

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Subjective Wellbeing in Parental Time: Gender Differences among Italian Couples

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1. Introduction

A large body of literature has documented a cultural shift towards more time-intensive and child-centered parenting (e.g. Craig et al. 2014). Those studies have also shown ‘concerted cultivation’, i.e. conspicuous and diversified parental time investment, to be positively associated to the healthy development of children (e.g. Laureau 2002). However, the implications of intensive parenting for the wellbeing of adults are less clear (Musick et al 2016). Parents have less free time available and are more likely to feel rushed than non-parents. Despite the widespread recognition of greater child-related stress for mothers compared to fathers, studies on the gender-specific effects of parenting on subjective wellbeing have led to mixed conclusions. The suggestion that women enjoy child care more than men has been used as a partial explanation to the stalled gender revolution (e.g. Coontz 2013). By contrast, Connelly and Kimmel (2014) found that both American mothers and fathers enjoy their time spent in child caregiving but fathers even more so than mothers. Similarly, Musick and colleagues (2016), using microdata from the American Time Use Survey, found that parents consistently report greater subjective well-being in activities with children than without. Mothers, however, report less happiness, more stress, and greater fatigue in time with children than fathers do. Meier et al. (2016) documented mothering experiences to be associated with high levels of emotional well-being; however, single-mothers report less wellbeing than partnered mothers. While a substantial body of literature shows lower levels of subjective wellbeing among parents compared to childless people (e.g. Aassve et al. 2012), fewer studies have analyzed the relation between child care time and parents’ wellbeing. Most of those studies have been focusing on the US, while little is known about European countries due to the more limited availability of time use surveys (TUS). Furthermore, information on wellbeing are less frequently collected in European TUS.

The main aim of this study is to analyze gender differences within Italian couples in subjective wellbeing during parental time. To this end, we use micro data from the most recent time use available within Italian couples (2013/4). We distinguish between different child care activities. In addition to the daily diary, the survey also collects detailed information on individuals and households including socio-demographic information as well as information on different aspects related to wellbeing, satisfaction and happiness. Moreover, the survey reports information on background variables including the use of formal childcare, informal help from the family (e.g. grandparents) or the use of market services (colf, baby sitter). This typology of data represents, thus, a precious source of information to study the existing relations between subjective wellbeing, time structures, individual characteristics and family composition.

2. Data and methods

The study builds on micro-data from the Italian TUS for the year 2013/4. TUS includes three data files: the individual file, the daily diary and weekly diary. The daily diary consists of time data collected through the diary technique: respondents record time use during the previous 24 hours in their own words. Time diaries are randomly distributed across the days of the week to all household members aged 3 years and over. Respondents are asked to fill in the daily diary every 10-minutes reporting the following information: description of the main activity carried out, the possible presence of a parallel secondary activity, the location where the activity was performed, the level of enjoyment experienced during the 10-minutes episode and, if applicable, the presence of another person. The individual file collects information about the socio-demographic characteristics of the individual, the characteristics of the household, background information and information on the wellbeing of the respondents in different life domains. Wellbeing information include a question on parents' satisfaction with their amounts of time spent with children. In a first step, we analyse the descriptive statistics based on this general question. Then, we use information from the episodes' enjoyment-scores to develop a more in-depth analysis of the wellbeing of mothers and fathers in child caregiving. The scores range from -3 to 3 and answer to the following question: *How pleasant was the moment?* Different approaches can be used to analyse gender differences in wellbeing during parental time based on the scores. One is to use the scores as dependent variable in a regression model. A common alternative in wellbeing literature (e.g. Kahneman and Krueger 2006), is to develop a dichotomous unpleasantness index (also known as U-index) for which it is first necessary to determine what criterion to follow to categorize an activity as unpleasant. Similarly to Musick and colleagues (2016), we classify an activity as unpleasant if its score is equal or lower to the 25th percentile. We use the U-

index as dependent variable and, thus, develop a logistic model to analyze its gender-related differences within couples. We are particularly interested in understanding whether and to what extent the subjective well-being of mothers and fathers change according to the presence of the partner and of a parallel activity (i.e. multi-tasking). The control variables include individual characteristics, couple characteristics and the characteristics of the episode (i.e. the duration of the activity episode, total duration of the activity during the diary day, the day of the week, the month of the year, start time).

3. Preliminary results

A first look at the descriptive statistics of the survey's question "*Are you satisfied with the quantity of time spent with your child/children?*" reveals that most parents are satisfied with the quantity of time devoted to children (56.7%). However, more than 40% of the respondents want to spend more time with their children, while less than 2% perceive that they spend too much time in childcare activities. About 67% of mothers are satisfied with their parental time, but the number drops to 44% when looking at fathers (Table 1). The share of dissatisfaction is higher among those with high education, which may partly depend by their higher time investment into career but also by the more widespread diffusion of intensive parenting social norms. Parents of two or more children are more likely to be dissatisfied than those with one child. Looking at the age of the youngest child in the family, the highest share of satisfaction is recorded among those with children aged less than two years which may be explained by the low diffusion of formal childcare for toddlers in Italy (and, thus, by the generally higher levels of time spent by parents with children at this age).

The survey's information collected on individuals' satisfaction with parental time offers only a very partial picture of gender differences in subjective wellbeing in time with children and doesn't allow, for example, to distinguish among different child care activities. Moreover, previous studies have highlighted as momentary assessments of wellbeing tend to be more reliable than global assessments being less sensitive to the tendency of people to adjust their responses (Kahneman and Krueger 2006; Musick et al 2015). Thus, episodes' enjoyment-scores can be very useful to obtain a broader understanding of men's and women's levels of wellbeing in child caregiving. Our preliminary results for the probability of mothers and fathers to experiment an unpleasant child-care episode (i.e. U-index =1) highlight the existence of statically significantly gender differences in subjective wellbeing during parental time, with mothers reporting higher values of the U-index for all the considered categories except for activities related to transporting and accompanying children (Figure 1).

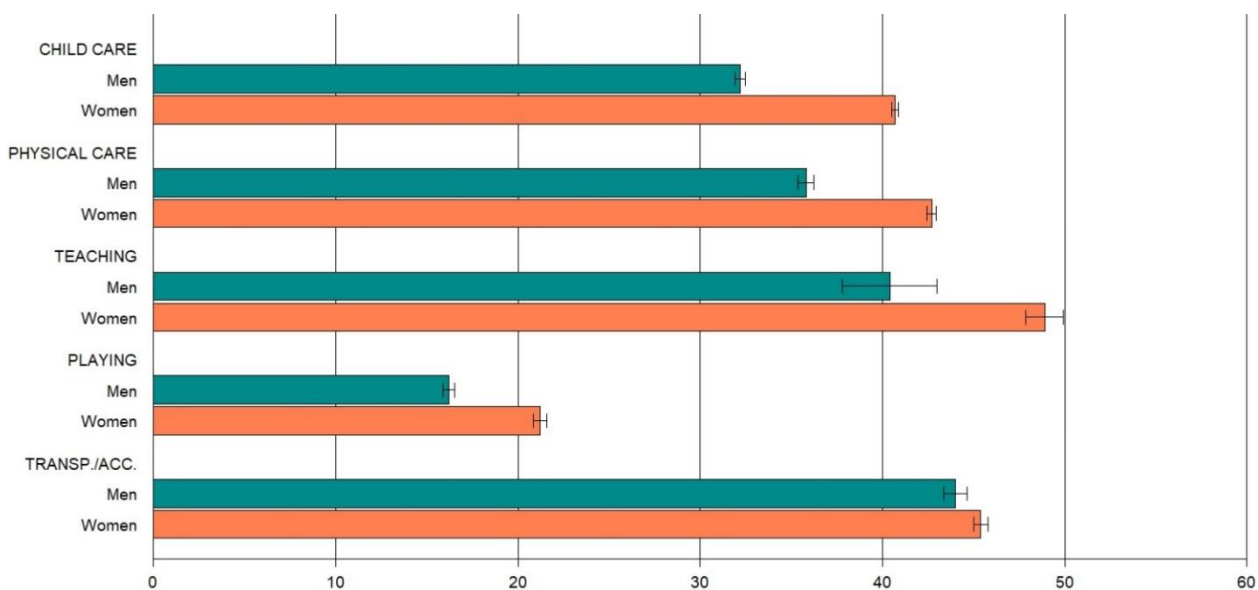


Fig. 1: Predicted values of the U-index indicator by gender and kind of activity

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