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How to cite

GANJOUR, Olga, WIDMER, Eric, ROCA I ESCODA, Marta. Family networks of lesbian and gay people in Switzerland. In: Family relations, 2025, vol. 74, n° 2, p. 791–807. doi: 10.1111/fare.13124

This publication URL: https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:183821
Publication DOI: 10.1111/fare.13124

Received: 9 February 2024 | Revised: 14 June 2024 | Accepted: 17 September 2024

DOI: 10.1111/fare.13124

RESEARCH

Family Relations
Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science

Family networks of lesbian and gay people in Switzerland

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Funding information
This publication benefited from the support of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES – Overcoming vulnerability: Life course perspective (NCCR LIVES), which is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number: 51NF40-185901). Additional funding was provided by a Young Scholar Grant awarded to the first author by the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Life Course Research (LIVES Centre)

Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study was to estimate the relevance of the family of choice hypothesis in family networks of lesbian and gay individuals living in Switzerland and its implications for their social capital.

Background: Over the past three decades, family scholars have paid more attention to the emergence of family configurations of LGBTQ+ people that extend beyond the nuclear family and blood kin, with voluntary kin and family of choice playing a key role. However, family networks of lesbian and gay individuals remain an unexplored topic in Switzerland, a country that has taken an extended period to implement institutional acknowledgment of lesbian and gay family rights.

Method: Personal network methods were used to map the main types of family networks of lesbian and gay individuals. In collaboration with an association advocating for lesbian and gay families in Switzerland, the study collected ego-centered network data on their family.

Results: The results reveal that the nuclear family holds prominence in many family networks of lesbian and gay people included in the sample, with limited involvement of either blood kin or voluntary kin, which has consequences for their family-based social capital.

Conclusion: The family of choice hypothesis is largely rejected. The focus on the nuclear family is consistent with the late legal recognition of same-sex marriage and parenthood in Switzerland.

Implications: The importance of the nuclear family in the family networks of LGBTQ+ people, as well as the relative diversity of such networks, should be considered by

Author note: The authors acknowledge the contribution of the Association of Rainbow Families in Switzerland for its support of the data collection.The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

professionals dealing with health and social issues, as well as by legislators, policymakers, and organizations working to promote the family rights of lesbian and gay people and their full social acceptance.

Existing research examining how lesbian and gay people define their family members has revealed, to some extent, the replacement of blood ties by elective or voluntary kin, as expected by the family of choice paradigm (Dewaele et al., 2011; Reczek, 2014b; Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2021; van Bergen et al., 2021). Interestingly, however, recent studies have shown that blood relatives and legal relatives, along with chosen members, are also present in LGBTQ+ families (Hull & Ortyl, 2019; Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). While empirical research on the significance of family of choice is well developed in the United States and United Kingdom, this issue has not been empirically considered in Switzerland, a country known for its conservatism in terms of family policies.

This study addresses issues related to the family configurations of lesbian and gay individuals and the social capital that they make available. Whereas previous studies focused either on network composition (Hull & Ortyl, 2019) or on the social capital of LGBT individuals beyond family (Erosheva et al., 2016), our study combines both issues of family composition and family-based social capital and relates them with critical information about the recent institutional history of Switzerland. This study addresses the following research questions. First, do family networks of lesbian and gay individuals living in the conservative institutional family context of Switzerland align with the family of choice hypothesis, or, alternatively, do their family networks deviate from this model by promoting the definition of a nuclear family? Second, do family networks of lesbian and gay individuals promote a specific form of social capital or relational resources, such as a *bridging form* with a central position in these configurations or a *bonding form* with dense ties formed without their engagement? The results stress the importance of nuclear family and relationships with partners and children in family networks and the family-based social capital of lesbian and gay individuals. The results are discussed in light of institutional developments with regard to the nondiscrimination of same-sex parenting in Switzerland.

CHOSEN FAMILIES AND KIN

Family networks of lesbian and gay people are often expected to adhere only weakly to the principles of the heteronormative model of the nuclear family for a variety of reasons. The presence of voluntary kin in family networks of lesbian and gay people, identified as a "family of choice" (Weston, 1991) is promoted by a multifaceted process of continuous reidentification of significant family members (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). Self-identified lesbian and gay people navigate the selection and exclusion of their relatives as a dynamic process shaped by their stigmatized sexual identification. This process suggests that in family networks of lesbian and gay people, blood ties do not universally define major forms of kinship (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2021; van Bergen et al., 2021). Kinship ties are not only incorporated by inheritance from former generations but are also actively chosen and, as such, may exhibit highly fluid boundaries intertwined with friendship ties (Lewin, 2009; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004).

Many lesbian and gay people were indeed seen by prior research as cautious about relying on their blood kin, preferring to maintain a supportive network of a "chosen family," which includes friends, ex-lovers, and other voluntary kin (Dewaele et al., 2011; Heaphy et al., 1998; Kurdek, 1994; Weston, 1991). They used the term *family* to describe their close voluntary relationships with individuals who are not biologically or legally related to them (Weeks

et al., 2001). However, the empirical evidence on the prevalence of voluntary ties in the family networks of LGBTQ+ individuals is mixed and somewhat inconclusive. Recent studies emphasize the respective shares of both given and chosen ties as fluid rather than seeing one as a substitute for the other (Furstenberg et al., 2020). The "chosen family" complements, rather than replaces, biological and legal family members in families of LGBTQ+ individuals (Hull & Ortyl, 2019). Indeed, LGBTQ+ individuals are included in broad and complex family configurations that often include their family of origin, extended and voluntary kin, chosen family, and, in some cases, consensual nonmonogamy (Barrow & Allen, 2020; Fish et al., 2024).

Like others, many lesbian and gay individuals are inclined to establish strong intergenerational relationships, but the estrangement of a parent may disrupt this process. In practice, they maintain fewer contacts with their parents on average than straight individuals, especially fathers, and their relationships with their parents are often characterized by conflict (Balsam et al., 2008; Kurdek, 2005; Reczek, 2014a; van Bergen et al., 2021). Parents may accept their child's sexual orientation but refrain from recognizing the full acceptability of their child's partner and their roles as grandparents within such families (Guizzardi, 2016). Although parents may approve of their son's or daughter's marriage, some may be anxious about societal acceptance (Smart, 2007). The transition to parenthood among LGBTQ+ individuals is associated either with a lack of support from parents, siblings, and other family members (Von Doussa et al., 2015) or with increasing closeness with family of origin (Bergman et al., 2010). Indeed, childless LGBTQ+ people stress that they are at times estranged from their family of origin (Lewin, 2009). Given this set of results, it can be expected that lesbian and gay people develop a variety of definitions of family by unequally including voluntary kin and blood relatives.

BONDING VERSUS BRIDGING FAMILY-BASED SOCIAL CAPITAL OF LESBIAN AND GAY INDIVIDUALS

The importance of personal relationships as a form of social capital has been stressed for LGBT and bisexual individuals (Erosheva et al., 2016; Grossman et al., 2000). Individuals with large and dense support networks have better outcomes across a range of domains, from health to educational outcomes (Lee et al., 2018). Social support is important for moderating the relationship between stress and negative health outcomes among LGBTQ+ individuals (Pflum et al., 2015; Tabaac et al., 2015; Verelli et al., 2019). Family-based social capital (Alcaraz et al., 2020; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; Furstenberg & Kaplan, 2004; Widmer, 2006; Zarwell et al., 2021) is defined as configurations of supportive family ties beyond households. Its two main forms are bonding social capital and bridging social capital (Sauter et al., 2023; Widmer, 2006, 2010). *Bonding social capital* pertains to personal networks in which all members are engaged in long-term and frequent contact, are emotionally close, and help each other on a regular basis. In such dense networks, information is transmitted quickly and trustfully, and collective expectations, claims, obligations, and trust are reinforced (Claridge, 2018; Coleman, 1988). Bonding social capital is typically found in family configurations where intergenerational ties are frequent (Widmer, 2006).

On the other hand, *bridging social capital* emphasizes the potential of being an intermediary in a personal network as a function of brokering opportunities (Burt, 1995, 2002; Claridge, 2018). A lack of connections between subgroups in a personal network create "holes" that provide certain individuals (i.e., brokers) with opportunities to mediate the flow of information among group members and control the projects that bring them together. Bridging social capital also applies to family networks through voluntary family ties, such as those with siblings and friends (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Cornwell, 2011; Widmer, 2006). Voluntary relatives, in most cases, do not have direct connections with blood relatives, making it necessary for individuals to act as intermediaries between autonomous sections of their family. The importance of bridging social

capital for older adults' health has been emphasized (Cornwell, 2009; Eriksson, 2011; Valente & Fujimoto, 2010). Bridging social capital relates to the network diversity of LGBT individuals and is positively associated with younger age, being female, transgender identity, identity disclosure to a friend, and participation in religious activity and service use (Erosheva et al., 2016). The connection between the composition of family networks and their bonding versus bridging form of family-based social capital is, however, largely unknown for LGBTQ+ individuals.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF SWITZERLAND

The prevalence of voluntary kin versus blood kin in the family networks of LGBTQ+ individuals depends to some extent on the normative and legal context of the recognition of same-sex relationships in the country (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Reczek, 2020). On the one hand, marriage provides the confidence needed to seek assisted reproduction and have children (De la Rosa & Peregrín, 2022). Consequently, marriage contributes to the normalization and social acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals by blood relatives, such as parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles (De la Rosa & Peregrín, 2022; Lewin, 2009; Pralat, 2018; Ravelingien et al., 2015). On the other hand, marriage as an institution may undermine community ties and support from friends (Drabble et al., 2020). Overall, the official status of marriage at the country level is ambivalent; it can serve as a "safety net" for same-sex couples (Acosta, 2021; Fish et al., 2024; Imaz, 2017), but at the same time, it can become a normative constraint on the freedom to "live without a script" (Drabble et al., 2020).

There are indeed reasons to believe that access to marriage and parenthood by LGBTQ+ people may promote heteronormativity as the prevailing social norm rather than moving away from it (Ganjour & Widmer, 2019). For instance, laws regulating procreation that restrict gay people's access to fatherhood via surrogacy are in place in many countries, which contradicts an open attitude toward diversifying family models beyond the heterosexual nuclear family (Gash & Raiskin, 2018; Lewin, 2009; Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). Indeed, the legal recognition of same-sex couples' parental rights appears to enhance their relationships with blood relatives and influences how LGBTQ+ individuals commit to a parental project and exercise their parenthood in everyday practices, both within the couple and with their children (Bos et al., 2016; Mezey, 2008; Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022). In countries where legal recognition of parenthood in same-sex relationships took place early, the inclusion of blood family members in same-sex parenting family configurations has been more extensive (Sanner & Coleman, 2017).

In this regard, Switzerland presents a particularly interesting national context for studying the institutional framing of family networks of lesbian and gay people due to its late legal recognition of same-sex marriage and access to parenthood by medically assisted procreation. Nearly two decades after the institutionalization of same-sex unions through the Partnership Act in 2007, Switzerland finally recognized same-sex marriage and access to parenthood through medically assisted procreation in July 2022. This long and laborious institutional development has eventually allowed automatic filiation from birth for children of lesbian couples born through assisted reproductive technology practiced in Swiss health facilities. Beyond legal recognition, the normative pressures from the heterosexual majority on same-sex parents can be conceptualized as a "burden of proof" (Peleg & Hartman, 2019), the recent institutional developments granting same-sex parents a sense of normality and competence in the eyes of the public, proving their parental capabilities. However, it also reinforces the normative framework of compulsory parental relationships. This could reverse the legal progress made in the inclusion of lesbian and gay people as recognized family units and return them to a state of heteronormativity, as has been questioned in the U.S. context (Drabble et al., 2020).

SUMMARY AND HYPOTHESES

This research addresses the open question of the extent to which family networks of lesbian and gay individuals match the expectations of the family of choice hypothesis in Switzerland, a country where the legalization of same-sex relationships occurred late by international comparison. First, we expect that late legal recognition of same-sex marriage and parenthood in Switzerland may favor relationships outside of the nuclear family. Consequently, family networks of lesbian and gay people encompass a broad range of relationships, including blood and voluntary kin, shaping distinct types of family networks. The Swiss normative and sociocultural context may promote a focus on the nuclear family in some types (Girardin & Widmer, 2015). Furthermore, the presence of blood relatives in their networks may be considered "natural" and inevitable (Hull & Ortyl, 2019; Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022).

Second, we expect that types of family networks are unequally associated with family-based bridging and bonding social capital. In particular, the types of family networks focusing on voluntary kin are expected to provide bridging social capital, whereas the types focusing on blood kin or the nuclear family are expected to provide bonding social capital (Cornwell, 2009).

METHOD

Recruitment and participants

The data come from a survey of same-sex families administered by the authors in the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland from June to September 2021. This survey was conducted in collaboration with an association defending the rights of LGBTQ+ families and collected primary data. Following the examples of other studies (L'Archevêque et al., 2009; Pollak & Schiltz, 1991; Velter et al., 2015), we recruited participants through the association due to the low number of self-declared lesbian and gay couples present in general population family surveys at the time. For example, in the Swiss national survey, Families and Generations, conducted in 2018, out of 15,171 couples, only 113 described themselves as being part of a same-sex couple (Federal Statistical Office, 2024). According to this sampling strategy, respondents are likely to be involved in their communities (Vyncke & Julien, 2008) and to have assumed their lesbian and gay identities (Tasker & Delvoye, 2018).

Because personal data were protected, the research team did not have access to the private addresses of the association's members. The leadership of the association contacted active members by means of a letter inviting them to complete the questionnaire. This letter was sent by post to all 400 active members. Two reminders inviting them to participate in the study were sent by e-mail during the following 2 months. The response rate was 60%, with 238 self-administered questionnaires completed on the Lime Survey website. Finally, we selected 157 questionnaires in which the questions on the personal networks had been completed. The sample consisted of 84% self-identified women, 13% self-identified men, and 3% individuals of other genders. Among the respondents, 56% were under age 39, and 44% were 40 and older. In terms of education level, 63% of respondents held a university degree, 23% had completed higher vocational school, 5% possessed a school-leaving certificate, 8% had an apprenticeship, and 1% had completed primary school. Regarding occupational status, 78% of respondents were employees, 7% were entrepreneurs, and 15% were in other occupations. Concerning marital status, 67% were in a registered partnership, 21% were single, 3% were separated but still married or in a previous partnership, 6% were divorced or in an interrupted partnership, and 3% were in other situations. In terms of nationality, 62% of respondents were Swiss citizens, 23% held dual nationalities, and 15% were foreigners (Supplemental Table 1).

Measures

One main innovation of this study is the use of personal network methods (McCarty et al., 2019; Small et al., 2021) to assess the composition and social capital of family configurations of lesbian and gay people. Personal network methods have been extensively developed over the past two decades, enriching the understanding of various social issues (Small et al., 2021). They have enabled researchers to deal with some main challenges of family research such as going beyond household structures to address issues related with family diversity (Widmer, 2021a). To tackle the complexity of interactions in contemporary families, the number of family relationships to be taken into account is much greater than those between partners, or between parents and their resident children (Widmer, 2021b). One strength of personal network methods is that they enable researchers to consider full configurations of relationships beyond specific dyads and household arrangements and find the complex structures underlying them (McCarty, 2002). The Family Network Method (FNM) instrument has been used in several research since the early 2000s (e.g., Giesbers et al., 2019; Widmer 1999, 2006; Widmer et al., 2018). Following personal network methods, a free-listing technique is first used to delineate the family networks of respondents. Respondents are asked to provide a list of all individuals whom they consider to be significant family members at the time of the interview. In all studies using the FNM, the term *family* is deliberately left undefined to approach the respondents' personal definitions of family. Participants are instructed that the term *significant* referred to family members who have played a role, either positive or negative, in their life during the past year. Such network members are referred to as *alters* in personal network research (McCarty et al., 2019). Sociodemographic information is collected for each alter, along with details about the nature of family ties, the duration of the relationship, and the frequency of contact between the respondent, referred to as the *Ego*, and each alter. Supplemental Table 2 provides an example of the FNM data entry form, showing the alters listed as significant family members in Column 2 (in addition to the respondent) and indicating who provided them emotional, practical support, or with whom they experienced conflicts. The FNM makes it possible to analyze relationships among a large set of family members because it asks respondents to assess relationships among all alters about emotional, practical support, and influence and conflict (Widmer, 1999, 2006; Widmer et al., 2013). Emotional support was described as the ability to provide guidance and moral comfort. It was investigated in Column 4 of Supplemental Table 2 by asking, "Who would give emotional support to You/X person [i.e., each alter included in the respondent's family configuration, considered one by one] during routine or minor troubles?" Respondents provide answers by listing the personal number associated with each network member they believe would offer support to them or to person X. Similarly, Column 5 in Supplemental Table 2 measured practical support. Consistent with research using personal network methods (McCarty et al., 2019), respondents were asked not only to evaluate their own family relationships but also the relationships among all the alters they identified as significant family members (Widmer, 1999; Widmer et al., 2013). In addition to emotional and practical support, conflicts were also investigated in the present study. Conflicts were measured by the following question: "Who among the family members on your list often annoys each other? And who do you think annoys you?" Following the personal network method, the FNM transforms the information generated by the questions above into adjacency matrices. Supplemental Table 3 shows the adjacency matrix for emotional support, derived from Column 4 of Supplemental Table 2. Each citation of an alter as a support provider for another network member is represented by a "1," whereas a "0" means that the respondent did not report such a relationship as existing. The rows indicate from whom each member in the family configuration would receive emotional support in case of need, while the columns summarize to whom each of them would provide it (McCarty et al., 2019). For example, the respondent receives emotional support from the partner, cousins, partner's mother, and other individual, and provides

support to all members of this family configuration. The binary nature of the information in the adjacency matrices is standard in personal network methods (McCarty et al., 2019).

Following other personal network surveys, the FNM also allows for the visualization and analysis of family configurations using the SNA (Butts, 2024) and Social Network packages in R (Butts, 2008, 2015). Figure 1 reports results from Supplemental Table 3. The arrows represent the emotional support ties exchanged among the family members, as reported by the respondent, with the arrows pointing toward the support providers. Figure 1 shows that emotional and practical support circulates among the members of this family configuration, with the respondent occupying a central position, providing support to all family members and receiving support from the partner, cousins, partner's mother, and another individual. Additionally, there are no conflictual relationships in this configuration; no family members are reported to annoy anyone.

Compared with our previous studies using the FNM (Widmer 1999; Widmer et al., 2013), some adjustments were made to the questionnaire regarding gender-related issues. In particular, the question about the gender of respondents and network members was changed to a question about their sexual identification, and a question about the sexual orientation of respondents and network members was added. These were the only changes made compared with our previous use of the FNM.

Following personal network method, adjacency matrices are then used to compute indices of social capital (Hanneman & Riddle, 2005; Scott, 1991), such as size, density, indegree and outdegree, and betweenness centrality (Burt, 1995, 2002; Scott, 1991; Wasserman & Faust, 1994; Widmer, 2006, 2010). *Network size* is the number of family members cited by respondents. *Indegree* centrality refers to the percentage of network members for whom the respondent would provide support in case of need, whereas *outdegree* centrality refers to the percentage of people who would give support to respondents in the case they need it. *Density* measures the overall level of connectivity and represents the ratio of perceived supportive ties to the total possible. These indices refer to bonding social capital. As an indicator of bridging social capital, respondents' *betweenness centrality* measures the proportion of paths in which a node appears as an intermediary within the paths connecting network members. The same indices were computed for conflict.

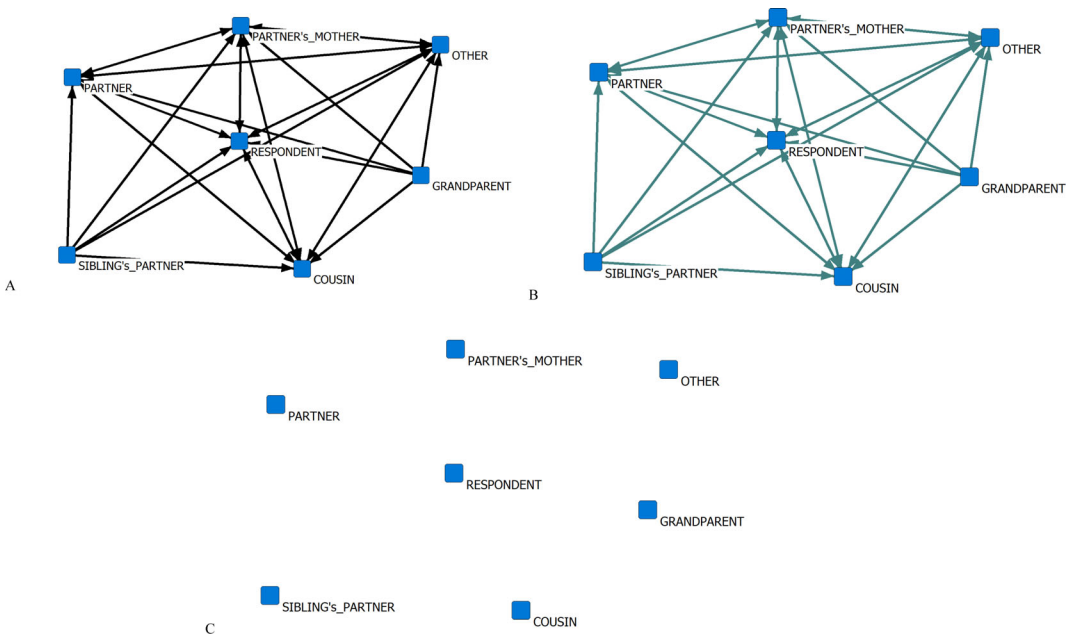

FIGURE 1 Example of a family network for (A) emotional support, (B) practical support, and (C) conflicts. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who cited each term, the average number of citations per family term, the percentage of the family term with reference to the total number of citations, and the cumulative percentages of terms. Respondents more frequently cited their partner and their children. *Partner* was the most cited term and was mentioned by 83% of the respondents. Additionally, 38% of the respondents mentioned their daughter, and 31% of the respondents cited their son. Ex-partner was also frequently mentioned, with 34% of the respondents referencing the father or mother of their child. The mention of cousins stands out among kinship members. Blood relatives, particularly parents, were not cited as often: 22% of the respondents mentioned their mother, and only 10% mentioned their father. In fact, in-law relatives were cited more frequently than the respondents' own parents. The partner's mother was mentioned by 41% of the respondents, and the partner's father was mentioned by 27% of the respondents. Citations of friends were the least common, with only 1% of the respondents mentioning their friends.

To map the main types of family networks present in the sample, we applied standard factor analysis and classification procedures to the ego-centered family network data (Widmer, 2006, 2010). To initiate the factor extraction, we conducted an initial factor analysis using principal

TABLE 1 Distribution of family terms and ranks of citations.

Family terms	Percent of respondents citing the terms	Average number of citations	Percent of terms cited	Cumulative percent of terms cited
Daughter	38	0.46	8	8
Son	31	0.38	6	14
Partner	83	1.16	19	33
Father/mother of my child	34	0.50	8	41
Mother	22	0.23	4	45
Father	10	0.11	2	47
Sister	12	0.23	4	51
Brother	6	0.06	1	52
Sibling's partner	15	0.18	3	55
Nephew/niece	18	0.22	4	59
Grandfather/grandmother	13	0.16	3	62
Uncle/aunt	29	0.32	5	67
Cousins	38	0.52	8	75
Partner's mother	41	0.49	8	83
Partner's father	27	0.34	5	88
Partner's sibling	18	0.23	4	92
Partner's child	6	0.06	0.9	93
Grandchild	3	0.03	0.5	
Friend	1	0.01	0.2	94
Mother's/father's new partner	0	0	0	
Child's new partner	0	0	0	
Another person who played a central role in the conception of my child	0	0	0	
Other terms (specified)	26	0.46	6	100

component analysis with varimax rotation on the 20 cited family terms. Empty terms were excluded from the analysis. Adhering to factor analysis practices (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996), we retained eight factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, accounting for 40% of the variance. Subsequently, employing exploratory multivariate statistical techniques (Lebart et al., 2006), we integrated the scores of these eight factors into a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's clustering algorithm. We examined solutions ranging from two to 20 clusters and ultimately selected a four-cluster solution based on consideration of interpretability and the validity of silhouette indices (Everitt et al., 2011). Table 2 shows the average number of citations for each term by type of family network, as well as the percentage of respondents developing each type of family network.

The first type of family network, the *Conjugal* type (38%), revolves around the current partner with only a few mentions of children, blood relatives, or the partner's kin. This network type was the smallest among all the network types, averaging just 3.31 members. Overall, this type reflects an exclusive approach to defining family. Interestingly, this is the most frequent type present in the sample.

The second type, the *Nuclear* type (25%), includes respondents who mentioned their children; current partner; and ex-partner, who is the father or mother of their children. Conversely, blood relatives of respondents and their partners, along with friends, were rarely mentioned.

TABLE 2 Family terms by types of family networks (average number of citations for each term, by cluster).

Family terms	Conjugal	Nuclear	Kinship	Alliance	Total	Fisher exact test
n	59	39	19	40	157	
%	38	25	12	25	100	
Daughter	0.29	0.54	0.37	0.35	0.38	2.185*
Son	0.03	1.00	0.32	0.03	0.31	191.4**
Partner	0.85	0.74	0.84	0.90	0.83	1.215
Father/mother of child	0.14	0.51	0.42	0.42	0.34	6.637**
Mother	0.19	0.21	0.32	0.22	0.22	0.48
Father	0.07	0.05	0.32	0.10	0.10	3.971**
Sister	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.12	3.705**
Brother	0.03	0.03	0.26	0.03	0.06	6.19**
Sibling's partner	0.12	0.15	0.32	0.10	0.15	1.827
Nephew/niece	0.17	0.21	0.53	0.03	0.18	8.187**
Grandparents	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.20	0.13	0.841
Uncle/aunt	0.27	0.26	0.37	0.32	0.29	0.362
Cousins	0.24	0.33	0.63	0.50	0.38	4.625**
Partner's mother	0.00	0.41	0.53	0.98	0.41	77.24**
Partner's father	0.25	0.15	0.32	0.40	0.27	2.137
Partner's sibling	0.22	0.05	0.16	0.25	0.18	2.189
Partner's child	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.06	11.03**
Grandchild	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.07	0.03	1.564
Friend	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	1.165
Others	0.24	0.26	0.37	0.25	0.26	0.438
Size	3.31	4.38	6.74	5.25	4.71	26.99**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

The *Kinship* type of the family network (12%) centers on blood relatives. It consists of respondents who cited a range of blood relatives, such as sisters, cousins, nephews, nieces, and parents. In addition to blood relatives, parents-in-law were cited more frequently than in the previous type. Notably, respondents cited their partner's mothers more often than their own mothers. The partner and children also received frequent mentions. Other family members also had frequent mentions of this type, which had the highest number of members, averaging 6.74.

Finally, the *Alliance* type of family network (25%) involved respondents who cited their partner's blood relatives. Among these networks, partners, the partner's parents, the partner's siblings, and the partner's child were the most frequently cited. Members of the family of origin, such as mothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins, were cited less often. In addition, a greater number of respondents in this group mentioned their partner compared with other types. This type comprises an average of 5.25 family members.

The types of family networks showed statistically significant associations with a series of sociodemographic variables, although some caution should be used in interpretation, as the figures on which such associations are based are rather small in some cases. Compared with respondents who identified themselves as women ($\chi^2 = 7.85$, $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = 0.26$), respondents who identified themselves as men were clearly overrepresented in the Nuclear type of family networks ($n = 60$), whereas they were underrepresented in the Kinship type ($n = 1$) and Alliance type of family networks ($n = 7$). Respondents under age 40 are overrepresented in the Alliance type ($n = 29$) and Kinship type of family networks ($n = 20$), whereas those aged over 40 are overrepresented in the Conjugal type of family networks ($n = 37$; $\chi^2 = 5.31$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .21$). Respondents with a high level of education are also overrepresented in the Alliance type of family networks ($n = 29$), although the association is only marginally significant ($\chi^2 = 53.2231$, $p < .10$, Cramer's $V = 0.17$).

Table 3 shows how indices operationalizing social capital are related to the types of family networks. Significant differences exist among the various types of family networks regarding the reception and provision of emotional and practical support, as well as the density of conflicts. The Conjugal type of family networks exhibits the lowest number of family members engaged in offering support and assistance. In this network type, respondents provide emotional and practical support to an average of only one alter, most of the time their partner. This type features a greater level of conflict than other family types.

The Nuclear type of family networks features on average two supportive family members, a similar number as the sample average. The respondents within these networks have a bonding structure. Furthermore, this family network type experiences lower conflict density than does the Conjugal type, which is in line with the sample average. Similar to the Conjugal type of family networks, this type has a limited number of significant family members and thus points to low social capital.

The Kinship type of family networks features a much greater size. Consequently, respondents of this type possess the most extensive array of family members. Such family networks also offer a greater amount of both practical and emotional support than other types. Interestingly, despite the incorporation of numerous family members, the conflict level is only average. In contrast to the previous two-family network types, the Kinship type provides a substantial level of social capital characterized by a bonding structure. Compared with the Kinship type, the Alliance type features a less extensive circle of supportive family members. Simultaneously, conflictual connections are least prevalent in the Alliance type. The absence of one's own parents is offset by the inclusion of the partner's parents. In this type, individuals provide their family members with an above-average level of social capital, amalgamating both bridging and bonding structures.

TABLE 3 Indices of social capital in the types of family networks: mean by cluster and F test.

Indices of social capital	Conjugal	Nuclear	Kinship	Alliance	Total	Fisher exact test
Indices of emotional support						
Density emotional	0.39	0.39	0.44	0.40	0.40	0.08
Indegree emotional	1.83	3.23	6.00	3.38	3.08	16.78***
Outdegree emotional	1.15	1.85	2.68	2.20	1.78	9.206**
Betweenness centrality emotional	0.08	0.06	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.21
Indices of practical support						
Density practical	0.43	0.35	0.47	0.39	0.41	0.05
Indegree practical	1.98	3.23	5.53	3.12	3.01	9.09***
Outdegree practical	1.37	1.90	3.68	2.00	1.94	4.38**
Betweenness centrality practical	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.635
Indices of conflicts						
Density conflictual	0.13	0.10	0.11	0.06	0.10	3.833*
Indegree conflictual	0.66	0.62	1.16	0.17	0.59	2.627
Outdegree conflictual	0.54	0.69	1.11	0.55	0.65	0.18
Betweenness centrality conflictual	0.02	0.01	0.05	0.00	0.02	0.992
Size	3.22	5.03	7.26	5.38	4.71	38.23***
N	59	39	19	40	157	

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study based on a sample of lesbian and gay individuals, active members of the association of same-sex families in Switzerland, reveal the prevalence of family networks that deviate from electivity and the family of choice hypothesis. Friends considered as family represent only a small percentage of significant family members compared with results from other social groups (Girardin & Widmer, 2015; Widmer, 2006, 2010). Most family networks consist mainly of partners and children, reflecting bonding family-based social capital. However, the presence of kin and voluntary family members, such as siblings and friends, is quite limited. Consequently, large family configurations in which respondents occupy a central position and manage relationships with both kin and voluntary family members—exhibiting bridging family-based social capital—are practically nonexistent in this sample.

Several explanations come to mind accounting for this result. The delayed legal recognition of same-sex marriage and parenthood in Switzerland may be one, as same-sex parenthood has remained perceived as a deviation from "normality" (Roseneil et al., 2000) and may make lesbian and gay people more secretive, withdrawn, and distrustful of those around them, including friends and blood kin. The extended nonrecognition of lesbian and gay parenthood in Switzerland (Delessert & i Escoda, 2022; Nay, 2018, 2019) leads to difficulties in day-to-day parenting practices, school contacts, grandparenting roles, and medical care (Baumle & Compton, 2015; Connolly, 2005; Rupp, 2011). Certainly, some Swiss lesbian and gay individuals are involved in more inclusive family networks predominantly with blood and in-law relatives, but they are not a majority in the sample of this study, which includes respondents who are especially sensitive to institutional family matters.

The unequal presence of blood relatives in the various types of family networks may be accounted for by gender and cohort effects (Ryser & Le Goff, 2015). Individuals identified as

men are overrepresented in the Nuclear type of family networks, characterized by a logic of exclusion. Individuals who identified as women develop more inclusive family networks in which children-in-law and parents-in-law are more frequently present. This gender difference may be related to the critical role that women play in the maintenance of social networks (Wellman, 1992). Indeed, the prevalence of women in the sample may have impacted the results because lesbian individuals tend to have larger social networks than gay men (Erosheva et al., 2016). The legal recognition of parenthood, which was more favorable to lesbian couples than to gay couples, may widen the differences between the two genders even further. Although access to assisted reproductive technology was forbidden for lesbian couples in Switzerland until summer 2022, most of those wanting to experience parenthood sought access to such technology in neighboring countries where it was permitted, enabling them to establish dual parentage through intrafamily adoption. The lesser recognition of male filiation compared with female filiation may be explained by more withdrawn and close intimate relationships between gay partners than among lesbian partners (Lewin, 2009). There is also subjective social pressure to be a "good parent" (Nay, 2015). Dealing with this normativity varies according to gender and sexual orientation. Two gay men will have to contend with social representations that qualify women as better parents than men (Hanlon, 2012). In addition, the children of LGBTQ+ parents sometimes face with stigma from their peers and other adults (Barrow & Allen, 2020).

To the same extent, cohort differences between family networks may relate to the institutional timing of the legal recognition of same-sex relationships in Switzerland. Respondents over age 40 who gained recognition as partners under the Swiss Partnership Act of 2007 place more emphasis on partner relationships and stress relationships with parents and children compared with respondents under 40. Respondents belonging to the over 40 birth cohort established and maintained their relationships in front of homophobic and stigmatizing social settings. Given the changing laws in most European countries and the legal recognition of filiation, younger cohorts of lesbian and gay people have reached adulthood in less stigmatizing social settings, in which intergenerational relationships are more likely to develop. This interpretation is confirmed by previous studies showing that parental approval of LGBTQ+ children has significantly increased in younger birth cohorts (Oswald, 2002). Our results show that lesbian and gay people under 40 years old are involved in the Alliance and Kinship family networks, characterized by bridging social capital, suggesting less normative control and social pressure. The presence of in-law relatives in the Kinship and Alliance family networks can be explained by less stigmatization of same-sex relations by partners' family members than by blood relatives. Interestingly, respondents with a high level of education are involved in more inclusive family networks, such as the Alliance, than respondents with a low educational level. Although our results show a strong correlation between the presence of blood kinship members in family networks of lesbian and gay people and the legal recognition of same-sex couples, the presence of voluntary family members is less influenced by legal recognition. "The chosen family" characterized by emotional closeness is framed as a supplement to family of origin (Hull & Ortyl, 2019). The lack of voluntary ties may also be due to the absence of transgender/queer respondents in our sample, who tend to include more friends in their networks than cisgender individuals (Hull & Ortyl, 2019). During the critical political juncture in which our survey took place, approximately 2 months before a critical vote for the legalization of same-sex parenthood in the country, it is likely that members of the partner association who completed the questionnaire felt compelled to provide responses focused on a more standard definition of family than they may have provided at other times. Interestingly, this result shows that personal definitions of family, particularly the extent to which they deviate from the nuclear family definition promoted by the institutional context, are closely linked to political and institutional developments. A longitudinal study is still needed to capture possible changes after the enactment of the law on same-sex marriage and parenthood.

These findings from the Swiss context shed light on the current discussion about the ambivalent effects of marriage and parenthood among LGBTQ+ people on their social inclusion (Drabble et al., 2020). Contrary to the expectation that the marriages and parenthood of LGBTQ+ people undermine extended family relationships and contribute to the erosion of queer identity and community—widely discussed in U.S. studies—our results, based on personal network methods (McCarty et al., 2019; Small et al., 2021), suggest that a heteronormative definition of family and a lack of friendship and community ties are not consequences of the legal recognition of marriage and parenthood. Rather, they may be the result of the delayed institutional recognition of the family rights of LGBTQ+ people in a country. In any case, the strong focus on couple in family networks of lesbian and gay people limited their access to bridging family-based social capital. Being focused on the couple or the nuclear family indeed has important consequences for family exchanges, which always carry symbolic significance (Carsten, 2004).

However, the lack of intersectionality is a limitation of our study, which is based on a rather homogenous sample of individuals strongly concerned with family issues. A recent comparative study of the life trajectories and parenting careers of cis- or transgender queer men in Switzerland and the Netherlands showed that the heterogeneity of queer parents' experiences depends on their (trans)identity, migration path, membership of a racialized minority, the ways in which the family is formed, and children conceived (Ammann, 2024). It would therefore be necessary to extend our analyses by strengthening an intersectional approach to provide social policies with more tools.

Practical implications

Family practitioners, social workers, and professionals working with LGBTQ+ people need to consider their family networks. We believe that the composition of families needs to be identified with minimal assumptions. Personal network methods (McCarty et al., 2019; Small et al., 2021) provide relevant tools for identifying meaningful family configurations of LGBTQ + people and assessing their social capital. Embeddedness in small family networks is associated with a lack of family-based social capital, a result that should be taken into account when providing services to LGBTQ+ people, especially older LGBTQ+ people, gay people, and LGBTQ+ individuals with low levels of education. Psychotherapists and medical staff working with LGBTQ+ people should be made aware of the potential limitations of their patients' family networks.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Ganjour, O., Widmer, E. D., & Roca i Escoda, M. (2025). Family networks of lesbian and gay people in Switzerland. *Family Relations*, *74*(2), 791–807. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.13124