

## Reconciliation of work and fertility in a familialistic context

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### Theoretical framework

Starting from the end of the '80s a positive cross-country correlation has been observed between TFR and female labour force participation levels in OECD countries (see, among others, Del Boca et al., 2003; Ahn and Mira, 2002). One of the key reasons that have been put forward to explain such a correlation is the importance of both social norms and institutional settings that favour the combination of work and family tasks. Institutions and policies oriented towards the reconciliation of work and family, such as parental leave, childcare provision, and the access to part-time employment are much less widespread in Southern European lowest low fertility countries. Among the OECD countries, Italy shows the lowest level in the conciliation of TFR and female occupation. Yet the average desired number of children is still above two (D'Addio and Mira d'Ercole 2005). The positive discrepancy between desired and actual fertility (Istat, 2006) is higher when compared to that of other European countries (Testa, 2006). Moreover, the number of housewives with children who would like to work if this were compatible with their family duties is quite high (Micheli, Rosina 2006): traditional gender roles continue to influence labour market participation strongly. For example, in Italy, 43% of women say that they do not work because of family responsibilities and other personal reasons - compared with only 6% in Finland" (OECD 2006). Interest has also been expressed in understanding the dynamics which contribute to a gender symmetric division of domestic labour (an increasingly common characteristic of the more educated couples from the youngest generations). It has been showed that in Italy "even in urban contexts, not much change has taken place in the family role-set (...). However, a progressive adaptation towards gender equity of family organization during the life course, including childbearing, is evident among a small proportion of dual-earning couples. Among these couples, belonging to the higher socio-economic level, women have a relatively high education level (...) Moreover, the gender-symmetric role-set of parents increases their likelihood to have one more child" (Mencarini and Tanturri, 2004). The ability to successfully reconcile family duties and work commitments very much depends on the level of education. Research has shown that the negative impact of the educational level on fertility has progressively lessened over time to the point that it disappears or even it reverses direction (Kravdal 2001). In Italy too, other things being equals, couples with greater cultural and economic resources tend to have a higher propensity to have children (Dalla Zuanna, Tanturri 2007; Rosina, Testa 2007). Ever more women hold a university degree, and after having postponed forming a family in order to invest in their personal development and profession careers, they may be likely to 'make up for lost time' (or recover their fertility) once they reach their late 30s (Caltabiano et al. 2007). Furthermore, women with higher levels of education tend to also have greater resources, needed in order to pay for services in the private sector, such as childcare and assistance for their elderly parents. Coherently, Rosina and Saraceno (2008) shows that women's individual human capital as measured by education appears by far the most important factor differentiating women both in the likelihood that they enter the labour market and that they remain in it throughout the family formation years, even controlling for the number of children. The husbands' human capital, as measured by education, plays instead an ambivalent role with regard to women's labour market participation. When the husband's education is higher than the wife's, it has a negative impact, confirming both the single utility function and the resource bargaining theories. In this paper, we analyse the effect of age and education asymmetry in the couple, the availability of childcare, the

partner involvement in the domestic work on the employment continuity/discontinuity after the birth of a child, using a parity-specific approach. To this purpose, we use recent data from a large-scale Italian survey on births carried out by Istat in 2002 and 2005.

## **Data**

The "survey on births", recently carried out by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), is a precious opportunity to analyse the factors that favour the conciliation between female occupation and fertility. The sample size is equal to 50,000. It corresponds to the 10% of the total births in 2002 and in 2005 in Italy. The interviews to the mothers were carried out by using the C.A.T.I (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) technique 18 to 21 months after the birth of the child. Therefore, the sample was interviewed in a period in which mothers are generally in the process of reflecting and deciding about having possible future children and in which work or financial constraints are more heavily felt in terms of reproductive fulfilment. The information gathered from the survey allows a reconstruction of the fertility by order of birth, supplying moreover an accurate picture of the opinions and intentions on the mothers and fathers' characteristics, on the family and social context in which the birth has occurred and on the impact of childbirth on work choices.

## **Provisional results**

More than half of the interviewed mothers has a job. From the questions on opinions and attitudes it emerges that women are extremely keen to keep their job position.

36% of those who kept on working declare to have had difficulties in reconciling their job to their family duties. 45% of the mothers living in the North work part-time against 35% of the women in the South. The resort to a part-time job is greater especially if there are two or more children (49%), if mothers have only a compulsory schooling level of education (47%), if they work in the private sector (46%) or in the services or retail sector (55%). Optional work absences and the use of maternity leave are more common for the mothers residing in the North (80%) than in the South (63%). Parental leave definitely represent a very useful tool which allows mothers and fathers of very young children to reconcile the care for their offspring with their work commitment. Yet, only 8% of the fathers has taken advantage of a parental leave within the first two years of life of their child, whereas 4% of the fathers intend to have one in the future. Furthermore, the data from the survey show how still intense is the recourse to the informal support network and the inter-generational solidarity supplied by family and friends. Just over half of the children of 1-2 years of age (52%) are indeed looked after by grandparents when the mother works against 13.5% who attend a public kindergarten, 14.3% a private kindergarten, 9.2% are in the care of a baby-sitter and 7.3% are looked after by the very parents. A further aspect which needs to be considered in evaluating the burden carried by the mothers is the housework. There is still a strong gender asymmetry in the division of the domestic labour in Italy, even when women are regularly employed. The number of hours women spend in domestic activities and childcare is about three times more than the men's. The gap does not become narrower for those couples in which the woman is regularly employed. The work burden for mothers is therefore even heavier when there is no help available for the domestic labour and the partner cannot be relied upon for cooperation. 63% of employed mothers declare to have no help in the housework. Among those mothers who have some help, 52% is helped by a housemaid, in 25% of the cases again the grandparents are involved and in 17% the partner helps out.

After a first descriptive analysis, by using a logit model, we will analyse the effect on the female reconciliation between family and work after childbearing of some characteristic such as age and education asymmetry in the couple, mother's job features, availability of childcare, partner's

employment, partner involvement in the domestic work and childcare, woman satisfaction level related to the partner's childcare share.

For some mothers, after a period of about 18-21 months from the birth of their child, the professional status appears dramatically changed; about a fifth of the mothers employed at the beginning of their pregnancy are no longer in the job market. About one third of them was fired or lost their job (e.g., many of them have a temporary position). The other mothers left their job because of irreconcilable working hours with the new household duties or to full-time dedicate themselves to the family. Among the key factors, the care-giving system plays a crucial role; mothers without grandparents helping in childcare or benefiting from childcare have an unemployment risk of about 76 per cent; at the opposite, only about 6,6 per cent of mothers with external help were unemployed after 18 months after childbirth. (Neri A., Lo Conte M., Casadio P., 2004). Job attachment seems to be strictly connected with other variables such as the human capital variables and the age.

The unemployment and resignation risks vary according to a set of key factors needing further analyses. For this purpose we intend to point out, using a logistic model, the main factors influencing the job exclusion risk of new mothers after delivery.

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