

When marriage is aggravating: Partners, children and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in Switzerland

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Background and Research question

- Well-being is higher for individuals who are married or cohabitating versus people who have no partners or are in a LAT relation, an effect mainly attributable to selection (Lewin 2017, Kalmijn 2017, Perelli-Harris et al. 2019)
- Cohabitation and marriages yield equally high levels of well-being in certain countries; elsewhere marriage still entails a happiness premium, because of selection effects and relational quality (Perelli-Harris et al. 2019)
- Having children is usually linked to temporary increases in happiness (Myrskylä and Margolis 2014)
- In Switzerland, family policies are still under-developed, work-family conflict is high for women; most births occur within marriages (Levy et al., 2002)
- Women in Switzerland experience a temporary drop in happiness at the birth of their children, not men (Mikucka and Rizzi 2020)
- Cohabiting couples experience a well-being disadvantage because of higher work-family conflict, as cohabiting women are more often employed (Ryser and Le Goff, forth.)
- Because well-being after a shock can reveal inequalities in constraints or resources which remain hidden otherwise...
 - ⇒ This paper asks how nuclear family ties (different conjugal relations and residential children) hindered or helped individuals adjust to the historic COVID-19 shock in Switzerland in terms of well-being

Data and Methods

□ Hypotheses :

- (H1) : non-partnered individuals (never married) will experience a drop in well-being during Covid-19
- (H2) : being married versus cohabiting versus in a LAT relation will be more beneficial to maintain well-being during Covid-19
- (H3) : women with live-in children will experience a drop in well-being

□ Data

- Swiss Household Panel data:** changes in well-being between 2019 (pre-crisis) and June of 2020 (1st wave of Covid-19). The sample is made of participants to both waves (44.42% out of the total sample). Attrition 2019-2020 analysis using logistic regressions: partnership status and residing children are not related to attrition; but education and employment is to some extent.
- Population :** adults 25-64, 2745 men and 3603 women
- Main independent variables**
 - Partnership status:** married, cohabitating, LAT, no partner never married, no partner ever married ("divorced"). The few individuals who experienced a change in partnership status between the waves were excluded
 - Residential children:** having children less than 18 years living in the household during the 2020 survey
- Dependent variable :** Life satisfaction ("De manière générale, dans quelle mesure êtes-vous satisfait-e de votre vie ? 0 Pas du tout satisfait-e – 10 Tout à fait satisfait-e")
- Control variables** measured in 2020: age, work status, self reported health, covid-19 infection. In 2019: education. We also created three variables from emotional and practical support received in 2019 from friends/ colleagues/ other, mother and father, siblings (PCA scores), since benefits and constraints of nuclear family ties depend on other close ties (Rossier et al. forth).

□ Analytical strategy

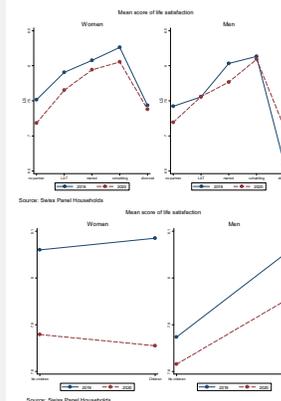
- Panel Random Effects models** to predict group-specific growth curves of LS between 2019 and 2020 (Kohler & Kreuter, 2009)

References

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Results

□ Descriptive statistics



Without controls:

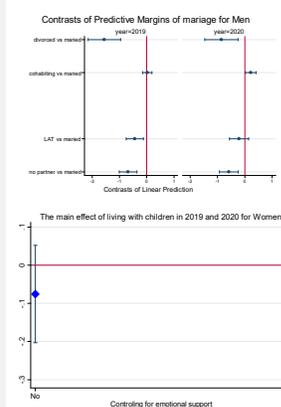
In 2019

- Marriage and cohabitation affect positively LS compared to having no partner and being in a LAT relation; significant difference between cohabitation and marriage
- Having a co-residing child is not associated to lower LS for men nor women

Between 2019-2020

- LS decreased especially among women who are mothers
- LS seems to have decreased more for married men than for men in other marital configurations

□ Regression analyses



With controls:

Men

- Living with children does not matter for men's LS change
- Married men are more likely to experience a decrease in LS, especially compared to cohabiting men

Women

- Women's LS during Covid did not vary according to their partnership status nor having residential children, nor in interaction
- However, when adding emotional -or practical- support from parents (2019), a negative effect appears for living with children in both years (main effect)

Conclusion

- The aim of this study was to evaluate the constraints and benefits inherent to varied nuclear family ties (different forms of partnership and residential children less than 18) by gender in Switzerland, a country with relatively conservative family institutions and norms,
- On the whole H1, H2 and H3 are not verified
- H1: having no partner or an LAT partnership did not put individuals more at risk of experiencing low LS during the Covid-19 crisis
 - ⇒ *The Covid-19 confinement was relatively short and liberal in Switzerland; people living alone may have benefitted from the use of communication technologies and from being free from the constraints inherent to a confined family life*
- H2: unexpected result: being married had a detrimental effect on LS for men
 - ⇒ *Cohabiting couples are more equalitarian in traditional Switzerland, which may have helped men adjust to being at home during the Covid crisis*
- H3: women are not weighted down by residential children before and during the crisis, except when receiving emotional/ practical support from their own parents
 - ⇒ *The help of mother/father may signal situations where the burden of child care is too heavy for women, independently of marital situation or sanitary crisis*

Interactions with the network of close relations as well as the precise modalities of "doing family" – as well as context- are crucial to understand whether nuclear family ties are beneficial or detrimental to individuals' well-being