

Bearing the Consequences? Parental Commuting and Children's Well-Being in Germany



Why this research?

The extent to which Germans commute to work is increasing. Among the commuters are employees who commute to work for at least 60 minutes a day. In Germany, the group of these **long-distance commuters** comprises **1.6 million** people.¹ This means that every 20th employee spends at least two hours a day on Germany's roads and railways.

Research to date has clearly shown that long-distance commuting can be accompanied by **lower life satisfaction**³, well-being⁴ or health⁵ of the commuter. Further, it is known that the relationship of a commuter can be affected, for example by a **lower stability**⁶ or **quality**⁷ of the relationship. However, it is unclear whether long-distance commuting can have negative side effects for the children as well. Therefore, this study examines **whether long-distance commuting can be harmful for the children of commuters.**



Data, method & variables

- **Data:** German Family Panel pairfam – pooled waves 5, 7 and partly 8 | $N_{3-5 \text{ years}} = 1,218$ | $N_{6-15 \text{ years}} = 1,462$
- **Method:** Structural Equation Modeling
- **Commuting distance** – short-distance (≤ 20 min.) vs. long-distance (≥ 60 min.)
- **Parent-child relationship**
 - Conflict – e.g. how often parent and child disagree (2 items)
 - Esteem – e.g. how often the parent shows the child that they appreciate it (2 items)
- **Child well-being**
 - Conduct problems – e.g. whether the child lies or fights (4 items)
 - Emotional symptoms – e.g. whether the child is unhappy or fearful (4 items)
 - Hyperactivity – e.g. whether the child is restless or easily distracted (5 items)
- **Controls** – daily time away from home and long working hours of respondent, commuting status (includes labour force status) of partner, gender and age of child



Research Question

How is parental commuting linked to children's well-being?

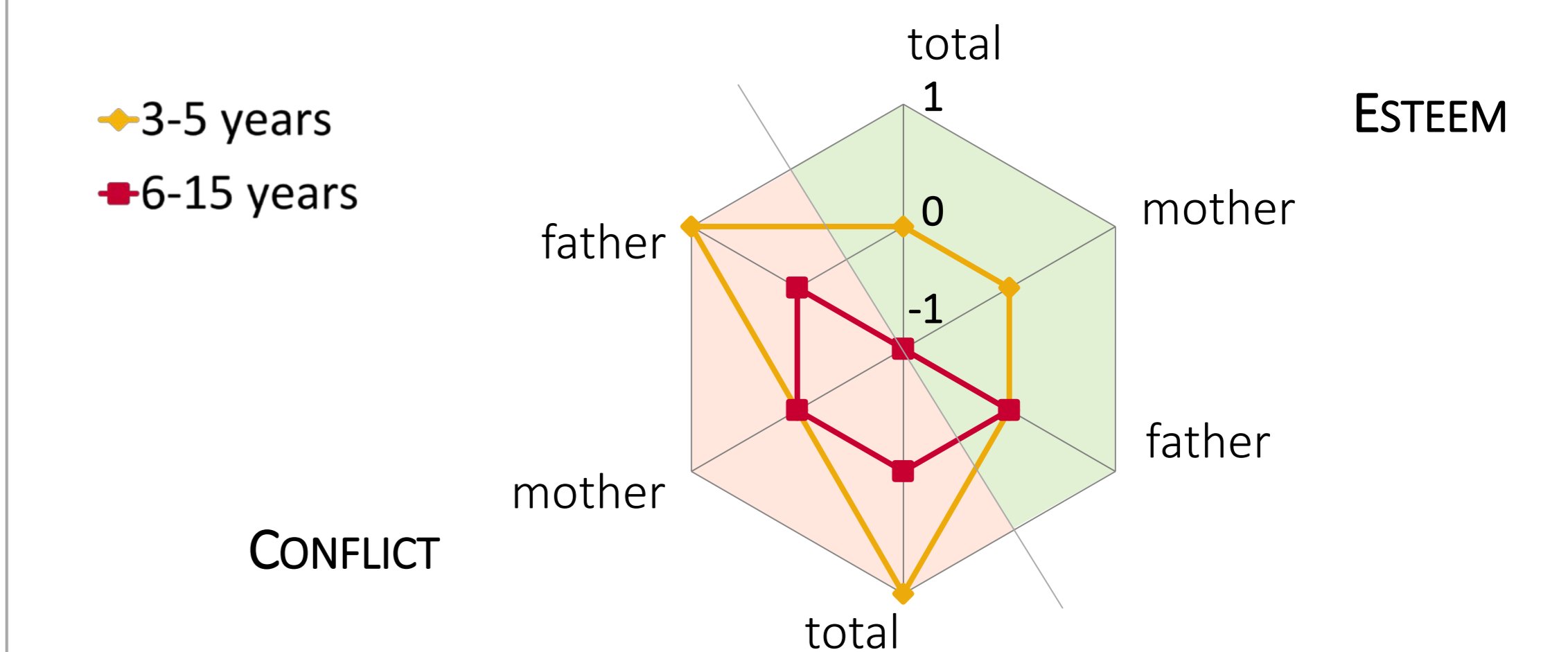
Hypotheses

- 1 Compared to short-distance commuters, long-distance commuting is associated with a **poorer parent-child relationship**
- 2 Long-distance commuting is associated with a **poorer well-being of the child**, which is linked to the commuting via the parent-child relationship



Testing of hypothesis 1

Compared to short-distance commuting, long-distance commuting is associated with more (1) or less (-1) parent-child conflict or parental esteem (0 = no significant correlation)



Findings

Hypothesis 1

- children aged 3-5 years: long-distance commuting **fathers** have **conflicts more often** with their children than short-distance commuting fathers
- children aged 6-15 years: long-distance commuting **mothers** show their child **esteem less often** than short-distance commuting mothers

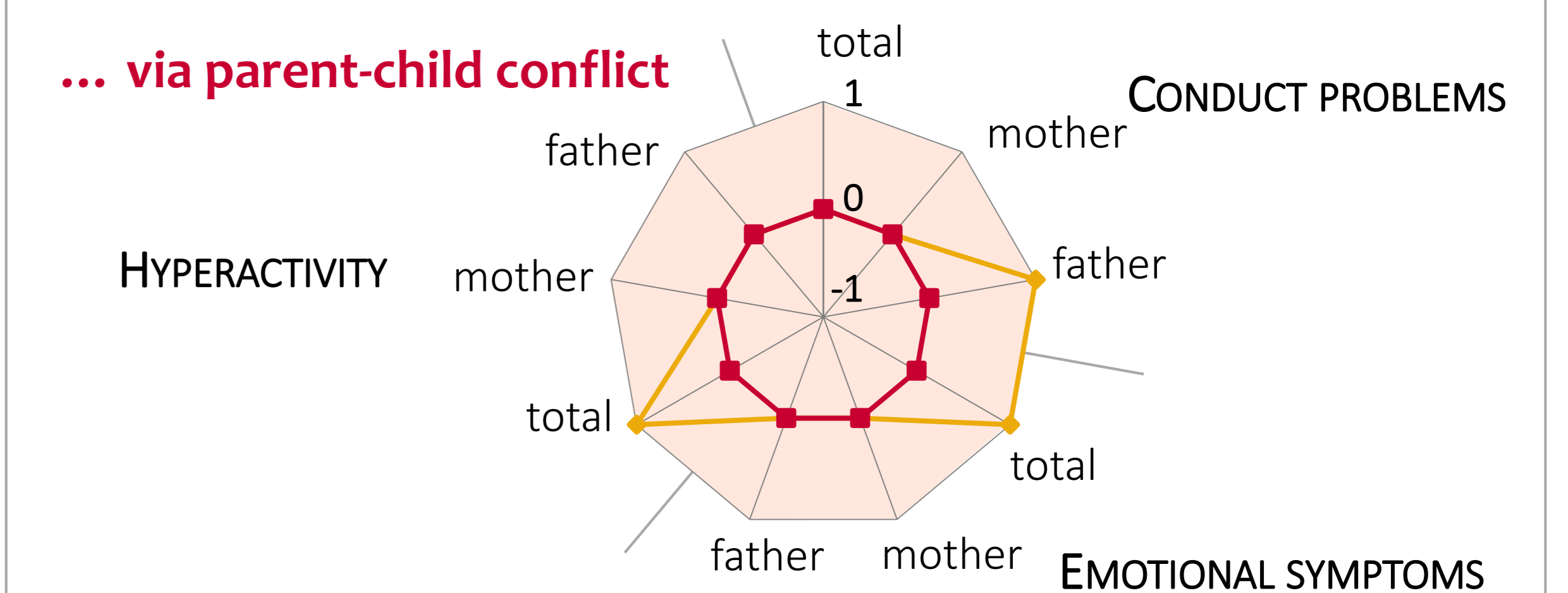
Hypothesis 2

- children aged 3-5 years: the more frequent **father-child conflicts** of long-distance commuters are associated with more **conduct problems** of the child
- children aged 6-15 years: the **less frequent esteem** of long-distance commuting **mothers** is associated with more **conduct problems, emotional symptoms and hyperactivity / inattention** of the child

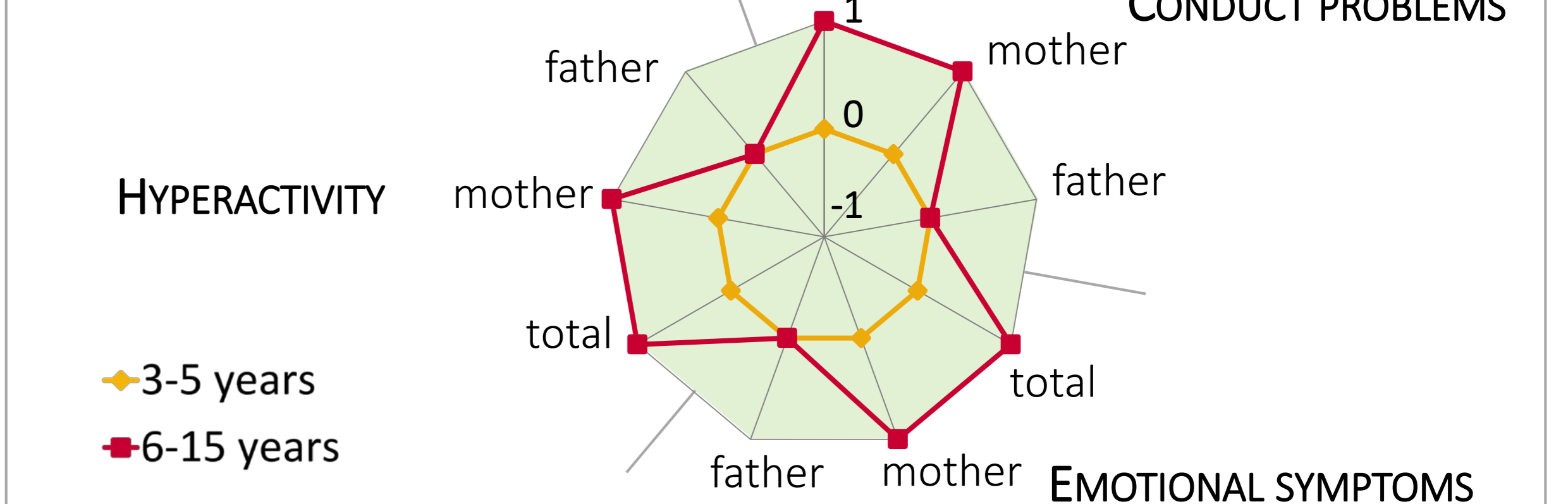


Testing of hypothesis 2

Compared to short-distance commuting, long-distance commuting is associated with more (1) or less (-1) conduct problems, emotional symptoms or hyperactivity of the child... (0 = no significant correlation)



... via parental esteem



Conclusion

Commuting over long distances is not only **harmful** for long-distance commuters, but also for their relationship with their child and ultimately **for the children themselves.**