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## An Analysis of Reproductive Intentions of Italian Couples

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### Abstract

This study aims at analysing the process of family formation by adopting a couple's perspective. Using household-level micro data, we examine the determinants of the partners' (contrasting) fertility intentions for the first and the second child. Italy is characterized by a high discrepancy between desired and actual fertility. There is a predominance of traditional gender roles and a lack of policy measures helping parents combine family and working life. Our main hypothesis is that, in Italy, couples in which the female partner has a higher education than the male partner are particularly exposed to a conflict, especially if the male intends to have a child. The same is assumed for working women. Moreover, we suppose that some levels of conflict emerge when women are unsatisfied with the gender division of childcare responsibilities and other family chores. When the couple's intentions to have a second child are considered, our findings are mostly consistent with the assumptions made.

### Keywords

Couple's fertility intentions, bargaining approach, work and family balance, Italy

## 1. Introduction

Most studies on household fertility decisions are based on Becker's model (1981) which states that all members in a family act to maximize one single household utility function. Using this model means that we are assuming that either partners prefer the same number of children or the woman reflects her partner's preferences on family size. Because of this assumption, most of the empirical literature on fertility – with the exception of few studies – ignores the potential importance of men and women having different preferences regarding having or not having children. Having a child is a decision made by both partners and not a unilateral one. The dynamic resulting from the couple's interaction represents, indeed, a substantial component in the decision-making process. Therefore, the dependent variable should not be the male and female separate likelihood to want a child, but the positive or negative couple's intention given that the two partners influence each other in shaping the childbearing preferences.

Recently, the importance of the partner's reproductive intentions has started to be recognized in the literature, even though few studies have provided analyses of the fertility plans of both partners (Thomson 1997; Hoem and Thomson 1998; Neyer 2000) and fertility research continues to be mainly based on the views of women. As is the case for most studies, this has to do with the lack of adequate data. To date, most studies have collected data on female respondents or on men and women separately, but not on both members of the same couple. Even if in some surveys individuals have been asked to report their partner's childbearing intentions, such responses have proved not to be truthful because they strongly replicate the respondents' point of view (Testa and Toulemon 2006) and tend to underestimate the level of disagreement (Hoem and Thomson 1998). The use of these data has been justified by the assumption that partners select each other in coherence with their values, so the intimate characteristics of one partner usually coincide with the ones of the other partner. Even if this approach has been taken for granted for years, various authors (see, among others, Corijn, Liefbroer and de Jong Gierveld 1996; Crippen and Brew 2007) recently highlighted that sometimes the overlapping of the characteristics of the members of one couple is not precise and complete, so in order to obtain non-misleading results it is better to consider the features of both components separately.

Based on the survey data set "Family and Social Subjects", Rosina and Testa (2009) did a study on determinants of couple's fertility intentions and disagreement on first births. We extend their work by considering not only first but also second births among Italian couples and by using a different estimation approach. We adopt a parity-specific approach since the influence of wives and husbands in the reproductive decision-making process is strongly affected by the number of previous children and dissimilar intentions of the partners may have a different impact on couples at different parities (Miller and Pasta 1995).

Italy is a particularly interesting case study for various reasons. It is the European country with the lowest completed fertility by generation of the mother, reaching a rate less than 1.5 for the cohorts born in the late 1960s (Caltabiano et al. 2009). Moreover, Italy is characterized by a very large discrepancy between desired and realized fertility (ISTAT 2006; Testa 2006). Recent statistics state that in 2003 the desired number of children in Italy was on average more than two children per woman (2.1), but the recorded Total Fertility Rate for the same year was 1.26 children per woman (ISTAT 2006). These data indicate that fertility would increase considerably (up to the levels around the replacement point) if the desired family size - be it measured by the ideal or the expected number of children - were actually realised. This gap is principally a consequence of the lack of adequate policy measures directed at reducing the direct and indirect cost of raising children (Saraceno 1994; Pinnelli 1995; Del Boca et al. 2004; D'Addio and D'Ercole 2005). The gap also relates to the predominance of very traditional gender roles (McDonald 2000 and McDonald 2006).

This paper is organised as follows. In Section 2 we review the main literature on couples' childbearing intentions. Section 3 is devoted to the presentation of the data. The employed methodology and the hypotheses are described in Section 4. Section 5 presents the results of the multivariate analysis. Finally, Section 6 summarizes and discusses the main findings and puts forth some policy implications.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Fertility decision-making is a complex process, made by the contemporary action of social mechanisms, normative pressures, subjective norms and behavioural control, as stated by Ajzen (1991). Considerable evidence indicates that men and women both make independent contributions to fertility decisions. Such

contributions start from relevant contacts and intergenerational transmission with parents and with the family of origin (Beckman 1983; Miller and Pasta 1995; Thomson et al. 1990; Thomson 1997), but the dynamic resulting from the couple interaction represents a relevant component in that process (Beckman 1983).

Neoclassical models of female labour force participation (Becker, 1981; Cigno, 1991) apply an economic theory to the most sensitive personal decisions, such as choosing a spouse or having children. The models hypothesize that women compare the costs and benefits of labour force participation when deciding whether to participate in the labour market or not. The costs of participation are both pecuniary and related to the job search and the purchase of external childcare, and non-pecuniary, such as those related to the reduction in time devoted to child-rearing or leisure. Becker uses unitary models with the basic economic assumptions of maximizing behaviour, stabilizing preferences, and equilibria in order to analyze the allocation of time to childcare as well as to careers, marriage and divorce.

In the economic literature, a couple's perspective was adopted as women started to achieve higher levels of education and income and gained stronger authority in decision-making within the household. As a consequence, in the late 1980s the unitary models were replaced by non-unitary models that rely on cooperative game theory, which assumes that players can make binding commitments and provide some help in identifying the determinants of the individuals' bargaining power (Lundberg and Pollak 2007).

Linking the non-unitary economic model to the fertility intention sphere<sup>1</sup>, literature shows that if the partners have conflicting fertility intentions the resolution of the disagreement depends on the type of decision each partner wants to make, on the existing level of gender equity, both at the individual and societal level, and on the prevalent rule adopted by the couples in disagreement. Usually women prevail in positive fertility decisions and men predominate in negative childbearing plans. Townes et al. (1980), for example, argued that wives' opinions are more important than the husbands' in determining whether couples will seek pregnancy, if wives are in favour of a pregnancy. Similarly, Beckman (1983) pointed out that in case of disagreement, a male view prevails in anti-fertility decisions, while a female opinion is dominant in pro-fertility decisions. In a study on a sample of well-educated couples, Beckman (1994) discovered that in couples with discordant opinions wives are less likely than husbands to desire another child in the short-run.

An important contribution on couples' attitude on the timing for the first child, and in line with the resource-bargain theories (Blood and Wolfe, 1960), is the work of Jansen and Liefbroer (2006). It focuses on Netherlands and highlights four different decision rules that may be adopted by partners who disagree on the intention of becoming parents in order to reach a final joint decision. A first rule that partners may use in dealing with diverging attitudes is based on power relationships and suggests that the attitudes of the most powerful partner will be decisive in the decision-making processes. Therefore, according to this rule, the more access a partner has to resources such as education, occupational status and income, the more power he/she holds and the more likely that this spouse's attitudes will prevail in decision making. That's why it is called the "power rule". A second rule is the so-called "golden mean" hypothesis. It is based on the assumption that spouses perceive each other as equals and that the notion of equality pervades all the spheres of family life. The corresponding decision rule is that partners view each other's attitudes as equally important and try to reach a compromise if they hold diverging opinions. The result will be that the decision will be midway between the preferences of both partners. Studies on intentions of couples toward childbearing, as the ones already mentioned, assert that if the member of a couple differs in the intended number of children or in child-timing intentions, couples often try to strike a compromise (Thomson 1997; Thomson et al. 1990). The so called "sphere of interest rule" is based on 1) traditional ideas about a gender-specific division of household and paid labour and 2) the New Home Economics Theory (Becker 1981) which provides a theoretical rationale for a gender-specific division of labour in which the wife focuses on family and children and the husband focuses on paid employment. Finally, it is not possible to rule out the possibility that two partners in disagreement are able to reach in any case a joint accord, resulting in another rule: the "social drift rule". Partners with conflicting values that apply this rule end with the postponement of

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<sup>1</sup> Reproductive intentions are receiving growing attention in human and demographic studies given that they are considered a salience of purposive human behaviour and an important variable in the analysis of fertility trends (Bongaarts 2001).

decisions or simply resolve their divergences by doing nothing, leading to the continuation of the existing status quo.

Following the same approach and basing their findings on data from the European Social Survey 2004, Bühlmann, Elcheroth and Tettamanti (2009) show that while most European couples live in coherent egalitarian configurations of values and practices in their pre-parental phase, they shift to a situation of tension between egalitarian values and gendered practices following the births of their first children. The three authors follow the approach developed by Krüger and Levy (2001) that assumes that women and men are endowed with a specific *master status* which, when activated by some kind of biographical events, leads to the privileged assignation of men to the occupational domain and of women to the familial domain. The dominance of the status does not exclude the eventual participation in the second field, but such possibilities are subsidiary to the prerequisites introduced in the principal domain.

In our study the main hypothesis is that, in Italy, couples in which the female partner has a higher education than the male partner are particularly exposed to a conflict, especially if the man intends to have a child. We similarly assume a higher risk of conflicting intentions between partners when women are working. Moreover, we suppose that some levels of conflict emerge when women are unsatisfied with the gender division of childcare responsibilities and other family chores.

In our study on fertility intentions we distinguish couples without children and couples with one child. In other terms, the aim of the paper is to study the determinants of partners' disagreement on having the first and the second child. If childless couples represent the start of the childbearing decision-making process that may influence the whole reproductive career (for example, if there is a considerable postponement of the transition to the first child), the decision of focusing on the second childbirth intention is due to the importance of the second childbearing in the developed world as large proportions of women remain childless or bear only one child (Frejka and Ross 2001, De Rose et al. 2008, Fiori 2009).

### 3. Data

The data used to conduct the analysis come from the Multipurpose Household Survey on "Family and Social Subjects", carried out in Italy by the Italian National Statistical Office (ISTAT) at the end of 2003 (November 2003). The survey focuses on family structures and elements such as informal networks, help received for childcare, life as a couple and in a marriage, life cycle and intentions to leave the parental home to get married or to have children. Attitudes and opinions on some daily life aspects, job careers, and search for employment are covered as well.

The survey unit used in the analysis is the household, so that information on both members of the couple are available, but some building blocks of the questionnaire -in particular the ones regarding fertility intentions- are included into the self-administered part, in order to gain a higher degree of independence between the answers of the partners in comparison to other different surveys in which both partners may be present at the interview. In any case, the same questions were asked to both partners and the question on fertility intentions is asked to people aged 18 to 49.

As the aim of the paper is to study the factors of the partners' disagreement in the couples' childbearing intentions, the whole investigation focuses on men and women living in a union. The analysis of couples' fertility intentions for a first child includes 1,083 childless couples, while we have selected respondents who had at least one recorded biological child and one or more recorded unions when dealing with the intention for a second child. This second sample size consists of 1,330 couples and individuals aged 25 to 49 years<sup>2</sup>. One possible critique for the inclusion of women over 40 years old could be connected with the fecundability issue: one can argue that women over 40 years old are not as prolific as their younger counterparts. Moreover, age 40 has frequently been considered as a normative "deadline" to childbearing (Testa 2006), and this should discourage their inclusion. In favour of the choice of including the last age group of women in the

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<sup>2</sup> We selected 25 years old as the lower limit in the group age, and not 18, because we selected the parents of one child and none of them were less than 25 years of age.

sample of investigated individuals and against these last arguments, there are the ones of Sobotka and Testa (2008) that showed for a sample of countries (including Japan, United States and Europe) the existence of a shift towards later childbearing. In most of the analyzed countries, the relative increase in fertility has been found to be steeper at age 40 to 44, indicating that late childbearing has become more common since the late 1970s and the mid-1980s in Northern and Western Europe and about one decade later in Southern Europe. Moreover, they argued that the continuing fertility postponement will bring further rise in the proportion of women with one child at ages 40-49 and an increased desire to have children late in life. All these considerations, together with past findings by Bratti and Tatsiramos (2008) that noticed that for working women delaying the first birth has a positive effect on the likelihood of progressing to the second parity, lead us to the final decision of including women who are more than 40 years old.

Referring to the fertility intention sphere, respondents were asked about fertility intentions in the following way: “Do you intend to have a child in the next three years?” The four different options presented in the survey were: “Surely not”, “Probably not”, “Probably yes” and “Surely yes”, but in order to conduct the present investigation “Surely not” and “Probably not” on one side and “Probably yes” and “Surely yes” were grouped together<sup>3</sup>. Another two questions on fertility intentions were included in the questionnaire, one more general without a precise time frame: “In the future do you intend to have any child?” And one with the main focus of capturing the desired number of children: “How many children would you like to have over your life course?” Given that the interest of the present investigation is in the couple’s intention for a (first and second) child, and given that in the literature it has been proved that the explicit reference to a precise temporal framework is able to drive individuals to give more faithful answers (Quesnel-Vallée and Morgan 2003), the analysis focuses only on the three-year timing preference measure: “Do you intend to have a child in the next three years?”

#### **4. Empirical strategy**

In this section we present the hypotheses we want to test and the analytical procedure we followed in order to conduct the investigation.

##### **4.1 Hypotheses**

###### **4.1.1 Cohabitation**

Italy is a traditional society that shows a limited diffusion of cohabitation per se: people who choose to cohabit as an alternative to getting married do also tend to have less traditional family values and attitudes (Fraboni 2005). Moreover, it is well known that in Italy cohabitation is in most cases only a temporary phase in the process of family formation often characterised by a high level of uncertainty concerning housing, employment and economic conditions in general, as well as the relationship with the partner (Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). As a consequence, we expect that cohabitation is inversely related to the couple’s agreement in having a child.

###### **4.1.2 Female’s education**

Given that women have the primary responsibility for the direct care of children even in a dual-earner family, they have to bear a disproportionately large share of the couple’s fertility cost. This cost is even higher for highly educated women. Thus, according to economic theory, they should have lower fertility intentions, *ceteris paribus*.

Recently the first signs of an opposite trend have been observed: couples with more human capital and economic resources do show, all other factors being equal, a higher propensity to have children (Rosina 2004; Dalla Zuanna and Tanturri 2007; Mills et al. 2008). In particular, the cited studies highlighted the

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<sup>3</sup> This action was done for the sake of simplicity, but the authors know that in the sphere of the intentions there are a lot of differences in interpretation between the terms “probably” and “surely”, especially when the intentions are treated as a predictor for the behaviour.

presence of a positive effect of the female educational level on first childbearing intentions. Similarly, we also expect to find in our study a positive effect of education on the intention to have a first child, but a negative effect of the woman's education on the intentions to have a second child.

In addition, because of the higher bargain power of higher educated women, we expect that they are more often in disagreement with their partner as to fertility intentions, i.e. they are less likely to adapt their intentions to those of the partners. In our study the educational attainment is taken into account by using the International Standard Classification of Education (Appendix 1).

#### **4.1.3 Female's employment status (being employed or not) and strategy (working part-time or full-time)**

A key issue for the fertility intention and its subsequent realization is the influence of the labour market participation. As fertility and the labour force participation of women compete with each other in terms of time and energies, we suppose that working women are more likely to have negative first child intentions. Regarding the intention for the second child, we suppose that the relation between female childbearing intention for a second child and female's employment status is negative, given the scarce presence of childcare services experienced by the majority of couples with a first child (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000). We make assumptions of a negative relationship between fertility intentions and the woman's participation in the labour market, despite the fact that some evidence exists of a positive effect of women's employment on birth risks in East Germany (Kreyenfeld 2004) and Hungary (Röbert and Bukodi 2005).

As to joint partners' fertility intentions, we assume that working women have a stronger bargaining power and that they are more often in disagreement with their partners as to fertility intentions.

#### **4.1.4 Satisfaction with the gender division of domestic work and couple's quality of life**

In order to see how the bargaining process works on the decision of becoming parents for the first and the second time, and in line with the bargaining process theory illustrated in the second section, it is interesting to consider the quality of the relationship. Actually, it seems reasonable to suppose that the more solid the relationship is, the lower the probability that a member of a couple opposes her/his partner in the fertility intention sphere is.

To capture these elements, a series of different topics on the frequency of the disagreement with the partner in the last 12 months has been taken into consideration. We consider the women's level of satisfaction with the gender division of domestic duties as a *proxy* for the quality of the relationship as well. Such dimension has been recognized to be of particular interest in the recent literature for different countries. For example, Miller and Short (2004) showed that, in the US, the decision to have a second child is less likely in case of unequal division of domestic tasks between partners. Similarly, Mills et al. (2008) and Fiori (2009) found for Italy that a "role conflict" is negatively related to a second shift.

#### **4.1.5 Individual values**

The fact that being religious has a positive impact on the individual's fertility level is well-known in the literature. Adsera (2004) found that in 1985 in Spain family size was similar among practicing and non-practicing Catholics, but a decade and a half later, practicing Catholics portrayed significantly higher fertility levels than others. Similar results are found by Frejka and Westoff (2006) who examined the importance of religiosity in the different recorded fertility rates founding that in southern Europe church attendance significantly determines progression to higher order births while the measure of the importance of religion is most relevant in Western Europe. More recently, Philipov and Berghammer (2009) found that all measures of religiosity are, in general, related to a higher ideal number of children, higher odds to intend to have another child and higher expected and actual number of children.

In order to see how religion influences the couples' fertility intention and in order to evaluate the effects of the other variables such as the level of education or the employment strategy net of the religious- ideals-ethic component, the variable Mass attendance is considered. As to couples' agreement or disagreement, it is

expected that the religiousness of only one of the two components may increase the probability of a disagreement within the couple.

#### 4.1.6 Model and variables

The model adopted for the analysis is a multinomial logistic regression model. Logistic regression is part of the class of statistical models called generalized linear models. Binomial logistic regression is a form of regression which is used when the dependent variable is binary. Multinomial logistic regression allows handling the case of a response variable with more than two categories. This model aims at capturing different dimensions within the same framework, as the sign of the intention (positive or negative) and its dynamics within the couple. The model allows us to study the different effects of female and male characteristics on the concurrent or dissonant intention to have a second child.

The formula of the adopted model is:

$$p_{ij} = [\Pr\{y_i = j\}] = \left[ \frac{\exp(\alpha_j + \beta_{ij} X_i)}{\sum_{k=1}^N \exp(\alpha_k + \beta_{ik} X_i)} \right], \quad j = 1, \dots, 4$$

where X denotes the independent variables.

In other terms, the four different combinations are recoded in order to obtain a single dependent outcome variable  $Y_i$  (the subscript  $i$  refers to the couple):

$$Y_i = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } S = 1, H = 1 \\ 2 & \text{if } S = 1, H = 0 \\ 3 & \text{if } S = 0, H = 1 \\ 4 & \text{if } S = 0, H = 0, \end{cases}$$

where S is equal to one when the woman recorded a positive intention for a second childbearing (zero otherwise), while H is equal to one when it is the man who recorded a positive fertility intention (zero otherwise).

In our study, the dependent variable of interest is measured by four categories that represent the four different combinations of intentions between the two partners, that is “both intend”, “both do not intend”, “she intends, he does not” and “he intends, she does not”. Given the unordered nature of the categories the model adopted in the investigation is a multinomial logit model that aims at capturing different dimensions within the same framework and its dynamics within the couple. In this way it allows the study of the different effects of female and male characteristics on the positive or dissonant intention to have a first or a second child. Notably, the reasons to adopt a multinomial logistic model and not a binary logistic are similar to those highlighted by Di Tommaso and Weeks (2000): multinomial models provide a better representation of the data, especially when utility maximization is over a set of possible combinations and utility is not additively separable over the choice set.

The analytic model for both the analyses includes five key explanatory variables, namely female’s employment status and strategy (more detailed for the second child given the relevance of considering specific job characteristics after the birth of the first child, Bratti et al. 2005), female’s education, male’s employment status, Mass attendance and aspects connected to the quality of life of the couple including female’s satisfaction with the division of domestic work. Cohabitation is included for the analysis of fertility intentions within childless couples, while in shaping the intentions for couples that already have one child we do not have cohabiting cases, because all the respondents were married.

Other control variables are also included in the model (Appendix 2 reports the couples’ intention to have the first and the second child in the next three years and the explanatory variables used in the multivariate models). These control variables relate mainly to the individual characteristics of the respondent, as the age

of the respondents, the type of marriage (if it was religious or civil) and the area of residence in Italy. Moreover, when dealing with the intention for a second child, the age of the first child is added.

## 5. Results

The following Section presents the results of the empirical analyses, reporting firstly the results for couples' intention for the first child and secondly the results for couples that already have one child.

### 5.1 Results: couple's intention for a first child

The degree of conflicting intentions is in general relatively low. The descriptive analysis (Table 1 and 2a, 2b) shows that the men's disagreement in first child intentions goes above 15% only at younger and advanced ages, whereas the women's disagreement is very low before 30 years of age (see also Rosina and Testa 2009).

Table 1. Frequencies of positive and negative intentions among couples

Childless Couples			
	She intends to have the first child	She does not intend to have the first child	Total
He intends to have the first child	n=747, 93.26%	n=54, 6.74%	100%
He does not intend to have the first child	n=64, 22.70%	n=218, 77.30%	100%
Total	N=811	N=272	100%
Couples with one child			
	She intends to have the first child	She does not intend to have the first child	Total
He intends to have the first child	n=518, 86.62%	n=80, 13.38%	N=598 100%
He does not intend to have the first child	n=67, 9.15%	n=665, 90.85%	N=732 100%
Total	N=585	N=745	N=1,330

For what concerns the intention for a second child that we will soon illustrate, female and male disagreement is more than 15% at advanced ages, while when the male partner in the couple is young, both male and female disagreement is very low. This last evidence and in particular the agreement within the couple on making fertility plans may find support in the literature regarding the attitudes toward having children. For instance, Beets et al. (1999) found that positive parenthood attitudes lead to have children at an earlier age (so an agreement of intending to have a child is recorded). More recently Rønsen and Skrede (2010) showed

Table 2. a) Female and Male disagreement in the intention to have the first child in the next three years, Childless couples (1,083), Weighed data.

	Male disagreement, percentage of couples with female positive intention	Female disagreement, percentage of couples with male positive intention
<i>Age (her)</i>		
<30	9.72	2.70
30 – 34	6.11	9.78
35 – 39	6.13	9.12
40 +	9.81	7.68
<i>Age (him)</i>		
<30	15.79	2.98
30 – 34	4.12	3.99
35 – 39	7.56	11.85
40 +	26.55	25.98



Table 2. b) Female and Male disagreement in the intention to have the second child in the next three years, Couples with one child (1,330), Weighed data.

	Male disagreement percentage of couples with female positive intention		Female disagreement percentage of couples with male positive intention
<i>Age (her)</i>			
<30	12.67		11.25
30 – 34	10.01		12.89
35 – 39	10.73		13.07
40 +	28.57		31.03
<i>Age (him)</i>			
<30	8.00		8.00
30 – 34	13.30		8.25
35 – 39	9.64		17.22
40 +	7.45		17.30

that fertility rate has increased slightly in younger cohorts, supporting again the idea that younger partner are more likely to agree on positive fertility plans.

The parameters estimated in the multinomial logit model for childless couples are shown in Table 3. They represent the effect of the covariates on a given category in respect to the reference category, which is “both partners intend to have a first child”. The following section reports an overview of the results considering each single hypothesis. Moreover, at the end of this section the same structure will be followed in order to show the results concerning our main interest, which is fertility intention for the first child.

### 5.1.1 Cohabitation

In line with the previous hypothesis (see also Rosina and Testa 2009), the results of the model show that the absence of intention for a first child is more likely among cohabiting couples ( $p < 0.05$ ), which are usually considered to have less traditional values and life styles if compared to married couples (Table 3). We found a significant negative effect of cohabitation on the couples’ concordant first child intentions. *Ceteris paribus* and consistently with our hypothesis, cohabiting couples are less likely to make childbearing plans as compared to married couples. This effect is captured by the positive effect on “both don’t intend”. Moreover, as it is possible to check by looking at the positive and significant coefficient on “he intends, she doesn’t”, cohabiting men with positive intentions, when compared to married men, tend to be contrasted more often by their female partner.

### 5.1.2 Female’s education

The effect of education on the couples’ first child intentions appears to be more complex than expected and does not go in only one direction. Female partner high education is positively associated to the intentions of both partners to have a first child, while male partner high education is negatively associated ( $p < 0.05$ ). When looking at the interaction terms, if in the couple the woman has the higher education, partners more often agree with not intending to have a first child ( $p < 0.05$ ), contrary to our previous assumptions.

### 5.1.3 Female’s employment status and strategy

Consistent with the previous hypothesis, working women tend to disagree more often with their partners’ first child intentions, as compared to women who are housewives ( $p < 0.05$ ). In fact, more often than housewives, working women do not intend to have a first child while their partners do intend. Also, couples where the man is unemployed are less willing to have the first child, as shown in other recent studies for Italy as well as for other European countries (Sobotka and Testa, 2008).

### 5.1.4 Satisfaction with the gender division of domestic work and couple's quality of life

Table 3. Multinomial logistic model on the intention to have a first child within the next three years. (Standard errors in brackets). (Couples aged 18–49), \*Significant at  $p < 0.05$  Level; °= Significant at  $p < 0.10$  Level; n.e. = not estimated (too few cases).

	Both do not intend	She intends, he does not	He intends, she does not
<b>Age (her)</b>			
<30	-1.018* (0.278)	0.377 (0.323)	-0.450 (0.419)
30 – 34	-0.167 (0.195)	0.094 (0.294)	0.826* (0.297)
35-39	Ref. Cat.		
40 +	0.965* (0.230)	-0.305 (0.462)	-0.633 (0.542)
<b>Age (him)</b>			
<30	-0.062 (0.310)	0.142 (0.349)	-1.027 (0.569)
30 – 34	-1.969* (0.284)	-1.073* (0.326)	-0.888* (0.350)
35-39	0.507* (0.217)	0.080 (0.386)	0.152 (0.382)
40-44	Ref. Cat.		
45 +	1.724* (0.299)	0.966 (0.557)	1.754* (0.652)
<b>Area of residence</b>			
North	Ref. Cat.		
South	0.468* (0.141)	0.069 (0.177)	0.189 (0.227)
<b>Type of union</b>			
Cohabitation	0.53* (0.128)	0.285 (0.175)	0.506* (0.198)
<b>Education (her)</b>			
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	0.641* (0.200)	0.238 (0.268)	0.543 (0.293)
Medium (Isced 3-4)	Ref. Cat.		
High (Isced 5 - 6)	-0.859* (0.242)	-0.381 (0.324)	-0.323 (0.342)
<b>Education (him)</b>			
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	-0.445* (0.189)	-0.276 (0.258)	0.074 (0.297)
Medium (Isced 3-4)	Ref. Cat.		
High (Isced 5 - 6)	0.496* (0.239)	0.202 (0.343)	0.151 (0.369)
<b>Mass attendance (her)</b>			
At least once a month	-0.009 (0.178)	0.271 (0.223)	-0.806* (0.221)
<b>Mass attendance (him)</b>			
At least once a month	-0.390* (0.180)	-0.238 (0.225)	0.643* (0.223)
<b>Female employment status</b>			
Employed	-0.272 (0.149)	0.074 (0.211)	0.790* (0.351)
Other (occasional-seasonal jobs)	0.321 (0.217)	-0.068 (0.307)	-0.981 (0.617)
<b>Male employment status</b>			
Unemployed	0.418* (0.203)	0.057 (0.319)	0.157 (0.387)
<b>Division of housework within the couple</b>			
She is not satisfied	-0.117 (0.114)	0.073 (0.152)	0.236° (0.164)
<b>Interaction</b>			
She is Highly Educated* He is Poorly Educated	1.398* (0.335)	0.807 (0.468)	n.e.
He is Highly Educated* She is Poorly Educated	-0.283 (0.559)	0.672 (0.552)	n.e.
<b>Intercept</b>	0.845 (0.621)	-0.848 (0.689)	-9.499 (0.538)

Noteworthy is the effect of the covariate “Satisfaction with the gender division of domestic work”. In particular, women less satisfied with the division of housework are more likely to oppose their partner if he wants a child ( $p < 0.10$ ). This result is coherent with recent findings about the impact of the men’s involvement in domestic duties on reproductive behaviour.

### **5.1.5 Individual values**

There is a strong negative effect of male religiousness on “both don’t intend” ( $p < 0.05$ ), but male religiousness also increases the risk that the female partner contrasts his positive attitude towards childbearing. On the contrary, if the woman is religious, she shows a lower risk of contrasting her partner’s intention to have a child.

## **5.2 Results: couple’s intention for a second child**

Following the same structure of Table 3 and connecting the results to the previous ones, Table 4 reports the estimates for the intention for a second child, while the following Sub-section presents the results found in the analysis.

### **5.2.1 Female’s education**

When the woman has a higher education, compare to male partner, the outcome “he intend, she doesn’t intend” is more likely ( $p < 0.05$ ). This is especially shown by the interaction term in the model. Such results are consistent with the assumption previously mentioned on the trade-off faced by higher educated women.

### **5.2.2 Female’s employment status and male employment**

Referring to the labour market sphere, couples with full time working women are less likely to make plans for a second child compared with couples where the female partner is a housewife ( $p < 0.10$ ). If we change perspective and consider the partners’ disagreement, we note - in line with the effect previously assumed- that working women tend to disagree more often with their husbands’ intentions for a second child ( $p < 0.10$ ). As to female’s employment strategy, it is interesting to highlight that part-time employed women who would like to become a mother again are less likely to disagree with their partner on the second child compared to a housewife ( $p < 0.05$ ).

The male employment status itself has an important and clear effect on the partners’ disagreement: even if in the sample only the 3% of the males do not have a job, couples with one child where the man does not work tend to record higher level of contrast if compared with couples with an employed male partner ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### **5.2.3 Satisfaction with the gender division of domestic work and union quality**

Net of other covariates, the satisfaction/non satisfaction with the gender division of domestic work does not have any significant effect on the partners’ agreement or disagreement. Even if this contrasts with our hypothesis, it is in line with Krüger and Levy (2001) who -as previously reported- argued that women and men have a specific *master status* which, when particular life events happen as the birth of the first child, leads to the privileged assignation of men to the paid job and of women to the unpaid job of familial domain. So, we can conclude that it is with the arrival of the first child that an unequal division of work within the couple is established, as we found in the previous analysis.

Referring to the quality of the relationship between partners, the most frequent topic of couples’ disagreements is if the woman has to work or not (almost 10% of women in our sample, with peak of 14.6 in the southern part of Italy declare that they often disagree with the partner on such topic). The result coming from our empirical analysis suggests that compared to couples that agree on that topic, conflicting couples are more likely to make plans for another child ( $p < 0.05$ ). Even if this could appear counterintuitive at a first sight, it could find its explanation in some empirical analyses. Actually, Vuri (2001), using the British

Table 4. Multinomial logistic model on the intention to have a second child within the next three years. (Standard errors in brackets). (Couples aged 25–49), \*=Significant at  $p < 0.05$  Level, °= Significant at  $p < 0.10$  Level

	Both do not intend	She intends, he does not	He intends, she does not
<b>Age (her)</b>			
<30	-0.772* (0.278)	0.012 (0.471)	0.685* (0.423)
30 – 34	-0.967* (0.220)	-0.133 (0.407)	0.499 (0.343)
35-39	Ref. Cat.		
40 +	1.579* (0.299)	0.947* (0.571)	0.588 (0.550)
<b>Age (him)</b>			
<30	0.073 (0.385)	0.371 (0.652)	-0.829 (0.610)
30 – 34	0.034 (0.232)	0.808* (0.370)	-0.857* (0.338)
35-39	Ref. Cat.		
40 +	0.455* (0.216)	0.150 (0.439)	-0.352 (0.386)
<b>Area of residence</b>			
North	Ref. Cat.		
Centre	0.091 (0.217)	0.369 (0.368)	0.326 (0.322)
South	-0.834* (0.188)	-0.394 (0.325)	-0.639* (0.309)
<b>Age group of children</b>			
0 – 5	-0.992* (0.527)	-0.209 (1.107)	-0.107 (1.120)
6 – 13	Ref. Cat.		
> 13	2.742* (0.892)	1.488 (1.516)	2.99* (1.416)
<b>Education (her)</b>			
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	0.117 (0.194)	-0.099 (0.350)	-0.067 (0.316)
Medium (Isced 3-4)	Ref. Cat.		
High (Isced 5 - 6)	0.219 (0.670)	0.897 (1.099)	-1.759 (1.169)
<b>Education (him)</b>			
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	0.200 (0.187)	-0.429 (0.335)	0.264 (0.303)
Medium (Isced 3-4)	Ref. Cat.		
High (Isced 5 - 6)	-0.946 (0.714)	-0.945 (1.173)	1.934° (1.120)
<b>Mass attendance (her)</b>			
At least once a month	-0.292 (0.223)	-0.225 (0.389)	-0.466 (0.370)
<b>Mass attendance (him)</b>			
At least once a month	-0.731* (0.384)	-0.649 (0.668)	-0.324 (0.546)
<b>Female employment status</b>			
Part-time Employed	-0.184 (0.240)	-1.046* (0.502)	0.411 (0.388)
Full-time Employed	0.289° (0.194)	0.107 (0.321)	0.538° (0.330)
Housewife	Ref. Cat.		
Unemployed	-0.491 (0.458)	-0.206 (0.681)	0.707 (0.543)
Other (occasional-seasonal jobs)	0.517 (0.633)	-0.413 (1.117)	0.914 (0.871)
<b>Male employment status</b>			
Unemployed	0.366 (0.494)	1.758* (0.578)	1.147* (0.654)
<b>Quality of relation (her)</b>			
Not satisfied with housework division	0.004 (0.202)	0.278 (0.321)	0.378 (0.304)
Disagreement on her job	-0.744* (0.259)	-0.821* (0.450)	-0.414 (0.395)
Disagreement on child education	0.004 (0.182)	0.578* (0.313)	0.268 (0.284)
<b>Interaction</b>			
She is Highly Educated* He is Poorly Educated	-0.708 (0.770)	-1.799 (1.328)	2.033* (1.282)
He is Highly Educated* She is Poorly Educated	0.943° (0.793)	0.740 (1.328)	-1.666 (1.246)
<b>Intercept</b>	0.890* (0.584)	-1.930* (1.197)	-2.332* (1.211)

Household Panel Survey argued that having children makes it less likely that a marriage will break down. In particular she stated that having children reduces the probability of a couple's marital dissolution by four percentage points, so the joint decision of increasing the number of children in the family may be an attempt in trying to save a marriage or in reducing the number of discordance<sup>4</sup>.

#### **5.2.4 Individual values**

Males' Mass attendance plays the most important role in explaining our variable of interest. In particular, the fact that the male partner frequently attends Mass services exerts a significant and positive influence on the couple's agreement of intending to have another child.

As already highlighted in the section devoted to the employed model for the investigation, the second part of the paper does not take into account the differences in intentions and the level of agreement/disagreement between married and cohabiting couples. The feature is recognized to be an important variable to be inserted in the analysis. It has been analyzed for the intention for a first child but, unfortunately, among the 1,330 couples that already have one child we do not have any non-married cohabiting couples, so we are not able to give an overview of the differences between cohabiting and married couples' intentions for a second child. Nor are we able to further support the analysis conducted by Rosina and Testa (2009) who found, in line with the initial hypothesis and with what stated by Billari and Rosina (2004), that cohabiting couples are less likely to make short-term childbearing plans as compared to married couples. Additionally, they found that i) cohabiting couples show a relatively high risk of discordance in first child intentions and ii) a significant positive effect of cohabitation on the probability that women do not share their partner's intention to have a child.

### **6. Discussion**

Having a child is a dyadic and not a unilateral decision. However, if the importance of the partner's reproductive intentions has been well recognized in both the demographic and economic literature, few studies have provided analyses of fertility plans of both partners. If we want to "explain" childbearing behavior both members of the couple should explicitly be taken into account. In this paper we have tried to partially fill in this gap by carrying out a study of fertility intentions and providing a unitary picture of the concordant or discordant partners' intentions.

Concerning the effect of the educational variables, the results are remarkable. The woman's higher level of education has a depressing effect on intention for the second child. Moreover, higher levels of woman's education are more often associated with partners' disagreement in fertility intentions for the second child. Because of the dissimilarity of results for the first and the second child, researchers should consider the parity-specific dimension in this research field.

Referring to the labour strategy, we found that couples in which the woman is working are more likely to disagree on the intentions to have a child, preferring not to have one in opposition to the partner. We find that especially mothers with a full-time employment have a higher probability not to intend to have an additional child and to be in disagreement with the partner.

Our results suggest that the family bargain is something between the Jansen and Liefbroer's "power rule" and the Krüger and Levy's "master status" (see second paragraph): women gain a power bargain with education and/or paid work, but men keep their master status in the occupational domain. This may cause a disagreement between partners in the domain of fertility intentions. In order to support working women and in order to reach a higher consistency between partners' desires, policies should increase symmetry in gender roles in society and implement policies that reconcile work and family.

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<sup>4</sup> However, in general terms we have to keep in mind that the potential stability of a marriage may affect the arrival of children: a couple's inclination to divorce may actually affect its decision to begin a family and the willingness to add children to an existing family, therefore, fertility may not be exogenous to the decision of marital dissolution as assumed by Vuri (2001).

We conclude by putting in evidence some shortcomings of our methodology and data. Considering the methodological aspect, the multinomial approach adopted in this investigation permits to find interesting results and fill in some existing gaps in the literature related to fertility intentions. However, a limitation of the dependent variables is that dichotomous measures of intention have been used. Consequently, there is no way of distinguishing between a weak aspiration and an uncompromising determination.

Moreover, the results on the fertility intentions for a second child are based on couples that already have experienced the birth of the first child, and the adoption of a *selection model* on women with one child could be relevant in order to understand the existence of a correlation between the probability of experiencing the first birth and the following couples' bargaining process related to the intention of becoming parents for a second time.

Referring to the employed dataset, some other remarks may be highlighted. Data gathered with the Multipurpose Household Survey on "Family and Social Subjects" survey have been used. These data offered the possibility to analyze the household as a survey unit thanks to the availability of information on both members of the couple. However, they did not allow us to explore dynamics in the life events. Thanks to the use of new data from the second wave of the Survey on Family and Social Subjects the impact of the partners' disagreement in childbearing intentions on subsequent behaviour will be soon investigated.

## **Appendix 1**

Different school levels, International Standard Classification of Education, 1997.

**Pre-primary Education**, ISCED Level 0. Institution-based and designed for children who are at least 3 years old.

**Primary Education**, ISCED Level 1. Have systematic introductory studies in core subjects, such as mathematics, reading, and writing. School participation at this level is mandatory in all Countries and generally lasts 5-6 years. Entry age varies between 4 years and 8 years.

**Lower-Secondary Education**, ISCED Level 2. Tends to have somewhat more subject-oriented education, the teachers are more specialized, and the numbers of instruction hours is higher than in primary education. Lower-secondary education is typically the last part of compulsory education.

**Upper-Secondary Education**, ISCED Level 3. Generally begins at the end of compulsory schooling. In the upper-secondary school, subject teaching is generally more advanced than at earlier stages. Students have considerable freedom to choose specialized subjects. The stage lasts from 1-5 years, depending on country and school system.

**Postsecondary nontertiary education**, ISCED Level 4. Programs sometimes require a secondary school qualification. They typically have more subject depth, are more specialized than secondary education, and are more often of too short a duration to fit into the ISCED 5 category.

**Tertiary education**, ISCED Level 5. Programs are more advanced than education offered at ISCED levels 3 or 4 and have a minimum duration of 2 years. They may require completion of a research project or a thesis and are meant to direct the participants to professions with high skill requirements or to research programs.

**Advanced tertiary education**, ISCED Level 6. Requires the submission of a thesis or dissertation. Students who complete this stage of education should have proved their ability to carry out and advanced research work.

## Appendix 2

A. Couples' intention to have the first child in the next three years and explanatory variables used in the multivariate models. (Childless couples, weighted data).

	Both intend	She intends, he does not	He intends, she does not	Both do not intend	N
	N=747	N=64	N=54	N=218	N=1,083
<b>Age (her)</b>					
<30	81.79	8.81	2.27	7.12	372
30 – 34	76.35	4.97	8.28	10.39	318
35 – 39	65.49	4.28	6.57	23.66	215
40 +	33.08	3.60	2.75	60.56	178
<b>Age (him)</b>					
<30	71.02	13.32	2.18	13.48	179
30 – 34	89.31	3.84	3.71	3.14	383
35 – 39	67.35	5.51	9.05	18.09	250
40-44	52.82	4.37	5.45	37.36	172
45 +	19.00	4.43	3.79	72.78	100
<b>Area of residence</b>					
North	66.82	5.83	5.27	22.08	847
South	76.70	6.28	3.89	13.13	236
<b>Education (her)</b>					
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	61.05	6.46	7.39	25.10	314
Medium (Isced 3 - 4)	71.12	6.06	3.75	19.07	556
High (Isced 5 - 6)	75.01	4.80	4.59	15.60	214
<b>Education (him)</b>					
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	67.98	5.74	6.03	20.25	425
Medium (Isced 3 - 4)	70.71	5.97	4.07	19.26	506
High (Isced 5 - 6)	65.93	6.31	5.03	22.73	152
<b>Type of Union</b>					
Cohabitation	54.74	8.85	7.58	28.83	163
Marriage	71.49	5.41	4.51	18.59	920
<b>Mass Attendance (her)</b>					
At least once a month	72.59	7.24	3.09	17.08	490
Less than once a month	71.97	5.21	5.00	17.81	407
<b>Mass Attendance (him)</b>					
At least once a month	73.36	5.25	6.25	15.14	391
Less than once a month	71.47	5.12	4.40	19.01	457
<b>Female employment status</b>					
Employed	62.66	6.01	4.08	27.26	175
Housewife	69.95	5.89	5.76	18.41	786
Other (occasional-seasonal jobs)	71.74	6.09	1.18	20.99	122
<b>Division of housework within the couple</b>					
She is satisfied	69.37	5.63	4.40	20.60	797
She is not satisfied	67.85	6.75	6.57	18.83	287

B. Couples' intention to have a second child in the next three years and explanatory variables used in the multivariate models. (Couples with one child, Weighted data).

	<b>Both intend</b>	<b>She intends, he does not</b>	<b>He intends, she does not</b>	<b>Both do not intend</b>	<b>N</b>
	<b>N=518</b>	<b>N=67</b>	<b>N=80</b>	<b>N=665</b>	<b>N=1,330</b>
<b>Age (her)</b>					
<30	63.39	8.04	8.04	20.53	224
30 - 34	63.17	7.08	9.35	20.40	353
35 - 39	37.35	4.50	5.62	52.53	356
40 +	5.04	2.02	2.26	90.68	397
<b>Age (him)</b>					
<30	66.67	5.80	5.80	21.73	69
30 - 34	64.29	9.86	5.78	20.07	294
35 - 39	48.64	4.63	10.21	36.52	405
40 +	15.30	2.67	3.20	78.83	562
<b>Area of residence</b>					
North	32.23	4.27	6.00	57.50	633
Centre	31.67	5.83	7.92	54.58	240
South	52.08	5.69	5.03	37.20	457
<b>Education (her)</b>					
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	34.83	4.31	5.28	55.58	511
Medium (Isced 3 - 4)	41.17	5.39	6.29	47.15	668
High (Isced 5 - 6)	43.05	5.96	7.28	43.71	151
<b>Education (him)</b>					
Low (Isced 0 - 2)	35.22	4.04	5.98	54.76	619
Medium (Isced 3 - 4)	42.71	5.80	5.62	45.87	569
High (Isced 5 - 6)	40.14	6.33	7.75	45.78	142
<b>Mass Attendance (her)</b>					
At least once a month	42.28	4.73	5.42	47.57	719
Less than once a month	35.02	5.41	6.71	52.86	611
<b>Mass Attendance (him)</b>					
At least once a month	44.04	4.77	5.87	45.32	545
Less than once a month	35.41	5.22	6.11	53.26	785
<b>Female employment status</b>					
Part-time Employed	43.95	2.69	7.62	45.74	223
Full-time Employed	32.35	5.36	6.18	56.11	581
Unemployed	54.00	6.00	12.00	28.00	50
Housewife	43.36	5.75	4.20	46.69	452
Other (occasional-seasonal jobs)	37.29	4.15	8.26	50.30	24
<b>Quality of the relation (her)</b>					
Satisfied with the division of housework	41.05	4.77	5.84	48.34	1028
Not satisfied with the division of housework	31.79	5.96	6.62	55.63	302
Disagreement on her job	51.10	4.83	5.52	32.62	145
Agreement on her job	36.95	5.24	5.95	51.87	1126
Disagreement on child education	34.15	5.89	6.71	53.25	492
Agreement on child education	43.77	4.56	5.55	48.58	811
<b>Age group of children</b>					
0 - 5	60.95	7.25	7.69	24.11	676
6 - 13	24.37	3.81	5.33	66.49	394
>13	0.86	0.86	2.58	95.70	233



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