

Critical events and family configurations

Research class of the *Master program in sociology*

Autumn (4h) and spring (4h) 2012-2013

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The research class (“atelier”) of the Master program in sociology of 2012-2013 will be dedicated to “critical events and family configurations”. It intends to uncover how different broad family contexts react to critical life events and what the impact is of those family contexts on conjugal and parent-child vulnerability. The de-standardization of the life course associated with the risk society creates many opportunities for critical events to impact on the organization of families. The strategies set up by families to face unemployment and precariousness, economic insecurity, downward social mobility, health problems, family breakups, or frequent spatial mobility, should be addressed using large and longitudinal datasets which do not only consider relationships within households but also other relationships such as those between grandparents and grandchildren, divorced parents, stepfamily members, uncles/aunts and nephews, godparents, etc. Are families facing hardship due to the so called “new risks” successful in maintaining sound levels of conjugal satisfaction, in pursuing their parental projects or in providing enough support to children? How are relationships between partners, parents and children, as well as other family relationships, modified in order to adapt to family-work conflict and employment instability? How social inequalities by gender, generation, and social class arise from such reorganization?

The data source is the panel “Social Stratification, Cohesion and Conflict in Contemporary Families”, collected in 1999 by Widmer, Kellerhals and Levy (2003), including data from 1534 couples residing in Switzerland (first wave at the end of the nineties; second wave in 2004, third wave in 2011). Critical life events and life transitions, and their effects on family relationships are the focal themes of the research. The research class will make use of the richness of this fifteen year longitudinal study of family life.

Some experience with statistical software is expected from participants. Participants will learn by doing how to perform a quantitative study in the social sciences using original data drawn from the NCCR lives project (<http://lives-nccr.ch/>). The outcome of the research class is the production of a scientific paper implementing the highest quality standards of the social sciences. Languages of the research class are English and French.

For more information, contact us at ivan.decarlo@unige.ch and visit <http://www.unige.ch/ses/socio/enseignements/master.html>.

References

Kellerhals, Jean, Eric Widmer et René Levy (2004). *Mesure et démesure du couple: cohésion, crises et résilience dans la vie des couples*. Paris: Payot.

Widmer, Eric, Jean Kellerhals et René Levy (2003). *Couples Contemporains - Cohésion, Régulation Et Conflits: Une Enquête Sociologique*. Zurich: Seismo.

Widmer, Eric, Jean Kellerhals and René Levy (2004). Types of Conjugal Networks, Conjugal Conflict and Conjugal Quality. *European Sociological Review*, 20(1), 63 -77.

Widmer, Eric (2006). Who are my family members? Bridging and binding social capital in family configurations. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 23(6), 979-998.

Widmer, Eric, Francesco Giudici, Jean-Marie Le Goff and Alexandre Pollien (2009). From Support to Control: A Configurational Perspective on Conjugal Quality. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71(3), 437–448.