OVERCOMING SOCIAL VULNERABILITES IN FAMILY : A CONFIGURATIONAL APPROACH

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Aim of the study

• To consider the conjugal dyads and their relationships to their social networks in a longitudinal perspective to examine the impact of adversity on the couples' life.
• In order to consider the longitudinal impact of critical life events and transitions on couples' lives and well-being, one should study the dynamic of conjugal dyads' relationships within the social network of close relationship of both partners. Furthermore, to understand these effects, one should consider them within the broader context of social stratification.

Theoretical Framework

• **Configurational approach of families** allows to consider divers family forms (e.g. cohabiting couples, childless couples or others) aside from the family unit and the nuclear family.
• **Typological approach of social networks** allows to distinguish different types of family configurations based on their structural, functional and relational properties.
• **Social stress process in family and couples**

Main research questions

• What types of family configurations allow the couple to adjust successfully to life-course adversity, and which types of family configurations weaken the couple even more?
• The conjugal adjustment in face of adversity is measured by conjugal quality, namely : satisfaction with conjugal relationship, thinking about separation and psychological strain.

Family configuration = set of relational ties of both partners with members of their social networks of kin and friends living in their proximity

Theoretical model
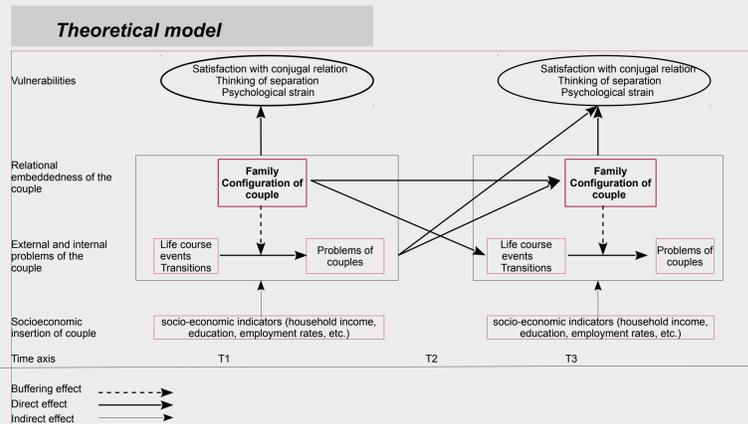
Sample of the study

The representative longitudinal sample of the three-wave **study of Swiss couples** conducted at University of Geneva (Switzerland).
• 1st wave in 1999 : **1534 couples** aged from 20 to 70 years, of three main linguistic regions of Switzerland
• 2nd wave in 2004 : **1054 women** who participated in the first wave.
• 3rd wave in 2011 : **927 couples** from a total of 2341 individuals, which include 1830 participants of the 1st wave and a new cohort of 180 young couples.
721 couples lasting over the three waves of study

Measures

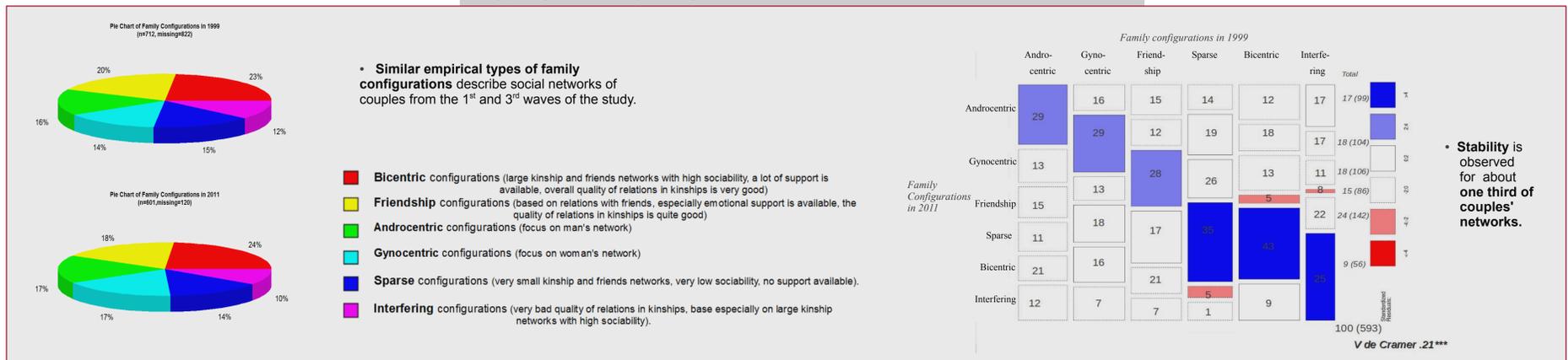• **Family configurations** (1999 and 2011): the size of the social network composed by friends and family members close to the couple, contacts with relatives and friends, the perception of support (emotional and financial), interference and quality of relations in kinships. Correspondence analysis and clusters are used to identify types.
• Satisfaction with the relationship,thinking about separation, perception of stress.
• External problems (socio-cultural, health and socio-professional; family life transitions).
• Internal problems (coordination, and interpersonal deviance).
• Education level, family income, presence of children.

Methods

• **Bivariate analyses** - in order to understand some of the main features of the variables in the study.
• Logistic regressions on conjugal and psychological vulnerability.
• Analyses are made using the statistical software R.
• Results of analyses of lasting couples will be compared with individuals of the first and second wave who separated or divorced, whether or not in couple during the third wave of the survey.

Overview of the first results from the bi-variate analyses

1. Typologies of family configurations in 1999 and 2011 and their evolutions in time.

• **Similar empirical types of family configurations** describe social networks of couples from the 1st and 3rd waves of the study.

Bicentric configurations (large kinship and friends networks with high sociability, a lot of support is available, overall quality of relations in kinships is very good)
Friendship configurations (based on relations with friends, especially emotional support is available, the quality of relations in kinships is quite good)
Androcentric configurations (focus on man's network)
Gynocentric configurations (focus on woman's network)
Sparse configurations (very small kinship and friends networks, very low sociability, no support available).
Interfering configurations (very bad quality of relations in kinships, base especially on large kinship networks with high sociability).

• **Stability** is observed for about **one third of couples' networks.**

V de Cramer .21***

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2. Longitudinal effect of family configurations from 1999 on the indicators of external and internal problems of couples reported in 2011
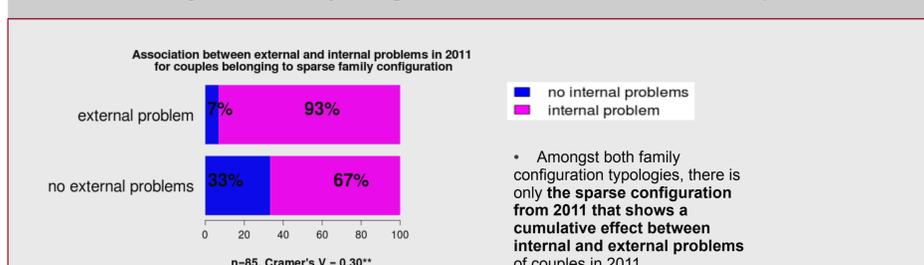
Summary of bi-variate associations between conjugal configurations of 1999 and the typology of problems, and with indicators of dimension of conjugal quality.

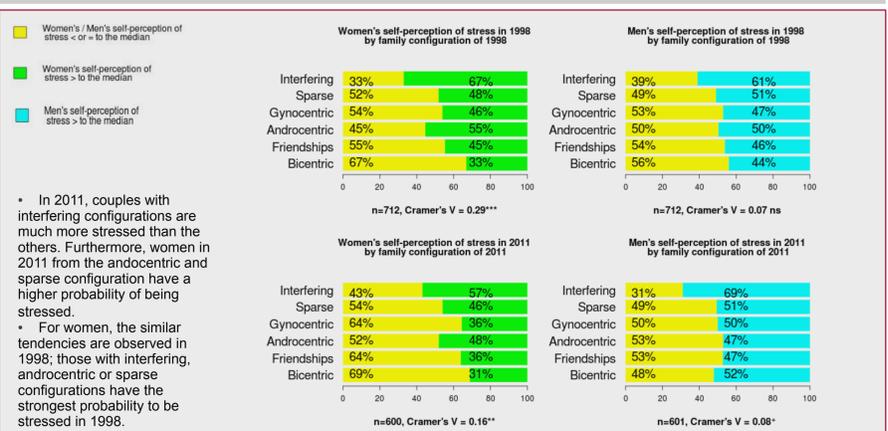| Indicators of couples (only positive response is noted) reported in 2011		Family configurations in 1999							
		Bicentric	Friendship	Androcentric	Gynocentric	Sparse	Interfering	Total (N)	Cramer's V
Types of external problems	Health	64	66	82	65	69	79	70 (496)	.15**
	Sociocultural	1	9	3	7	6	4	5 (33)	.13**
	Socio-professional	22	38	29	37	31	28	31 (218)	.13**
Types of internal problems	Coordination	68	74	64	65	71	76	70 (486)	.09 (ns)
	Violence/addiction	9	12	13	13	13	20	13 (69)	.10 (ns)
	Relational	58	60	51	55	68	69	60 (419)	.10*
Conjugal quality	Relation not really good (Women)	49	53	51	51	54	64	53 (450)	.09 (ns)
	Relation not really good (Men)	52	44	41	50	60	55	50 (399)	.13*
	Have already thought of separation	32	47	37	37	37	44	39 (275)	0.11+
Separation of couple in 2011		9	10	7	8	10	20	10 (976)	.12**

Note: N between 399 et 699; ***p<=.000; **p<=.01; *p<=.05; +p<=.1

• **Configurations types of 1999 are more strongly associated with external than with internal problems in 2011.**

• Couples with **bicentric configurations** in 1999 declare the lowest levels of all problems in 2011.

• Couples with **interfering configurations** in 1999 have the highest levels of health and relational problems, and the lowest levels of overall conjugal quality. In fact, these couples separated the most between waves 1 and 3.

• Even if couples with **sparse configurations** in 1999 report no significant problems in comparison to other types of family configurations in 2011, the conjugal relation is not well evaluated, especially for men.

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3. Buffering effect of family configurations between external and internal problems

Association between external and internal problems in 2011 for couples belonging to sparse family configuration

no internal problems
internal problem

n=85, Cramer's V = 0.30**

• Amongst both family configuration typologies, there is only **the sparse configuration from 2011 that shows a cumulative effect between internal and external problems** of couples in 2011.

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4. Direct effect of family configurations on the psychological vulnerability of partners in 1999 and 2011.

Women's / Men's self-perception of stress < or = to the median
Women's self-perception of stress > to the median
Men's self-perception of stress > to the median

Women's self-perception of stress in 1998 by family configuration of 1998
n=712, Cramer's V = 0.29***

Men's self-perception of stress in 1998 by family configuration of 1998
n=712, Cramer's V = 0.07 ns

Women's self-perception of stress in 2011 by family configuration of 2011
n=600, Cramer's V = 0.16**

Men's self-perception of stress in 2011 by family configuration of 2011
n=601, Cramer's V = 0.08+

• In 2011, couples with interfering configurations are much more stressed than the others. Furthermore, women in 2011 from the andocentric and sparse configuration have a higher probability of being stressed.
• For women, the similar tendencies are observed in 1998; those with interfering, androcentric or sparse configurations have the strongest probability to be stressed in 1998.

Conclusion

• The results underscore the importance of family configurations to study family vulnerability. Globally, it seems that couples with the bicentric family configurations adapt best to the life-course adversity, and in contrary, the couples with the interfering and sparse family configurations are the most vulnerable.

More investigation of these tendencies from the bi-variate analyses are needed, which include : the dimensions of social stratification, the conjugal dynamic in the situation of social stress, variables of the 2nd wave of survey. Multivariate analyses and regressions are needed to investigate further the bi-variate results.