



**University of
Zurich^{UZH}**

Institute of Sociology

Forever and ever?

Emotional closeness in elderly European couples

5th SHARE User Conference

Luxembourg, November 12-13, 2015

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Introduction

- **increasing life expectancy → longer time together**
 - **decreasing marriage rates and increasing divorce rates**
 - **Decline of marital quality with age**

 - **natural decline of close relations in old age**
 - **smaller family sizes and potential of close relations**
 - **increasing loneliness in old age**
- Partner as the main reference person?**



Research Questions

- 1. Can we identify gender and/or country-specific differences regarding emotional bonds within partnerships?**
- 2. Which individual, partnership, family-related and contextual circumstances can explain this situation?**



Data & Methods

- **Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)**
 - Main sample: 4th wave (2012), Release 1.1.1
 - 16 Countries: AUT, BEL, CHE, CZE, GER, DNK, EST, ESP, FRA, HUN, ITA, NLD, POL, PRT, SVN and SWE
 - Respondents with partner
 - Living in one household
 - N: 36,976



Data & Methods // Operationalization of dependent variable

Now I am going to ask some questions about your relationships with other people. Most people discuss with others the **good or bad things** that happen to them, **problems** they are having, or **important concerns** they may have.

Looking back over the last 12 months, who are the people with whom you most often discussed important things?

These people may include your family members, friends, neighbors, or other acquaintances. Please refer to these people by their first name.



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Partner is member of the social network: Yes/No

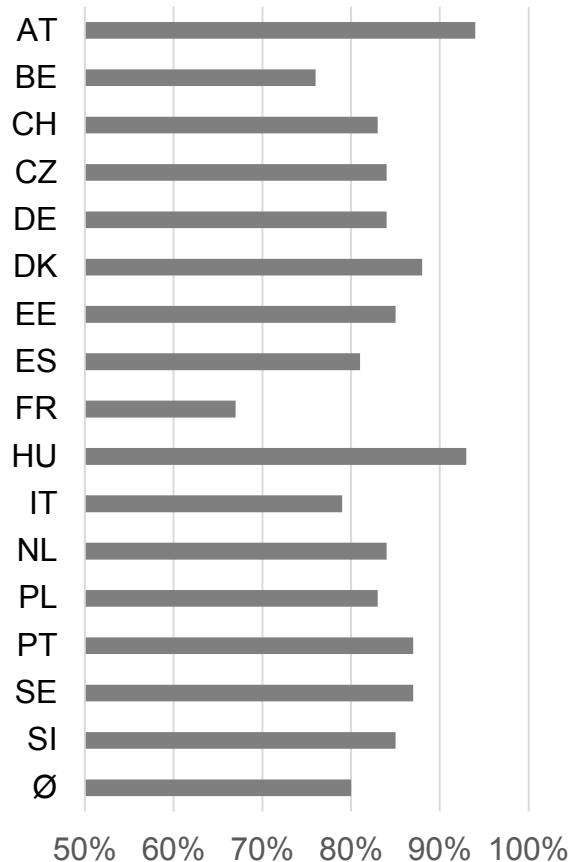
Multi-level logistic regressions

Total/Gender

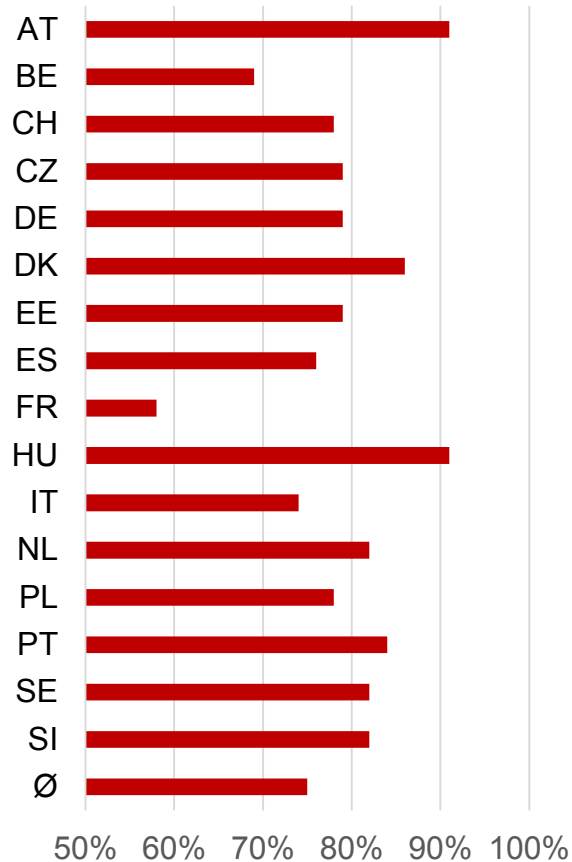


Results // Partner and gender

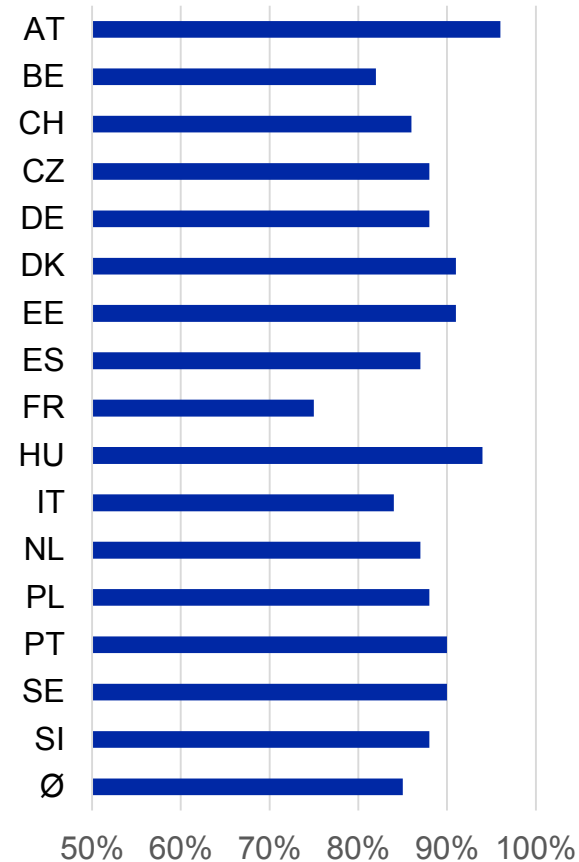
Total



Women

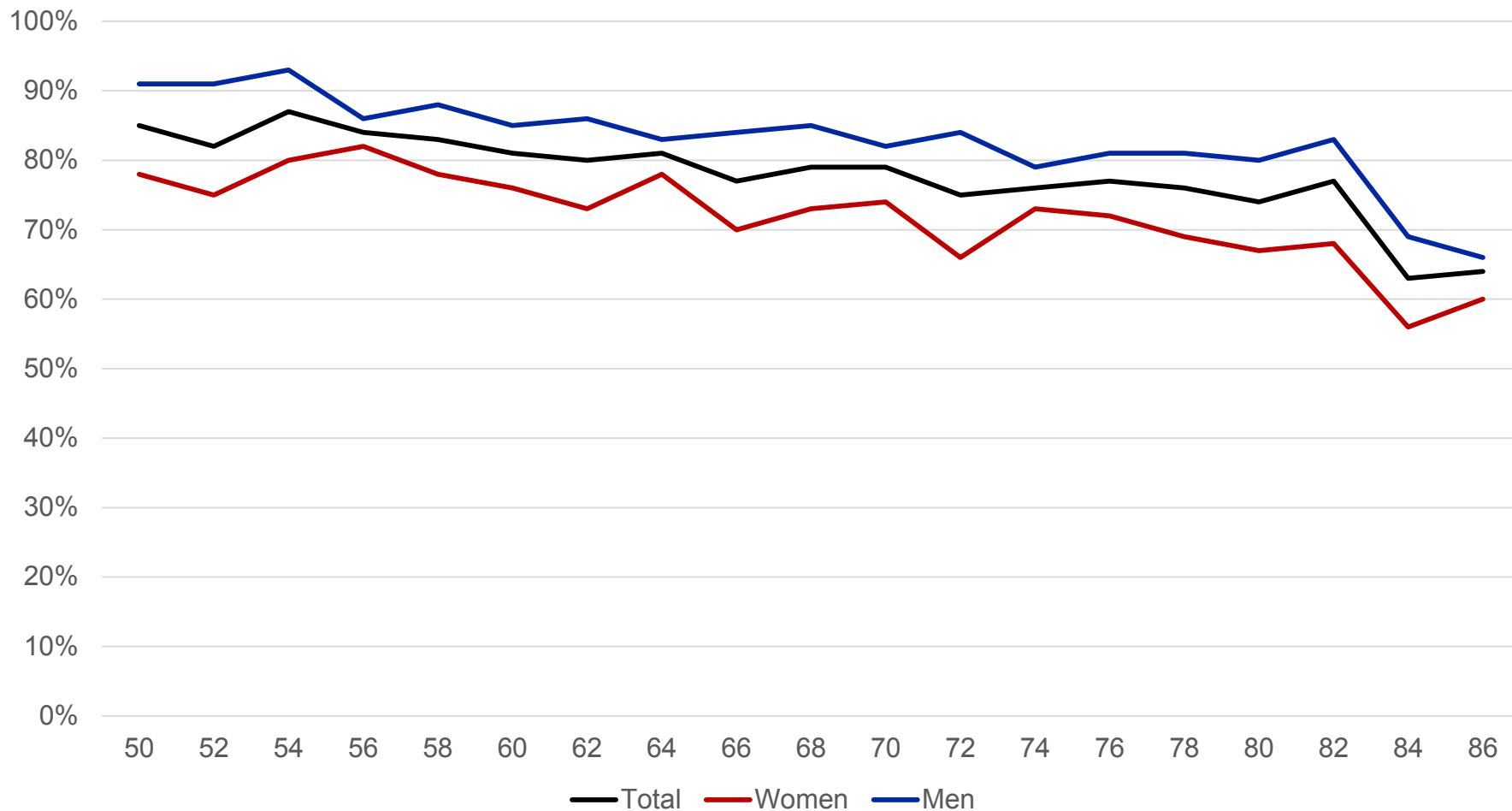


Men





Results // Partner and age





Results // Individual & Partnership

		Total		Women		Men	
		OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.



Results // Individual & Partnership

	Total		Women		Men	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Education						
<i>Ref.: Low</i>						
Medium	1.60	***	1.34	***	1.20	**
High	2.36	***	1.77	***	1.50	***
Education (difference partner)						
<i>Ref.: Same</i>						
Respondent higher	0.69	***	0.81	***	0.81	*
Partner higher	1.35	***	1.26	***	1.11	



Results // Individual & Partnership

	Total		Women		Men	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Employment status						
<i>Ref.: Nobody</i>						
Respondent only	0.93		1.00		0.90	
Partner only	0.97		0.98		0.93	
Both	1.47	***	1.27	***	1.16	*
Make ends meet						
Great difficulty	0.63	***	0.79	***	0.80	**
Some difficulty	0.95		0.96		1.00	
<i>Ref.: Fairly easily</i>						
Easily	1.22	**	1.06		1.12	
Health						
Excellent	1.35	***	1.21	***	1.28	***
Very good	1.34	***	1.19	***	1.24	**
<i>Ref.: good</i>						
Fair	0.93		0.89	***	1.01	
Poor	0.88	**	0.78	***	0.97	



Results // Support & Family

	Total		Women		Men	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Help/Care to Partner: Yes	0.67	***	0.76	***	0.85	***
Help/Care from Partner: Yes	2.22	***	1.76	***	1.82	***
Children						
<i>Ref.: none</i>						
1	0.86		0.81	**	1.01	
2	1.02		0.92		1.07	
3+	0.90		0.83		1.07	
Not adult child(ren): Yes	0.82		0.80	**	0.94	
Grandchild(ren): Yes	0.92		0.96		0.96	
Other in social network: Yes	0.13	***	0.26	***	0.35	***



Results // Context

	Total		Women		Men	
	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.	OR	Sig.
Migration: Yes	0.91		0.93		0.83	*
Shadow of partner: Yes	1.54	***	1.54	***	1.07	
<hr/>						
N (Respondents)	36,976		18,860		18,116	
N (Couples)	22,011					
N (Countries)	16		16		16	



Conclusion

1. Can we identify gender and/or country-specific differences regarding emotional bonds within partnerships?

- Women in all countries less often
- Women < Men → HU, AT, DK, NL
- Women << Men → PT, SE, CH, CZ, DE, IT, PL, SI
- Women <<< Men → FR, BE, EE, ES



Conclusion

2. Which individual, partnership, family-related and contextual circumstances can explain this situation?

- ↗ Male
- ↗ young
- ↗ higher educated
- ↘ poor health (women)



Conclusion

2. Which individual, partnership, family-related and contextual circumstances can explain this situation?

- ↘ age difference (women)
- ↗ married and duration
- ↗ higher education of partner (women)
- ↗ both employed
- ↘ financial restrictions



Conclusion

2. Which individual, partnership, family-related and contextual circumstances can explain this situation?

- ↗ Help/Care from partner
- ↘ Help/Care to partner
- ↘ (not adult) children (women)
- ↘ other members in social network



Conclusion

2. Which individual, partnership, family-related and contextual circumstances can explain this situation?

- ↘ Migration (men)
- ↗ Shadow of the partner (women)



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Thank you for your attention!



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Appendix



Theoretical Background

▪ 3 Types of Solidarity:

Affectual

- Emotional closeness of the relation

Associational

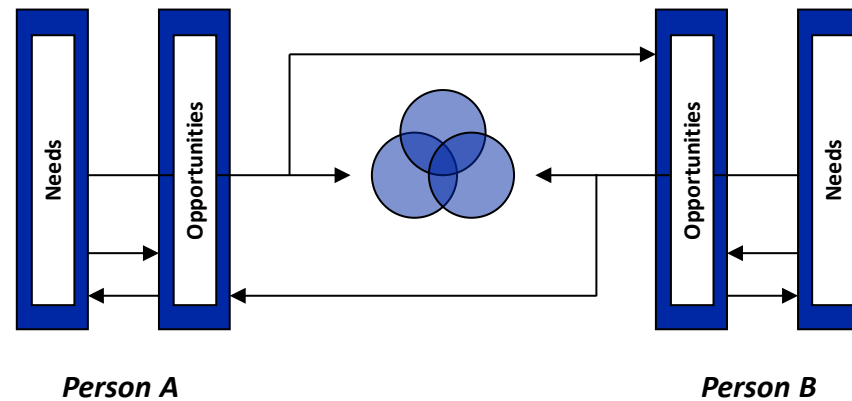
- Common activities, type and frequency of contacts

Functional

- Giving and taking of money, time and space



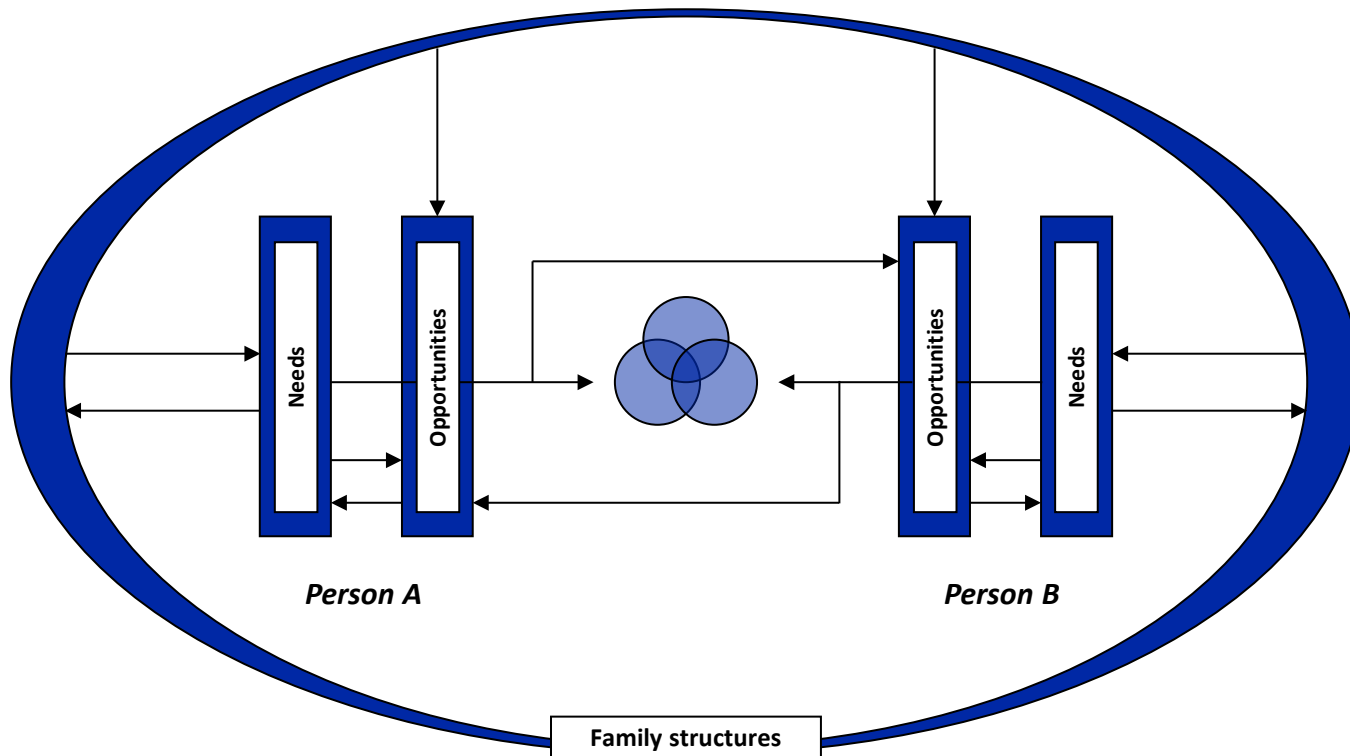
Theoretical Background



Source: Szydlik (2000: 45)

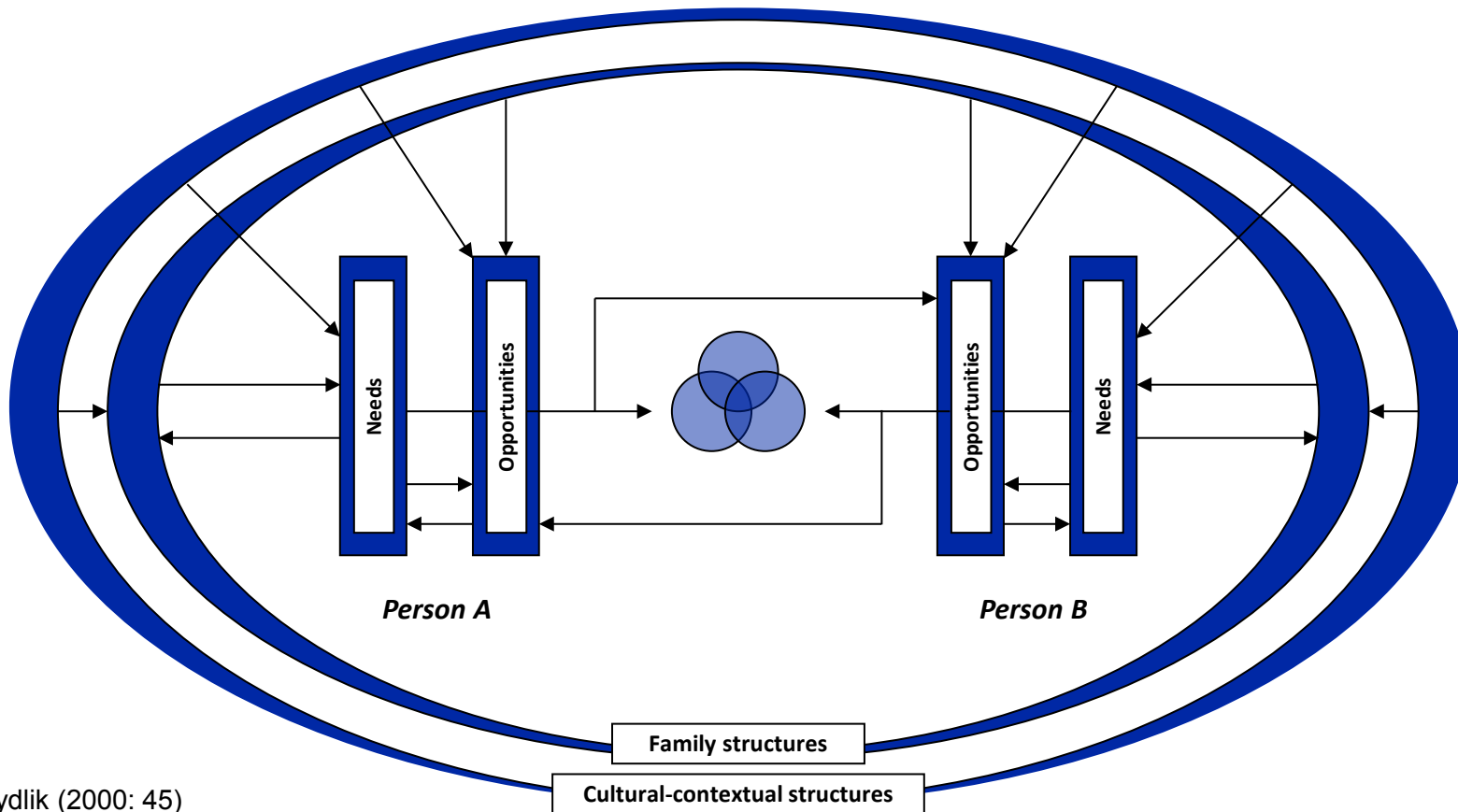


Theoretical Background



Source: Szydlík (2000: 45)

Theoretical Background



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