**How do external factors and "relational reflexivity" influence the dynamics of family relations?**

What influences the quality of family relations? Why are some spouses getting divorced and others are planning for it? My hypothesis is that families are “stronger” if spouses had “relational reflexivity” (Donati, Archer 2015). This concept suggests that reflexivity can only be viewed through the relationship of people with each other and not individually. In their opinion, the biography of each person is in close contact with a significant other and a non-social world. A person is not a self-sufficient entity: he/she is a “subject in a relationship”, where social relations are in part fundamental to the personality, although it is assumed that they are not exclusively such[[1]](#footnote-1).

Sociologists of family studies conducted research about the construction of "we-relations" (relational reflexivity) in the family. By analyzingquantitative and qualitative data, scientists were able to determine the factors that influence the dynamics of relationships. One of the methods was to differentiate "relational reflexivity" into two positions of the subject: “self-detachment”, when one spouse withdraws and puts themselves in the place of the other, and “relational steering”, to understand how spouses react to various everyday situations[[2]](#footnote-2). A similar analysis will be used in this report.

**Study design**

During the longitudinal study two stages of interviews with young families who have been married for 1 to 5 years were conducted. In total, more than 80 interviews were collected in the first and second stages, which is a total of 40 couples. The gap between the first and second interviews is 1-2 years was made to consider the experience during the pandemic.

In this work I use the case study method, which is supposed to analyze 8 interviews (4 in the first, 4 in the second) with two young families to identify "relational reflexivity". What contributes to it, and what, on the contrary, interferes with its occurrence?

The characteristics of both couples have more similarities than differences, and the dynamics of relationships in the two families are significantly different. First interviews were more positive and included questions of personal biography, parental family, education, history of acquaintance and marriage, attitude to marriage, divorce, etc. Second interviews contained questions about the current life of the respondents, changes after the first interview, assessment of the relationship between spouses, financial issues, etc.

At the conference, I want to compare how the spouses assess their relationship in each couple according to the results of the first and second interviews: how family life began, what was important in the relationship then and now, how they treated marriage, how attention was shown to each other, how difficulties were overcome, etc., in order to understand what role “relational reflexivity” plays in each particular family and whether it can contribute to family relationships.

**Conclusions**

When comparing the two families, it can be assumed that the presence of "relational reflexivity" affects the quality of relationships and contributes to the stability of the marriage. The more often partners take the position of "detachment from myself" (I am in the position of the Other) and try to "manage relationships", showing attention to destabilizing situations (changing jobs, managing stressors in relationships, solving joint problems, etc.), the stronger their union is. The opposition of "relational reflexivity" can be "individualism", i.e. when the family lacks support and attention towards each other and everyone solves problems alone, which can lead to discord in the family and affect its future.

1. Pierpaolo Donati and Margaret S. Archer. Relational subject // Cambridge University Press. 2015. P. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Moscatellia M., Ferrari C., Parise M., Serrano C., Carrà E., “Constructing the We”: Relational Reflexivity of Couples with Children in Italy. A Mixed-Method Study/Marriage & Family Review. 2021. P. 1-30 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2021.1997873> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)