Is Blood Thicker Than Water?
Comparing Social Support from Nuclear, Extended, and Chosen Families Across Twenty-Seven Countries

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Abstract

In recent years, social scientists have renewed attention to the role of extended kinship in life-course events and inequalities. In this literature, kinship is implicitly defined through genealogical ties, assuming that social relations defined through chains of parental and marital connections generate social obligations that have primacy over other social ties, as reflected in the saying "blood is thicker than water." Anthropological research has challenged this view, suggesting instead that kinship is rooted in social roles and practices. Ethnographic research on chosen families, fictive kinship, and disrupted family networks, highlighted that the functional, symbolic, and cultural element of kinship could exist independently of bio-legal links. This article examines whether bio-legal relationships are proxies of the functional elements attributed to kinship in western societies. First, it advances a functional definition and operationalisation of kinship detached from bio-legal assumption: the primary expectation of social support. Second, using survey data from 27 countries, it explores whether bio-legal relationships align with individual primary expectations of support for material and emotional needs. Findings suggest that while nuclear family members are the primary sources of support, friends and community strongly surpass the extended family. Moreover, individuals missing close family members are most likely to compensate through non-bio-legal ties rather than more distant relatives. These results challenge reliance on bio-legal networks in socio-demographic research and advocate redefining kinship to better reflect contemporary realities and the diverse experiences of kinship.

Introduction

In recent decades, social scientists have taken a renewed interest in kinship ties beyond the household and the nuclear family, particularly the structure and resources of the extended family as foundations of inequalities and determinants of life-course events (Bengtson, 2001; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; Mare, 2011; Verdery, 2015; Daw et al., 2016; Caswell, 2019; Park et al., 2019; Verdery et al., 2019; Furstenberg, 2020; Alburez-Gutierrez et al., 2020; Andersson & Kolk, 2023; Sohn, 2023; Barclay & Conley, 2024). In this growing literature, kinship and the extended family have been implicitly defined through genealogical links, meaning consecutive chains of births and marriages extending beyond primary relatives

This growing sociodemographic interest in kinship reflects the belief that genealogical ties uniquely identify webs of individuals within the broader population, with the assumption that those connected through such ties are bound by an unquestionable duty to support one another. This understanding assumes that familial relationships based on "blood" and "marriage" entail social obligations that are stronger and take priority over other relationship in society, an assumption expressed by the popular belief that "blood is thicker than water." Thus, the number and proximity of extended kin are seen as indicators of the availability of some sort of unconditional social support stemming from the underlying bio-legal[1] relationships[2].

This assumption has been the object of a longstanding anthropological debate which, starting in the 1960s, sought to denaturalised the study of kinship, by questioning the role of sex, procreation, and the rearing of children as the “universal raw material” forming systems of kinship. Like the study of gender, Kinship studies have been critiqued for their tendency to analytically presuppose social differences as an inherent, presocial reality—treating it as existing independently of cultural processes.

However, this assumption has been questioned by a long-standing anthropological debate and extensive ethnographic research, which suggests that kinship is shaped more by the ongoing effort to nurture relationships than by biological or legal links (Carsten, 2004). Cultural anthropologists from the 1970s and 1980s challenged the notion of family as a universally fixed category determined by biology (Schneider, 1968, 1984; Stack, 1974; Strathern, 1992; Franklin & McKinnon, 2001; Carsten, 2000, 2003; Sahlins, 2013). Their research emphasized that kinship is culturally constructed, suggesting familial ties are not simply inherited but "done"—actively created and maintained through social practices. This shift highlighted the centrality of non-biological relationships in providing social support, particularly, but not exclusively, in contexts where traditional family forms have been altered or disrupted. These relationships, often referred to as "chosen families" or "intentional families," are defined by voluntary exchange, commitment, and mutual support rather than by blood or legal bonds.

Despite research showing that who people actually consider family does not always align with the genealogical grid (Stack, 1974; Chatters et al., 1994; Weston, 1997; Taylor, 2013, 2022), recent

[1] The term biological here is not used to refer to the actual share of biological substance or genetic material between relatives but rather to the social recognition of the presumption of biological relationships or their simulation (e.g., adoption) which in western societies have generally been symoblised by the sharing of biological substance such as blood or genes.

[2] A related but substantively different research agenda has correlated socio-economic and demographic outcomes of vertical and horizontal distant kin to investigate the multigenerational persistence of social inequalities (e.g., Hällsten & Kolk, 2023; Minardi et al., 2024). Despite adopting similar approaches, this literature it is not based on the same assumption as studies on the presence and extension of kinship network. In this works, distant kin are taken as proxy of similar social origin and socialisation processes rather than primary obligations. The more distant the relatives’ correlations the more persistent inequalities are across generations.

quantitative social science research continues to focus largely on kin defined through birth and marriage. A population-wide formal exploration of the extent to which bio-legal relations take precedence over other social bonds is still lacking. The question of whether bio-legal kin are a privileged source of support in contemporary societies remains unsettled.

The disjunction between the genealogical framework and the actual patterns of social support arising from it has consequences. Many marginalized groups—based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and migration background—are characterized by disrupted bio-legal networks but extensive voluntary families. Consequently, a bio-essentialist definition of family results in important measurement issues, misrepresenting actual patterns of social support and the actual family structures as they are lived and perceived by individuals (Furstenberg et al., 2020; Sanner et al., 2021; Timmermans & Prickett, 2022; Fish et al., 2024). Moreover, a misalignment between genealogical expectations and actual support patterns implies that researchers may not be measuring what they intend to. This is especially relevant in contemporary societies, where migration processes have distanced most individuals from their families of birth (Bryceson, 2019), and growing family diversity blurs the boundaries of who is considered and act as "family" (Furstenberg, 1987; Timmermans & Prickett, 2022).

This paper addresses this gap by empirically examining whether individuals expect bio-legal relationships to be stronger and take priority over other relationships. It explores an alternative definition and operationalization of relatedness based on *primary expectations of social support*, allowing for the observation of family-like links even without bio-legal ties. Building on this functional definition of relatedness, it investigates whether relationship defined through the genealogical grid really have priority over other non-bio-legal ties. Using survey data that captures individuals' primary expected sources of social support—whether for everyday needs, extraordinary economic help, or emotional support—the study tests the extent to which different categories of bio-legal ties serve as a reliable proxy for primary social support compared to non-bio-legal relationships across 27 countries.

The analysis first examines the distribution of reliance on different categories of kin and non-kin, noting cross-country variations and differences by age. It then explores whether the absence of close family ties leads individuals to rely more on distant relatives, in-laws, or non-kin for support. The findings indicate that while the nuclear family remains a key source of social support, friends, neighbours, and coworkers surpass extended family (secondary and in-law relatives) as primary sources of social assistance. Regression analyses further reveal that individuals without close relatives are more likely to turn to friends or acquaintances than extended family members.

These findings challenge the long-standing assumption that biological kinship reliably predicts social support and that bio-legal extended kinship functions as a social safety net. Instead, they suggest that family ties, especially in support networks, are constructed through social relationships rather than predetermined by biological or legal connections. This calls for a more inclusive approach to studying kinship and family-like ties, particularly among populations that lack traditional bio-legal kin but remain embedded in rich networks of voluntary kinship. Finally, the article discusses implications for data collection and empirical research.

Blood is Thicker than Water: Kinship as a Bio-Legal Link and Its Assumptions

The idea that a greater number of blood and in-law relatives would, on average, result in greater social support has been a foundational assumption in much of the literature mapping individual genealogical networks and their effects on life outcomes. The premise is that individuals

connected by consecutive chains of births and marriages have obligations toward one another that are more binding and primary than those owed to other members of society.

In his seminal critique to the study of kinship as a universal social phenomenon rooted in biology, Schneider (1986, p. 165) highlighted the implications of this assumption: “Because ‘Blood Is Thicker Than Water,’ kinship consists in bonds on which kinsmen can depend and which are compelling and stronger than, and take priority over, other kinds of bonds. These bonds are in principle unquestioned and unquestionable. They are states of being, not of doing or performance—that is, the grounds for the bonds ‘exist’ or they do not, the bond of kinship ‘is’ or ‘is not,’ it is not contingent or conditional, and performance is presumed to follow automatically if the bond ‘exists.’” This assumption is often implicit, taken for granted, sometimes briefly mentioned, but never tested or formally explored.

From this premise, quantitative social scientists and demographers begin with the observation of heterosexual reproduction and from there construct extensiive bio-legal kinship networks. The underlying assumption is that these chains of births and heterosexual unions identify individuals who hold social relevance for one another. For instance, if we did not expect cousins to hold social significance, there would be little reason to map their existence.

The idea that social obligations and their strength follow from shared biological substance and legal ties has specific implications for expected patterns of social support, resulting in a clear and testable model.

First, the degree of consanguinity is expected to be linearly correlated with the intensity of social obligations. As Schneider (1986, p. 173) stated, “Kinship consists in bonds on which one can more or less depend, which are more or less compelling and take more or less priority over other kinds of bonds, and so on. The qualifier depends on degrees of closeness. Degrees of closeness can be calculated in various ways. Primary relatives are closer than secondary, secondary are closer than tertiary, and so on. Civil law, canon law, and genetics provide other modes of calculating closeness and distance, but for the problem at hand, the differences between these methods are irrelevant. All depend on the assumption that what has been called "‘genealogical distance’ is a crucial variable in the strength of the bond of kinship, and genealogical distance is a measure of the magnitude of the biological component and hence the strength of the bond.”

If a genealogical model holds in a specific society, we would expect close relatives to be the first line of support, followed by more distant ones, until consanguinity is no longer recognized (usually at the 2nd or 3rd degree), after which friends and acquaintances step in. In this model, relatedness is generally defined as the number of steps through births and marriages that link ego to another person. The fewer the steps, the stronger the "thickness" of the link.

A second expectation is that when a network is severed, for example, when a close relative is missing, individuals will replace that tie with the next closest genealogical relationship. This is reflected in much of the literature on single parenthood's influence on children's outcomes, which stress as a compensatory factor and moderator of the lack of a partner the presence of another family member, usually a grandparent (DeLeire & Kalil, 2002; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007; Hogendoorn & Härkönen, 2023).

Another important assumption that derives from a bio-legal perspective is the static nature of kin ties. If kinship ties are rooted in immutable biological connections, then they can only be severed through the end of these links, which can occur only through death. However, kinship relationships can change over the life course for several reasons, including migration or emotional detachment. This rationale is behind the term "chosen families" (Weston, 1997), introduced in a seminal study of LGBT communities in San Francisco. Weston observed that many community members experienced an erosion of their biological bonds and created family-like relationships

within their communities. While these voluntary kin ties were defined through a complex process of cultural and symbolic representation, expectations of practical, emotional, and economic support were central components.

Beyond Bio-Legal Ties: Kin Ties as Primary Resources of Social Support

The anthropological study of kinship underwent significant shifts since the 1970s and 80s following David Schneider's critique of the genealogical model. In "A Critique of the Study of Kinship" (1984), Schneider questioned the assumption that ties arising from procreation and marriage had universal cultural significance. He argued that kinship theory had long been built upon Euro-American folk assumptions, particularly the idea that biological connections, such as those between parents and children, formed the natural basis of kinship systems worldwide. This view, summarized by the adage "blood is thicker than water," implied that biological reproduction formed the core of all kinship relations. According to Schneider, this biological bias distorted the study of non-Western societies by imposing a Western framework that privileged procreation and blood ties. Instead, he advocated for a focus on the symbols, meanings, and practices through which different cultures construct and understand kinship.

This critique laid the foundation for a new approach to kinship that focuses not on biological or legal ties, but on the social processes that create and sustain familial relationships. Schneider's rejection of the universality of genealogical structures opened the door for anthropologists to explore forms of kinship that are not predicated on procreation, even within Western societies. These explorations led scholars to examine how kinship is "done" or performed through social interactions, mutual obligations, and emotional support, rather than something simply given by birth or law.

The work of scholars studying non-biological or "fictive" kinship highlights the central role of support in defining kin relationships. Ethnographic studies have shown how mutual and primary expectation of social support are a crucial component of what people in many context define as family, regardless of the strength or presence of bio-legal ties. For example, research on marginalized communities in the United States has demonstrated how people create kinship ties with non-relatives who fulfil the roles traditionally associated with family members, such as childcare, economic or emotional support.

One of the earliest studies focusing on Western societies that decoupled the bio-legal family from individuals' perception of family and who actually performs family function, was Carol Stack's "All Our Kin" (1974). Stack examines kinship networks in an impoverished African American community, illustrating how people form extensive support networks that include many non-bio-legal relatives who are treated as kin, while many bio-legal relatives are completely excluded and irrelevant. These networks are vital for economic survival, child-rearing, and emotional support, and they operate on principles of reciprocity and mutual aid. She not only highlighted that many non-bio-legal relationships performed traditional family function, but also that many "non-kin. . . conduct their social relations within the idiom of kinship" (p.40).

Her in depth ethnography drove her to define "'family' as the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival. The family network is diffused over several kin-based households, and fluctuations in household composition do not significantly affect cooperative familial arrangements. The culturally specific definitions of certain concepts such as family, kin, parent, and friend that emerged during this study made much of the subsequent analysis possible. An arbitrary imposition of widely

accepted definitions of the family, the nuclear family, or the matrifocal family blocks the way to understanding how people in The Flats describe and order the world in which they live" (p. 30).

Similarly, Kath Weston's Families We Choose (1991) explores kinship among gay and lesbian communities in San Francisco, where individuals often form "chosen families" that provide the emotional and material support typically associated with bio-legal families. Weston's research reveals that the defining characteristic of these chosen families is not biological relatedness, but the expectation of care and support over time. The formation of these families reflects a deliberate rejection of the primacy of blood ties in favor of relationships based on mutual commitment and shared experiences. For many individuals in these communities, chosen families are the primary source of support, and the bonds between members are as strong as, or stronger than, those found in biological families.

Both Stack and Weston's ethnographic work underscores the idea that kinship is fundamentally about the expectations of support that individuals have for one another. These expectations are not inherently tied to biological relationships; rather, they are socially constructed and maintained through shared obligations and reciprocal care. In these contexts, kinship is "done" through actions that demonstrate care and responsibility, rather than being something passively inherited through birth. These same dynamics have been observed to a wide range of communiteis and demographic groups, such as elderly (Rae, 1992; Johnson, 1999, Allen, 2011) or migrants (Vivas-romero, 2020; Taylor, 2022)

The implication of these findings is that kinship can be more accurately defined by the roles that individuals play in each other's lives, rather than by their biological or legal status. This shift toward a functional understanding of kinship emphasizes the primacy of social support as the key marker of kin relationships. If we strip away the biological and legal components of kinship, what remains is the expectation of unconditional care and support from those considered kin. This functional definition aligns with the reality that many people experience in their everyday lives, where family ties are often defined by who provides care, rather than by who shares their genetic material.

This perspective has significant implications for how we measure and analyze kinship. Primary expectations of support provide a clear, measurable link that can serve as an alternative to biological ties in the study of kinship. Rather than focusing on genealogical connections, researchers can assess kinship based on who individuals rely on for emotional, financial, and practical support. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of kinship that reflects the diversity of familial arrangements in contemporary society. Furthermore, measuring kinship through support expectations provides a way to test the adequacy of the genealogical grid in capturing the full range of support relationships that people experience.

Data

The empirical exploration relies on the 2001 wave of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), collected across 27 countries. It is the only cross-national survey collecting detailed information on individuals' primary support references, disaggregated by kin and acquaintance categories. It also gathers information on the actual existence of a respondent's kin, from close to distant relatives.

The main survey questions on social support ask respondents who their first two go-to contacts are in case of three specific support domains: housework, economic, and emotional support. The exact survey questions ask: (1) "Suppose you had the flu and had to stay in bed for a few days and needed help around the house, with shopping, and so on. Who would you turn to first for help? And who would you turn to second?"; (2) "Now, suppose you needed to borrow a large sum of money.

Who would you turn to first for help? And who would you turn to second?"; (3) "Now suppose you felt just a bit down or depressed, and you wanted to talk about it. Who would you turn to first for help? And who would you turn to second?"

Response options included "Husband, Wife, Partner"; "Mother"; "Father"; "Daughter"; "Daughter-in-law"; "Son"; "Son-in-law"; "Sister"; "Brother"; "Other blood relative"; "Other in-law relative"; "Close friend"; "Neighbour"; "Someone you work with"; "Someone at a social services agency"; "Someone you pay to help"; "Someone else"; "No one." The responses for economic support also included "God-parent"; "Employer"; "Government or a social agency"; "A bank or credit union"; "A private money lender." Responses for emotional support further included "Priest or member of the clergy"; "Family doctor"; "A psychologist or another professional counselor"; "A self-help group."

To facilitate interpretation, these responses were grouped into larger categories: Partner; Child; Parents; Siblings (who together identify primary relatives); In-law; Other blood relatives (who together identify secondary relatives); Close friends; Neighbors or co-workers (who together identify non-bio-legal relationships); Formal help; No one; Someone else.

The empirical analysis starts by mapping the share of respondents who consider each relationship as a primary source of support for the whole sample, by country, and across ages. The primary intent is to compare secondary relatives to non-bio-legal relationships. This is first investigated for the full sample and then disaggregated by country to assess societal variations.

The second set of analyses consists of a series of linear probability models regressing the probability of being considered one of the top two support references for each of the eight categories in response to the absence of a bio-legal relative or group of relatives, adjusted for age and country. Models are estimated for individuals aged 35 to 55. In other words, the analysis asks what the effect is of not having a parent (or a sibling, cousin, etc.) on the probability of considering another category (e.g., a sibling, parent, cousin, or friend) a primary source of support. This set of models explicitly tests the assumption of progressive linear support—whether the lack of a closer relative is compensated by expectations being shifted to the next closest bio-legal relative or someone else entirely.

Average and Cross-Country Differences in Support Expectations

Figure 1 maps the percentage of individuals reporting each relationship category among the top two primary resources for each support domain for the full sample, with detailed disaggregation by country available in the appendix (Figure A1 to A3). Figure 2 shows a formal comparison of the extent to which non-bio-legal categories are more relevant than distant relatives across all countries.

Categories in Figure 1 are further separated through different colors into broader classes of relatives to facilitate interpretation: Close relatives, Distant relatives, Formal help, Non-bio-legal relationships, No one, or Someone else.

The first immediate conclusion is the centrality of the nuclear family, which, of all informal relationships, represents the most frequent source of primary social support for housework and extraordinary economic support. Beyond personal informal relationships, in cases of extraordinary economic support, individuals were most likely to ask formal help (such as banks or other institutions) or even no one at all. A partner is unsurprisingly the first option in all categories except economic support, which is justifiable by shared economic resources.

Non-bio-legal relationships are, in all domains, the second most frequent source of primary social support. In the case of emotional support, they are second only to partners.

In every domain, extended family (other blood relatives and in-laws) falls behind all other social or bio-legal relationships. Both in-laws and other blood relatives are less commonly identified as primary sources of support than more distant relationships, such as "neighbors or coworkers." In terms of small housework or emotional support, people are more likely to ask no one than to ask distant blood relatives. The population-wide primacy of non-bio-legal relationships over extended bio-legal relatives, as well as the low expectations of support from distant relatives, casts doubt on the relevance of the extended family as a socially significant category in terms of social support. Close friends and communities are, for most people, a much more immediate source of help.

This holds true for all the countries analyzed. Figure 2 shows the relationship between the share of individuals who declare "other blood relatives" among their primary sources and those who declare "close friends" or "neighbors or co-workers." Any point above the forty-five-degree line suggests that individuals in that country are more likely to report non-bio-legal relationships than distant blood relatives as primary sources of support, a pattern observed in all the countries and domains of social support analyzed.

Consanguinity and bio-legal kinship do not linearly predict social support, casting doubt on bio-essentialist models and the ability of the genealogical grid to approximate social ties.

Fixing the Broken Web

Close relatives emerge as the most important source of support, which is expected given the cultural, legal, and economic centrality given to the household and nuclear family in all the societies analyzed. Consequently, individuals with living, proximate relatives are, of course, more likely to rely on them.

Figures 3 to 5 show who the most frequent sources of primary social support are for individuals missing specific bio-legal relationships. Missing a bio-legal relative can mean several things: their death (as with parents), their absence due to them never being born, or their absence due to a missing genealogical link (for instance, one cannot have in-laws without a partner or cousins without an aunt or uncle). Impossible or extremely unlikely coefficients are not estimated—for example, the impact of not having in-laws on the likelihood of relying on a partner is not estimated because those without a partner cannot have in-laws. All coefficients are estimated controlling for age and country for individuals aged 35 to 55.

Figure 3 shows the association between the lack of a bio-legal relative and the likelihood of considering each other group for support in housework. Missing a partner has the most significant effect on every category, and missing all relatives that follow from having a partner also is highly correlated with many outcomes. In general, missing a close relative has a large and significant effect on the probability of considering other close relatives, friends, and neighbors or coworkers as primary sources. In contrast, the association with the likelihood of relying on other blood relatives and in-laws is close to zero. The association between not having a parent and the likelihood of relying on a close friend or a neighbour/coworker is comparable to relying on a sibling, highlighting the centrality of bio-legal ties. Finally, there is a strong negative relationship between missing a secondary relative and the likelihood of relying on a partner, which is partly but not exclusively mediated by the likelihood of having a partner.

Figure 4 shows similar patterns for the likelihood of considering each category a primary source of extraordinary economic support. The lack of close relatives increases the likelihood of considering other close relatives and the likelihood of considering friends and other acquaintances, but this is never compensated for by more distant relatives.

Finally, Figure 5 shows how people respond to missing bio-legal ties in terms of emotional support. Here, the lack of a partner is the most important factor, mostly compensated by close friends, followed by close relatives, but once again never by distant relatives.

Overall, the results suggest that non-primary bio-legal relatives rarely emerge as primary sources of social support when more proximate links of support are severed or non-existent. Instead, individuals lacking the most common primary sources of support are more likely to compensate with non-bio-legal relationships, mostly friends but also neighbors or coworkers.

Discussion and Implications for Data Collection and Empirical Research

The first result from this exploratory study is that, across the many countries analyzed, for most people, the primary source of social support is a member of the nuclear family. This reflects the primary role given in social sciences to the study of "the family," understood as the closest bio-legal relatives. The nuclear family's primary role is driven by the many economic and social functions it performs as a basic institution of contemporary societies.

However, this is a population-wide result. One of the key messages from the anthropological literature cited is that the greatest divergence in terms of bio-legal relationships and social support is expected in specific subgroups, for whom family relations are severed or unreliable for various reasons. Existing ethnographic research has identified Black American families, LGBTQI+ families, and migrants. Unfortunately, the data at hand does not allow for the distinction of these groups. A crucial development of this study would be to investigate the overlap between bio-legal and social relationships across subgroups to test the extent to which differences in bio-legal family composition appropriately predict the social stratification of family support.

Regarding the growing interest of quantitative social research in broader kinship networks and the extended family, this study suggests that distant blood relatives and in-laws rarely serve as primary sources of social support and rarely play an important role for individuals lacking more typical sources of familial support. These results run contrary to expectations derived from bio-legal models, which would expect primary expectations of support to be associated with genealogical closeness in terms of chains of births and marriages. More distant relatives should, according to these models, be the first to compensate for the loss of primary relatives.

Instead, for the general population, people identified by the survey categories of close friends, neighbours, or coworkers take priority over more distant bio-legal relatives. Non-bio-legal relationships also emerge as the first "replacement" for individuals lacking close relatives.

Once again, a key objective for future studies is to investigate how this comparison plays out in subgroups with atypical family structures and relationships. Existing ethnographic research suggests that these dynamics may be even more evident in specific subgroups.

These results have important implications for studies on the social stratification of family diversity and structures. First, they highlight that missing close or distant relatives is not necessarily associated with a lack of first-line support sources. Inferring that single-parent, single, or lone individuals are disadvantaged in terms of social resources can be highly misleading, as individuals can rely on other equally "thick" relationships, indistinguishable from families in all relevant characteristics. This is even more relevant given that qualitative literature has highlighted that intentional families are most common among groups typically characterized by unstable bio-legal family structures.

More problematic are studies mapping population networks of extended families and social stratification in the availability of kin beyond primary relatives. As the results from this study show, extended families are rarely of primary relevance to individuals. Social inequalities in extended

family networks do not necessarily represent social inequalities in support networks. In general, the primacy that many non-bio-legal relationships have over more distant relatives questions the rationale for considering the extended family, defined through bio-legal links, as a salient social category or an analytical concept for social analysis.

One of the main takeaways of this article is that researchers should be aware of the distinction between the relationships they investigate and the social functions they assume these relationships perform. Therefore, rather than exclusively asking individuals who their living relatives are and what contact they have with them, surveys should also collect information on the social functions they expect kin to perform, ask respondents who actually performs those functions in their lives, and assess how easy it is for them to find that kind of support. If kinship is measured as a proxy for specific types of social support, a direct measure of the availability of social support would provide a much more precise and appropriate measure.

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Figure 1 Percentage of individuals reporting each relationship category among the top two primary resources for each support domain for the full sample (sampling weights applied)

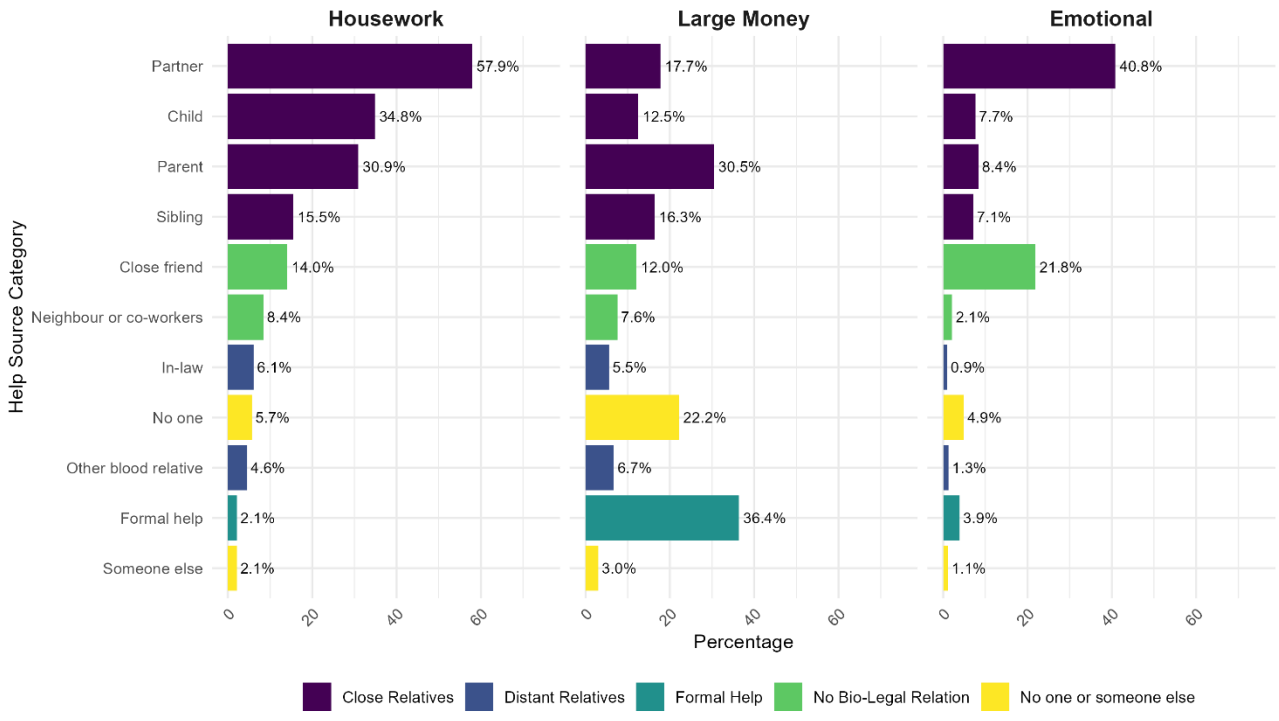


Figure 2 relationship between the share of individuals who declare “other blood relatives” among their primary sources and those who declare “close friends” or “neighbours or co-workers” by country (sampling weights applied)

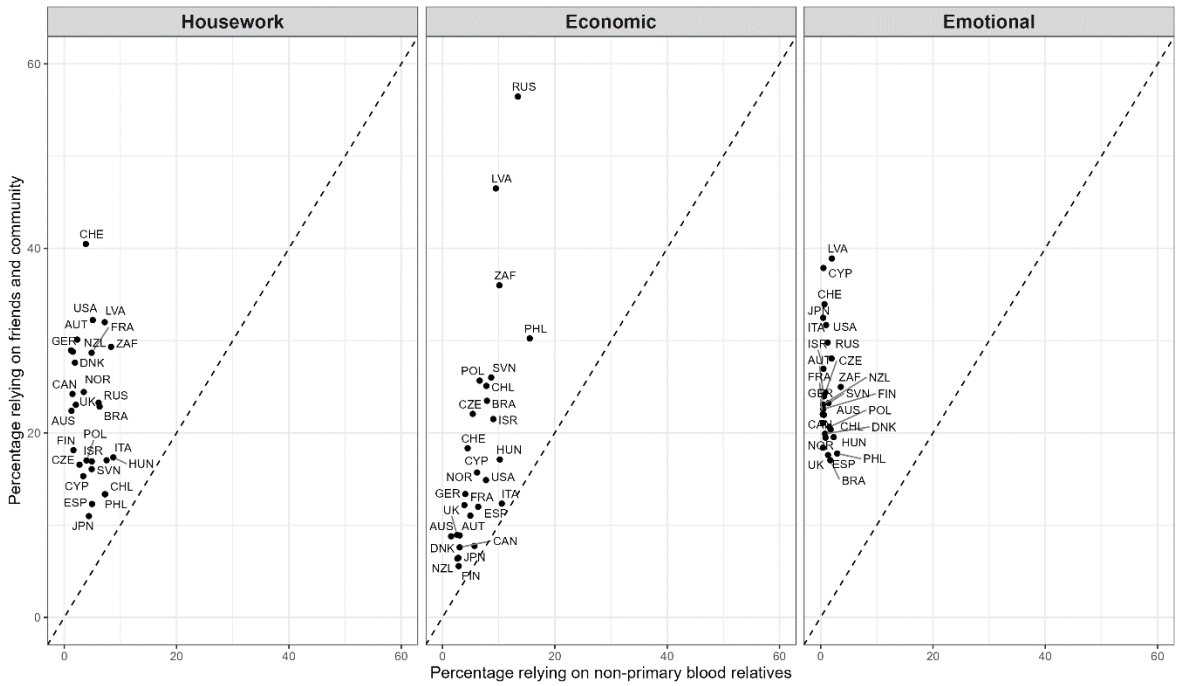


Figure 3 Results from multiple linear probability models regressing dummies indicating the presence of the relationship category (box title) among the top two references for housework support on dummies indicating the absence of a relative of group of relative (x-axis). Coefficients adjusted by age and country; sampling weights applied.

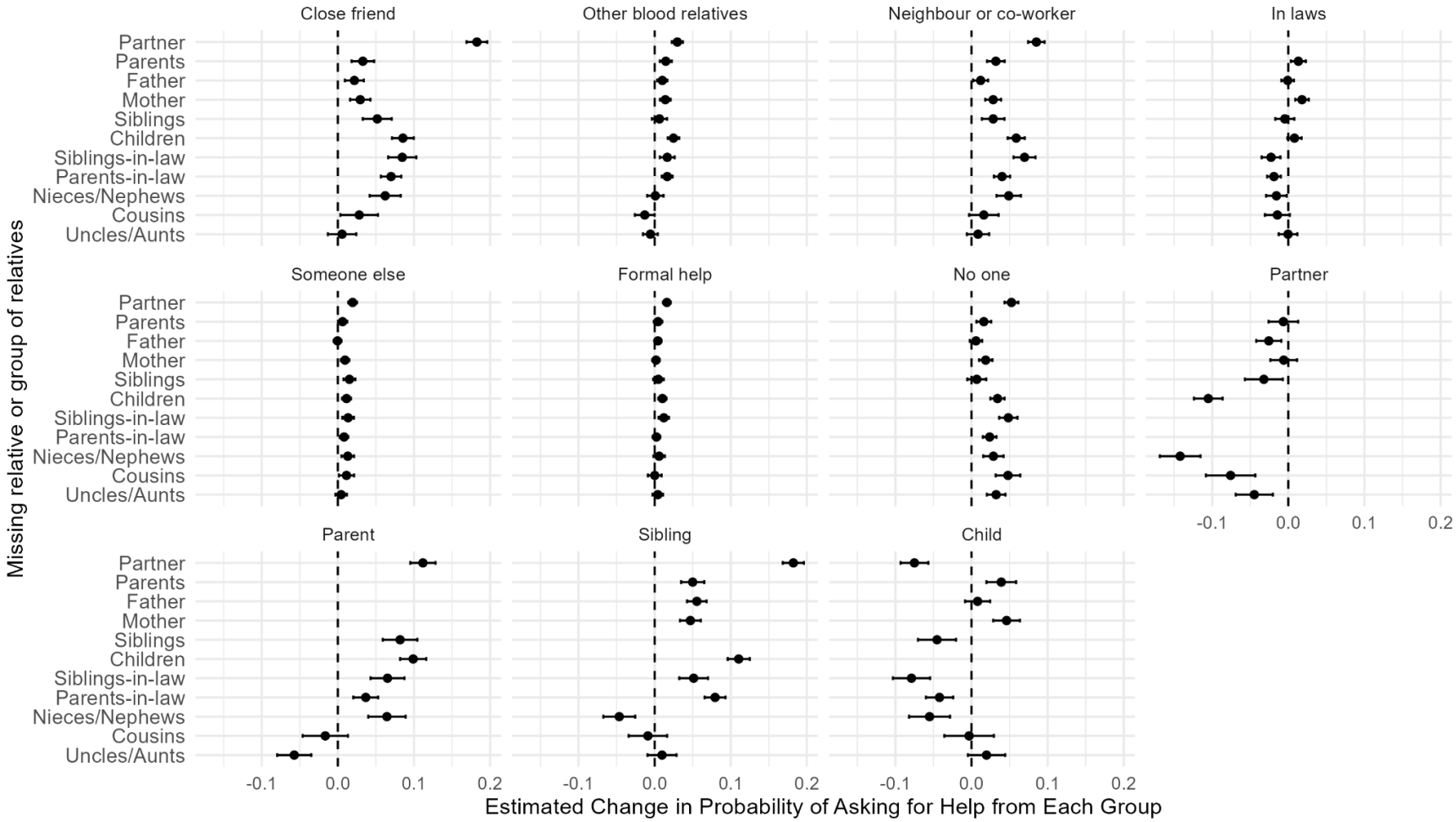


Figure 4 Results from multiple linear probability models regressing dummies indicating the presence of the relationship category (box title) among the top two references for extraordinary economic support on dummies indicating the absence of a relative of group of relative (x-axis). Coefficients adjusted by age and country; sampling weights applied.

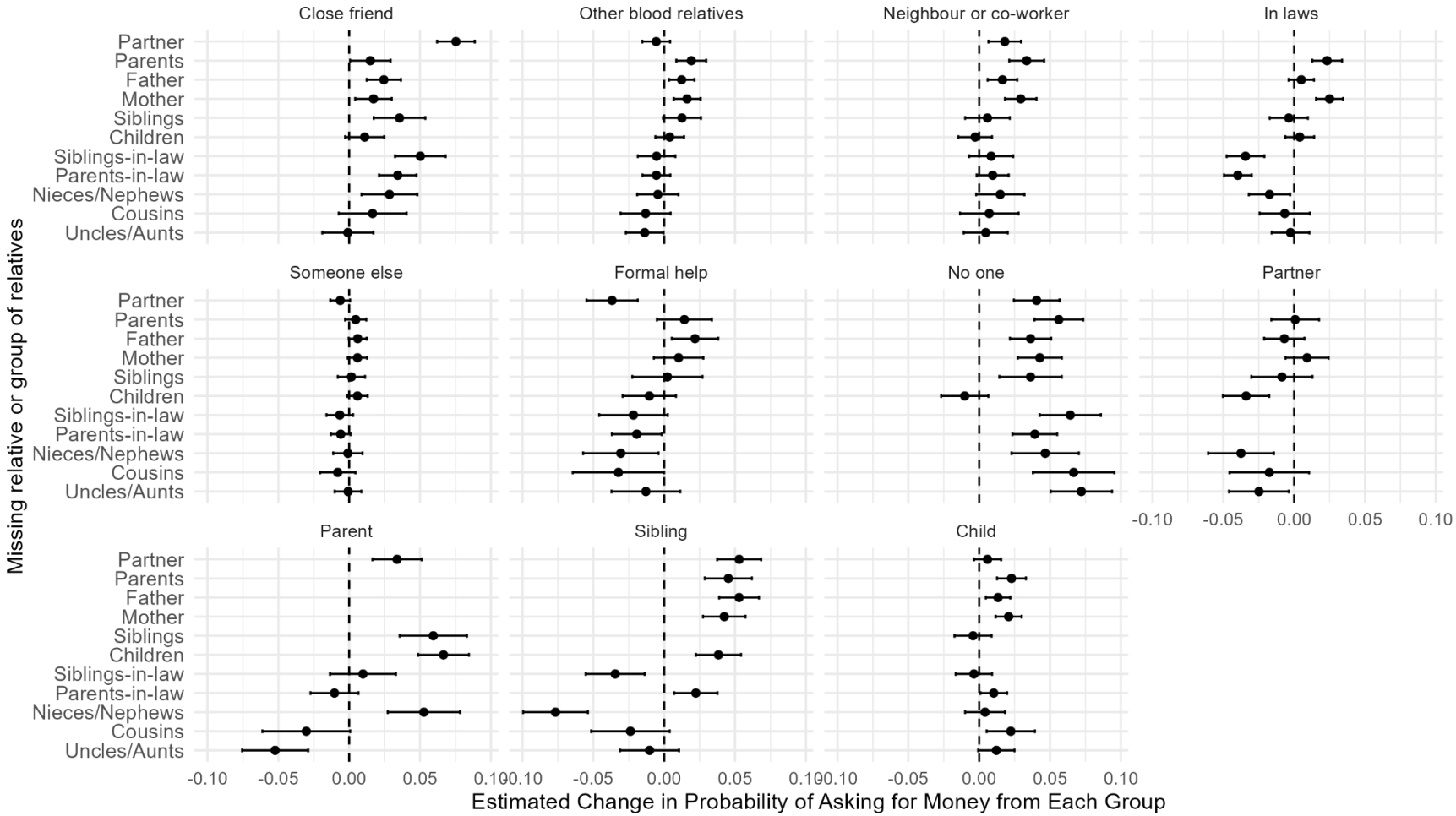
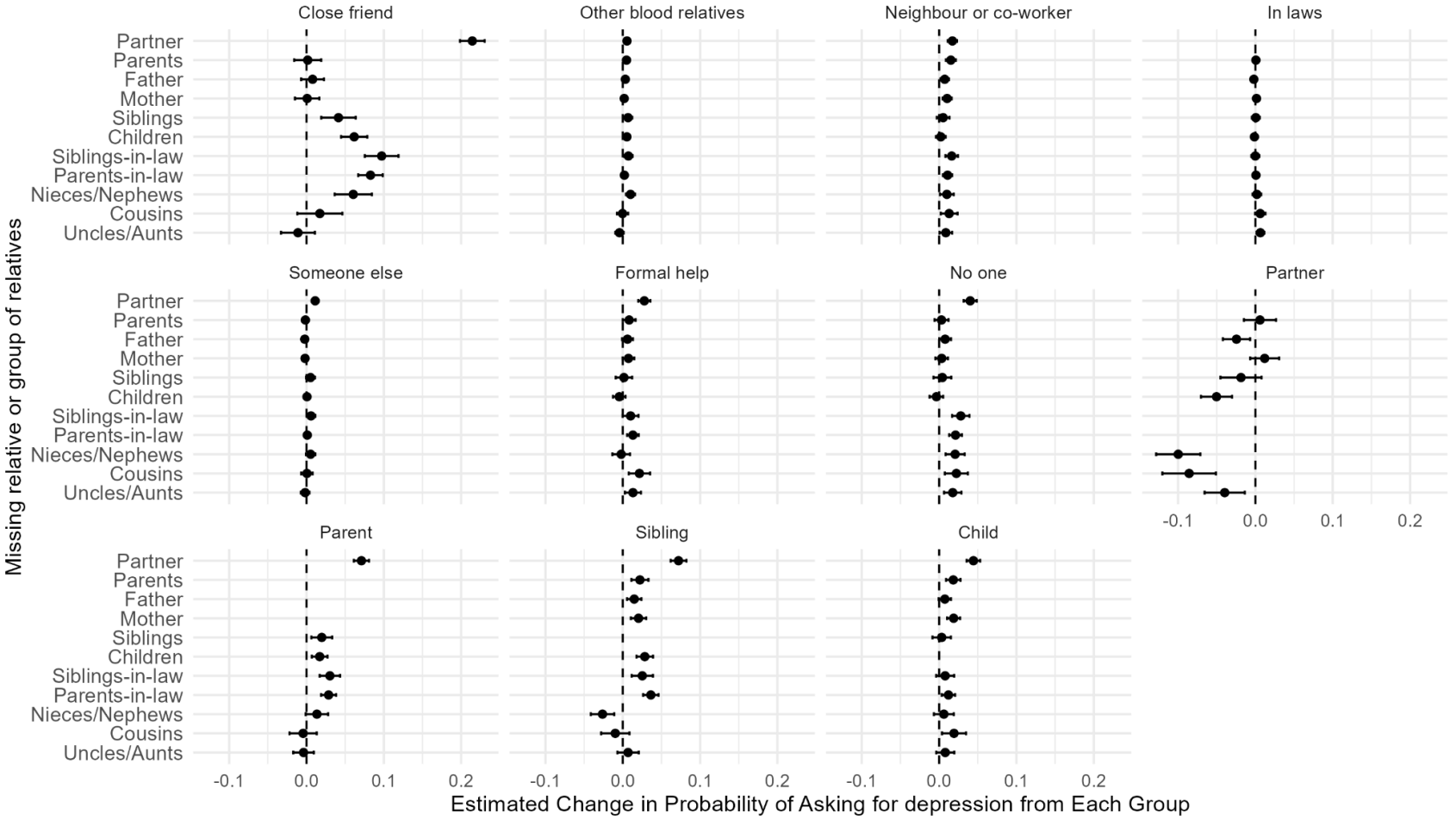


Figure 5 Results from multiple linear probability models regressing dummies indicating the presence of the relationship category (box title) among the top two references for emotional support on dummies indicating the absence of a relative of group of relative (x-axis). Coefficients adjusted by age and country; sampling weights applied.



APPENDIX

Figure A1 Percentage of individuals reporting each relationship category among the top two primary resources for housework support by country (sampling weights applied)

Figure A2 Percentage of individuals reporting each relationship category among the top two primary resources for extraordinary economic support by country (sampling weights applied)

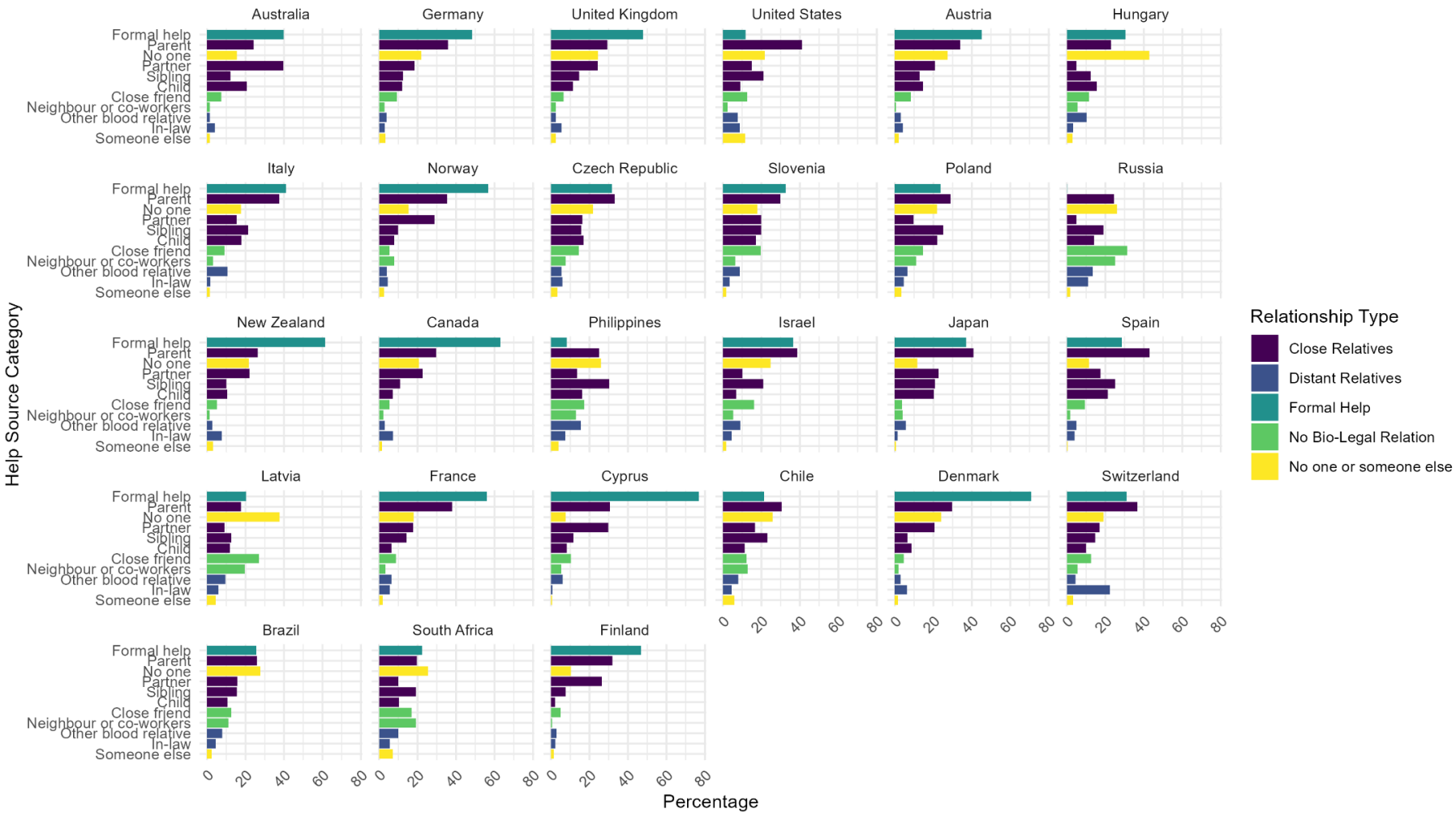


Figure A3 Percentage of individuals reporting each relationship category among the top two primary resources for emotional support by country (sampling weights applied)