

The Great Recession and the work-parenting balance in Italian couples: a time use study.

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BACKGROUND

Demographers have traditionally been interested in the consequences of both social and economic crises on demographic behaviors. The Great Economic Recession, which started in 2007, seems to have triggered an analogous Great Demographic Recession, whose main characteristics consist of further delay in nest leaving (young people leaving their parents' home), lower propensity to form a union, especially marriages, and even lower propensity to have children. The multiplicity of changes in employment, housing, wealth, fertility, living arrangements, psychological distress, and attitudes induced by the Great Recession, are supposed to have had, in their turn, immediate impacts on the organization and patterns of family daily life.

Women and men are differently affected by political and economic circumstances, especially in the case of an economic downturn of such magnitude as the 'great recession'. This is because women and men occupy different positions in the labour market and have an unbalanced and unequal access to economic resources - including employment (occupational segregation).

In Italy during the Great Recession men's unemployment rates have increased, while women's unemployment level has remained almost stable, and in many sectors even declined (as a consequence an increase in the proportion of female breadwinner households has been registered) (De Rosa 2018, Addabbo et al. 2017, Bryan and Longhi, 2017).

Despite long-standing interest on gender roles, in a general context of women's increasing educational and economic attainment, much remains to be known on the multiple ways in which the economic downturn (hitting men harder than women, and thus favoring the so called added worker effect) has shaped family lives in Italy, as in many other Developed countries (e.g. in the US, Aguiar, Hurst, E. and Karabarbounis 2013; in Europe, Dotti Sani 2017).

Previous studies carried out in other Developed countries (e.g. Paihlé and Solaz 2013 in France; Kalils and Ziol-Guest 2013 in the US) reveal that unemployed men are reluctant to increase their involvement in family life. Fathers' job loss has thus negative implications for family life and child development, while mothers' job loss does not: indeed, mothers tend to use free time in childcare and household production, while fathers are more likely to spend it on personal care and leisure. However, no previous study on Italy have been carried out on this topic.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this paper is to analyze the effects of the economic crisis on gendered patterns of socioeconomic resources and precariousness that may affect breadwinning, parenting, ways of doing family, and work-family balance in Italy. In contrast to much existing research, we pay explicit attention to the interplay between gendered preferences, constraints and opportunities for leading specific family lives. Our analyses paint a more encompassing picture of Italian gender-roles definition/re-definition for facing the economic crisis.

A specific analysis will be focused on work-family arrangements in order to understand if they have changed from before to after the beginning of the recession.

The first step will be to empirically verify the relationship between female and male labour supply during the recession. We aim at understanding whether new models of female labour market participation and household work allocation have been taking place during the downturn phase of the business cycle.

By specifically focusing on married or cohabiting couples with 0-14 years old co-resident children, we want to understand if and to what extent the Great Recession has changed the way Italian couples negotiate their time allocation between paid and unpaid work, and how such changes influence individual well-being.

A specific attention will be given to changes in parental time use, as they do not only help us to understand the recession's effects on the organization of households, but also offers a window on understanding the potential impacts on children's development that may unfold in the future.

To study in depth the consequences of this new division of paid work inside the family we'll focus on the time use of men and women within the family with the aim to assess whether new forms of couple work arrangements emerges, and if female breadwinner families or in those families where women are the main earner, a redefinition of the parenting responsibilities by gender occurs or not.

The picture resulting from the joint analysis of the allocation of time between paid work and childcare activities within the couples, and their changes over time as a consequence of the great recession could be a starting point to reflect on the permanent changes in the division of roles and responsibility in the couples.

We'll try to answer the following research question: in a quite traditional country like Italy, do the Great Recession led to less traditional schemes of work-parenting negotiation, in a new, de-gendered scenario?

DATA AND METHODS

Data from the Italian Time Use survey carried out in an far-from-recession period (2003-2004), during the early phases of the economic downturn (2008-09) and when the effect of the recessions are more evident (2014-15) will allow to compare time use before, just before the beginning of the crisis, and few years later. The rich background information of the data sets will allow to examine whether these effects vary by family typology, parental education, age and number of children, and territorial area.

In a micro-level perspective, in addition to a time budget approach describing time use in terms of average duration of the analyzed activities, we propose an original chronological approach to the analysis of time use surveys, taking into account the importance of 'timing' in the organization of everyday life.

Furthermore, we'll use sequence analysis techniques for understanding if new work-family arrangement typologies have emerged as a consequence of the recession. Italian data allow us to put together the information of both the partners in the couple, thus representing an important source of detailed information on how they manage the allocation of time in work and childcare activities.

As a second step, once different typologies of work-childcare negotiation inside the analyzed couples have been identified, will use regression models for understanding if they are associated to different levels of satisfaction with respect to the work-life daily balance.

RESULTS

As a starting point, we applied sequence analysis techniques to the couples' time use data (Italian TUS 2008-2009), by taking into account the time they devote to paid work, in a chronological perspective, allowing us to exactly reconstruct the way the partners allocate their time in paid work activities, in each moment of the 24 hours observational day. Four state have been taken into account (Figure 1 and 2): none of the partners works, both work, she works only, he works only. Three groups emerged: the male breadwinner couples,

representing the 48% of our sample; the dual earner couples, representing the 33% of the sample, and characterized by couples in which both the male and the female partner are engaged in paid work activities, with an high level of synchronization in the morning, and a lower level of synchronization in the afternoon and evening hours. The last group identified, composed of the 19% of the couples in the sample, includes those couples in which both partners work (with a higher participation of women in paid work related activities), in a totally desynchronized way: women work mainly in the central part of the day, men in the late evening and in the night.

As a second step we will run the same analysis both on the pre-crisis data (Italian TUS 2003-2004) and on the post-crisis ones (Italian TUS 2014-2015), in order to try to understand if different groups of couple work arrangements emerge.

In a hierarchic perspective, in order to understand if and how the way couples manage their time in paid work influences the way they negotiate the time to be spent with children, we run sequence analysis on the different work arrangement groups previously identified, by taking into account how such couples divide/share their time with children, for trying to understand if common parenting schemes emerge, not depending on the couples work arrangement, or whether specific parenting styles emerge, corresponding to specific couple work arrangements clusters. In such a way we'll be able to understand if different 'parenting groups' emerge in the post-crisis period.

As a last step, we'll test if belonging to different parenting groups is associated to different levels of self-assessed satisfaction for the work-family life balancing.

Figure 1. Italian couples work arrangement clusters. Chronograms.

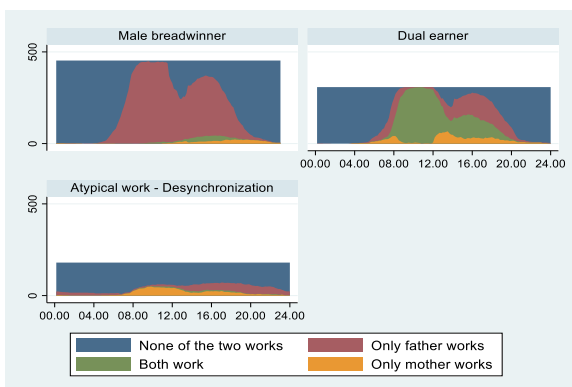


Figure 2. Italian couples work arrangement clusters. Index plot.

