0249

Socio-economic determinants of the gender deprivation gap

- **Substantive equation: country fixed effect significant**

- National differences in the gender deprivation gap can be due to:
  - the distribution of relevant socio-economic characteristics
  - the survey methodology (mode of interviewing, use of proxy interviews)
  - idiosyncratic factors (for some countries).

Sensitivity analysis of the impact of proxy interviews on gender differences

- Proxy interviews allowed when one partner is absent, often due to work
- Percentage of proxy interviews substantial in many countries, particularly for men
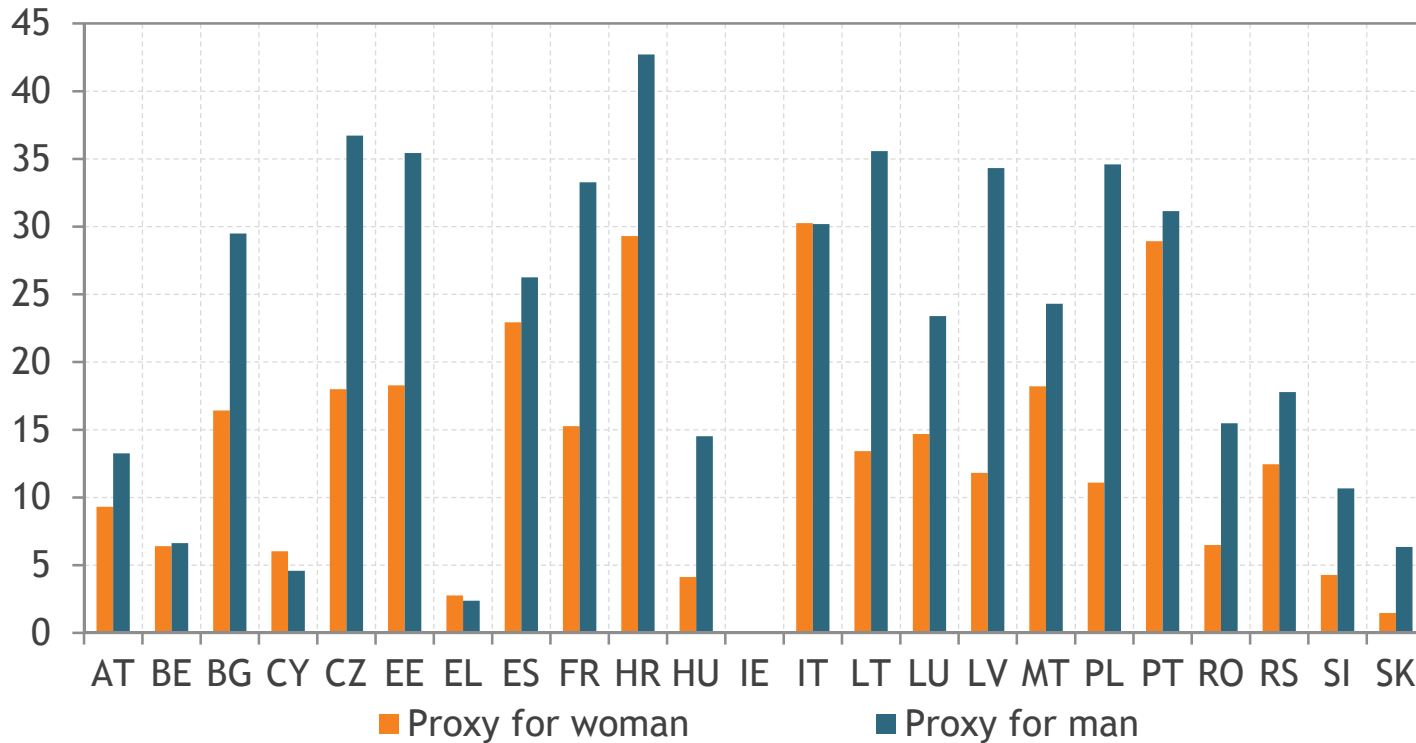
Discussion and conclusion

- Analysis of EU-SILC 2015 data, using six deprivation items at the individual level
- At the item level, gender differences in enforced lack within couples are limited but:
  - significant and to the disadvantage of women for 5 out of 6 items, ranging from 0.2% for shoes to 1.9% for pocket money
- When aggregating item scores (enforced lack) into a scale, and looking at the difference between partners, we find:
  - no difference for 84% of all couples
  - number of enforced lacks is higher for the woman in 9.2% of all couples
  - number of enforced lacks is higher for the man in 6.5% of all couples

Discussion and conclusion

- One should be careful in drawing inferences from these findings on the intra-couple gender *deprivation gap* for the intra-couple distribution of *economic resources*
  - A gender deprivation gap can occur even when partners have equal or equivalent access to resources
  - However, the finding that the gender deprivation gap is systematically skewed to the detriment of women, is an indication that deviations from an equal distribution of resources within couples disadvantage women more often than men
  - Conversely, the *absence* of a gender deprivation gap does not necessarily indicate that the intra-couple distribution of resources is equal or equitable.

Discussion and conclusion

- The work status of the partners and their share of joint income are important determinants of the intra-couple gender deprivation gap.
    - A larger share of income for the female partner is associated with a smaller probability of a deprivation gap to her disadvantage.
    - When a partner is in paid employment, while the other is not, this reduces the risk of a gender deprivation gap to his or her disadvantage, while increasing it for the other partner, both for women and men.
- National differences in the gender deprivation gap can be due to:
    - the distribution of relevant socio-economic characteristics,
    - the survey methodology (mode of interviewing, use of proxy interviews)
    - idiosyncratic factors (for some countries).

Discussion and conclusion

- Recommendations for future data collection:
  - Individual information on personal deprivation should be collected in all EU countries, including countries where most data comes from administrative sources
  - As the use of proxy interviews has a clear impact on the data
    - Proxy interviews should be avoided as much as possible
    - However, not using proxies at all could result in high non-response rates (Ireland)
  - The presence of the partner (or of other household members) during the interview may have an effect on the replies provided. Therefore, ideally, each member aged more than 15 years should be surveyed on his/her own.
  - In Malta and Slovenia, the number of diverging couples is extremely low and deserves further investigation.