Social Network Effects on Intentions of Work Participation by Swiss Men and Women in the Transition to Parenthood

Francesco Giudici, Antoine Pierrard, Marlène Sapin, and Eric D. Widmer
(University of Geneva and Lausanne, Switzerland)

Contact: Francesco.Giudici@unil.ch

Becoming parent is a key transition for the division of domestic and paid work between men and women. Overall, the division of labor becomes significantly more unequal during this transition (Widmer et al, 2003).

In her seminal work, Elisabeth Bott (1957) hypothesized that dense social networks were associated with segregated conjugal roles. From there, we hypothesize that the intentions of individuals expecting their first child about their division of labor for their future life as parents are related to the type of networks they are embedded in.

Sample: 228 men and 233 women being in a partnership in Switzerland and expecting their first child. Mean age is 30.6 for women (SD=3.9) and 32.7 for men (SD=4.7). Higher educational levels are slightly overrepresented. Three wave survey. Results come from the first wave.

Measures: Respondents were asked to report about a maximum of 15 alters considered important during the current year (kind of relationship with ego, sex, occupation, status, age, etc.). Sociometric questions concerning emotional and practical support were asked about the first six alters cited.

Dependent variable: Occupational intentions related to the period after the maternity leave. (41% of women intend to work at 60% or less; 60% of men intend to work 90% and more).

Independent variables: Density of networks for emotional support (men: mean = .33, SD = .25; women: mean = .27, SD = .22) and practical support (men: mean = .34, SD = .28; women: mean = .28, SD = .23), overlap with the partner's network (men: mean =.17 , SD = .18, women: mean = .19, SD = .20), composition of the network (see clusters, Table 2).

Control for educational level, occupational situation (working full time or part-time), and opinion of best options for the division of labor.

Table 1 presents a logistic regression on occupational intentions showing an effect of density of emotional support for women and density of practical support for men.

Table 1. Logistic Regression on occupational intentions; for women to work 60% and less; for men to work 90% or more.

Women		Men	
Educational level		Educational level	
Low	-	Low	-
Medium	1.14	Medium	2.24
High	.33*	High	.79
Household Income [a]		Household Income [a]	
Less than 8K	-	Less than 8K	-
8K to10K	.84	8K to10K	.27*
10K and more	1.53	10K and more	.79
Size of network	1.02	Size of network	.76
Emotional support density	5.21*	Practical support density	3.58*
Same % of work at the present	6.03**	Same % of work at the present	21.07**
Opinion: for an equal division of labor	1.01	Opinion: for an equal division of labor	.28*
ChiSquare	34.65**	ChiSquare	61.19**
DF	8	DF	8

**p<.01, *p<.05

References:

Bott, E. (1957). Family and Social Network. Londres, Tavistock.

Widmer E., et al. (2003). Couples contemporains: Cohésion, régulation et conflits. Une enquête sociologique. Zürich, Seismo

Cluster analysis based on the status of alters revealed three types of networks composition (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of nework composition.

Terms	Multiplex	Friendship	Kinship	F-test
%	47.07%	33.41%	19.52%	
Partner	0.88	0.86	0.91	0.61
Mother	0.90	0.42	1.00	102.98**
Female Friend	1.49	1.42	0.87	5.37**
Father	0.80	0.04	0.92	324.90**
Male Friend	1.52	0.92	1.12	8.25**
Partner's Mother	0.21	0.25	0.93	114.72**
Sister	0.45	0.37	0.38	0.94
Brother	0.55	0.09	0.53	32.05**
Partner's Father	0.09	0.12	0.84	195.87**
Superior	0.25	0.17	0.20	1.65
Female Coworker	0.44	0.09	0.03	25.83**
Male Coworker	0.36	0.14	0.16	6.62**
Others terms	1.48	1.50	2.36	9.71**
Mean Size	9.43	6.39	10.26	63.08**

Multiplex networks are characterized by the presence of relatives, friends and co-workers (106 women, 111 men).
Friendship networks are characterized by the presence of friends (90 women, 64 men).
Kinship networks are characterized by the presence of both relatives by blood and in-laws (37 women, 53 men).

Table 3 revealed that emotional support density depends on network types and overalp.

Table 3. Linear regression on emotional support density.

	I		II		III	
	W	M	W	M	W	M
Educ. Level						
Low	-	-	-	-	-	-
Medium	-.05	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.03	-.00
High	-.12	-.07	-.07	-.03	-.09	-.04
Household Income [a]						
Less than 8K	-	-	-	-	-	-
8K to10K	.06	-.18*	.04	-.18*	.03	-.17*
10K and more	-.07	-.12	-.09	-.13	-.08	-.12
Clusters						
Kinship	-	-	-	-		
Multiplex	-.18	-.06	-.10	.04		
Friendship	-.28**	-.22**	-.16	-.13		
Overlap w. partner			.29**	.26**		
Interaction terms						
Kinship high Overlap					-	-
Kinship small Overlap					-.16*	.06
Multiplex high Overlap					-.23*	.06
Multiplex small Overlap					-.27**	-.08
Friendship high Overlap					-.15	.01
Friendship small Overlap					-.43*	-.28**
R Squared	.06	.06	.14	.12	.11	.12

Results show that: 1) Higher density of emotional support is associated with lower intentions of work participation for women (Table 1). **2)** Higher density of practical support is associated with higher intentions of work participation for men (Table 1). **3)** Density depends on network composition. Networks based on kinship are more dense than friendship and multiplex networks (Table 3). **4)** Density depends on overlap of network members between partners. More overlapping networks have a higher density of emotional and practical support (Table 3).

Conclusion: *Social networks matter for gender inequalities created by the transition to parenthood. The division of paid and domestic work is not a privatized issue in the hand of partners only but relates to network composition, overalp between partners' networks and network density.*