



The promotion of single mothers health: measures are necessarily multisectorial

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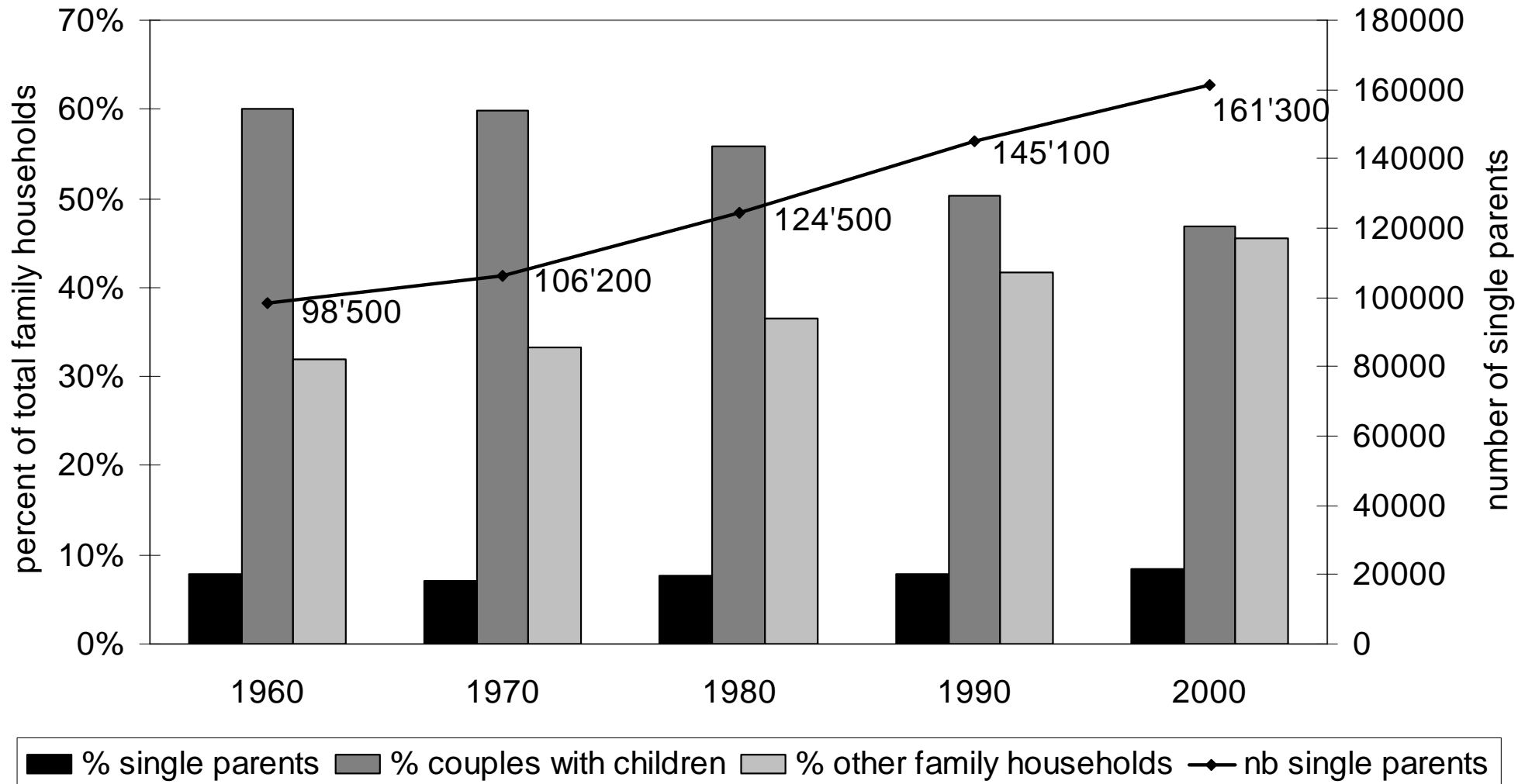
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Definition of single parents

« A parent who raises alone one or several children »

- Sociological definition ... versus civil status, demographic, economic, self-reported definitions
- Heterogeneity of the category 'single parents'
- A sequence of life

Single parents in Switzerland



Characteristics of single parents in Switzerland

- Mostly women (88% of single parents)
- Smaller number of children per family (1.56 versus 1.92 in dual parent families)
- Single parents are older than dual parents
- High proportion of *working poors* among single parents (10.3%)
- 23.6% of single-parent headed families live under the poverty level

Single mothers health

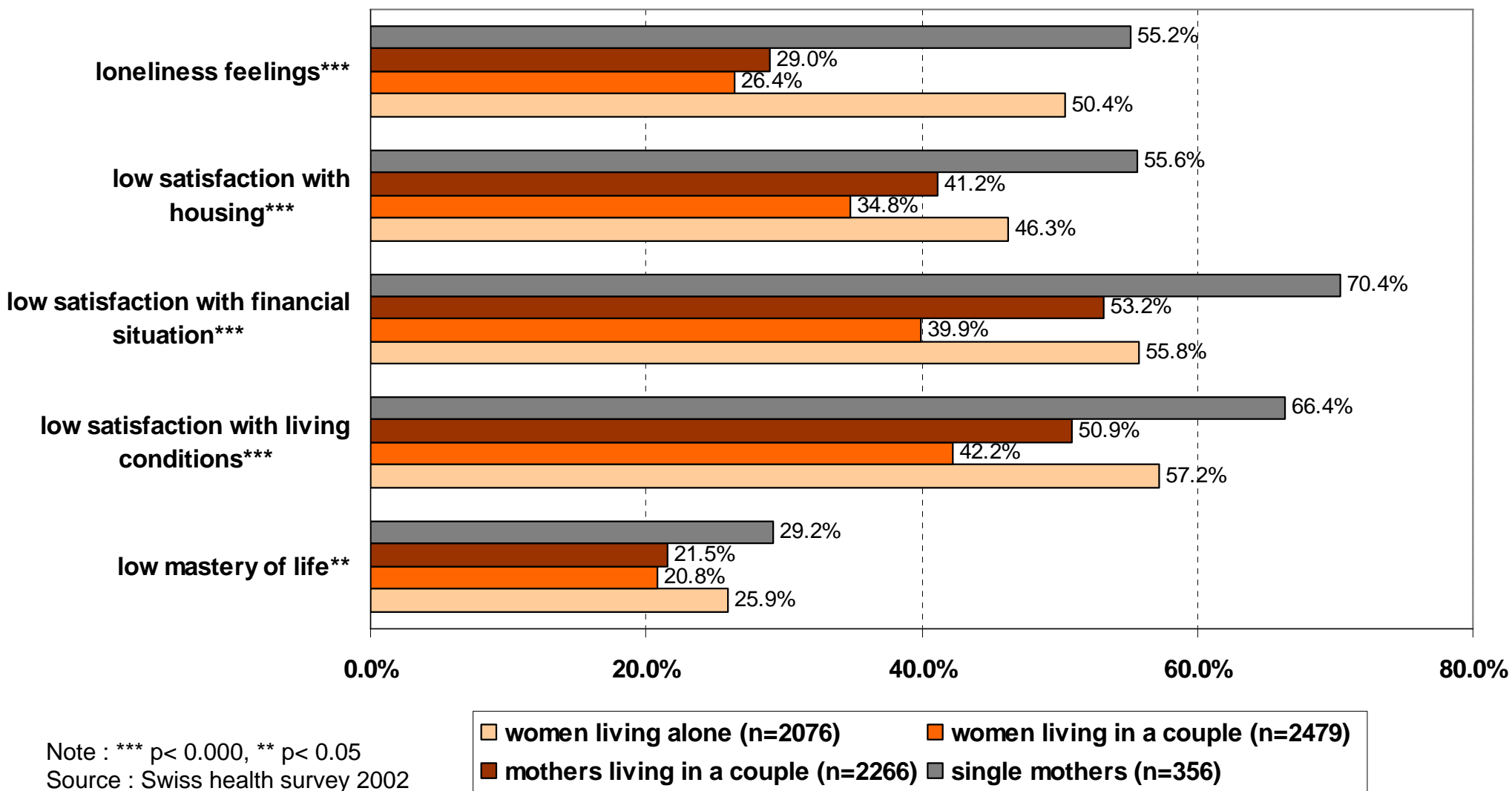
Swiss health survey 2002

- Single mothers: n=356
- (Single fathers: n=40)

Comparison groups

- Mothers living in a couple and having at least one child below 18 (n=2266)
- Women living in a couple, without children (n=2479)
- Women living alone (n=2076)

Single mothers quality of life



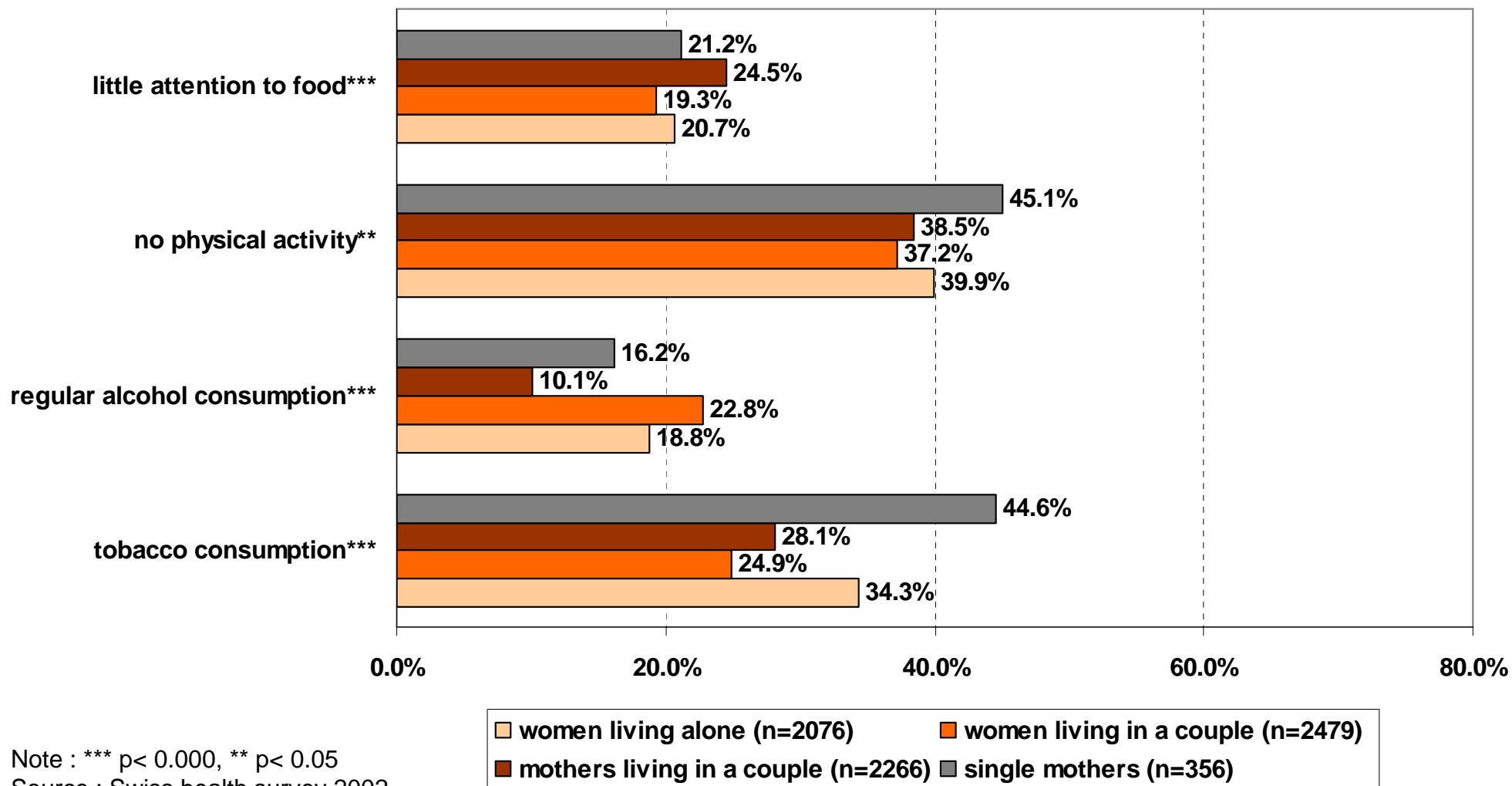
Single mothers health status



Single mothers health status

- Single mothers health is not associated with the age and number of children
- Divorced single mothers have a poorer psychic balance
- Limited impact of social support
- Absence of work is strongly associated with deteriorated health

Single mothers health behaviours




Health care use

	Single mothers (n=356)	Mothers in a couple (n=2266)	Women in a couple (n=2479)	Women living alone (n=2076)
Visited a doctor during the last 12 months **	75.5%	80.3%	83.2%	81.3%
Average number of medical visits (among women who consulted)	6.08	4.17	4.61	5.55
Hospitalisations (at least 1 day)***	14.7%	15.6%	11.3%	11.1%
Drug consumption over the last 7 days***	40.6%	33.7%	48.0%	49.2%

Note : *** p< 0.000, ** p< 0.05

Source : Swiss health survey 2002

Implications for public policies

- Public policies  health inequalities
- Comparative studies reveal importance of public policies
Whitehead M., Burstrom B., et al. (2000)
- Policies should enhance **autonomy** or **protection** of single-parent headed families?

Implications for public policies

- Health policies
 - Avoid obstacles in access to health care
 - Consider family situation as a determinant of health
- Family policies
 - Swiss family policy is underdeveloped
 - Recent recognition of diversity
 - Impact of the new law on divorce
- Work policies
 - Facilitate single mothers access to work, but under which conditions?
 - Enhance work-family balance

Conclusions

- Single mothers in worse health than mothers in dual parent families, especially regarding mental health
 - Accumulation of disadvantages
- Multisectoral measures are necessary

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