



*"I'm happy when you are happy"*

## Life satisfaction between cohabitation and marriage

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## Family dynamics and wellbeing

- During the second half of the 20th century, **family forms** have become more **diverse** in nearly all European countries.
- However, much of the research has focused on the traditional family and has not considered alternative pathways, and their **consequences on wellbeing** of individuals (Vignoli, Pirani & Salvini 2013).
- The link between wellbeing and family dynamics raises important questions in post-industrial societies, because even if the trend toward "new family forms" comes to a halt, **a return to a traditional family model is unlikely.**



## Partnership status and wellbeing

- Although **some European studies** exist (but not for Italy), the majority of this research has been conducted for the US.
- Previous studies have found that cohabiters are **less committed** to and **less satisfied** with their partnerships than individuals who are married (e.g., Brown & Booth 1996; Nock 1995; Stanley, Whitton & Markman 2004).
- In addition, there are reasons to expect that there are **country variations** in the degree to which relationship assessments differ across union types...
- ...mainly because of country differences in **institutionalization and the prevalence of unmarried cohabitation** (Soons & Kalmijn 2009; Wilk, Keizer & Lappegård 2012).



## Partners' wellbeing

- **In marriage**, we know that, for both genders, there is a positive and statistically significant **spillover effect** of life satisfaction that runs from one partner to the other.
- **BUT**: is it true also in cohabitations?
- **AND**: is it true in realities where cohabitations are far less common than elsewhere?
- **Our Objective**:
  - to contribute to the debate on the **link between partnership status and wellbeing**,
  - taking into account **partners' spillover effects**
  - scrutinizing the relationship for **Italy**.



## Data & Variables

- **Data**

- Istat survey «Aspetti della vita quotidiana» 2012
- About 4.000 couples (married or cohabiting)
- Men and women aged 18-49

- **Key variables**

- Life satisfaction of couples' members (1-to-10 scale response)
- Cohabitation vs. marriage

- **Correlates**

- *Demographic variables*: age, area of residence, household size, presence of children
- *Socio-economic status*: education, occupational status, assessment of economic resources
- *Other control variable*: assessment of health status

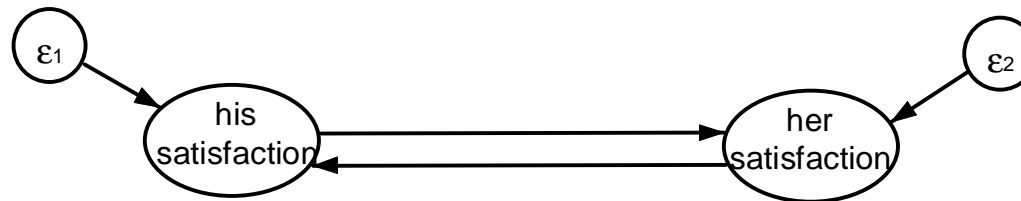


## Method

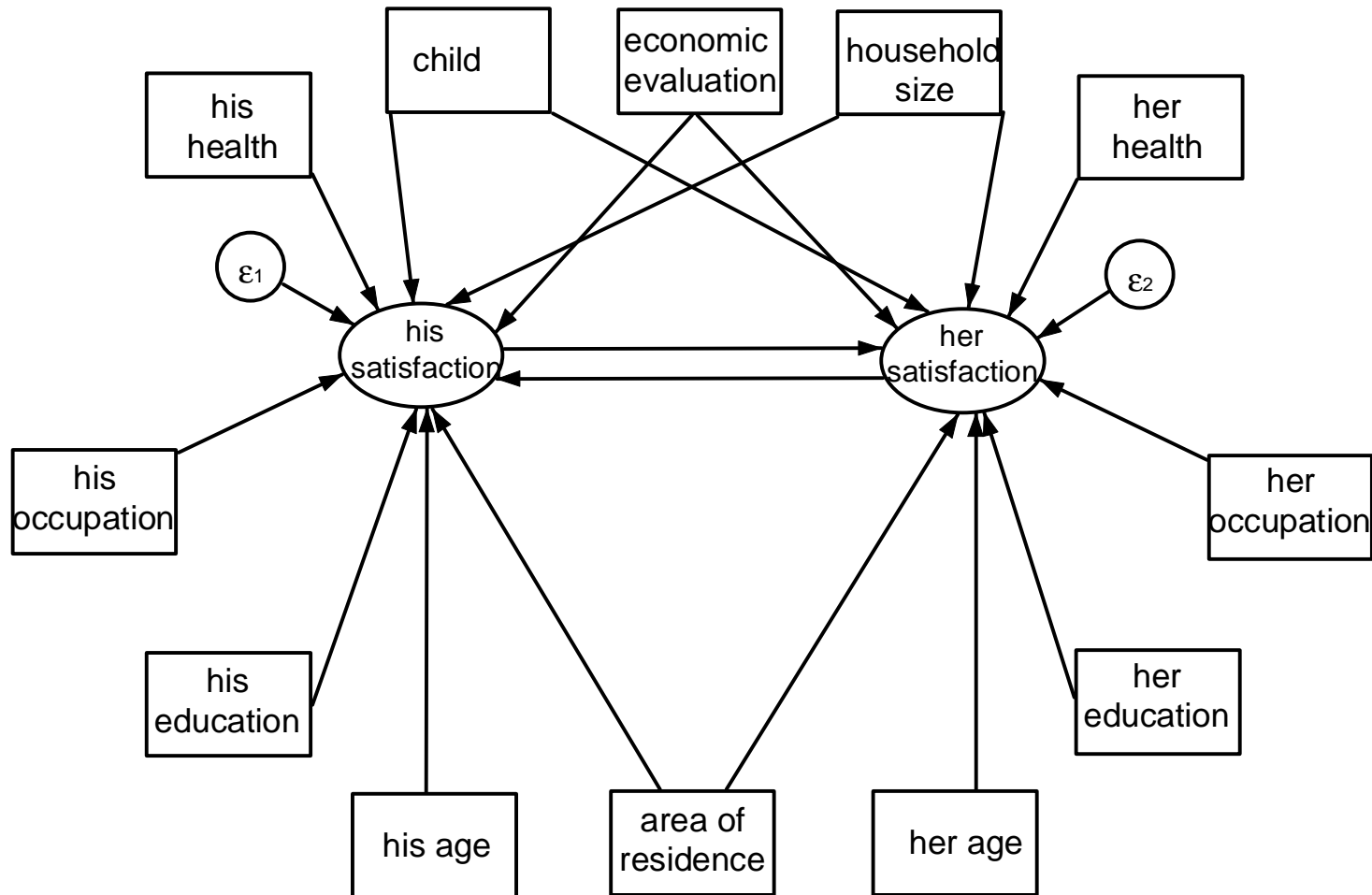
- **SEM – Structural Equation Model** (or simultaneous equation models): multi-equation regression models.
- The response variable in one regression equation may appear as a predictor in another equation: **variables may influence one-another reciprocally**, either directly or through other variables as intermediaries.
- **Effects:**
  - direct (presumed causal relationship between 2 variables),
  - indirect (presumed causal relationship via other intervening or mediating variables),
  - total (sum of direct and indirect effects)
- **Non-recursive model:** dependencies between endogenous variables (feedback loops)



## Path diagram (1/5)

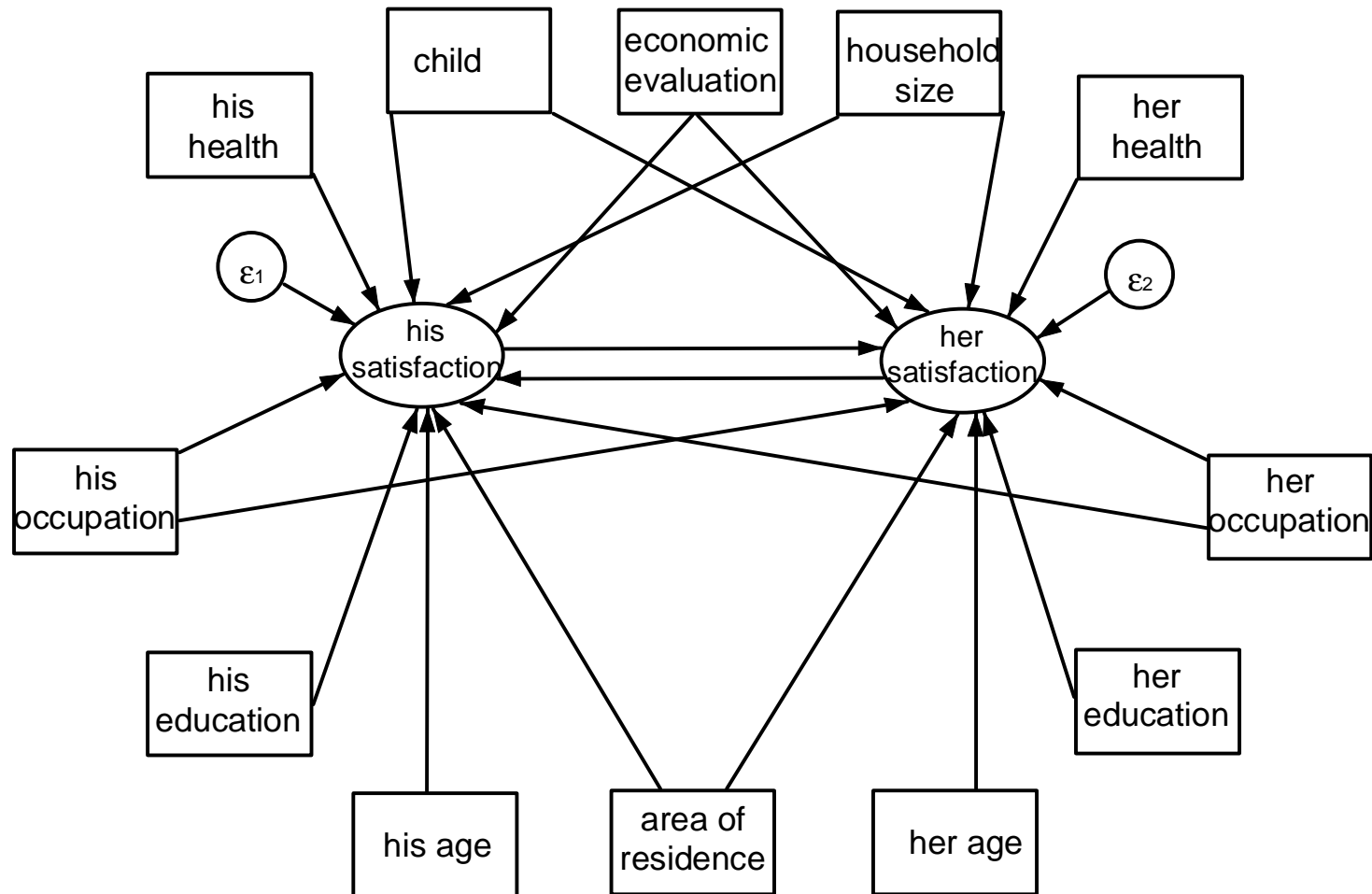


## Path diagram (2/5)

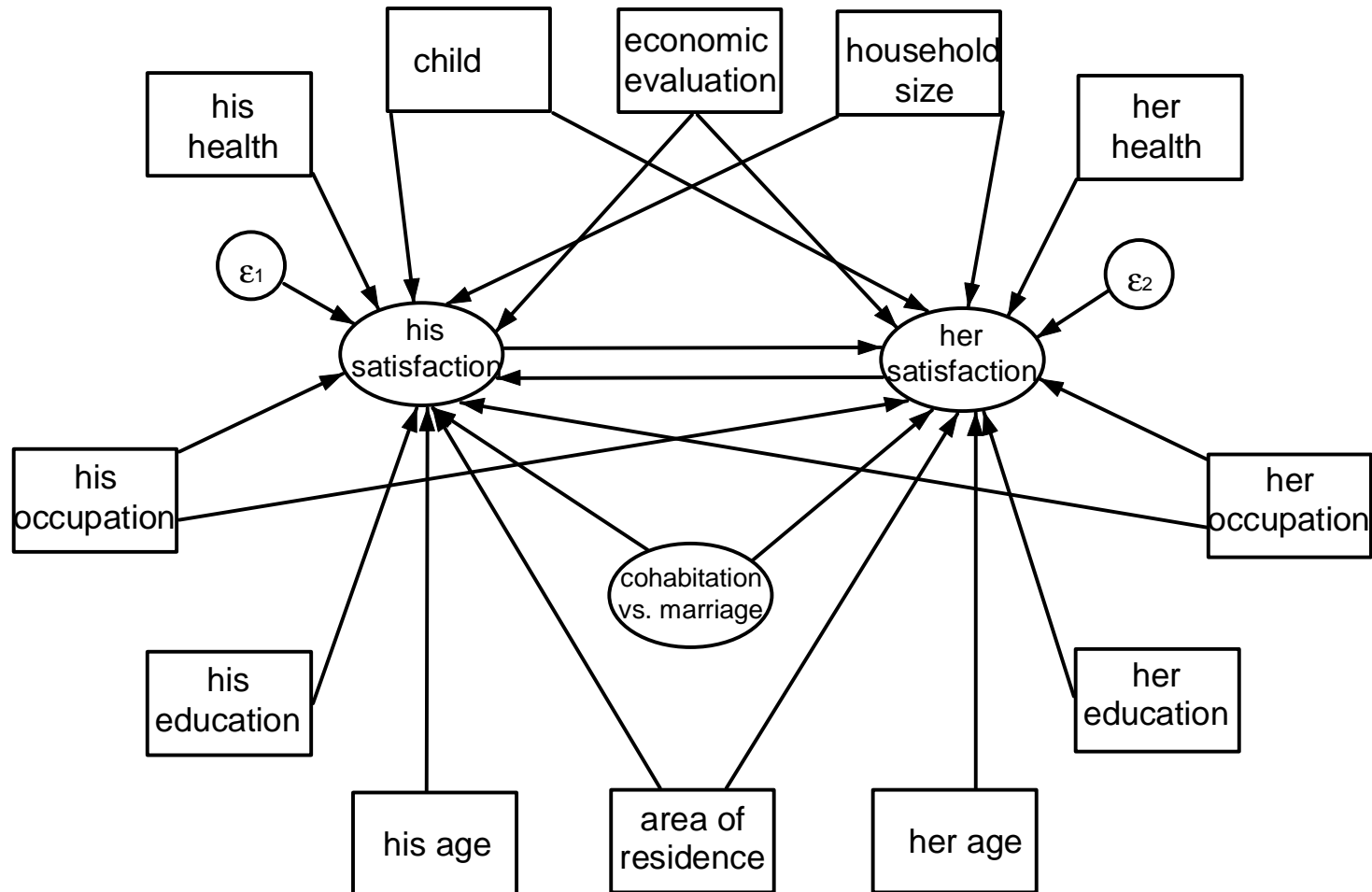




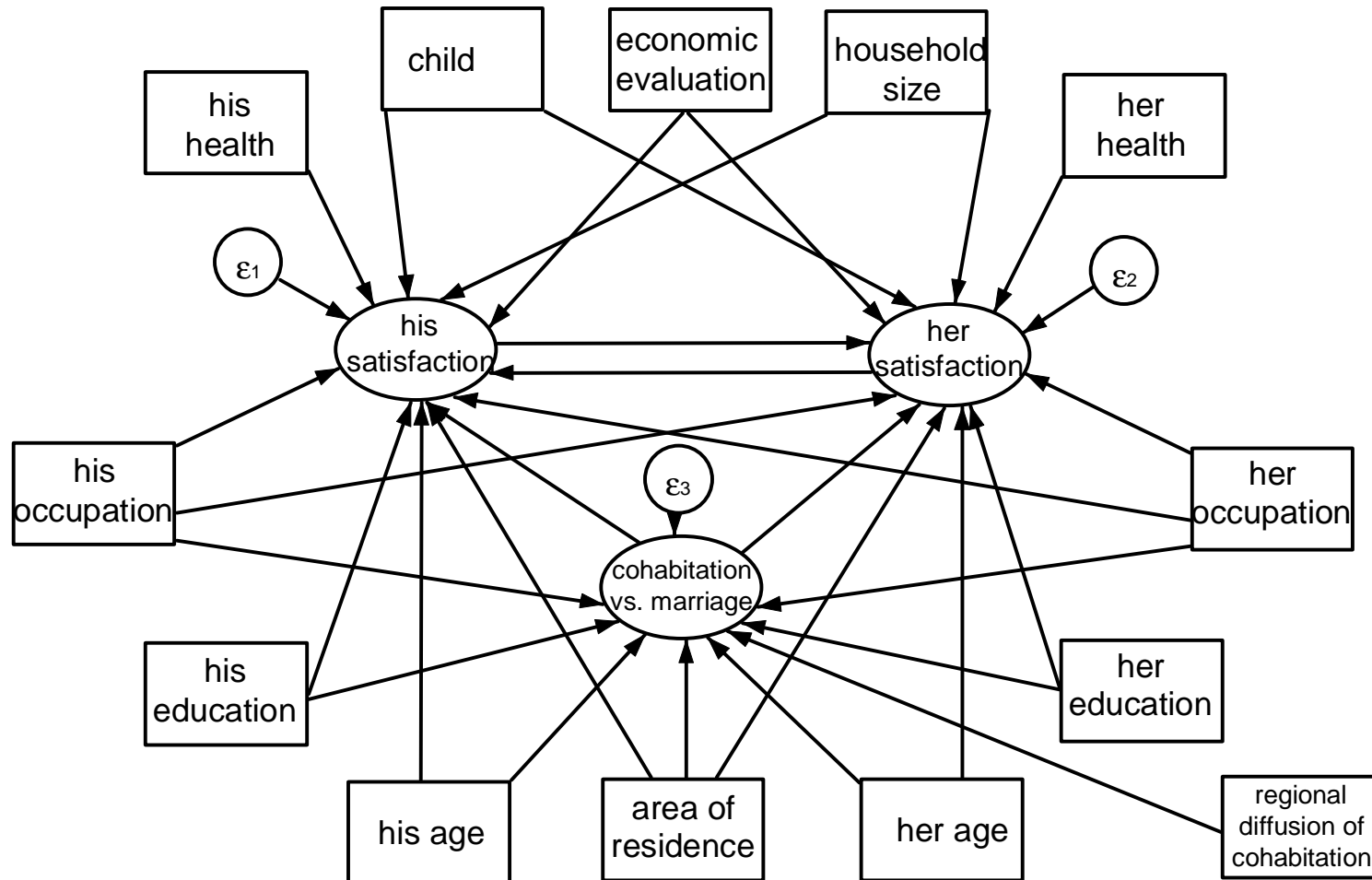
## Path diagram (3/5)



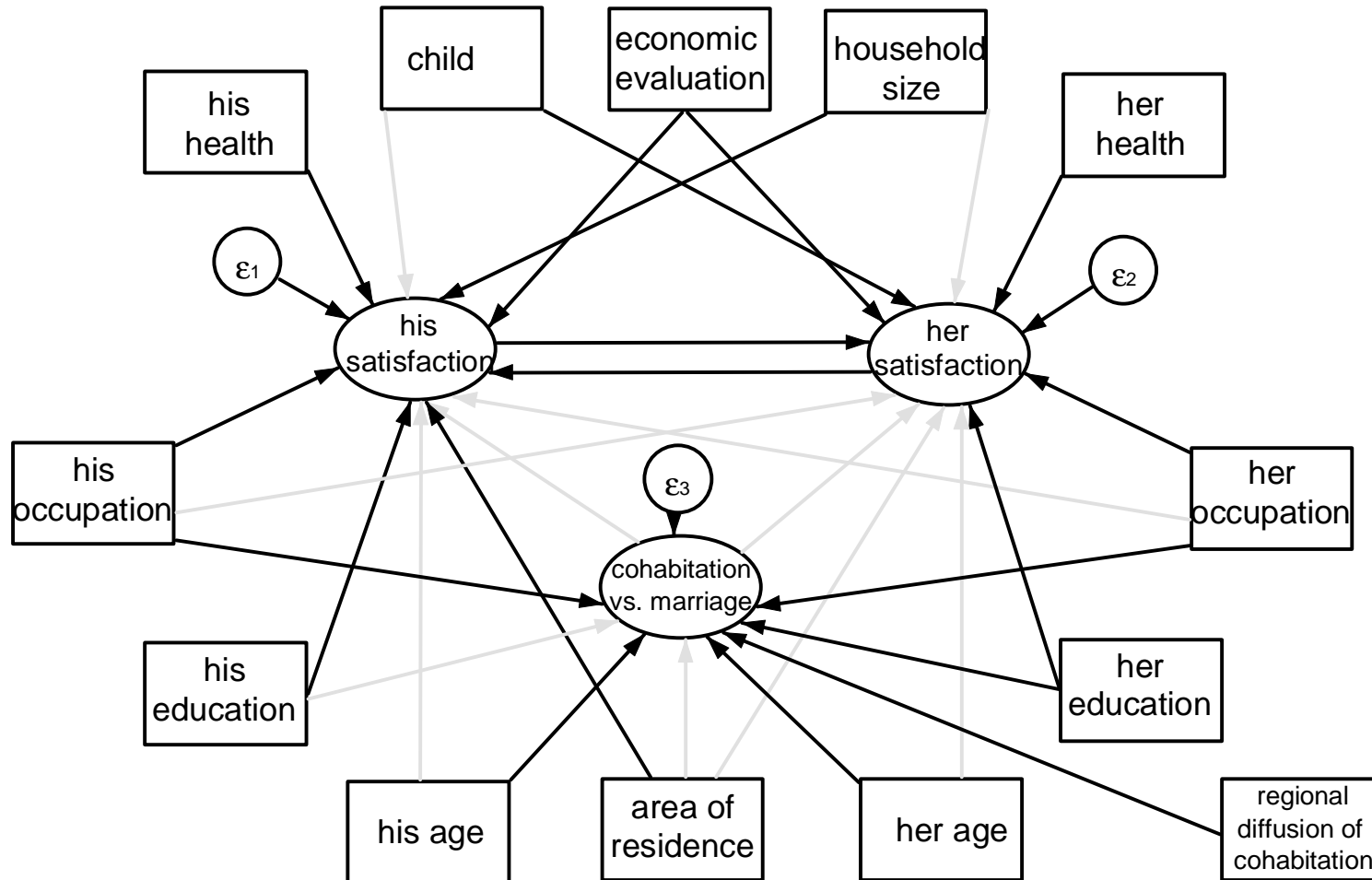
## Path diagram (4/5)



## Path diagram (5/5)



## Results





## Concluding remarks

- Italian cohabiting people are **not less satisfied** with their lives than married couples
  - Are things changing? Is this a signal of a increasing acceptance of cohabitation?
- **Spillover effect** between partners exist also in case of cohabitation and it does not differ from marriage
- **Life satisfaction** assessment comes from different spheres of life (e.g.: family, health, economic situation, job, social relationships,...)
  - What happens if we consider **satisfaction of family relations**?



## Furter developments

- Modeling **satisfaction of family relations**
- **Introducing temporal comparison**
  - Has the relation between partnership status and wellbeing changed in last 20 years?
- **Overcoming some drawbacks** with data: e.g.
  - religion,
  - relationship duration,
  - marriage intention
- **Longitudinal data**



**Thank you – Comments and  
suggestions are welcome!**

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