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Workshop on

Friends of the elderly / friendship networks of older adults

In family sociology, a general reading of the modernisation process assumes a decline in the formal ties regulated by public norms (basically the nuclear family ties) and an increase of “configurations” constructed and actively maintained by a given individual. Those configurations include family members, friends, and even sometimes animals. We are here especially interested by friends since they are selected on the basis of common interests and life-styles. While family is a world of love and hate, of support but also tensions, friends are per excellence illustration of the “elected” ties.

Only a few studies document a growing presence of friends in the elderly everyday life, in their daily social interactions. A first aim of this workshop and of the paper that will be the product of, is to verify if friends are more and more important in the life of old people.

A second aim is to analyse inequality and the impact of aging. Indeed, being an efficient animator of a network of elected implies personality traits that are not equally shared among the individuals and in the social structures. Moreover, what happens when the elderly becomes frail? Does he/she endure a double penalty with both the fragilisation process and friends withdrawal? What are the implications in terms of socio-emotional selectivity?

Using three surveys done in Switzerland, respectively in 1979, 1994 and 2011, we will answer those questions. But participants must feel free to come with other data.

Participants of the workshop are expected to be familiar with a statistical package for data analysis (eg, STATA, SPSS, R) but do not need very advanced skills.