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Perception and Evaluation of Changes across the Life Course: A Swiss - Argentinian comparison

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CEVIE international research program:

- University of Geneva, Switzerland: Center for Interdisciplinary Gerontology & Department of Sociology
- National University of Luján, Argentina: Program « NEFERI », Department of Social Sciences
- Latin-American Faculty for Social Sciences (FLACSO), Buenos Aires, Argentina: Project « Ageing and Society »

QUESTIONS

- What is the occurrence and the nature of perceived changes at different stages of the life course?
- What is the gain/loss dynamic across the life course when participants evaluate their changes?
- How are specific types of changes assessed in terms of gains/losses?
- What are the similarities and differences between two different socio-cultural environments (Switzerland and Argentina)?

METHOD

Data collected in Geneva (November 2003) and Buenos Aires (May-June 2004). In each country, people of five age-groups (20-24, 35-39, 50-54, 65-69, 80-84 years) answered the open-ended question presented below. N=622 in Switzerland, N=579 in Argentina.

Non-random sample, stratified by gender. Face-to-face interviews.

QUESTIONNAIRE

During the last year, did any significant change occur in your life ?

- Yes ?
- No ?

If yes, please describe briefly each change and evaluate it.

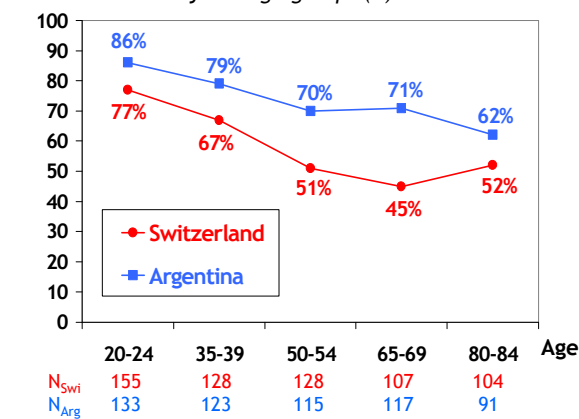
- Change 1:

Gain ? ; Loss ? ; Both ? ; Neither ? ; Don't know ?

etc.

RESULTS 1: Occurrence of changes

Figure 1: People reporting at least one change by country and age-groups (%)



RESULTS 2: Type of perceived changes

Table 1: Perceived changes by country and domains (column % and rank)

Domain	Switzerland		Argentina	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Family/couple (marriage, birth of child...)	17	1	22	1
Work (first job, layoff, retirement...)	15	2	20	2
Health (illness, surgery, hospitalization...)	12	4	13	3
Education (starting school, graduation...)	11	5	10	4
Residence (migration, nursing home...)	15	2	6	7
Death (death of a loved one)	6	7	8	6
Finances (financial difficulty, purchase...)	3	10	9	5
Activities (hobby, sport, journey...)	6	7	4	8
Self (religious experience, identity crisis...)	5	9	4	8
Friendships (making new friend, quarrel...)	3	10	2	10
Miscellaneous	7	6	2	10
Number of changes	770		1124	

Table 2: The five most frequently mentioned domains of change by country and age-groups (%)

Country	Age	Domains (%)				
		20-24	35-39	50-54	65-69	80-84
Switzerland	Education	20	27	31	26	41
	Residence	19	22	13	17	18
	Family/c.	16	11	10	15	12
	Work	10	8	8	13	10
	Activities	9	6	7	7	7
Argentina	Others	26	26	31	22	12
	Total	100	100	100	100	100
	Work	24	23	25	21	28
	Family/c.	22	21	24	21	24
	Education	19	12	12	16	19
Switzerland	Residence	8	11	11	12	6
	Finances	5	11	8	10	5
	Others	22	20	20	20	18
	Total	100	100	100	100	100

RESULTS 3: Evaluation of perceived changes

Figures 2: Subjective evaluation of perceived changes by country and age-groups (%)

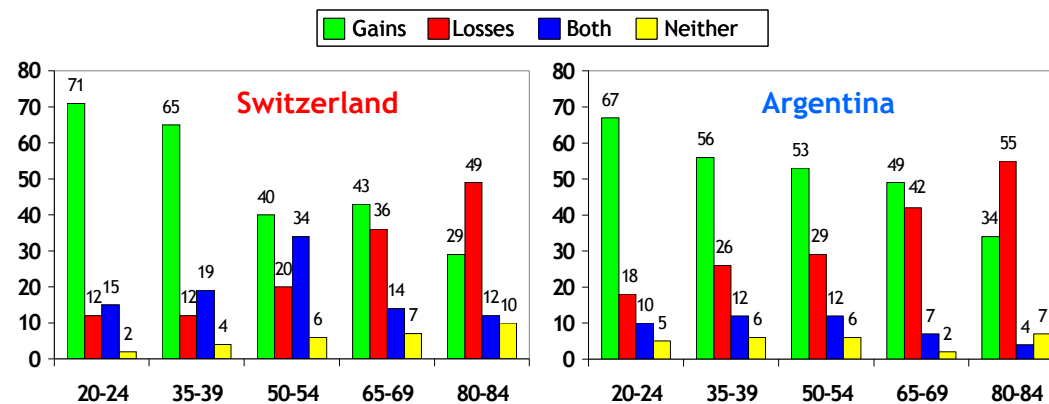


Table 3: Subjective evaluation of the seven most frequently mentioned domains of change by country

Domain		Gain	Loss	Both	Neit.	Total
		Family/couple	Swi 72	5	17	6
	Arg 73	12	8	7	100	
Work	Swi	61	14	22	3	100
	Arg	61	19	16	4	100
Health	Swi	20	52	19	9	100
	Arg	21	62	6	11	100
Education	Swi	77	7	12	4	100
	Arg	87	9	2	2	100
Residence	Swi	51	14	30	5	100
	Arg	47	25	24	4	100
Death	Swi	7	76	17	0	100
	Arg	0	98	2	0	100
Finances	Swi	52	29	15	4	100
	Arg	48	36	12	4	100

CONCLUSIONS

• More young persons than old people report at least one change. In Switzerland, the old-old mentioned more changes than the young-old.

• Age affects directly the nature of the reported changes. The distribution of changes by domains suggests that the life course pattern is quite similar in Switzerland and Argentina (however, economic changes are more frequent in the latter country).

• In both countries, gains (a) greatly outnumber losses in the first three age-groups, (b) are as frequent as losses among the young-old, and (c) are quite rare in very old age. Ambivalent ratings are used more often in Switzerland (especially among fifty-year old) than in Argentina.

• An original feature of this study is to ask participants for a subjective evaluation of their life changes.