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SOCIAL SUPPORT OF MARRIED PERSONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND ITALY

BY

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL SUPPORT OF MARRIED PERSONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND ITALY

BY

Lin, Yu-hsi

The data used in this study is DSS data collected in 1986 and 1987. This study examines the roles of kin and friends in married persons' social network and social-support choices in the United States and Italy. It also uses logistic regression to examine the impact of education on the choices. Social support choices refer to whom married persons turn to when they have problems with their spouses, feel depressed or need advice on making important changes in life. Results show that Americans generally associate with best friends more often than with kin, and Italians associate with kin more often than with friends. In addition to education, other factors also impact married persons' choices of helpers, such as gender, social class, and culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Social support is considered a positive way of coping with stress or life events and has been widely researched. This paper examines the roles of kin and friends in married people's social network and social-support choices in the United States and Italy. I chose married people because they account for a larger percent of the population than the unmarried, widowed and divorced and because marital status and mental health are closely related (Lin, Dean & Ensel 1986).

Social support refers to the perceived or actual instrumental, informational (cognitive) and expressive (emotional) support provided by the community, the social network, and the confiding partners (Lin et al. 1986). Instrumental support includes material goods and services (such as child care, housekeeping, or money donations) which help one solve practical problems; emotional support involves admiration, respect, love, caring, acceptance, intimacy, and "unconditional positive regard" which increase one's self-esteem and self-worth; informational support includes advice, guidance, and knowledge which help one understand one's world, find resources, weigh alternatives, and take necessary steps to solve problems (Jacobson 1986, Wills 1985).

Lin et al. (1979) found that at all levels of life

events people with better social support had fewer psychiatric symptoms. Pinneau's (1976) study of working men proved that social support reduces some psychological strain and stresses. A study of female and male factory workers by Loscocco and Spitze (1990) shows that work-related social support from supervisors and coworkers promotes well-being among males and females, though it does not buffer effects of other stressful working conditions. Unemployed men who are not supported show higher levels of cholesterol, illness, and self-blame than did the supported counterparts (Gore 1978).

The family structure in the U.S. has undergone dramatic change. The majority of Americans never lived in an extended family (Reiss 1971), and one woman in five was employed outside the home in 1900 (Statistical Handbook on the American Family). The more common nuclear-family form than extended family nowadays and the increasing number of employed married women must have large impact on the social network and the social-support choice of married people in general. The social-support choice in this paper refers to whom married women and men turn to when they have problems with their spouses, feel depressed or need someone's advice on making an important change in life. In addition to the choice of helpers, how gender and educational status influence the choices is also examined. The reason I chose two countries is that the United States is a typical individualist country and Italy is considered a very family-

oriented country though its family structure has transformed from extended family to primarily nuclear family. It will be meaningful to additionally compare the impact of culture on the social network and social-support choices of the married.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Support from Kin and Friends

Cassel (1974) suggests that the strongest social support is provided by the primary groups of most importance to the individuals -- parents, spouse, siblings, and children. In addition to one's family, the primary group consist of relatives and friends. The primary groups are characterized by:"emphasis on mutual responsibility, caring, and concern; strong mutual identification, emphasis on the uniqueness of group members, face-to face interaction and communication; norms of intimacy, close associations and bonds, and the provision of affection, security, and response" (Dean & Tausig 1986, p. 118). Family members have a mutual obligation to provide emotional and material support every day and in times of critical events (ibid), even though this obligation is not always met. In addition, a confiding relationship, an intimate form of social support, is regarded as a primary relationship. Dean and Tausig defined a confidant relationship as the presence of someone the respondents felt he/she could trust and talk to (ibid p. 122-23). Lowenthal and Haven (1968) found that a confiding relationship, can be built between spouses, good friends, and even neighbors.

Fischer (1982) argues that "modernization and urbanization break down the family through strains that

drive members apart and seductions that pull them apart;"
consequently, kin care for, sacrifice for and share with one
another less (p. 81). Industrialization, urbanization and
capitalism largely account for the prevalence of
individualism and nuclear family in the U.S nowadays[1], and
they also draw many more women into the labor force than
before. In addition, easy access to social activities in
urban areas have increased people's association with
friends. Naturally, the composition of men's and especially
women's social networks have changed dramatically.

In individualist countries, people emphasize self-
reliance and do not sharply distinguish ingroups (family and
good friends) from outgroups (Triandis et al. 1988). Social
relations, which are more temporary and voluntary, occur in
small groups; individuals have few obligations to ingroups
but receive less social support, resources or security from
them (ibid); people have greater skills in making new
friends and leaving new social groups (ibid). It seems that
kinship involvement becomes selective. "People largely
maintain kin ties out of a sense of concern and obligation,
whereas they maintain nonkin ties because of compatibility
and enjoyment" (Fischer 1982).

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2. Donohue (1990) holds that capitalism, with its "get-ahead"
   individualism released the individual from the grasp of
   kinship, community and inherited status. Reiss (1971)
   attributes industrialization to the breaking down of extended
   family and argues that the geographic mobility required by
   industrialization also reduced the likelihood of extended
   family becoming common.

A married person's social network primarily consists
of the friends and the kin s/he contacts or visits. Visits
and contact are not done only when they are faced with
problems. Peoples' selective kinship involvement and better
social skills in the individualist cultures raise a few
interesting questions: How often do married people in the
U.S. associate with the kin? Whom do they frequently visit
or contact?   Do they associate with friends more often than
with kin ?

**Hypothesis 1a: Married persons in the U.S. generally contact
or visit best friends more often than kin.**

Driven largely by urbanization, the nuclear family
became prevalent in central and northern Italy from 1915 on,
and southern Italy also has nuclear family households and
small household size (Barbagli & Kertzer 1990). Despite the
small household size, kinship relations have become "an
instrument that the individual can manipulate to strengthen
his position on the labor market" (Piselli 1981). Raggio
(1990) argues that "the links between family units and the
network of solidarity among consanguineous kin constitute a
rigorous and binding code that conditions individual
strategies to the interests of the group..." Family is
referred to as a social group, which includes "all blood and
in-law relatives up to the fourth degree as well as those to
whom one is related through godparenthood" (Tomasi 1972 p.
10). In some areas, there is strong group solidarity and
attachment to the land owned by the family, and extended

kinships dominate over individual family units (Levi 1990).
Compared with Americans, Italians are fiercely loyal to the
extended family and heavily involved with its members
(Pearlin 1971).

Triandis et al. (1990) argue that collectivist
cultures are characterized by family integrity,
interdependence within the ingroup, emotional attachment to
the ingroup, and ingroup harmony. People have fewer skills
in making new friends, but friends imply a life-long
intimate relationships (Triandis et al. 1988). These
characteristics can be found in many Italians. Though
Northern Italy is not considered as family-oriented as
Southern Italy, Italians in general value kin relationships
more than relationship with people outside the family. "No
Italian who has a family is ever alone" (Nelli 1983). In
the Italians' viewpoints, the immediate family comprises
"the only people in the world that you can really trust"
(ibid p. 132). Therefore, we may predict that people in
Italy associate with kin more than with friends.
Hypothesis 1b: Married persons in Italy generally contact or
visit kin more often than friends.

Whom do married persons turn to first when they have
family problems, feel depressed or need advice? Kin,
spouse, and friends must be important sources of support to
them. In addition to these three, from whom will they
consider seeking help? Suppose Italians have stronger kin
relationship than Americans, will the strength of kin

relationship impact married persons' choices of helpers?
Will gender and socioeconomic status influence their
choices? What other factors influence their choices? These
are the questions to be answered in this paper. Before
answering these questions, it is necessary to know if
married men and women benefit from marriage equally. It is
because the degree of gender equality of married couples
impacts the amount of support received from their spouses.

Gender Roles and Mental Health of Married Individuals

Because marriage is the expected norm of individuals
and considered the most emotionally stable state of adult
life, single individuals are constantly subjected to
pressure to conform to the norm, and failure to do so
contributes to a less than desirable psychological state
(Ensel 1986). In general, being married is better for one's
mental health (Vanfossen 1981). Marriage contributes to
individuals' better mental health in two ways. First,
marriage offers an opportunity for confiding and intimate
interactions, which leads to psychological comfort and
support. Second, marriage allows the pooling of personal
resources of two partners, thus allowing better coping with
social problems and stressors (Lin & Westcott, 1991 p. 214).

Lin, Dean and Ensel (1986) hold that married couples
have lower rates of mental distress than unmarried people.
Single, divorced or widowed women have lower rates of mental
problems than single, divorced or widowed men. However,
among the married, women have higher rates of mental

distress (p.284) -- two and a half times as many as men
(Hobfoll 1986). These findings indicate that men benefit
more from marriage than women.

The fact that married women are much more depressed
than married men can be accounted for from different
perspectives. First, according to the "exposure
hypothesis," women are more often depressed than men because
"their different roles expose them to greater number of
stressors or chronic strains (Rosenfield 1980). Second, the
"vulnerability hypothesis" suggests that women are more
often depressed than men because "they are more vulnerable
to the deleterious effects of stress", not because they are
more exposed to stressors (Kessler & McLeod 1984). Third,
women are less likely than men to receive the social
supports they need from their spouses (Bernard 1971 p. 69).
Studies also show that more wives than husbands report low
levels of spouse reciprocity, e.g., 36 percent of the wives
and 28 percent of the husbands agree that they give in to
the wishes of their spouses rather than vice versa
(Vanfossen 1986). According to the exchange theory,
relationships between two individuals are most likely to be
maintained as long as partners provide equal amount of, and
equally important, benefits for each other (Kelley & Thibaut
1978). This theory can be applied to marital relationships:
The more equitable the marriage relationship is, the less
stressed women are.

Two perspectives may explain why women receive less

spouse support. First, functionalist theory suggests that the division of labor within the family, based on reproductive roles, delegates the tasks of providing nurturance and emotional support to women, while the tasks of achievement and accomplishment in the external environment to men (Parsons 1949). In other words, women play the expressive role and men play the instrumental role. Therefore, it is not appropriate for males to exhibit emotional expressiveness (Turner 1994 p.523). Second, the conflict theory suggests that women's lesser support within the family results from the institutionalized male dominance prevalent in industrial society (Vanfossen 1986 p. 69). The "devaluation of femininity," a natural outcome of such male dominance, may lead to the lessened respect wives sometimes receive from their spouses and children (ibid). Many women with high-status jobs may experience much stress partly because their spouses do not emotionally support them. Their husbands may think that the wives' demanding jobs distract them from attention to the family or feel inferior to them because they earn more income.

In the U.S. though gender inequality between a married couple still exists, it is widely recognized that their marital relationship is more equal than that in many other countries. Many couples regard sharing thoughts, feelings, tasks, values, or life goals as the greatest virtue in a marital relationship (Bellah et al. 1986 p. 91). Tamosi (1972) holds that in Italy the husband is the head and lord

of the nuclear family: Not only his children but also his wife are expected to obey him. Despite the strong family feeling, a husband only occasionally shows his affection for his wife openly. Popular consent allows the father to discipline his children and his wife (pp. 10-11). Pearlin (1971) holds that many women in Italy are irritated by their disadvantaged position not because they do too much but because their husbands acknowledge too little. "They want appreciation and esteem as worthy persons" (ibid p. 146).

Social Network & Social Support of Married Persons

Though the prevalence of nuclear family and individualism may reduce the amount of contact with family members, the kin (parents, siblings, children, relatives) should still be important members of married couples' social network. Bedford (1989) holds that expressive supports are not as dependent on physical proximity as instrumental support. Even though married people do not live with their parents, siblings or children, these family members can still provide them with emotional and informational support.

In addition, friends should also be important members of married persons' social network. According to Kandel (1978), friendships are based on shared values and attitudes, affection, expectations of mutual pleasure or benefit. Bedford (1989) also argues that friendship is formed and maintained on the basis of attraction and mutual interest and that it specializes affective supportive functions rather than instrumental functions. Family

members would be assessed negatively for not performing
support functions, especially in times of crisis. Yet,
friends do not have obligations to the individual and
therefore would not be assessed negatively for not providing
social support (Antonucci 1985). Thus, when support is
provided by friends, it is assessed very positively (ibid).
Booth (1972) found that women have greater propensity for
same-sex close friendship than men because women are
socialized to be more passive in opposite-sex contact.
During certain phases of females' lives, friendships with
other females are as supportive and intimate as
relationships with husbands or male partners (McLanahan et
al. 1981).

Education is a source of great social opportunity
(Fischer 1982). Studies have shown that educated people are
involved with a larger number and more diverse types of
nonrelatives than are comparatively uneducated people. The
lower and working class has relatives; the middle class has
friends (Allan 1979). Because of geographic mobility, the
middle class tends to be cut off from the support of
relatives and is more likely to rely on friends (Oakley &
Rajan 1991).

Do married men and women differ in their size of
social network? According to Turner (1994), women have
significantly larger networks than men, generally report
receiving more social support (especially emotional support)
than do men, and experience more support from same-gender

friends. The perceived support among women can be explained by more frequent contact with network members and by the tendency to maintain more kin relationships (ibid pp. 521-22). Gender role differences may also impact the amount of social support received. The instrumental role is characterized by independence and rationality and the expressive role by compassion and supportiveness (ibid p. 523). Therefore, feminine characteristics seem more compatible with seeking and providing social support, and masculine characteristics tend to inhibit help seeking (ibid). Though Turner does not specifically refer to <u>married</u> women, it is reasonable to say that married women's social network size is larger than men's.

Though women and men do not receive equal support from their spouses, the spouse is often viewed as the key resource of support networks for most adults (Ensel 1986 p. 186). The marital relationship is a primary resource for mitigating the effects of stressful life events, providing emotional support and affirming one's identity (Campbell 1980). Ensel (1986) holds that "a healthy mental state requires sharing and confiding with intimates" (p. 287). Depression is a problem requiring expressive action; the stronger the social tie used for expressive problems, the lower the depression (ibid). Ensel's study also shows that help from a spouse is related to a lower level of depressed mood than help from any other tie (Ensel et el. 1986 p. 317) and that the majority of the male and female respondents in

their study choose spouse/lovers as opposite-sex confidants (p. 299). Therefore, we can predict that married people would most likely turn to their spouses first when they are depressed.

No research that I am aware of has been done on how educational level impacts a married person's first choice of their spouses as helpers. In Cutrona and Suhr's (1992) study of supportive interactions, marital relationship impacted whether a married person will seek help from the spouse when s/he is depressed. Couples who were more satisfied with their marriages provided a greater number of supportive behaviors to their spouse (ibid). In other words, those satisfied with their marriages received more emotional support from each other. We can also predict that they would more likely seek help from their spouses when they feel depressed. Married persons of different educational statuses may encounter different types of stress. Yet, sources of depression did not affect the choice of spouse (ibid). Both husbands and wives welcomed emotional support no matter what type of stress they were facing (p. 130). Therefore, we may predict that their educational status seems to have little impact on the choice of their spouse as the first helper since one's spouse is the primary source for emotional support which requires sharing and confiding.

Hypothesis 2A: When a married person feels depressed and wants to talk about it, s/he would most ikely turn to

her/his spouse first for help, no matter what educational level s/he is at.

For those who do not turn to their spouses first when they are depressed, perhaps their spouses are unexpressive, dominant or self-centered. So, they may turn to trustful confidants, such as kin members or friends, for help. Gender inequality in some cultures, such as Italian culture, is much larger than that in the U.S., which may tremendously decrease married women's help seeking from their spouses.

The spouse also plays an important role in providing informational support. In Lin & Westcott's (1991) study, when married respondents confronted with a major life event, between 50 and 65 percent of them sought support from their spouses (p. 215). Making an important change, such as finding a new job or moving to another part of the country, is a major life event for the married people. The main reason that they turn to their spouses for advice first is that major life events have great impact on the future well-being of the two partners. If they do not turn to their spouses first, it is probably because they anticipate that their ideas would be rejected by their spouses or because they are not satisfied with their marriages.

Enckrole (1991) argues that the nature of help expected and the nature of the topic itself affect whether a person seeks help from a particular close relationship. Even when the topic itself is not off limits or sensitive but unhelpful responses are anticipated, support seeking is

likely to be inhibited (p. 170). In Cutrona and Shur's (1992) study, ninety percent of married couples offered some kind of advice to their spouse when the latter disclosed an important stressor in life to them. Making an important change in life can be regarded as an important stressor. Moreover, the couples satisfied with their marriages offer a greater amount of advice to their spouse than unsatisfied couples do (ibid p. 121). In other words, couples less satisfied with their marriage receive less advice from their spouses because "advice is perceived as an effort by the spouse to assert control or dominance" (Rogers and Farace 1975). We may say that the more equal the marriage relationship is, not only the more advice will a married person be offered by his/her spouse but also the less likely s/he is to perceive the spouse' advice as a means of control.

No research that I am aware of has been done on whether educational status will impact the likelihood of seeking advice from one's spouse. However, there is a positive correlation between education and quality in marriage relationship (Bowman 1990). Generally speaking, gender equality between a couple is an important element of a good marriage relationship. The more educated a married couple is, the more equal their relationship is and the more likely they will turn to their spouse for advice. **Hypothesis 2B: When a married person needs advice on an important change in her/his life, for example about a job,**

or moving to another part of the country, the more education s/he has, the more likely s/he would turn to her/his spouse first for help.

Ensel et al. (1986) also argue that women are socialized into emotional sustenance and seen as primary confidants for both genders (p. 288). In addition, men primarily depend on their spouse and women rely on more varied sources of support (Antonucci 1985, p. 32). Therefore, we can also predict that husbands would more likely turn to their wives than wives would turn to their husbands when they feel depressed or need advice for important decisions in life.

Hypothesis 2C: A married man would more likely turn to his spouse than his spouse would turn to him when he feels depressed or needs advice for making an important change in life.

Marriage contributes to one's psychological well-being, but it is also a substantial source of conflict. Life events that involve negative interactions with one's spouse rank among the most stressful (Turner 1987). Furthermore, "relations with spouse changed for the worse, without divorce or separation" is also very stressful (Dohrenwend, Krasnoff, Askenasky, & Dohrenwend 1978). Turner (1994) argues that women appear to be more adversely affected by marital conflict than men (p. 535). When faced with marital problems, women are more likely than men to seek advice or support. Based on the previous discussion

that friendship serves the function of affective support and
that the middle class relies on friends more often than the
working class, it is very likely that married persons of
higher educational status will more likely turn to friends
first for family problems. They turn to friends not
necessarily for gaining advice but primarily for talking
about their problems so as to reduce their stress. Those of
lower educational status will turn to kin first. In
addition, problems with a spouse may have different causes,
and some of them may not be appropriate to be discussed with
one's parents, siblings or children. Therefore, friends and
psychologists seem to be good helpers for some marital
problems.

Hypothesis 2d: When a married person is upset about a
problem with his or her spouse and has not been able to sort
it out with them, s/he would turn to her/his friend or kin
first for help. Those with low educational status will
more likely to turn to kin first, and those with middle or
high educational status will more likely turn to friends
first.

Though each gender is seen as serving the other gender
in a mutually comforting capacity, it is well accepted that
a female confidant is better than a male confidant in
providing emotional support for both genders (Lin et al.
1986). Women see themselves as more positively expressive
(sweeter and kinder) than men see themselves (ibid. p. 289).
In Lin et al.'s study, 58 percent of the married males had

female confidants, and 43 percent of married females choose male confidants (p. 296). In addition, females help more with relationship-oriented problems than males (Eagly & Crowley 1986).

Hypothesis 3: The gender of the confidant or helper plays an important role. When having family problems, feeling depressed or needing advice, married persons in the U.S. and Italy, who do not turn to their spouses first, will more likely turn to female kin for help than to male kin.

METHODS

Data

The data used in this paper are called ISSP
(International Social Survey Program) data, part of the
General Social Surveys (GSS) carried out by the National
Opinion research Center (NORC), University of Chicago. The
data, with the topic "social network and social support
systems," were collected in the U.S. in 1986 and in Italy in
1987 and made available by Inter-University Consortium for
Political and Social Research (ICPSR) in Ann Arbor Michigan.
The data of the U.S. subjects were collected through self-
administered questionnaire and that of the Italian subjects
were collected through personal interview.

ISSP's study of "social network and social support
systems" supplements regular national social science surveys
in the following countries: West Germany, Great Britain,
United States, Italy, Austria, Australia, and Hungary. The
data contains more than one hundred variables, providing
detailed information of respondents' contacts with relatives
and friends as well as information on where they would turn
to for help when they need instrumental support (household
assistance, borrowing a large sum of money and minor
illness), emotional support (talking with someone when faced
with depression and family problems), and informational
support (seeking advice on making an important change in

life). This paper only deals with emotional and informational support.

Subjects

The subjects of the U. S. sample are English-speaking persons 18 years of age or over, living in non-institutional arrangements within the U.S.

The total of married people in the U.S. sample is about 826 (female= 443, male= 383). 51.2 percent of males and 52.1 percent of females are between 25 and 44 years old. The mean of years in school is 12.73 for males and 12.55 for females. The employment rate is 78.5 percent for males and 49.6 percent for females. The mean number of best friends is 8.1 for male subjects and 6.36 for female subjects. 11.6 percent of respondents never attend church.

The total of married people in the Italian sample is 676 (Male= 338 Female= 338). 40.2 percent of males and 46.1 percent of females are between 25 and 44 years old. The mean of years in school is 9.97 for males and 9.62 for females. The employment rate is 76.6 for males and 31 percent for females. The mean number of best friends is 3.78 for males and 3.51 for females. 96.2 percent of respondents are Catholics and 12.7 percent never attend church.

Sampling

The sample is a multi-stage area probability sample. The units used for sampling are Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) or non-metropolitan counties.

These SMSAs and counties were stratified by region, age and race for selection. In the second stage, the units of selection were block groups (BGs) and enumeration districts (EDs), which were stratified based on race and income before selection. In the third stage, blocks were selected with probabilities proportional to size. In places without block statistics, measures of block size were obtained by field counting.

The sample type of Italian subjects was probability with quotas, and the sample was representative of Italian population. No further sampling information of Italian subjects is provided by the ISSP.

Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a

Married persons in the U.S. contact or visit best friends more often than kin.

Hypothesis 1b

Married persons in Italy contact or visit kin more often than best friends.

Hypotheses 2

Strongest social support is provided by the primary group. For a married person, the most important member in the primary group is his or her spouse. Therefore, we have the following hypotheses:

2a) When a married person feels depressed and wants to talk about it, s/he would most likely turn to her/his spouse first for help, no matter what educational levels s/he is at.

2b) When a married person needs advice about an important change in her/his life, for example about a job, or moving to another part of the country, the more education s/he has, the more likely s/he would turn to her/his spouse first for help.

2c) A married man would more likely turn to his spouse than his spouse would turn to him when he feels depressed or needs advice for important decisions in life.

2d) When a married person is upset about a problem with his or her spouse and has not been able to sort it out with them, s/he would turn to her/his friend or kin first for help. Those with low educational status will more likely turn to kin first, and those with middle or high educational status will more likely turn to friends first.

Hypothesis 3

The gender of the confidant or helper plays an important role. When having family problems, feeling depressed or needing advice, married persons in the U.S. and Italy, who do not turn to their spouses first, will more likely turn to female kin for help than to male kin.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1a states that married persons in the U.S. visit or contact friends more often than kin. To test hypothesis 1a, the frequencies of married men and women visiting their kin (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, and relatives) and friends are obtained. The frequency categories include "living in the same household," "several times a week," "once a week," "once a month," "several times a year," and "less often." Because the data is ordinal, the mean is not a perfect measurement. However, median is not a good measurement and is not used, because each group has the same median, ie, 5.

Because of the way the frequencies are coded (e.g. the same household= 1, daily= 2, once a month= 5), the smaller value of mean frequency of visits and contacts means more frequent visits and contacts. Examining the ranking of mean frequencies in Table 1.1, we see that married people in the U.S. visit best friends most frequently, followed by visiting sons and daughters (all three frequencies are between several times a week and once a week). On the average, they visit parents and relatives at least once a month, while visiting relatives a little more frequently than visiting parents. Siblings are least visited, but at least several times a year.

In addition to comparing mean frequencies of visits

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and contacts, the Wilcoxon signed-ranked test is conducted to test the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the mean frequency of visiting best friends and that of visiting any kin member. If the test for visiting best friends vs. son (the kin member most frequently visited) has a significant p value, there is no need to compare best friends with other kin members. Thus, we may reject the null hypothesis and conclude that best friends are most frequently visited in the U.S.

The same test can be conducted to see if there is difference between the frequency of contacting best friends and that of contacting other kin members. The one-tailed rather than 2-tailed p value is examined because the ranking of percentages was not looked at before hypotheses 1a and 1b were made.

Based on the results of Wilcoxon test, the p value is significant when best friends and sons are compared in terms of their frequencies of being visited. Since the son is the most frequently visited among the kin, we can predict that the p values will be even more significant when comparing best friends and other kin groups. Therefore, we may conclude that married persons in the U.S. generally visit best friends more often than any of their kin.

Table 1.1 (USA Male & Female)

Frequency of visiting best friends, parents, siblings, children, and relatives

best friend	mother	father	sister	brother	daughter	son	relatives
1.	.4	1.9	1.0	.5	.7	16.6	23.2	1.8
2.	14.9	8.3	9.9	4.2	4.5	13.2	10.7	9.7
3.	19.2	19.3	15.1	7.2	7.3	15.2	11.7	14.6
4.	26.8	19.5	17.4	16.3	14.1	15.2	14.0	19.5
5.	19.4	15.7	17.4	20.8	18.4	14.2	13.7	23.8
6.	12.1	19.3	19.0	21.7	27.2	14.5	17.7	18.9
7.	7.2	15.9	20.3	29.2	27.7	11.1	9.3	11.8
	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
MEAN	3.2	4.6	4.78	5.34	5.37	3.85	3.75	4.57

Note: 1=same household, 2=daily, 3=several times a week,
4=once a week, 5=once a month, 6=several times a year,
7=less often

N	773	517	385	595	602	296	300	774

Ranking of frequencies from high to low: best friends > son
> daughter > relatives > parents > siblings

Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for the Ranking in Table 1.1

```
        V25           how often visit sons
with V42              how oft. visit best friend


    Mean Rank     Cases
      112.93        100  - Ranks (V42 LT V25)
      118.35        131  + Ranks (V42 GT V25)
                     42    Ties  (V42 EQ V25)

      Z =    -2.0707            1-Tailed P = .0192

        V21           how often visit daughter
with V42              how oft. visit best friend


    Mean Rank     Cases
      104.56         83  - Ranks (V42 LT V21)
      110.16        132  + Ranks (V42 GT V21)
                     54    Ties  (V42 EQ V21)

      Z =    -3.2100            1-Tailed P = .0006
```

However, the frequencies in Table 1.2 shows that married people contact daughters most frequently, followed by contacting mother (at least several times a week), sons and best friends (at least once a week)(see table 1.2). They contact best friends more frequently than father/ relatives and sisters. Brothers are least contacted.

The Wilcoxon test shows that the p values are significant when comparing best friends with daughter, mother, father and sister. This means that married persons contact mother and daughter significantly more often than best friends and contact best friends significantly more often than father, relatives, and siblings. Hypothesis 1a is supported for visits but not for other contacts.

Table 1.2 (USA Male & Female)

Frequency of other contact with best friend, parents, siblings, children, and relatives

	best friend	mother	father	sister	brother	daughter	son	relatives
1.	14.1	16.4	10.8	7.3	3.7	26.5	13.0	11.5
2	21.1	23.9	14.8	11.8	7.0	22.0	23.0	15.8
3.	23.7	28.1	29.6	18.6	18.3	28.2	29.1	23.1
4.	20.8	21.5	21.6	26.4	24.8	12.7	17.0	25.3
5.	9.2	4.0	9.2	20.3	24.5	5.7	10.4	13.5
6.	11.1	6.1	14.0	15.6	21.8	4.9	7.4	10.8
	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
MEAN	3.23	2.91	3.45	3.87	4.24	2.63	3.10	3.45

Note: 1=daily, 2=several times a week, 3=once a week, 4=once a month, 5=several times a year, 6=less often

N=	773	506	379	591	597	245	230	758

Ranking of frequencies from high to low: daughter > mother > son > best friend > father & relatives > siblings

Table 1.2 (cont'd)

Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for the Ranking in Table 1.2

	V23	other contact w daughter
with V44		other contact with best friends

$Z = -4.0775$ 1-Tailed P = .0000

	V7	other contact with mother
with V44		other contact with best friends

$Z = -4.7837$ 1-Tailed P = .0000

	V27	other contact with son
with V44		other contact with best friends

$Z = -.2847$ 1-Tailed P = .3879

	V11	other contact with father
with V44		other contact with best friends

$Z = -2.9874$ 1-Tailed P = .0014

	V15	other contact with sister
with V44		other contact with best friends

$Z = -6.7335$ 1-Tailed P = .0000

Hypothesis 1b states that married persons in Italy
contact or visit kin more often than friends. The
frequencies are coded the same way as those for Americans.
The results are presented in Table 1.3 and 1.4. Table 1.3
shows that married people in Italy visit sons and daughters
most frequently (parents and children either live in the
same household or parents visit children daily), followed by
visiting mother (at least once a week), relatives and
father. They visit best friends (at least once a week) only
more often than siblings (at least once a month). The

Wilcoxon test shows that the p values are significant when sons, daughters, mother and relatives are compared with best friends in terms of their frequencies of being visited. This means at least four kin groups are more frequently visited than best friends.

TABLE 1.3   (Italy Males & Females)

Frequency (valid percent) of visiting best friend, parents, siblings, children and relatives

best friend	mother	father	sister	brother	daughter	son	relatives
1. .4	10.3	7.6	.8	.9	60.7	64.6	6.2
2. 25.1	25.4	25.9	15.0	17.2	16.7	12.9	26.8
3. 23.1	22.9	21.9	15.0	13.5	9.3	9.2	20.4
4. 24.4	18.5	20.7	16.9	16.8	7.4	5.8	21.7
5. 15.8	11.1	10.8	23.9	20.5	1.6	2.5	15.0
6. 6.7	5.7	4.8	14.4	14.3	.8	3.3	6.5
7. 4.4	6.2	8.4	14.0	16.8	3.5	1.7	3.4
100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
MEAN 3.67	3.36	3.49	4.46	4.49	1.88	1.85	3.45

Note: 1=same household, 2=daily, 3=several times a week, 4=once a week, 5=once a month, 6=several times a year, 7=less often

| N= 549 | 389 | 251 | 473 | 453 | 257 | 240 | 613 |

Ranking of frequencies from high to low:
children > mother > relatives > best friend > siblings

Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for the ranking in Table 1.3

```
        V25        how often visit sons
with V42           how often visit best friends

        Z =   -9.0441              1-Tailed P =   .0000

        V21        how often visit daughter
with V42           how often visit best friends
        Z =   -9.7001              1-Tailed P =   .0000
```

Table 1.3 (cont'd)

| V5 | how often visit mother |
| with V42 | how often visit best friends |

Z = -3.3152   1-Tailed P = .00045

| V35 | how often visit relatives |
| with V42 | how often visit best friends |

Z = -3.3264   1-Tailed P = .00045

| V9 | how often visit father |
| with V42 | how often visit best friends |

Z = -1.0314   1-Tailed P =.1512

Similarly, married persons in Italy contact daughters, sons and mothers most frequently (at least several times a week), followed by best friends/relatives (the same frequency) and siblings (see table 1.4). The Wilcoxon test shows that the p values are significant when the frequencies of daughter, mother, father, sister and brother are compared with best friends in terms of how often they are contacted. This means that married persons in Italy contact only daughter and mother significantly more often than best friends.

In short, married people in italy visit most of the kin more often than best friends but only contact some of the kin more often than best friends. Hypothesis 1b is significantly supported for visits, but not for contacts.

TABLE 1.4   (Italy Males & Females)

Frequency of contact with best friends, parents, siblings, children and other relatives

best friend	mother	father	sister	brother	daughter	son	relatives
1. 14.8	24.2	16.0	2.2	8.6	35.3	25.0	19.6
2. 21.4	28.6	24.0	14.2	11.3	29.4	25.0	24.0
3. 23.6	18.0	20.0	25.9	22.6	13.7	22.5	22.8
4. 17.7	8.1	9.0	22.4	19.9	2.0	2.5	15.4
5. 7.4	2.5	4.0	11.6	9.5	2.0	2.5	3.7
6. 15.1	18.6	27.0	23.7	28.1	17.6	22.5	14.4
100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

MEAN	3.02	2.77	3.28	3.46	3.87·	2.39	2.88	3.02

Note: 1=daily, 2=several times a week, 3=once a week, 4=once a month, 5=several times a year, 6=less often

N=	547	346	231	463	446	100	85	570

Ranking of frequencies from high to low: daughter > mother > son> best friends & relatives > father > siblings

Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for the Ranking in Table 1.4

V23	other contact with daughter
with V44	other contact with best friends

$Z = -3.8887$ 1-Tailed P = .00005

V7	other contact with mother
with V44	other contact with best friends

$Z = -1.7325$ 1-Tailed P = .0416

V27	other contact with son
with V44	other contact with best friends

$Z = -.2251$ 1-Tailed P = .4109

V11	other contact with father
with V44	other contact with best friends

$Z = -1.8085$ 1-Tailed P = .0352

V15	other contact with sister
with V44	other contact with best friends

$Z = -3.5549$ 1-Tailed P = .0002

Table 1.4 (cont'd)

| | V19 | other contact with brother |
| with V44 | | other contact with best friends |

Z = -6.9405   1-Tailed P = .0000

Tables 1.1 to 1.4 also show some other interesting results: a higher percentage of Italian respondents live with parents, children and relatives. Less than two percent of American respondents live with parents, while 7.6 to 10.3 percent of Italians do so. Less than 24 percent of American respondents live with children, while over 60 percent of Italians do so. 1.8 percent of American respondents living with relatives, while 6.2 percent of Italians live with relatives. The percentages for living with siblings are very similar in these two countries -- both less than one percent.

Hypothesis 2 examines the relationship between education and a married person's first choice of spouse as a helper when s/he is faced with depression and needs advice, and it examines the effect of educational level on a respondent's first choice of friends or kin when s/he is faced with family problems. The percentages of their choices of various helpers are presented in Table 2.2 and Table 2.3.

Logistic regression is used to test hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2d. The results of the logistic regressions are presented in Table 2.1. For each hypothesis, four groups of

respondents (American males and females and italian males and females) are chosen. First, to test hypothesis 2a and 2b, the values of the dependent variables v57 (help-seeking choices when feeling depressed) and v59 (help-seeking choices for advice) are recoded into spouse = 1 and nonspouse (options other than spouse) = 0. Second, to test Hypothesis 2d, the values of the dependent variable v55 (help-seeking choices when faced with family problems) are recoded into 1 = friend (closest friend and other friend), 0 = nonspouse kin (mother, father, daughter, son, brother and sister) and other options are treated as missing values. Third, education is the independent variable for testing hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2d, and education is mean corrected. A variable which indicates years in school, is used as the independent variable in the regressions.

Hypothesis 2a states that a married person would turn to his or her spouse first when s/he feels depressed, no matter how much school education s/he has. Table 2.2 and 2.3 show that 74.9 percent of American males and 52 percent of American females turned to their spouses first, while the percentages of Italian respondents are 61.8 for males and 29.4 for females. These percentages are larger than those of other options (though 29.4 percent is not very high) and prove that respondents from all four groups are more likely to turn to their spouses first than anyone else. Table 2.1 shows that education has a barely significant effect (p =.0431) on American females' choices of spouse as first

helpers. However, there is not a significant relationship between education and the choices of spouse for the other three groups. The negative signs in Table 2.1 may be just sampling errors. Thus, hypothesis 2a is supported.

Table 2.1
Unstandardized logistic regression coefficients for the effect of education on choices of helpers

	Family Problem B		Depression B		Advice B	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
USA	.093*	.1729**	-.004	.0795*	.1142**	.0952*
Italy	.2191***	.1740*	-.0948	.0938	.0098	.1718**

(*= p < .05   **= p<.01   ***= p<.001)

Note: For family problem, v55 is recoded as 1= friend (closest friend & other friends) 0= nonspouse kin.
For depression and advice, v57 and v59 are recoded as 1= spouse, 0= nonspouse.

Table 2.2 (U.S. males and females)
Choice of helpers (indicated by valid percent) on three occasions

	family problem		depression		advice	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
no one	6.0	2.4	1.9	1.7	2.7	1.9
spouse	12.5	9.1	<u>74.9</u>	<u>52.0</u>	<u>77.7</u>	<u>75.1</u>
mother	11.4	14.4	1.6	5.9	.5	5.0
father	3.3	2.4	.5		4.0	1.2
daughter	4.4	8.4	1.1	5.2	1.1	2.6
son	4.6	3.3	.8	1.4	2.2	2.6
sister	4.6	8.4	2.4	4.5	.5	2.4
brother	5.2	1.4	1.9	.5	1.3	.2
other relatives	4.1	4.3	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.2
closest friend	18.5	23.2	8.1	20.8	4.3	3.8
other friend	1.4	.7	.5	.9	.3	.2
neighbor	.5	.2		.5		.7
someone you work with	.5	.5	1.1	.7	1.1	.2
church, clergy	16.1	16.5	3.0	3.1	1.3	2.1
family doctor	1.1	1.0		1.2		
psychologist/ psychiatrist	5.4	3.6	.5	.2	.8	.5
solicitor, lawyer					.3	.2
other	.3	.2	.5		.8	
N=	367	443	383	443	383	443

TABLE 2.3 (Italy Male & Female)
Choice of helpers (indicated by valid percent)
on three occasions

	family problem		depression		advice	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
no one	19.8	12.7	5.9	7.1	8.6	8.6
spouse	7.1	3.0	<u>61.8</u>	<u>29.4</u>	<u>73.1</u>	<u>61.2</u>
mother	5.3	16.0	1.8	6.8	.6	7.1
father	2.1	.9		.6	1.2	2.1
daughter	5.9	13.9	1.2	9.5	.6	5.0
son	8.0	5.3	1.8	2.4	2.7	3.0
sister	6.5	14.2	2.4	8.6	.9	1.5
brother	6.2	3.0	.9		1.8	2.1
other relatives	8.0	7.4	1.5	3.6	1.2	2.1
closest friend	24.0	16.9	16.9	25.2	6.2	4.7
other friend	1.2	1.8	1.2	1.5	.3	
neighbor		.3	.9	3.3	.3	
someone you work with	.3	.3	2.1	.3	1.2	.3

church, clergy	2.4	2.7	.3	.6	.6
family doctor	.6	.3	1.5	.9	.3
psychologist, psychiatrist	2.4	1.5			.6
solicitor, lawyer				.6	.6
other	.3			.3	.9	.3
N=	338	338	338	338	338	338

Hypothesis 2b states that more educated married persons would more likely turn to their spouse first when they need advice on making an important change in life. Table 2.2 and table 2.3 show that 77.7 percent of American males and 75.1 percent of American females turn to their spouses first, while the percentages of Italian respondents are 73.1 for males and 61.2 for females. These percentages are much higher than those of other options and prove that respondents in four groups are more likely to seek advice from their spouses first than from anyone else. Table 2.1 shows that there is a significant relationship between education and seeking help from spouse first for all but one group (Italian males). The positive coefficients indicate that the more educated a married person is, the more likely s/he would turn to his or her spouse for advice. This hypothesis is supported.

According to **Hypothesis 2d**, the less educated a married person is, the more likely s/he would turn to kin for help with family problems; the more educated a married person is, the more likely s/he would turn to friends. The unstandardized regression coefficients (B) in Table 2.1

range from .093 to .2191. The positive coefficients
indicate that the more educated a married person is, the
more likely s/he would turn to friends first. In addition,
there is a significant relationship between education and
his or her choice of friends as the first helper for all
groups. The relationship is highly significant (p < .001)
for Italian males. Hypothesis 2d is supported.

   Hypothesis 2c tests if the likelihood for men to turn
to their wives is greater than that for women to turn to
their husbands for help with depression and advice.
In Table 2.2 and Table 2.3, the frequencies of v57 (help
seeking choices when feeling depressed) and v59 (help-
seeking choices for advice) are used to know the percentages
of married persons' first choices of helpers in these two
situations. By comparing the percentages of men's and
women's choices in both countries, we shall know if the
percentages for choosing spouses first are higher for men
than for women. To prove that the results are not sampling
errors, the p values of Pearson's chi-square are examined.
To conduct the chi-square test, the values of v57 (help-
seeking choices when feeling depressed) and v59 (help-
seeking choices for advice) are recoded as 0= nonspouse and
1= spouse.

   Because there is some gap between American and Italian
respondents' educational statuses (about 24 % of Americans
and 12 % of Italians have college education), two U.S.
subsamples and two Italian subsamples are used to test if

education accounts for the difference between Americans and Italians. The U.S. and Italian subsamples consist of those who have university education and those who do not have university education. The same procedures for testing hypothesis 2c are applied to the subsamples.

The results in Table 2.2 and 2.3 indicate that the percentages of American and Italian women who turn to their spouses when they are depressed are 52.9 and 29.4 separately, while the percentages are 75.1 and 61.2 when they need advice. However, the percentages of American and Italian men who turn to their spouses when they are depressed are 74.9 and 61.8 separately, while the percentages are 77.7 and 73.1 when they need advice. The percentages for men are larger than those for women in two situations, and their difference is more obvious for Italian respondents.

In Table 2.4 we see that there is a significant difference in the likelihood of American men's and women's turning to their spouses for help with depression (p=.000), but not for advice (p=.385). In addition, the percent difference for depression (22.9 %) is larger than that for advice (2.6 %).

However, for both depression and advice, Italian men and women differ significantly in their likelihood of turning to their spouses for help. The P value is .000 for depression and .001 for advice. Like American respondents, the percent difference for depression (32.4 %) is larger

than that for advice (11.9 %).

Table 2.4

Comparison of males' and females' tendency to seek help from spouse/nonspouse in the U.S. & Italy for depression & advice

USA Respondents

column %	Depression		Advice	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Nonspouse	25.1%	48%	22.3%	24.9%
Spouse	<u>74.9%</u>	<u>52%</u>	<u>77.7%</u>	<u>75.1%</u>
M - F		22.9 %		2.6 %
N	371	423	372	421
Sig	<u>.000</u>		<u>.385</u>	

Italian Respondents

column %	Depression		Advice	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Nonspouse	38.2%	70.6%	26.9%	38.8%
Spouse	<u>61.8%</u>	<u>29.4%</u>	<u>73.1%</u>	<u>61.2%</u>
M - F		32.4 %		11.9%
N	338	337	338	338
Sig	<u>.000</u>		<u>.001</u>	

NOTE: M - F refers to the percent difference between males
and females

The results for testing the subsamples are presented
in Table 2.5. In Table 2.5 we see that among American
respondents with university education, there is no
significant difference between males and females in the
likelihood of their turning to their spouses for help with
depression (p= .077) and advice (p= .318). Among Italian
respondents with university education, there is also no

significant difference between males and females in the
likelihood of their turning to their spouses for help with
depression (p= .183) and advice (p= .752).

Because the ch-square test does not measure strength
of association between two groups, it is necessary to
compare the percent difference among well-educated and less
educated respondents. The reason for comparing percent
difference is that it is an unbiased estimate of the
strength of association in the population. From Table 2.5
two conclusions can be made:

(1) In both countries, the percent difference among
well-educated persons is usually smaller than that among
less educated ones. For example, the percent difference for
depression is 11.5 % among American well-educated people,
while it is 25.8 % among less-educated people. In the
Italian sample, the percent difference for depression is
15.5 % among well-educated persons, while it is 33.1 % among
less-educated ones. (2) Well-educated Americans and
Italians have fairly similar patterns of help seeking for
depression and advice. With regard to advice seeking, well-
educated Americans show a percent difference of 5.5 % while
well-educated Italians show a percent difference of 3.3 %.
Thus the two percent difference scores differ by only 2.2 %.
By contrast, less educated people from the two countries
differ from each other to a great extent. For advice
seeking, less-educated Americans show a percent difference
of .07 %, while less-educated Italians show a difference of

12.1 5. Thus the two percent difference scores differ by 11.9 percent.

Hypothesis 2c, which states that men would more likely turn to their spouse for depression and advice than women, is significantly supported for only American and Italian respondents without college/university education. Part of this is a result of the fact that the sample sizes for less-educated respondents are larger than those for well-educated ones in both countries, thus making it easier to get statistically significantly results.

Table 2.5

Percent Difference & P value of Pearson's chi-square test for American and Italian subsamples

USA Respondents with college education

	Depression		Advice	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
spouse	73.8 %	61.9 %	85%	79.5
M - F		11.5 %		5.5 %
N	107	84	107	83
Pearson	sig	.007	sig	.318

Italian Respondents with college education

	Depression		Advice	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
spouse	62.2 %	46.7 %	73.3 %	70.%
M - F		15.5 %		3.3 %
N	45	30	45	30
Pearson	sig	.183	sig	.752

Table 2.5 (cont'd)

USA Respondents without college education

	Depression		Advice	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
spouse	75.4 %	49.6 %	74.7 %	74 %
M - F		25.8 %		0.7 %
N	264	339	265	338
Pearson	sig	.0000	sig	.833

Italian Respondents without university education

	Depression		Advice	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
spouse	61.8 %	27.7 %	73 %	60.4 %
M - F		34.1 %		12.6 %
N	293	307	293	308
Pearson	sig	.000	sig	.001

Note: M - F refers to the percent difference between men and women in seeking help from their spouses.

Regarding the choices of helpers for **family problems** in hypothesis 2d, Tables 2.2 and Table 2.3 also present many interesting findings. For both U.S. and Italian males and females, the percentage of turning to closest friends when they have family problems is higher than that of any other helper:18.5 percent of U.S. males and 23.2 percent of U.S. females; 24 percent of Italian **males** and 16.9 percent of Italian females. For U.S. respondents, the likelihood of turning to church clergy for family problems is the second highest (16.1 percent for males and 16.5 percent for females). These percentages are much higher than those for Italian respondents (2.4 % for males and 2.7 % for females).

U.S respondents also more likely turn to psychologists (5.4
% for males and 3.6 % for females) than Italian respondents
(2.4 % for males and 1.5% for females). For Americans and
Italians, the percentages of turning to psychologists and
clergy for family problems are much higher than the
percentages when they turn to psychologists and clergy for
depression and advice. Yet, Italians are more likely to
turn to no one (19.8 % for males and 12.7 % for females)
than Americans (6.0 % for males and 2.4% for females).

In addition, American and Italian respondents are
similar in the pattern of seeking help for depression and
advice: They predominantly depend on spouses, kin and
closest friends and minimally depend on neighbors, co-
workers, family doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and
lawyers. Yet, more American respondents turn to church
clergy for help with depression and advice than Italian
respondents (about three percent for Americans and less than
one percent for Italians).

Hypothesis 3 predicts a greater tendency for a married
person who does not turn to his/her spouse first to turn to
female kin than male kin for help in three situations.
The binomial test is used to test Hypothesis 3. The values
of v55 (help-seeking choices when faced with family
problems) are recoded into male kin (father, son and
brother) = 1, female kin (mother, daughter and sister)= 2,
and other options = missing. This test examines the
proportions of male and female kin from whom four groups of

respondents (American males and females as well as Italian males and females) seek help.

Table 3 presents the effect of the gender of the confidant on the help seeking of respondents from both countries in three situation. Both American and Italian women are more likely to choose female kin rather than male kin to help with family problems and depression (p <.001). In terms of advice seeking from female kin, the p value is smaller than .01 for American women and smaller than .05 for Italian women. So, we can reject the null hypothesis that females from both countries equally turn to male and female kin.

Married men in the U.S. are more likely to turn to female kin than to male kin for help with family problems (p <.05) but are more likely to turn to male kin for advice (p <.01). However, the likelihood that they will seek help from females rather than males does not significantly differ from 50 % (i.e. p= .2812). As for married men in Italy, they turn to male kin for advice more often than female kin (p= .031). When they are depressed or faced with family problems, the proportion of females sought does not differ significantly from 50 % (p= .1237 and p= .7091 separately). This hypothesis is always supported for women and sometimes supported for men.

TABLE 3

Proportions of male and female kin from whom both U.S. & Italian respondents seek help for family problems, depression and advice

A. USA Respondents

1. Female Respondents' Helpers

	Family Problem	Depression	Advice
Helpers	% female total 81 % 160	% female total 89 % 74	% female total 71 % 59
2-tailed P	.0000	.0000	.0018

B. Male Respondents' Helpers

Helpers	% female total 60.9 % 123	% female total 61 % 31	% female total 22 % 36
2-tailed p	.0191	.2812	.0015

B. Italy respondents

1. Female Respondents' Helpers

	Family Problem	Depression	Advice
Helpers	% female total 82.7 % 180	% female total 89.4 % 94	% female total 65.7 % 70
2-tailed p	.0000	.0000	.0121

2. Male Respondents' Helpers

Helpers	% female total 52.1 % 115	% female total 66.6 % 27	% female total 26.9 % 26
2-tailed p	.7091	.1237	.0310

Note: The figures under "total" are the sum of male and female helpers. P levels test the null hypothesis that the proportion of chosen females is 50 %

DISCUSSION

The findings primarily support hypothesis 1a --
married persons in the U.S. do visit friends more often than
all the kin. Among the kin, they visit children most
frequently, visit relatives slightly more often than
parents, and visit siblings the least often. However, the
findings do not support hypothesis 1a that Americans contact
best friends more often than kin because they contact
daughters and mothers more often than best friends.
Obviously, friends play an important role in the social
network of married persons. They may visit or contact their
kin out of obligation. Yet, since they do not have
obligations for friends, they may visit or contact friends
for seeking or offering help or just for socializing
purpose. They regard closest friends as "in-group" members,
and the reason they see friends more often than parents may
be that many of them do not live with or close to parents.
In this sample, siblings are least visited or contacted
among the kin, which may also be the consequence of
geographic mobility, but sibling ties may reemerge in one's
old age (Cumming & Schneider 1961).

The findings also primarily support hypothesis 1b
-- married persons in Italy visit kin more often than best
friends. Italian respondents visit best friends less
frequently than children, parents and relatives. However,

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the findings do not show that they contact all kin more often than best friends. They only contact children and mother more often than best friends. The percentage of them living with children is three times as large as that of their American counterparts and for those living with parents the percentage is five times as large. Young people in Italy usually stay in the parental home until marriage and often after marriage (Moors 1990). In addition, from Tables 1.1 to 1.4 we see that American respondents visit or contact their kin less frequently than Italian respondents. Though siblings are least visited, Italians visit siblings more than once a month. In the U.S. sample, siblings are visited once a month or less often. All these imply that Italians have a closer relationship with kin than Americans. However, U.S and Italian subjects visit or contact friends almost as frequently -- at least once a week.

Bott (1971) attributes the following factors to married persons' relationship with kin: economic ties with kin, residence and physical accessibility of kin, type of genealogical relationship, the connectedness of the kinship network, the presence and preference of "connecting relatives," idiosyncratic combinations of conscious and unconscious needs and attitudes. People tend to have closer relationship with relatives or kin living nearby than with those living far away. Residence and physical accessibility is impacted by geographic and social mobility, and dwelling habits. Geographic and social mobility are in turn

influenced by one's socioeconomic status, economic structures of a society and culture. On the average, respondents in the U.S. have more years of education than Italian respondents, and the U.S. is more industrialized than Italy. More education makes social mobility easier, and educational as well as economic opportunities in a highly industrialized country make geographic mobility very frequent. Additionally, since American culture emphasizes independence and self-reliance, contact with relatives outside the nuclear family is not taken for granted, and even parent-child relationship is a matter of individual negotiation once the children have left home (Bellah et al 1986).

Despite the prevalence of individualism, Americans are forever forming different types of associations -- commercial, industrial, religious, moral, and so on (Bellah et al. 1986). Individuals are expected to join groups of his choice. "Getting involved" is the American notion of the relationship between self and society. This also explains why Americans associate with friends more than kin.

In contrast, Italy is not as mobile as the United States. Many Southern Italians live on agriculture, and education has not been emphasized until the late sixties (Ozer 1971). The respondents in this sample have an average of 8 years of schooling. Uneven development in the south and the north, rigid class stratification, and too many dialects in the country (Mangano 1971) make geographic and

social mobility not as easy as they are in the U.S. Most
Italians (except those living in large Northern cities) also
like to live together in the large blocks of flats rather
than live alone in an enclosed house of one's own (Bryant
1971). Additionally, Italy is much smaller than America;
geographic proximity also contributes to closer kin ties.
However, some scholars think that among the factors
contributing to close kin relationships, the most important
one is their high value placed on family. Take Southern
Italians for an example, they show great concern for the
well-being of his immediate family, but he shows "almost
pathological distrust toward persons outside of the small
circle of the family of procreation" (Tamosi 1971). Though
urbanization has weakened kin ties, the power of Italian
family is still much stronger than that of American family.
Given the power of Italian family alone, it is logical to
conclude that Italian respondents associate with friends
less than with kin.

The findings support hypotheses 2a and 2b that when a
married person feels depressed or needs advice on an
important change in life, s/he would most likely turn to his
or her spouse for help, no matter at what educational level
s/he is. These findings suggest that one's spouse plays an
important role in providing emotional and informational
support. That the percentages of male and female married
persons' choosing the spouse first when they are depressed
are larger than other options in both countries confirms

Ensel's finding that spousal help lowers the level of depression more than help from any other tie. However, the percentage of female respondents who turn to their husbands first is much lower in Italy than in America. This proves that Italian women still suffered from gender inequality in marital relationships when the data was collected in 1987. This also proves Cutrona and Suhr's finding that help-seeking from one's spouse for emotional support is impacted by marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2c states that a married man would more likely turn to his spouse than his spouse would turn to him when he feels depressed or needs advice on an important change in life. This is primarily supported among American and Italian respondents without college/university education. The findings for this hypothesis also indicate that both American and Italian males without college or university education rely on their spouses much more than their spouses rely on them. This suggests that the tendency for male and female respondents to seek help from their spouses is influenced more by educational status than by culture.

In both countries, education does not substantially impact either a male or a female subject's choice of spouse as the first helper with depression. However, education was found to have a positive impact on married persons' choices in terms of informational support. This makes sense because higher educational status is positively correlated with more

equal marital relationship, the more educated a married
person is, the more likely s/he would turn to his or her
spouse for advice. The educational level of American
respondents is higher than that of Italian respondents. So,
the percentage of turning to their spouses first is higher
in America than in Italy. Since gender inequality between
an Italian couple is very common, it is understandable that
only 29.4 percent of all Italian female respondents turn to
their husbands first when depressed because their husbands
are dominant and unexpressive.

Why is there a much higher percentage of them turning
to their husbands first (61.2 percent) when they need
advice? The logical explanation is that the Italian husband
is the head of the household and has more decision power
than the wife. Therefore, wives have to ask their husbands'
opinions first before making important decisions.

As for seeking help for family problems, education
also has a significant effect on both American and Italian
respondents' choices of kin or friends as first helpers.
The findings support hypothesis 2d that a less educated
married person is more likely to turn to kin first for help
with family problems but a more educated married person
would turn to friends first. This can be explained by
noting that the lower class have fewer resources (such as
time, money and energy) to associate with friends than
middle and upper class. Some researchers argue that the
middle and upper class retain more solid ties with kin than

the lower class even after urbanization (Pearlin 1971) because the former have more resources to help their kin. However, our data indicates that the lower class are more likely to depend on kin for family problems rather than the other way around.

In terms of the choices of helpers in three situations, we found that spouses, friends and church clergy constitute a large portion of American respondent's helping network, but Italians depend on church clergy only minimally even when faced with family problems. The church clergy in the U.S. plays an important role in solving family problems: U.S. respondents turn to church clergy first seven times more than Italians. Though church clergy is not included in the hypotheses, the role of church in both countries is worth discussion.

According to the samples, the number of U.S. respondents attending church once a week is larger than that of Italians. Putnam (1995) holds that America continues to be an extraordinarily "churched" society though church attendance has decreased. Religious affiliation is the most common associational membership among Americans (p. 69). Religion provides Americans a conception of how one should live (Bellah 1986), and church clergy help them out of difficulties, such as offering marriage counselling for those with family problems. In Italy, nine out of ten Italians call themselves Catholics and nearly 100 percent of these self-identified Catholics are baptized (The Economist

1996). However, many people have bitter feeling against the Roman Church and are disgusted at church clergy. They believe that the church derives its wealth and power from the ignorance and superstition of the poor and that a large group of clergy are in the church simply as an honorable profession but have little religion (Mangano 1971). In Italy, attending church has more of social custom than of religious significance; the majority of men of all classes never attend church except for weddings or funerals; "churchgoing is left to the women and children" (ibid p. 71, 74, 75).

As for other options of helpers for family problems, psychologists serve better in the function of solving family problems than in other functions. American respondents turn to psychologists first twice as often as Italians when feeling depressed. We are not sure if Americans trust psychologists better than Italians. However, whether seeking help from psychologists or not depends on one's educational and income status. Since American respondents have higher socioeconomic status than Italian respondents, this may explain why the former are more likely to turn to psychologists. The comparisons as well as the finding that Italian respondents turn to nobody three to five times more likely than their American counterparts lead us to speculate that Italians are reluctant to disclose their family problems to people other than kin and friends. Generally speaking, men in both countries are less likely to seek help

than women in three situations mentioned above, and more
Italian respondents do not seek help than American
respondents.

Previous findings indicate that the gender of
respondents impacts their choices of helpers: men primarily
depend on their spouses and women depend on more varied
sources of support. The findings for hypothesis 3 show that
there is also gender preference in terms of the helpers they
seek.

The findings support part of hypothesis 3 that both
American and Italian women would more likely seek help from
female rather than male kin first in three situations, if
they do not turn to their spouses for help. The difference
between the percentage of female and male helpers whom they
turn to for depression is the largest; the difference is the
second largest when they seek help for family problems and
the smallest for seeking advice. This implies that females
turn to female kin for help with depression more than for
family problems and advice.

However, the findings do not support the rest of
hypothesis 3 that American and Italian men would more likely
turn to female kin rather than male kin first in three
situations, if they do not seek help from their spouses.
Findings show that married men in both countries would most
likely seek help from female kin than from male kin for
depression, followed by family problems. This suggests that
female kin are more expressive and help more with emotional

problems. Both American and Italian men turn to male kin more often than to female kin for advice probably because they believe that males are more capable of offering the advice they need than females.

LIMITATIONS

Because this paper deals with emotional and informational support only, we can not see the effect of gender on the choices of helpers in other aspects of support. For example, whom will married men and women turn to more often when needing household help and financial help or when feeling ill? In addition, education is the only predictor used in the logistic regression. The effects of age, income, employment status, and other variables on the choices of helpers are not examined, because gender and cultural difference have already been covered in the study. Since the paper compares two countries, using many predictors will make the paper too complicated to read. The reason race is not used as a predictor is that it does not exist in the data. As for the questions in the survey, they have some shortcomings. If respondents had been asked why they choose a certain helper first, and how they are helped, it would help researchers explain the findings better.

CONCLUSION

Culture, social class, geographic mobility, and social mobility impact married persons' kin and friend ties, while their gender, educational levels, the extent of gender equality in their marital relationships, and their attitudes towards or attachment to the church have much impact on married persons' choices of helpers when they need support for family problems, depression and advice.

Based on previous findings and discussion, the following conclusions are reached: (1) Italian respondents associate with kin more often than American respondents, while the latter associate with friends more often than the former. (2) In both countries, kin, spouse and friends are the most important sources of support for a married person. Spouse support is especially important when s/he needs help with depression and advice, no matter s/he is from individualist or family-oriented culture. Friends help most when s/he is faced with family problems. (3) Women in both countries are more likely to turn to female kin than men. (4) Americans are more likely to seek help from church clergy and psychologists than Italians. (5) Women rely on a wider variety of sources of support than their husbands. Men rely on their spouses to a large extent and more likely turn to nobody than women in three situations. In particular, men are more likely to get help with depression

from their spouses than women are. The last finding is consistent with Hobfall's (1986) and other researchers' findings. This suggests that marriage is more conducive to the mental heath of men than that of women. Increasing gender equality in a marital relationship is a prerequisite of improving the mental health of married women.

APPENDIX

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APPENDIX

Variables & Survey Questions

V55 -- help in family problem
Suppose you were very upset about a problem with your husband, wife, or partner, and haven't been able to sort it out with them.

Who would you turn to first for help?

1. no one 2. husband/wife/partner 3. mother 4. father
5. son   6. sister 7. brother
8. other relatives, including in-laws
9. closest friend   10. other friend
11. neighbor   12. someone you work
                                         with
13 church, clergy or priest   14. family doctor

15. psychologist, psychiatrist,   16. other
    marriage guidance or other
    professional counselor

V57 -- help in depression

Suppose you felt just a bit down or depressed, and you wanted to talk about it.

Who would you turn to first for help?

(The options are exactly the same as those for v55)

V59 --help with advice

Suppose you needed advice about an important change in your life -- for example about a job, or moving to another part of the country.

Who would you turn to first for help?

1. no one 2. husband/wife/partner 3. mother 4. father
5. son   6. sister 7. brother   8. other relatives,
                                         including in-laws
9. closest friend   10. other friend
11. neighbor   12. someone you work
                                         with

13 church, clergy or priest

14. family doctor

15. psychologist, psychiatrist,
    marriage guidance or other
    professional counselor

16. solicitor/ lawyer

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