11. Standing together: is family a resilience factor for subjective wellbeing?

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INTRODUCTION

The term social support, as reported by Barrera (1981, p. 435), 'has been popularized to connote the various forms of aid and assistance supplied by family members, friends, neighbors, and others'. The definition underlines either the sphere of social support related to the immediate family or the broader nature of sociality as referred to social interactions. Both aspects were found to be positively associated with subjective wellbeing and human flourishing and many studies on quality of life emphasized social support as a crucial determinant of wellbeing (Abbey et al. 1985). On one side married people were found to be happier and more satisfied, with higher levels of purpose in life, optimism and energy and displaying better wage premiums and financial resources than all the other groups (Cohen 1988; House et al. 1988; Case et al. 1992; Gove et al. 1990; Inglehart 1990; Stutzer and Frey 2006; Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Bierman et al. 2006). On the other hand, people with more satisfying social relations, larger amounts of friends and a higher consumption of relational goods were found be better off in terms of health, life satisfaction and happiness (Colón et al. 1991; Cacioppo and Cacioppo 2014; Luo et al. 2012; Becchetti et al. 2008; Bruni and Stanca 2008). Furthermore, both family and social relationships were considered as key factors to overcome stressful events (Myers 2003), playing a supportive and protective role against shocks. Individuals receiving higher social support were found to cope better with a variety of life crises including bereavement, rape, job loss, and illness (House 1981; Abbey and Andrews 1985). According to Becker (1981) marriage can be considered as a basic insurance against adverse life events and provides important protective barriers against the stressful consequences of external threats (Liu et al. 2013; Gove et al. 1983; Umberson 1992; Ross 1995). Moreover, it provides economic advantages and it is considered a

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safety net with married people affording better housing, food and services (Stack and Eshleman 1998) and married men displaying a wage premium and job advantages (Korenman and Neumark 1991).

This chapter investigates the role of different family types as both a driver factor and a buffer for subjective wellbeing. The work relies on the recent economic crisis as an external source of individual stress in order to challenge the protective role of family. The hypothesis tests whether close family relations constitute a buffer against unforeseen economic uncertainty: Which types of families are happier? Did people surrounded by stronger family ties experience lower drops in wellbeing during the recent recession?

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section is a literature review on the application of marriage, family and wellbeing. In sections three and four the data and the method are reported. In section five the results are commented upon.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND WELLBEING

The link between marriage and wellbeing has been explored from different perspectives: researchers exploited the effects of marriage on health, income, wages, happiness, social wellbeing and psychological health.

Evidence strongly supports the link between health and social/family ties: indeed, compared with those having few social ties, people are less likely to die prematurely if supported by close relationships with friends, family or members of other support groups (Cohen 1988; House et al. 1988). Similarly, broken social ties (becoming widowed, fired or divorced) were found to correlate with increased vulnerability to disease (Dohrenwend et al. 1982). Furthermore, among heart attack patients the rate of a recurring attack within six months was found doubled among those living alone (Case et al. 1992), while among leukemia patients preparing to undergo bone marrow transplants those who said they had strong social support from their family or friends were found to live longer (Colón et al. 1991).

When looking at happiness the story looks similar: the happiest university students were the ones displaying higher satisfaction with their love life (Emmons and Diener, 1985) and those enjoying close relationships were found to cope better with various stresses (Abbey and Andrews 1985; Perlman and Rook 1987). In particular, with regard to marriage, a number of studies support the idea that married people are happier and more satisfied with life compared to those who are single or widowed, and especially those who are divorced or separated (Gove et al. 1990; Inglehart 1990).

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Stack and Eshleman (1998) tested the relationship between marital status and happiness, marital status and financial satisfaction and marital status and perceived health in 17 nations and found that, in 16 nations, married people were significantly happier both than single and than cohabiters and they were significantly better off in terms of financial and health satisfaction compared to all the other categories. Blanchflower and Oswald (2004) found that in the US and the UK reported wellbeing (happiness and life satisfaction) was greatest among women, married people, the highly educated and those whose parents did not divorce. They also reported that subsequent marriages are less happy while long-lasting marriages are worth US$100 000 per annum. Moreover, some researchers (Stutzer and Frey 2006) investigated on the possibility of selection bias in the marriage, finding that those who married younger (before 30) were on average singles with above average life satisfaction even before marriage.

On the psychological side of wellbeing, most studies examining marital status and psychological distress found that married men and women have a mental health advantage and present lower distress outcomes compared to their unmarried counterparts (Pearlin and Johnson 1977; Gore and Mangione 1983; Gove et al. 1990; Ross and Mirowsky 1989). Moreover, when looking at the different dimensions that are supposed to capture the functioning and the realization of a person's potential (e.g. competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning and purpose in life, optimism, accomplishment, social relationships, self-esteem and vitality) the relation between marriage and wellbeing still holds. Bierman et al. (2006) found that the consistently married had significantly higher purpose in life than all other groups once age, race and the presence of children were controlled for. Differently, Shapiro and Keyes (2008) registered only a modest wellbeing advantage for married persons against single persons, while there was more consistent evidence that cohabitants had lower wellbeing than married people. The weaker effect of cohabitations on wellbeing is also confirmed in other studies (Stack and Eshleman 1998), and the phenomenon is known as the 'cohabitation gap' (Soons and Kalmijn 2009). Despite this evidence, Pirani and Vignoli (2016) tested the cohabitation gap hypothesis over time in Italy, finding that even though over the second half of the 1990s cohabiters were running a significantly higher risk of being dissatisfied with their family life, from the first decade of the 2000s the association between union type and family life satisfaction weakened, and data from the second decade of the 2000s was no longer significant, suggesting that cohabiters are no longer less satisfied than spouses. Always with reference to the positive effect of marital status on psychological wellbeing a contrasting position is proposed by Marks and Lambert (1998): the authors found that even though transition to

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separation/divorce or widowhood was constantly associated with negative effects across a number of dimensions of wellbeing, marriage did not always have a positive robust influence on all dimensions of psychological wellbeing. In fact, there were also cases where unmarried people reported better wellbeing than the married (e.g. in autonomy and personal growth dimensions), suggesting that marriage is not always a universal beneficial determinant of all dimensions of psychological wellbeing.

Moving on to the relation between parenthood and wellbeing, mixed results arise. Some researchers discovered a positive relationship between parenthood and subjective wellbeing, with parents reporting higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, positive emotions and meaning in life (Stutzer and Frey 2006; Haller and Hadler 2006; Hansen et al. 2009; Angeles 2010; Nelson et al. 2013; Aassve et al. 2012). Kholer et al. (2005) highlighted a large and positive effect on happiness only for the first child, while Herbst and Ifcher (2016), using US data, indicated that parents become happier than non-parents only over a longer time span. However, other researchers reported that having children is negatively related to subjective wellbeing and that the negative relation is mostly explained by the negative impact on financial satisfaction (Stanca 2012; Colombo et al. 2018; Beja 2015; Bhargava et al. 2014).

To this picture it worth adding what has been called family resilience theory. The concept arises from psychology and with the aim of family therapy. The National Network for Family Resiliency defines resilience as 'the family's ability to cultivate strengths to positively meet the challenges of life'. Atkinson et al. (2009) define individual resilience as 'the ability to bounce back and have better physical and mental health outcomes'. Beyond seeing individual family members as potential resources for individual resilience, the concept of family resilience focuses on risk and resilience in the family as a functional unit (Walsh, 1996, 2003; Walsh and Rolland, 2006). The idea is that serious crises and persistent adversity have an impact on the whole family, and in turn key family processes, characteristics, dimensions and properties mediate the adaptation of all members and their relationships. Without deepening the analysis with the psychological and behavioral process able to make families more resilient, in applied economics some researchers focused on the protective role of marriage. Becker (1981) offered the first theoretical framework, which considers marriage as a basic insurance against adverse life events. Thanks to household specialization, each of the spouses has advantageous conditions for human capital accumulation and this is reflected in married people earning higher incomes than single people. In particular, Korenman and Neumarkwhite (1991) collected data from a company personnel file to investigate marital pay differences. They found that married workers had

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a marital pay premium, persisting even within a single firm for a relatively homogeneous group of occupations (managers and professionals) and that married workers in this company received higher performance ratings from their supervisor, displaying higher productivity. Liu et al. (2013) focused on the link between life satisfaction and marital status/marital quality in China. They found that marriage still serves as an important protection against the stressful consequences of external threats.

DATA

The empirical application is based on a harmonized dataset derived from the Italian National Survey 'Aspects of Daily Life' carried out each year from 1993 by the Italian National Statistical Institute. The survey collects information on citizens' habits and the daily problems they cope with. The thematic areas mainly investigated wide arrays of information from the economic situation to social life, health, lifestyle, leisure and work time, as well as individual personal satisfaction on different life dimensions and on the quality of public services. The dataset provides objective and subjective measures with the aim of depicting a general understanding of the national quality of life.

The dependent variable is derived from the general life satisfaction question: 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole, on a scale between 0 and 10?' This variable has only been available since 2010, thus the analysis considers only the period 2010–15. Yet, using different specifications other individual subjective information is considered as dependent variables: satisfaction with health, job, family/friends relations and household's economic condition, all measured on a scale between 1 and 5. The variables of satisfaction were dichotomized for modeling purpose.

The interest variable of family structure is shaped on the concept of family nucleus and the word family refers exclusively to the primary family's members. Still, given the complexity involved in the definition of family it deserves a bit of discussion. In the mid-1990s the functionalist sociologist George Peter Murdock provided one of the classic definitions of family as 'a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially-approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults' (Murdock 1949). Yet the last decades have seen the traditional concept of marriage and family quickly changing. Marriage rates are decreasing, cohabitation is becoming a consolidated status and non-traditional family

are more common. In this context, if on one side the peculiarities of living together, sharing economic resources and possibly having children remain valid, on the other side a redefinition of family structure is required (Sharma 2013). The redefinition has to cover either the traditional family as composed by married parents with children, or the modern concept of family where cohabiting parents or cohabiting couples appear and married couples are voluntarily childless. Similarly, recent decades have seen the increase of single-parent families where one parent raises one or more children on their own, and numerous studies have focused on the effects of growing up in a single-parent family in terms of children wellbeing (Gennetian 2005; Krein and Beller 1988). Moreover, according to Johnson et al.'s (1999) commitment framework three types of marital commitment can be defined: personal, moral or structural commitment. The first two types of commitment are experienced as internal to the individual and depend on a person's own attitudes and values: personal commitment refers to the extent to which an individual wishes to stay in the relationship, whereas moral commitment refers to the extent an individual believes they ought to stay in the relationship. Contrarily, structural commitment is experienced as external to the individual and refers to the perceptions of constraints that make it costly for the individual to leave the relationship. There are many motivations for individuals to feel personally, morally or structurally committed to a relationship. Among them the presence of children is generally associated with higher commitment and represents a stabilizing factor in cohabiting relationships (Brown and Booth 1996), similarly the religious component enhances the extent of moral commitment in such a way that religious marriage results more stable unions than civil marriage (ISTAT 2016; Stanley et al. 2004). Furthermore, legal constraints as well as social pressure represent few of the exit costs married couples may experience. This theoretical framework of consent reflects, on the one hand, the strengths of keeping a relationship, and on the other, the costs of letting it go. With these considerations in mind, the variable of family structure is modeled to address such complexity and to meet our assumption: that the higher the strength of family ties the higher the probability of family being a resilience factor for subjective wellbeing. Accordingly, the strength of family ties is modeled on moral commitment factors, namely the presence of children and religiosity, and structural constraints, namely legal marital status. It is worth remarking that these are not the only types of moral or structural commitment but the ones matching data availability. Therefore, religious married couples and married couples with children are assumed to display stronger family ties than cohabiters without or with children, respectively. Conversely, single parents and single individuals are assumed to rely on lower/absent family ties. Therefore the variable of

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family structure is shaped as follows: (1) *married couples* (with or without children; religious and not religious) as a representation of the traditional nuclear family; (2) *cohabiting couples* (with or without children; religious and not religious) as a representation of the modern quasi-nuclear family; (3) *single father and single mother*; and (4) *single individuals* (adults living alone or with other relatives such as two sisters or with friends) as a representation of the non-family.

The set of individual characteristics is represented by age, gender, divorced/widowed status, education, working condition and working position, leisure activities and social interactions.

The set of regional characteristics come from the Italian Statistical Institute territorial accounts data source, and reports those regional aggregates supposed to capture the local belief system related to the family's values. It includes the regional divorce rate, the ratio between religious marriage and civil marriage, and an indicator capturing the degree of institutionalization of cohabitation as a percentage of cohabiting couples over the total number of couples. Descriptive statistics presented in Appendix 1 (Table 11.1A).

MODEL SPECIFICATION

The first four model specifications consider life satisfaction (and separately all the subjective domains) as a probabilistic function of family structure and individual and local characteristics, with region and time fixed effects. Life satisfaction is the proxy of individual wellbeing, while family structure is our independent variable that consists in a set of dummies as modeled in section three. Individual characteristics represent individual objective factors such as age, gender, education, working position, working conditions and religiosity. Here the aim is to highlight the average effect of different family types on subjective wellbeing.

In particular:

$$LifeSatisfaction_{irt} = \alpha + \beta_1\, couples_{irt} + \delta IC + \zeta RC + \mu_r + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{irt} \quad (11.1)$$

This baseline specification considers standard nuclear or quasi-nuclear family as married couples and cohabiting couples to be compared with the benchmark of the non-standard family, namely single parents and single individuals. The term *IC* represents the vector of individual characteristics, the term *RC* the set of regional characteristics, while the terms μ_r *and* λ_t represent respectively region and time fixed effects. The assumption is that

the stronger the family ties the higher the probability of being satisfied. According to this specification, couples are assumed to have stronger family ties and higher than expected Odd Ratio.

$$LifeSatisfaction_{irt} = \alpha + \beta_1 \, married\ couples_{irt} + \beta_2 \, cohabiters_{irt} + \delta IC + \zeta RC + \mu_r + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{irt} \quad (11.2)$$

The second specification investigates the strength of the structural and personal commitment. It compares being married and cohabiting with respect to the categories of single individuals. The hypothesis is the higher the level of commitment the higher the probability of being well. Hence, married couples are expected to report higher OR either with respect to single or to cohabiters.

$$LifeSatisfaction_{irt} = \alpha + \beta_1 \, married\ with\ children_{irt} + \beta_2 \, cohabiters\ with\ children_{irt} + \beta_3 \, married\ without\ children_{irt} + \beta_4 \, cohabiters\ without\ children_{irt} + \beta_3 \, single\ parents_{irt} + \delta IC + \zeta RC + \mu_r + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{irt} \quad (11.3)$$

The third specification investigates the strength of the moral commitment with respect to children. It differentiates family structure according to the presence of children (below age 24) in the nucleus. Therefore, married couples with children and cohabiters with children are compared respectively to married couples and cohabiters without children, whereas single parents are compared to single persons. Here the assumption is that familiar ties strengthen with the presence of children so that couples with children are expected to displays higher OR. However, it is worth noting that empirical findings show contrasting results on the relation between presence of children and subjective wellbeing, as highlighted in section two.

$$LifeSatisfaction_{irt} = \alpha + \beta_1 \, religious\ married_{\ irt} + \beta_2 \, non\text{-}religious\ married_{\ irt} + \beta_3 \, religious\ cohabiters_{irt} + \beta_4 \, non\text{-}religious\ cohabiters_{irt} + \delta IC + \zeta RC + \mu_r + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{irt} \quad (11.4)$$

Similarly, the forth specification investigates the strength of the moral commitment with respect to religiosity. It differentiates family structure as according to religiosity. Hence, religious married couples are compared to non-religious married couples, religious cohabiters to non-religious. In this case, the assumption is that religious couples display higher levels of moral commitment than non-religious couples reflected in higher satisfaction. It means that the OR of religious couples is expected to be higher than for other family configurations.

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$$LifeSatisfaction_{irt} = \alpha + \beta_1\, couples_{irt} + \beta_2\, couples_{irt} * crisis + \beta_3\, crisis + \delta IC + \zeta RC + \mu_r + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{irt} \quad (11.5)$$

Finally, in order to proxy the effect of the crisis, the fifth specification assesses the effect of being in a family during the crisis on subjective wellbeing. In particular, we considered 2012–14 as the years of the crisis since these represent the years the unemployment rate skyrocketed (Figure 11.3). Here the assumption is that family constitutes a buffer against an exogenous shock, which has affected the whole population at the same time. If the hypothesis is verified, we should observe consistently higher OR for couples over the crisis (coefficient β_2).

It is worth noting that, in absence of longitudinal data or appropriate instrumental variables, the possible unobservable heterogeneity was controlled through time and spatial fixed effects and the set of individual characteristics. Still it was not possible to tackle individuals within heterogeneity and the model specifications just look at the average effects.

RESULTS

The first specification aims at testing the individual effect of being part of a family on subjective wellbeing. From a descriptive point of view, Figure 11.1 shows the Kernel distribution of the four different familiar categories. For values of satisfaction lower than 7 the curve of single

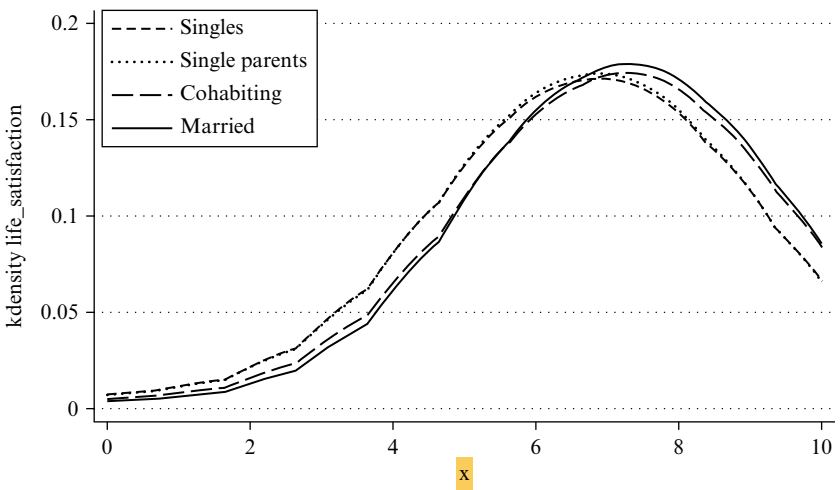


Figure 11.1 Kernel distribution of life satisfaction by four family types

persons and single parents lie above the curve of the couples, whereas for values higher than 7 the shift is evident: couples display higher satisfaction than single persons and single parents and precisely married couples report the highest figures.

Table 11.1 reports logistic estimates for equation (11.1).

The first row displays the probability of being satisfied experienced by those belonging to a family (both married or cohabiters) with respect to the reference category of single. Couples display a statistically higher probability of achieving life satisfaction with an odds ratio of 1.60. The latter result is consistent with health satisfaction (1.35) and family and friend's satisfaction (2.18, 1.31). By contrast, couples report a lower probability of being satisfied with leisure than single individuals (0.918). Almost all the individual covariates display significant estimates and it is worth mentioning two figures: first, marriage length is not a significant predictor of life satisfaction as a whole but longer marriage increase the probability of being satisfied with economic resources, family, leisure and also labor; second, having children is good for life satisfaction as a whole (1.24) but bad for economic and leisure time.

Table 11.2 reports logistic estimates for equation (11.2).

Married couples show an higher probability of achieving life satisfaction than single individuals with an odds ratio of 1.70, followed by cohabiters that report an odds ratio of 1.49. Yet the coefficients of married and cohabiters are not statically different to one another, therefore the two types of union are not directly comparable as far as life satisfaction is concerned. By contrast, the probability of married couples is found to be significantly higher both than single and than cohabiters with respect to health, family and friends satisfaction (test on coefficient equality significant). The latter results confirm the presence of a cohabitation gap.

The third specification aims at testing moral commitment in the form of children present in the nucleus. Here the assumption is that family ties strengthen with the presence of children so that couples with children are expected to display a higher odds ratio than couples without. Table 11.3 reports estimates from equation (11.3).

The results clearly highlight that couples with or without children and also single parents report a higher probability of being satisfied with life than single individuals. Yet the test on coefficient for life satisfaction is not statistically significant, meaning that the categories married with and without children as well as cohabiters with and without children cannot be compared. By contrast, with respect to health the test on coefficient is significant for cohabiters, suggesting that cohabiters with children report a higher probability of being satisfied with health (1.46) than cohabiters without children (1.10). Similarly, with respect to leisure those who are

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Table 11.1 Couples and life satisfaction

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
couple	1.605***	0.984	1.351***	2.185***	1.311***	0.918***	0.966
	(0.180)	(0.023)	(0.046)	(0.086)	(0.044)	(0.021)	(0.030)
age	1.075***	1.046***	0.830***	0.984***	0.953***	0.958***	0.994
	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)
female	0.948	1.074***	0.819***	1.016	0.950***	0.767***	1.017
	(0.057)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.019)
divorced	0.739***	0.806***	0.998	0.649***	1.019	0.960*	1.049
	(0.077)	(0.020)	(0.033)	(0.022)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.035)
widowed	0.809*	1.170***	0.831***	1.429***	0.906***	1.095***	1.258***
	(0.097)	(0.035)	(0.027)	(0.067)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.076)
marriage_length	0.996	1.004***	0.994***	1.006***	0.999	1.004***	1.003***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
working_position	0.901***	0.848***	0.967***	0.960***	0.977**	0.942***	0.842***
	(0.034)	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.009)
employment_status	1.350***	1.059***	1.314***	1.091***	1.129***	0.677***	1.218***
	(0.054)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.019)
eduction	1.160**	1.209***	1.233***	1.005	1.044**	0.989	1.015
	(0.074)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.021)
economic_condition	3.491***	6.945***	1.817***	1.713***	1.480***	1.586***	2.512***
	(0.228)	(0.086)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.043)
religiosity	1.330***	1.114***	1.154***	1.164***	1.151***	1.073***	1.108***
	(0.038)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.009)
children	1.246***	0.959***	1.070***	1.062**	1.000	0.796***	1.049**
	(0.104)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.021)

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Table 11.1 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
friends	1.939***	1.121***	1.486***	1.396***	4.433***	2.073***	1.204***
	(0.111)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.073)	(0.025)	(0.022)
social_interaction	2.503***	1.239***	1.437***	1.155***	1.434***	1.349***	1.045**
	(0.217)	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.018)	(0.019)
coabh_rat1	2.616	0.621	1.019	0.913	1.343	2.332	0.953
	(8.088)	(0.402)	(0.823)	(1.027)	(1.158)	(1.461)	(0.883)
divorce_rate	1.140	1.514	1.540	0.256***	0.480**	0.750	1.611
	(1.463)	(0.415)	(0.515)	(0.119)	(0.172)	(0.196)	(0.615)
unemployment_rate	1.049*	1.010*	1.003	0.985	0.997	1.009	0.990
	(0.026)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Constant	2.818**	0.113***	8.845***	4.895***	2.210***	4.313***	1.270
	(1.376)	(0.012)	(1.223)	(0.908)	(0.319)	(0.439)	(0.194)
Observations	152 230	152 757	152 631	152 480	152 505	152 390	88 770
Wald chi2 (40)	1401	32 191	16 749	4581	12 879	12 132	5123
Prob > chi2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R-squared	0.102	0.192	0.153	0.0590	0.123	0.0691	0.0591

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

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Table 11.2 Marriage and life satisfaction

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
married	1.700***	1.029	1.455***	2.353***	1.427***	0.882***	0.988
	(0.225)	(0.028)	(0.058)	(0.111)	(0.055)	(0.023)	(0.035)
cohabiters	1.491***	0.920***	1.204***	1.983***	1.166***	0.973	0.938*
	(0.215)	(0.029)	(0.054)	(0.101)	(0.049)	(0.029)	(0.036)
age	1.075***	1.046***	0.830***	0.984**	0.953***	0.958***	0.995
	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)
female	0.948	1.074***	0.819***	1.016	0.950***	0.767***	1.018
	(0.056)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.019)
divorced	0.752***	0.821***	1.027	0.662***	1.054	0.945**	1.058*
	(0.079)	(0.021)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.036)	(0.023)	(0.036)
widowed	0.813*	1.174***	0.838***	1.434***	0.914**	1.091***	1.264***
	(0.097)	(0.035)	(0.028)	(0.067)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.077)
marriage_length	0.995	1.003***	0.992***	1.004***	0.997***	1.005***	1.003***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
working_position	0.901***	0.848***	0.967***	0.960***	0.978**	0.941***	0.843***
	(0.034)	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.009)
employment_status	1.349***	1.057***	1.313***	1.089***	1.127***	0.678***	1.218***
	(0.054)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.019)
eduction	1.157**	1.206***	1.229***	1.002	1.040**	0.991	1.014
	(0.074)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.021)
economic_condition	3.489***	6.942***	1.816***	1.712***	1.478***	1.587***	2.511***
	(0.228)	(0.086)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.043)
religiosity	1.329***	1.113***	1.152***	1.163***	1.149***	1.074***	1.107***
	(0.038)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.009)

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Table 11.2 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
children	1.226**	0.946***	1.049**	1.040	0.976	0.806***	1.042**
	(0.106)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.031)	(0.023)	(0.012)	(0.021)
friends	1.939***	1.122***	1.486***	1.397***	4.437***	2.072***	1.204***
	(0.111)	(0.015)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.073)	(0.025)	(0.022)
social_interaction	2.507***	1.240***	1.438***	1.157***	1.436***	1.347***	1.046**
	(0.218)	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.018)	(0.019)
coabh_rat1	2.742	0.651	1.078	0.976	1.477	2.233	0.983
	(8.481)	(0.422)	(0.871)	(1.099)	(1.274)	(1.399)	(0.910)
divorce_rate	1.132	1.510	1.531	0.254***	0.475**	0.753	1.610
	(1.453)	(0.414)	(0.512)	(0.119)	(0.170)	(0.197)	(0.614)
unemployment_rate	1.049*	1.010*	1.003	0.985	0.997	1.009	0.990
	(0.026)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Constant	2.806**	0.112***	8.711***	4.891***	2.183***	4.321***	1.265
	(1.369)	(0.012)	(1.204)	(0.907)	(0.315)	(0.440)	(0.194)
Observations	152230	152757	152631	152480	152505	152390	88770
Wald chi2 (41)	1402	32189	16775	4565	12897	12143	5124
Prob > chi2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R-squared	0.102	0.192	0.153	0.0591	0.123	0.0692	0.0591
chi-square test:married=cohab	0.614	10.94***	13.76***	8.056***	18.81***	9.154***	1.532

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

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Table 11.3 Children and life satisfaction

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
married_with_children	2.126***	0.953**	1.537***	2.457***	1.395***	0.706***	1.020
	(0.255)	(0.023)	(0.055)	(0.101)	(0.049)	(0.017)	(0.032)
married_without_children	1.852***	0.977	1.510***	2.415***	1.444***	0.860***	0.972
	(0.300)	(0.029)	(0.068)	(0.137)	(0.063)	(0.025)	(0.039)
cohabiters_with_children	1.851***	0.900**	1.461***	2.125***	1.186***	0.764***	1.043
	(0.396)	(0.040)	(0.104)	(0.157)	(0.070)	(0.031)	(0.055)
cohabiters_without_children	1.534**	0.857***	1.107*	1.950***	1.126**	0.981	0.859***
	(0.281)	(0.034)	(0.060)	(0.127)	(0.061)	(0.038)	(0.043)
single_parents	1.435**	0.791***	1.082	1.065	0.977	0.765***	0.948
	(0.228)	(0.030)	(0.056)	(0.052)	(0.047)	(0.026)	(0.043)
age	1.077***	1.044***	0.831***	0.984**	0.953***	0.957***	0.994
	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)
female	0.942	1.079***	0.818***	1.015	0.950***	0.768***	1.023
	(0.056)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.019)
divorced	0.739***	0.842***	1.028	0.660***	1.056	0.951**	1.079**
	(0.078)	(0.022)	(0.035)	(0.023)	(0.037)	(0.024)	(0.037)
widowed	0.816*	1.172***	0.842***	1.436***	0.916**	1.089***	1.280***
	(0.097)	(0.035)	(0.028)	(0.067)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.078)
marriage_length	0.993*	1.004***	0.992***	1.003**	0.997***	1.005***	1.003***
	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
working_position	0.902***	0.848***	0.967***	0.961***	0.978**	0.941***	0.842***
	(0.034)	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.009)
employment_status	1.349***	1.057***	1.313***	1.089***	1.128***	0.678***	1.220***
	(0.054)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.020)
eduction	1.156**	1.207***	1.229***	1.002	1.040**	0.991	1.014
	(0.073)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.021)

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Table 11.3 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
economic_condition	3.490***	6.942***	1.816***	1.712***	1.478***	1.587***	2.510***
	(0.228)	(0.086)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.043)
religiosity	1.329***	1.112***	1.152***	1.163***	1.149***	1.074***	1.107***
	(0.038)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.009)
friends	1.942***	1.121***	1.486***	1.397***	4.437***	2.072***	1.203***
	(0.111)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.073)	(0.025)	(0.022)
social_interaction	2.507***	1.241***	1.440***	1.157***	1.436***	1.347***	1.047**
	(0.218)	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.018)	(0.019)
coabh_rat1	2.776	0.648	1.070	0.974	1.471	2.240	0.964
	(8.585)	(0.420)	(0.865)	(1.097)	(1.269)	(1.404)	(0.894)
divorce_rate	1.130	1.521	1.536	0.254***	0.476**	0.753	1.626
	(1.450)	(0.417)	(0.514)	(0.119)	(0.170)	(0.197)	(0.621)
unemployment_rate	1.049*	1.010*	1.003	0.985	0.997	1.009	0.990
	(0.026)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Constant	2.708**	0.116***	8.610***	4.857***	2.179***	4.371***	1.285
	(1.324)	(0.012)	(1.191)	(0.901)	(0.315)	(0.446)	(0.197)
Observations	152 230	152 757	152 631	152 480	152 505	152 390	88 770
Wald chi2 (43)	1407	32 183	16 784	4569	12 902	12 147	5133
Prob > chi2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R-squared	0.102	0.192	0.153	0.0591	0.123	0.0692	0.0592
married_with_child= married_no_child	1.493	1.738	0.383	0.195	1.563	123.8***	3.966**
cohab_with_child=cohab_ no_child	0.495	0.786	10.50***	0.830	0.472	22.46***	8.412***

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses.

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married with children report around a 30 per cent lower probability of being satisfied compared to those who are single, whereas those who are married without children report a 20 per cent lower probability, with a significant test on coefficient: it means, as expected, that those who are married and have children are less satisfied with leisure than their childless counterparts

The fourth specification aims at testing moral commitment in the form of religiosity. In this case, the assumption is that religious couples display stronger family commitment than non-religious couples and accordingly present a higher probability of being well. Couples are assumed to be religious if they declare that they attend religious church at least a couple of times per year. Therefore, non-religious couples are those who never attend church.[1] Estimates confirm the hypothesis for married couples (see Table 11.4): religious married couples show the largest probability of being satisfied (2.00), whereas non religious couples report a slightly lower probability (1.21) and the test on coefficient is significant, meaning that religious married are more satisfied. When turning to cohabiters the figure is reversed, with non-religious cohabiters reporting a slightly higher probability (1.5) than religious cohabiters (1.4), yet the test on coefficient is not significant. Similar results are reported for health, family and friends satisfaction with religious married couples reporting significantly higher OR than non-religious married couples. For cohabiters the differences in the ORs are not significant. Results suggest that, although in the case of married couples religious commitment operates as a family tie and this is reflected in the higher probability of being well, in the case of cohabiters religious commitment is not a significant determinant.

The fifth specification challenges the strength of family during the years of the crisis. From a descriptive point of view, life satisfaction has decreased over the period 2010–15 and the reduction has similarly affected married, cohabiters, single parents and single individuals (Figure 11.2). At the same time unemployment sharply increased at the national level by more than four percentage points between 2012 and 2014 (Figure 11.3).

Indeed, the variable *crisis* is a dummy-year variable, which assumes value 1 during the worst years of the crisis (2012–14) and value zero otherwise. The hypothesis is that family constitutes a buffer against economic uncertainty and the stronger the family ties the bigger the protective role of family.

The results improve the baseline specification where the standard nuclear or quasi-nuclear family (married couples and cohabiting couples) are compared to the non-(standard) family, (namely single parents and single individuals). In Table 11.5 couples report a significant 5 per cent

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Table 11.4 Marital religiosity and life satisfaction

VARIABLES	(1) life_ satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
married_religious	2.004***	1.020	1.510***	2.492***	1.504***	0.877***	1.010
	(0.275)	(0.028)	(0.061)	(0.120)	(0.059)	(0.023)	(0.037)
married_not_religious	1.218	1.063*	1.281***	2.002***	1.210***	0.901***	0.930*
	(0.170)	(0.034)	(0.057)	(0.108)	(0.053)	(0.028)	(0.039)
cohabiters_religious	1.404*	0.906***	1.203***	2.080***	1.174***	0.967	0.961
	(0.254)	(0.034)	(0.065)	(0.134)	(0.060)	(0.034)	(0.045)
cohabiters_not_religious	1.549**	0.950	1.178**	1.808***	1.120*	0.988	0.893*
	(0.337)	(0.047)	(0.083)	(0.138)	(0.072)	(0.046)	(0.052)
age	1.075***	1.046***	0.831***	0.984**	0.954***	0.958***	0.995
	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)
female	0.942	1.074***	0.818***	1.015	0.948***	0.767***	1.017
	(0.056)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.019)
divorced	0.757***	0.821***	1.025	0.663***	1.054	0.945**	1.059*
	(0.080)	(0.021)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.036)	(0.023)	(0.036)
widowed	0.839	1.171***	0.847***	1.450***	0.926**	1.089***	1.277***
	(0.099)	(0.035)	(0.028)	(0.067)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.078)
marriage_length	0.995	1.003***	0.992***	1.004***	0.998***	1.005***	1.003***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
working_position	0.901***	0.848***	0.967***	0.960***	0.977**	0.941***	0.843***
	(0.034)	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.009)
employment_sta	1.346***	1.058***	1.312***	1.087***	1.125***	0.678***	1.217***
	(0.054)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.019)
eduction	1.159**	1.205***	1.231***	1.004	1.042**	0.991	1.016
	(0.073)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.021)

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economic_cond	3.477***	6.944***	1.815***	1.709***	1.476***	1.588***	2.509***
	(0.227)	(0.086)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.043)
religiosity	1.236***	1.119***	1.129***	1.133***	1.115***	1.078***	1.092***
	(0.039)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.010)
children	1.216**	0.947***	1.046*	1.036	0.973	0.806***	1.041**
	(0.105)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.023)	(0.012)	(0.021)
friends	1.938***	1.122***	1.486***	1.397***	4.440***	2.072***	1.205***
	(0.111)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.073)	(0.025)	(0.022)
social_interaction	2.498***	1.240***	1.437***	1.155***	1.434***	1.348***	1.045**
	(0.217)	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.018)	(0.019)
coabh_rat1	2.748	0.654	1.058	0.951	1.446	2.239	0.972
	(8.487)	(0.424)	(0.855)	(1.069)	(1.247)	(1.403)	(0.900)
divorce_rate	1.158	1.508	1.536	0.255***	0.477**	0.752	1.624
	(1.488)	(0.414)	(0.514)	(0.119)	(0.170)	(0.197)	(0.620)
unemployment_r	1.049*	1.010*	1.003	0.985	0.997	1.009	0.990
	(0.026)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Constant	3.302**	0.111***	9.125***	5.193***	2.338***	4.282***	1.300*
	(1.613)	(0.012)	(1.262)	(0.962)	(0.338)	(0.437)	(0.199)
Observations	152 230	152 757	152 631	152 480	152 505	152 390	88 770
Wald chi2 (43)	1419	32 189	16 799	4545	12 938	12 143	5133
Prob > chi2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R-squared	0.104	0.192	0.154	0.0596	0.123	0.0692	0.0592
married_rel=married_no_rel	28.65***	3.437*	39.44***	32.63***	61.78***	1.722	7.336***
cohab_rel=cohab_no_rel	0.131	0.656	0.0644	2.151	0.369	0.155	1.130

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses.

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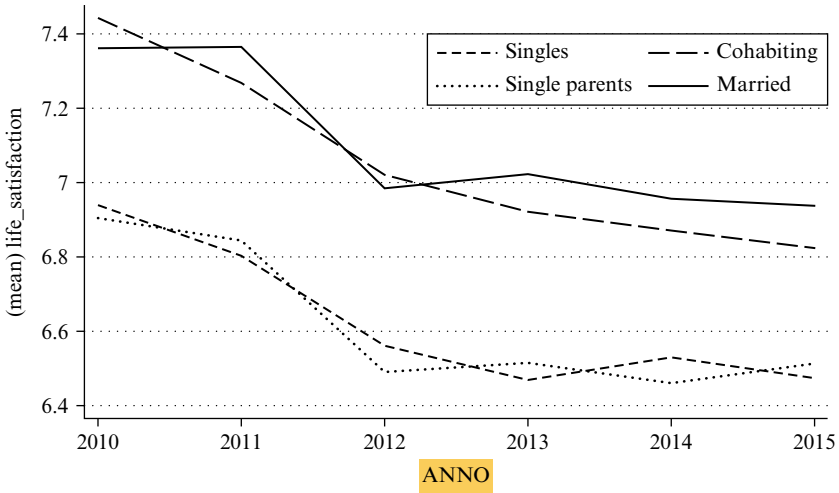


Figure 11.2 *Decrease of life satisfaction over the years by four family types*

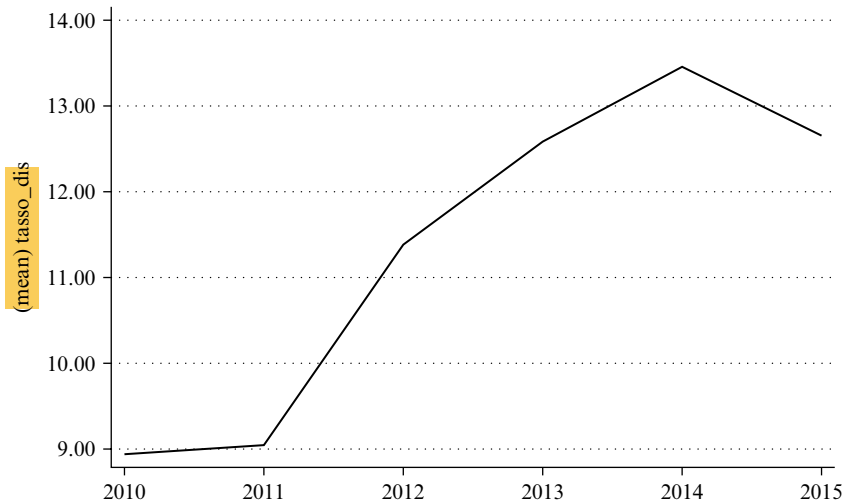


Figure 11.3 *Unemployment rate*

lower probability of being satisfied with economic resources and with friends' relationships during the years of the crisis. Nonetheless, when looking at overall wellbeing couples report a 24 per cent higher probability of being satisfied with their life as a whole.

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Table 11.5 Couples, crisis and life satisfaction

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
1.couples	1.436***	1.005	1.381***	2.192***	1.345***	0.930***	0.974
	(0.179)	(0.026)	(0.051)	(0.095)	(0.049)	(0.023)	(0.034)
1.crisis	0.470***	0.833***	0.749***	1.094	1.047	1.008	1.020
	(0.079)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.066)	(0.052)	(0.037)	(0.056)
1.couple#1.crisis	1.249**	0.953*	0.953	0.993	0.944*	0.972	0.983
	(0.139)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.041)	(0.032)	(0.025)	(0.038)
age	1.075***	1.046***	0.830***	0.984***	0.953***	0.958***	0.994
	(0.018)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.005)
female	0.948	1.074***	0.819***	1.016	0.950***	0.767***	1.017
	(0.057)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.009)	(0.019)
divorced	0.740***	0.806***	0.998	0.649***	1.019	0.960*	1.049
	(0.077)	(0.020)	(0.033)	(0.022)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.035)
widowed	0.808*	1.170***	0.831***	1.429***	0.907***	1.095***	1.258***
	(0.096)	(0.035)	(0.027)	(0.067)	(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.076)
marriage_length	0.996	1.004***	0.994***	1.006***	0.999	1.004***	1.003***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
working_position	0.901***	0.848***	0.967***	0.960***	0.977**	0.942***	0.842***
	(0.034)	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.009)
employment_stat	1.350***	1.059***	1.314***	1.091***	1.130***	0.677***	1.217***
	(0.054)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.019)
eduction	1.161**	1.209***	1.233***	1.005	1.044**	0.989	1.015
	(0.074)	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.021)
economic_cond	3.496***	6.945***	1.817***	1.713***	1.479***	1.586***	2.512***
	(0.228)	(0.086)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.024)	(0.019)	(0.043)

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Table 11.5 (continued)

VARIABLES	(1) life_satisfaction	(2) eco_sat	(3) health_sat	(4) family_sat	(5) friend_sat	(6) leisure_sat	(7) work_sat
religiosity	1.330***	1.114***	1.154***	1.164***	1.151***	1.073***	1.108***
	(0.038)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.009)
children	1.249***	0.959***	1.070***	1.061**	1.000	0.796***	1.049**
	(0.104)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.021)
friends	1.941***	1.121***	1.486***	1.396***	4.433***	2.073***	1.204***
	(0.111)	(0.014)	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.073)	(0.025)	(0.022)
social_interaction	2.504***	1.238***	1.437***	1.155***	1.434***	1.349***	1.045**
	(0.217)	(0.017)	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.018)	(0.019)
coabh_rat1	2.430	0.632	1.031	0.916	1.374	2.361	0.960
	(7.525)	(0.410)	(0.833)	(1.031)	(1.185)	(1.480)	(0.889)
divorce_rate	1.221	1.499	1.525	0.255***	0.474**	0.746	1.604
	(1.570)	(0.411)	(0.510)	(0.119)	(0.170)	(0.195)	(0.612)
unemployment_rat	1.049*	1.010*	1.003	0.985	0.997	1.009*	0.990
	(0.026)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Constant	2.989**	0.111***	8.713***	4.886***	2.170***	4.274***	1.263
	(1.466)	(0.012)	(1.209)	(0.908)	(0.314)	(0.436)	(0.194)
Observations	152 230	152 757	152 631	152 480	152 505	152 390	88 770
Wald chi2 (41)	1408	32 188	16 750	4581	12 881	12 132	5123
Prob > chi2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pseudo R-squared	0.103	0.192	0.153	0.0590	0.123	0.0691	0.0591

Note: Robust seeform in parentheses.

CONCLUSION

This chapter investigated the role of family as both a driver factor and a buffer for subjective wellbeing, with special attention to the relationship between different types of family and wellbeing. Indeed, if on the one hand, in the literature, married couples were found to be better off than their unmarried counterparts or than cohabiters, the contribution of this chapter is to extensively disentangle such a relationship by comparing the outcomes of different types of family according to the strength of family ties. Moreover, the chapter aimed to test whether stronger family types constitute a buffer against unforeseen uncertainty.

The results confirmed that married couples display the largest probability of being satisfied with their life, also confirming the existence of a 'cohabitation gap' with respect to health, family and friends satisfaction. In addition, when considering different life domains, couples (married and cohabiters) were found more likely to achieve better outcomes in terms of economic satisfaction, health satisfaction and relationships satisfaction, whereas single persons were found to be more satisfied with leisure time and work.

Once the type of family ties by religiosity were included the results became even stronger. In particular, religious commitment operates as a family tie for married couples and this is reflected in the higher probability of being well for those who are religious and married. Conversely, in the case of cohabiters, religious commitment represents a factor that slightly reduces the probability of being well, mostly because individuals who are religious and cohabiting may feel that their familiar status is incomplete or in transition and therefore they exhibit a lower satisfaction. With regard to the presence of children in the family, the results confirm mixed evidence. Cohabiters with children report a higher probability of being satisfied with health than cohabiters without children, whereas those who are married with children are less satisfied with leisure than their childless counterparts.

Finally, when looking at the effect of uncertainty on the subjective wellbeing of different types of family, the results partially confirm the hypothesis. Couples (both married or cohabiters) report a significant 5 per cent lower probability of being satisfied with economic resources and with friends' relationships during the years of the crisis. Nonetheless, when looking at overall wellbeing couples report a 24 per cent higher probability of being satisfied with their life as a whole.

In conclusion, the chapter challenges the role of the family as a protective factor for wellbeing and models this issue by designing a theoretical framework of family types according to different family commitments. The results partially confirm the hypothesis and further investigation

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is desirable at least in two ways. First, from a conceptual point of view it would be useful to further disentangle the type of family not only as according to the presence of young children in the nucleus but also by looking at those couples whose sons/daughters are already out of the family. Second, from a technical point of view it would be worthy to test the hypothesis in a panel setting in order to fix possible sources of endogeneity.

NOTE

1. It is worth noting that church means every type of religious place, according to the type of religion the respondent practices.

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APPENDIX

Table 11.1A Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std.	Min	Max
life_sat	179 588	0.40	0.490	0	1
econ_sat	180 198	0.46	0.499	0	1
health-sat	180 122	0.82	0.376	0	1
family_sat	179 908	0.92	0.265	0	1
friends_sat	179 937	0.85	0.352	0	1
leisure_sat	179 774	0.66	0.472	0	1
work_sat	93 351	0.76	0.426	0	1
married	213 674	0.68	0.465	0	1
cohabiters	213 674	0.04	0.196	0	1
sinle parents	213 674	0.10	0.310	0	1
single persons	213 674	0.16	0.374	0	1
age	213 674	10.16	4.22	1	18
gender	213 674	0.51	0.499	0	1
professional_pos	138 086	2.64	0.884	1	4
working_cond	181 692	1.98	0.943	1	3
education	201 526	1.85	0.593	1	3
good_economic cond	212 371	0.55	0.497	0	1
religious	197 307	0.79	0.400	0	1
1child	213 674	0.30	0.461	0	1
2children	213 674	0.33	0.470	0	1
3children	213 674	0.08	0.281	0	1
4children	213 674	0.013	0.117	0	1
5+children	213 674	0.0015	0.039	0	1
friends	199 920	0.70	0.455	0	1
social_inter	213 674	0.42	0.493	0	1

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