Exploring differences and similarities
among women of different parities in Italy

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ABSTRACT

In Italy, cohorts born since the 40s have experienced a dramatic reduction of the proportion of high-parity women, while the two-children pattern has become prevalent. Recent estimates for cohorts born after 1960 reveal a steep increase of the proportion of childless women and a high proportion of those having just one child.

Aim of this paper is to delineate the profiles of those women who can be considered "deviant" with respect to the normal and modal behaviour that consists of having two children. Their background characteristics and their partners', together with the information on couple features in the first period of their union, are taken into account. Further investigation is dedicated to the motivations given for not having had a first or a further child. A discussion on possible reactions to family policies is also included. We analyse data from a quantitative survey conducted in five urban areas in 2002.

Keywords: *low fertility, fertility determinants, childlessness, Italy.*

1. Introduction

The case of the Italian lowest-low fertility is well-known to demographic literature (Salvini, 2004, Billari, Kohler & Ortega 2002). Fertility pathways across generations reveal that cohorts born since the 40s have experienced a dramatic reduction of the proportion of high parity women, while the two-children pattern has become prevalent (Fig. 1 and 2). A new reproductive model seems thus to have emerged: cohorts have shifted from having "at least two children" to "no more than two" (Santini 1995, Zanatta & De Rose 1995). Moreover, recent estimates for cohorts born after 1960 show a steep increase of the proportion of childless women (22.5 % for the 1966 cohort) and a high proportion of those having just one child (28.7% for the same cohort). In particular, the cohort born in 1960 is the first one, for which the lowest parities (0 or 1 child) are more frequent than the two-children pattern (Zanatta & De Rose 1995). Therefore, the new widespread pattern of childbearing is more and more characterised by childless and low parities women, while the traditional high parity pattern has become the heritage of a minority group. How different are those women adopting either a new reproductive behaviour (childless woman) or a "traditional" one (having three or more children), from the modal group having two children? Are they selected for a plurality of characteristics? On the one hand, if macro evidence supports that childlessness is not a negligible component of low fertility levels any longer, efforts should be made to delineate the profile of women having no children. On the other hand, it is evident that couples choosing to have a large offspring are less and less common and it should be worth studying their peculiarities.

Unfortunately, we cannot rely of national representative data sources to try to answer the above questions. Indeed, the Italian Fertility and Family Survey (1996) does not provide micro-data relative to cohorts born at the end of 1950s, while, obviously, the 2002 Italian Births Sample Survey does not supply data on childless women. The lack of suitable and up-dated data prompted a research group to conduct a CATI survey to gather micro data on women born around 1960. Although limited to five urban contexts - the municipalities of Udine, Padua, Florence, Pesaro and Messina – they represent a useful and unique source to get an insight into the profile of those women born around 1960.

In this paper, we are particularly interested to test some of the hypotheses that, according to literature, differentiate women with distinctive reproductive behaviours and to investigate whether they are still valid for younger cohorts approaching the final phase of their reproductive life. It is interesting to compare these groups of women, using both their background characteristics and their partners' together with the information on couple features in the first period of their union. The hypothesis here is that all these factors can play a role in order to distinguish couple's fertility

outcomes. Further investigation is dedicated to compare the motivations that women of different parities give for not having had a child or a further child, with the aim to emphasize similarities and differences. Delineating the profiles of those women, who can be considered - to a certain extent - "deviant", with respect to the normal and modal behaviour, is also useful as a basis for discussing women's possible reactions to family policies.

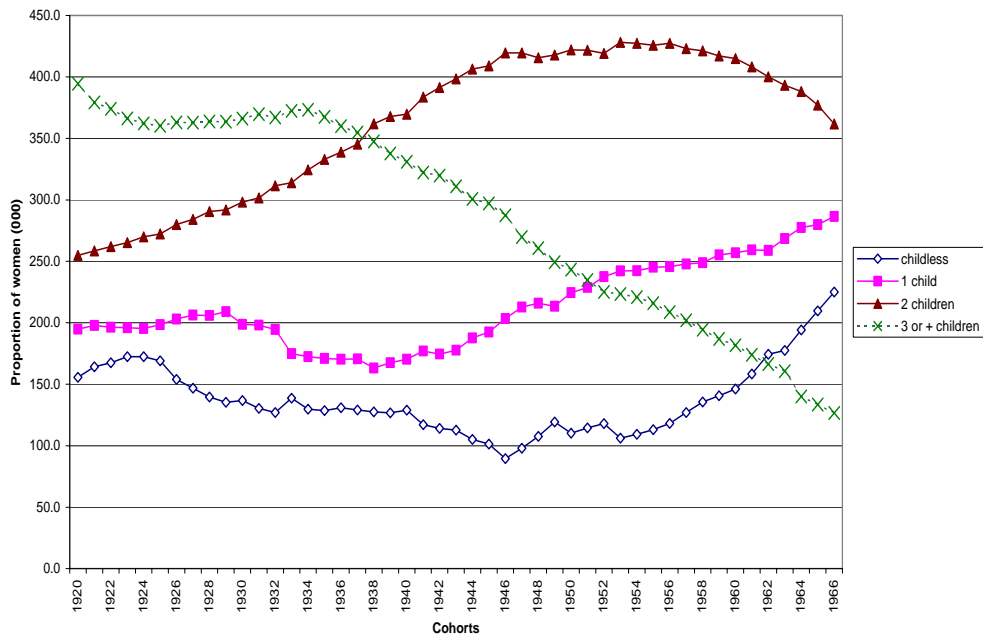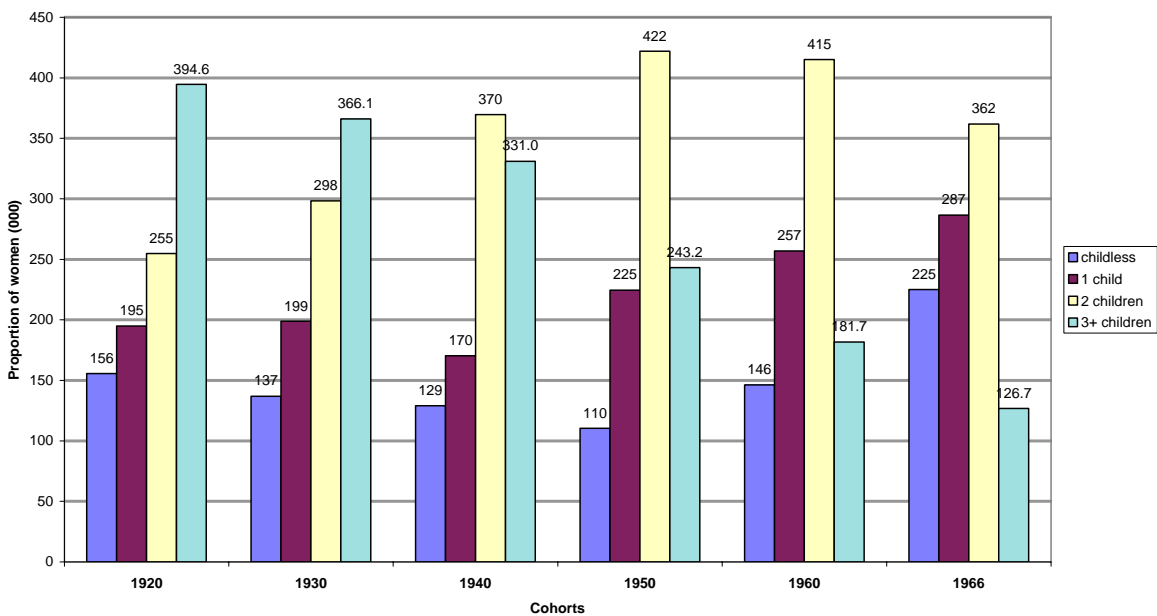**Figure 1: Proportion of women by parity in Italy. Cohorts 1920-1966. (Data source: ISTAT)**

Figure 2: Proportion of women by parity in Italy. Cohorts 1920-1966. (Data source: ISTAT)

2. Background and hypotheses

In literature, there are no many theoretical approaches trying to explain why women make different fertility choices. Recently, Hakim (2002) elaborated the *theory of fertility preference*s. According to this theoretical perspective, women are heterogeneous and in the first period of their life develop dissimilar preferences with regard to childbearing and lifestyle, which determine their subsequent behaviour. Hence, women become more family or career–oriented according to their first socialisation process. The weakening of moral and social norms encourages women to follow their propensities, without being stigmatised. The Hakim's conclusion is that fertility policies to be successful should take into account the differences among typologies of women and implement specific measures only for women who are more family-oriented.

In this paper, we are interested to bring to light possible aspects distinguishing women having different fertility outcome, at the end of their reproductive life. Differently from the Hakim's theory, we argue that not only women characteristics have an impact on this choices, but also their partner's ones, as well as the couple's features in the first period of their life together.

A first group of hypotheses to test is related to individual characteristics. We wonder whether women's different fertility behaviours are still influenced by differences in education and religiousness, which are typically considered relevant fertility determinants. Female education has been deemed as a key variable explaining the decline of fertility, in Italy as in other countries, by most of the literature (Salvini 2004; Ongaro 2002). From an economic perspective, higher education is tied to greater career aspirations, to an increase in the opportunity cost of children (Gustafsson 2001) and to a delay in entry into motherhood (Nicoletti and Tanturri 2005). Moreover, from an ideational perspective, higher educated women have been more often socialized in a context where less emphasis was given to maternity and thus they are more likely to be receptive to alternative values and cultural orientations. It is also possible that more educated women have postponed maternity and therefore they might occur more frequently in infertility problems (Gustafsson *et al.* 2002).

Religious observance has always been a characteristic that plays an important role in shaping fertility behaviour in our country. Several previous studies show the importance of religious observance on fertility behaviour in Italy (i.e. Dalla Zuanna, 2001): secularism seems more often associated to both childlessness and low fertility, while more religious women are usually more likely to have larger off-spring (De Sandre *et al.* 1999, Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1995). We wonder whether the religious attitude is still relevant to distinguish younger women having different fertility

outcome. It is not clear indeed whether the differences shrink as the context become more secularised or widen, due to a new radicalism.

Another individual characteristic we focus on is the intergenerational transmission of fertility patterns. This is aimed to evaluate the role of the early socialization process on subsequent life preferences. From previous studies relative to the Italian context (Murphy & Wang 2001, Casacchia & Dalla Zuanna 1999, Micheli 1999) it emerges that fertility patterns of parents and children are positively correlated, even in a context of declining fertility. The relationship between fertility of different generations is becoming even stronger with time and therefore it seems promising to evaluate its importance also for the cohorts born around 1960.

A second group of hypotheses concerns the role of the same characteristics, but belonging to their partners. Italian literature on this topic is not abundant: the traditional approach in fertility studies usually neglects the role of partners in determining reproductive choices, focussing only on women. Just recently, demographic literature shows more interest in partner's characteristics as playing not a minor role in determining fertility outcome (Attanasio and Dalla Zuanna 1999, Dalla Zuanna 2001). We expect that both education and religiosity have an impact similar to the one observed for women, but probably weaker with regard to education (as the male education is a proxy for family income) and stronger for religion (as observant men are rarer and therefore a more select group).

A third group of hypothesis is focused on couple characteristics in the first period of their union. First, we are interested to evaluate whether a delayed enter into a union is associated to lower parities. Second, we want to verify whether entering a union in good economic conditions is associated to lower or higher parities. Third, we concentrate on how couples arranged their leisure time, labour supply and domestic tasks, according to the prevailing gender roles. Women's greater participation in the labour market is usually linked with lower levels of fertility, but this conclusion seems incomplete without taking into consideration the relationship between partners, the degree of existing equality, the roles inside and outside the home. The division of tasks within the family, particularly those that can generically be defined as "housework" and childcare, characterizes family role-set. Obviously, in couples where women do not work for the labour market – the male "bread winner model" - the division of labour is strongly asymmetric, so that both domestic and caring duties are prevalently or, even totally, carried out by women. Conceivably this arrangement still facilitates women to have larger parities, as it used to be. Conversely, for that increasing proportion of women who no longer build their social "identity" just through marriage and the family, but also want to work or to be economically independent (Piazza 2003), the possibility to

have children depends very much either on their partners' share of domestic tasks or to the existence of adequate family services (Mencarini and Tanturri 2004).

2. The sample

Data from two parallel retrospective surveys - conducted in 2002 in five Italian urban contexts – namely the provincial capitals of Padua and Udine (in the North of Italy), Florence and Pesaro (in the Centre) and Messina (in the South) - have been analysed. As we stated before, this data source - in spite of its geographical limitation - represents a unique – and therefore precious - data sources for women born around 1960.

The first survey was conducted on a sample of 859 childless women randomly extracted from council registers. The age range of women is restricted to 40 – 44 years old. This range is deemed as old enough to provide information on permanent childlessness, but also sufficiently young to recall details on their reproductive choices quite easily. The survey was conducted with the CATI method, using a computerized questionnaire.

The second survey was conducted on about 3,000 mothers in the same five Italian provincial capitals, within the same research project, in 2002. Mothers sample was derived by a sample of children (aged 13-14) attending the last year of "Junior Secondary School". Mothers were interviewed by a self-administered questionnaire distributed at school to their children. This sample design allows to over-represent the higher parities women, since the ones having more children had a higher probability to be interviewed. In this way we could obtain a largest sample of a minority group to be analysed with the standard statistical models (Dalla Zuanna, Salvini 2003).

Both surveys are based on the same questionnaire - with the obvious exception of questions regarding children – although the sample design and interview mode are different. After requesting information about personal and family background, questions are then directed towards learning more about working life and steps toward independence. The third section focuses on experiences of union, devoting particular attention to the characteristics of the first union and the first partner. Childless women – who had at least a stable partnership - are asked to provide motivations for not having had children, while mother with either one or two children are asked to explain why they did not have another child. It should be noted that, since in the Italian context, having a stable partnership – in most cases a marriage – is still considered a necessary prerequisite for having a child, it was decided not to pose any question on reproductive choices to women who have never entered a union.

We put the datasets together. The "combined" data set with mothers and childless women contains information from two independent random samples extracted from different size populations. From the survey on mothers, we selected a sub sample of 1,100 individuals in the same age group of the childless. From this childless sample we selected only women who have ever experienced a stable partnership. The aim is to put in evidence only characteristics distinguishing women having different parities among women ever in couple. Conceivably, women who have never experienced a stable partnership form a highly selected group. The assumption here is that different traits could differentiate the propensity to entering a union, either marriage or cohabitation, that in Italy is still a fundamental prerequisite to give birth[1].

Towns included in the project have not been chosen randomly, but are the places where the research groups involved in the project are located. This choice facilitated both access to the city population registers as well as the interpretation of results, since the environment is well known to the researchers. Selection criteria, however, do not seem to be correlated to being childless, given that these towns do not differ systematically from other towns in the same territorial areas, in proportion to childlessness, cohabitation rates, and the main socio-demographic indicators. Therefore, it is quite feasible that even non-randomly selected towns are sufficiently representative of the Italian urban context. Emphasis has been placed on this specific context because this is where new lifestyles and less traditional demographic behaviours emerge, both in general and in this specific case (Livi Bacci, 1999).

These retrospective cross-sectional surveys present typical shortcomings. Answers may be biased by interviewee ability to remember past events, experiences encountered over-time, social desirability of certain answers, and by the need to justify previous decisions which were often determined by different factors (*ex-post rationalization*). Nevertheless it is worth underlining that, in spite of its limits, this survey is an attempt to gather detailed data on a generation of women born around 1960 that are responsible for the major changes in parity distribution in Italy.

3. Exploring characteristics associated to different parities

A central aim of this paper is to identify those characteristics that may be important in predicting the probability for a woman of being of certain parity. A weighted multinomial logit

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[1] In a previous study (Tanturri & Mencarini 2004) it has been shown that single childless women are more likely to never attend religious services, to have a higher level of education and to come from larger family of origins – with respect to women who have ever entered in union.

model (Greene, 2002) is used to contrast mothers of two children – the modal group - with three other categories: childless women, those who have an only child, and the mothers of three or more children.

Our sampling strategy for both surveys can be considered "choice based"; i.e. the selection probabilities are known because the size of each group -mothers and childless women- in the population is known. Therefore, a discrete choice model can be consistently estimated by weighted maximum likelihood (Manski & Lerman, 1997; Manski & MacFadden, 1981; Imbens, 1992). Data are thus weighted taking into account the different proportion of each subgroup of childless women and mothers in the reference population in each city.

3.1 Variables

The present condition of women is certainly a result of their background, but also of their previous life-course. We therefore concentrate our attention on both unalterable individual characteristics - such as number of siblings – and on information on couple and partner, referring specifically to the initial period of the first cohabitation and marriage, excluding all current information, referred to the time of the survey. The sole exception to this principle is residence: only information on the current residence of women is available, but since it is known that most house-moves in Italy take place within a short-range, this premise is also assumed here as a quite stable truth (Istat, 2003).

As a dependent variable we use the outcome of fertility behaviour that can be considered a good proxy of fertility preferences in a context of controlled fertility. It should be noted, however, that this correspondence might not be perfect, since there are cases in which women cannot control their fertility perfectly or, conversely, that cannot get the number of children they wish, for a plurality of reasons (unwanted pregnancies, infertility, union breakdown…)[2].

The covariates included in the models are listed in Table 1A (in Appendix). The highest level of education, although in principle changeable during a life course, can generally be considered a fixed characteristic. Women are divided in three groups: (a) those having no higher than the basic compulsory education level, that is eight years of study in total (only very few

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[2] For instance, in the case of childless women sample, it can be shown that a third of the initial sample is constituted by involuntary childless women (Tanturri and Mencarini, 2004). Unfortunately, the information of fertility preferences is not available for the mother sample, so that the above assumption is necessary. The effect on the observed association should have been even stronger if we could take into consideration the pure fertility preferences.

women have no education at all or only elementary school); (b) women with at least a high school diploma, which translates into no less than 13 years of schooling; (c) women with a university degree or higher level of education. Religion is asked in terms of attendance at religious services, of any religion, when the woman was aged 25. Women regularly observant, went to Church or other service every week or more; the occasionally observant went only a few times per month or only during special periods such as Christmas or Easter; the non-observant never attended religious service of any kind.

Age at the beginning of the first cohabitation or marriage refers to the woman. Information on economic conditions are gathered as general subjective women's judgment, and it is related to the overall situation of the couple in the first period of the union. This latter item is dichotomised only into two classes: good conditions or poor. Partner background information – e.g. number of siblings – are classified following the same procedures as with women. Partner religious attendance was related to the first period of the union. Similarly, judgment of leisure time and details on work activities, again, for both partners, refer to the initial period of union. Women's leisure time is dichotomised in "little or very little" or "sufficient or very much". The amount of partner leisure time is asked of women in comparison to their own: more, less or as much as her. Partners' involvement in domestic tasks is also taken into account.

Job characteristics are recorded in the same way for both partners: the type of position distinguishes between a fixed-term position and a permanent one. A distinction is also made between having a fixed or a flexible work schedule. For women we also included a modality that referred to those not working in that period, a modality that was unnecessary for men who all belong to the labour-force.

Table 1A (in Appendix) where column percentages are reported[3], shows some differences in the four groups of women that are quite salient in terms of background variables and that evidence how childless women and mothers with three children are the extreme groups, quite different also from one-two children mothers. Childless women more frequently are lonely child, have a higher education and are not religious observant, so it is for, all these characteristics, for their partner. In terms of job, childless women have more frequently a higher-level job, more frequently with a fixed work schedule and a permanent position. They declared that their partner participate more often to housework tasks.

As opposite, mothers with three children, less often had at the beginning of their couple-life an active working life, and they have a more traditional background, being – with their partner –

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[3] All the difference among groups are proved statistically significant with a chi-square test.

more religious and with a higher number of siblings in the family of origin. Only the multivariate model can assess the effect of these single characteristics on the probability to belong to each group of women.

3.2 Empirical findings

Tables 2A and 3A (both in Appendix) present the estimated parameters of the multinomial logistic models for characteristics predicting women of different parity[4]. Three different models have been estimated: the first one (MOD1, table 2A) includes only covariates relative to women. The second one (MOD2, table 2A) encompasses also variables relative to their partners, while in the third - and most complete – one, variables refer to couples in the first period of their union (MOD 3, table 3A). The estimated coefficients, and their statistical significance, are reported for all three models, standard error and Wald test only for the completed one. Each estimated coefficient represents the effect of independent variables on the probability of being childless, mother of one child, mother of three or more children, against the probability of being a mother of two children. Results are summarised in a table (table 1), where the probabilities to belonging a group of women of certain parity are reported, for each model.

The baseline probability is related to a reference woman, who resides in Udine (in the North-East of Italy), has no religious affiliation, a high level of education, has consistently worked, and has just one sibling. She also has a non-religious partner with one sibling, entered their first union between 25 and 30, and has ever cohabitated. In the first period of the union, the couple's economic conditions were good, women had much or enough leisure time with their partner having more time than the woman, and sharing domestic tasks, both partners worked with a fixed-term contract, but the woman had a flexible work schedule.

Results indicate that the childless group presents more differences from the reference group, i.e. mothers having two children. This seems to confirm that childless women are a group distinguished by many aspects from the group of the mothers. This might suggest also that they have different propensities for family formation and respond to a radically different model of behaviour. Mothers of different parities differ among each other as well, but on the whole they appear to have more characteristics in common.

As expected, women who are more secularised, much more educated and more frequently only child, are more likely to be childless. It is useful to remark the important effect of religiosity: women who are not observant have three times the probability of remaining childless, compared to

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[4] It is useful to remark that only ever-in-union women have been included in the analysis.

the observant. It is interesting to notice that the effect of those variables are similar and even stronger when they are referred to their partners, with the exception of the education level: men with the high school diploma are more likely to have no children, then the graduated.

Women who are more likely to have entered a stable union later than the reference group (over 30), have a more than double probability not to be mothers. The predictive effect of this variable is the strongest and highly statistically significant. This can be interpreted on one hand as a consequence of a low propensity to have a family, on the other hand as a cause of a reduction of fecundity with age[5].

The experience of cohabitation, followed or not by a marriage, increases the probability of being childless. This could depend not only on the greater fragility of these forms of union - as has been underlined on many occasions in literature (De Sandre, Rettaroli & Salvini, 1997) -, but also on what this form of union represents in Italy. It can reasonably be hypothesized, in fact, that there is lesser propensity among cohabitants to choose a "complete" family project because of a kind of aversion to definitive constraints. Surprisingly, having cohabited increases also the probability to have a birth of higher order. In this case it is possible that a cohabitation experience have contributed to accelerate their transition to motherhood (Rosina and Billari 2003).

Women's job instability, and flexibility of schedule time, contributes to increase the likelihood of being childlessness. The opposite is true for male job characteristics. If a woman did not work in the first period of the union she has a considerably higher probability to have a larger offspring. Another relevant finding is related to leisure time. As it has been previously noticed, the gender contract is still remarkably unbalanced in Italy, and consistently women who recall having had little or very little leisure time in the first period of union seem more likely to forgo motherhood.

Women having one child are more similar to the reference group. We might argue that their preferences are similar to the modal group and that external constraints, or difficulties in reconciling job and motherhood, have refrained them to have another child (as it will be shown in the next paragraph). Women who have larger offspring present some interesting differences to the modal group. They are less likely to have a diploma, but more likely to have either higher or lower education. As expected they are more likely to have never entered the labour market. They more often come from larger family, as they have inherited a higher propensity to have more children. The fertility of individuals thus seems very much influenced by their parents' level of fertility, even

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[5] It is useful to note that almost a third of childless women in our sample reveal to have tried to have children, but in vain (Tanturri & Mencarini 2004).

once we control for other variables that are influenced by the socio-economic status of the family of origin, such as education and religiousness. Our results seem to confirm previous findings on the importance of intergenerational transmission of fertility patterns in Italy, as well as in other Western Countries.

As expected, religious observance is an important element of distinction: women who never attended religious functions at the age of 25 are more likely to be childless, but also to have only one child. Partner religiousness has a similar, and even stronger, effect. It is conceivable that less religious individuals are less sensitive to the religious concept of reproduction. Both women's education and religiousness weaken their effect, once the same variables referred to their partners are included in the model: this might be the result of the high level of omogamy, that is typical in the Italian context. In particular, men who are observant are much less likely to be childless or to have only one child. The effect of religiousness and education disappears once variables of the couple characteristics are included. This is the evidence that these variables shape the couple arrangements.

Table 1: Estimated probabilities. Results of Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis for Characteristics Predicting deviant case from the mode (2 children). Women's, partners' and couples' variables.

	MODEL 1 Women's characteristics				MODEL 2 Women's & partners' characteristics				MODEL 3 Women's & partners' & couple's characteristics			
	0	**1**	**2**	**3+**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3+**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3+**
Baseline	0.412	0.158	0.324	0.106	0.428	0.157	0.335	0.081	0.393	0.232	0.317	0.058
City (Udine)												
Padua	0.329	0.163	0.409	0.098	0.342	0.159	0.427	0.072	0.325	0.224	0.397	0.054
Florence	0.274	0.253	0.390	0.083	0.271	0.254	0.411	0.064	0.249	0.340	0.365	0.046
Pesaro	0.276	0.192	0.429	0.104	0.274	0.188	0.459	0.079	0.312	0.247	0.386	0.055
Messina	0.229	0.081	0.532	0.159	0.222	0.079	0.579	0.120	0.148	0.126	0.641	0.085
Religious observance (non observant)												
regularly observant	0.142	0.185	0.493	0.181	0.279	0.194	0.419	0.108	0.317	0.245	0.356	0.082
occasionally observant	0.194	0.190	0.503	0.113	0.310	0.172	0.433	0.085	0.326	0.230	0.379	0.064
Education (degree)												
compulsory school	0.257	0.192	0.366	0.185	0.308	0.173	0.400	0.119	0.447	0.220	0.282	0.051
high school diploma	0.341	0.200	0.370	0.090	0.357	0.183	0.397	0.063	0.473	0.208	0.285	0.034
Work experience (ever worked)												
never worked	0.419	0.096	0.319	0.166	0.444	0.098	0.336	0.122	0.424	0.188	0.332	0.057
N. Siblings (1)												
0	0.479	0.153	0.257	0.111	0.496	0.152	0.267	0.086	0.471	0.215	0.244	0.069
2 or more	0.365	0.150	0.314	0.171	0.399	0.148	0.324	0.129	0.255	0.265	0.368	0.112
Partner's religious observance (non observant)												
regularly					0.203	0.152	0.495	0.150	0.216	0.225	0.448	0.110
occasionally observant					0.204	0.198	0.505	0.094	0.195	0.282	0.460	0.063
Partner's education (degree)												
compulsory school					0.343	0.201	0.340	0.116	0.355	0.291	0.288	0.065
high school diploma					0.477	0.178	0.268	0.077	0.468	0.261	0.226	0.045
Partner's N. of siblings (1)												
0					0.507	0.103	0.306	0.084	0.589	0.118	0.238	0.056
2 or more					0.390	0.156	0.333	0.121	0.415	0.215	0.287	0.084
Age at first union (above 30)												
below 25									0.230	0.202	0.409	0.159
26-30									0.964	0.021	0.012	0.003
Economic condition (good)												
poor									0.509	0.144	0.278	0.069
Cohabited during first union (ever)												
never									0.222	0.266	0.459	0.053
Leisure time (much or enough)												
few or very few									0.481	0.184	0.271	0.064
Partner's leisure time (more than her)												
less than her									0.781	0.099	0.100	0.019
As much as her									0.733	0.102	0.137	0.029
Type of position (fixed-term)												
permanent									0.056	0.403	0.495	0.046
did not work									0.102	0.278	0.501	0.119
Working time (flexible)												
rigid									0.191	0.287	0.433	0.089
Partner's type of position (fixed-term)												
permanent									0.522	0.158	0.279	0.041
Partner's envolvement in domestic task (yes)												
no									0.408	0.260	0.260	0.072

4. Why women did not have a/another child? Exploring reasons provided in the survey

Reproductive behaviour can be determined by conscious reproductive choices, which are effected by both social norms and individual values. However, also external constraints have an influence and may induce women to modify their reproductive preferences or to forego maternity. Reasons and perceived constraints to motherhood have been asked only to "voluntary" childless women – having never tried to have children – and therefore not with physically impediments to motherhood (see Mencarini and Tanturri, 2004), and to those who have one or two children. The wording of the questions was the same for women of any parity, although there is a battery of three motivations, related to existing children and previous experiences of motherhood, proposed only to mothers.

Women were asked whether they thought that a certain reason has been relevant or not for their reproductive choices. Consequently, reasons provided are not mutually exclusive, so that a series of feasible causes might arise, given that women were not obligated to state just one prevalent reason for being childless or not have had one more child. These reported explanations, although *a posteriori,* and therefore susceptible of problems of *ex-post* rationalization, should well reflect the individual system of values of the interviewed women.

Questions asked cite costs of a child (financial and opportunity costs), specific couple situations, and instability as well as other constraints, such as health or aging problems as potentially influencing this life choice.

According to table 2, indirect costs are very important not only in terms of time (35% of childless women, 34 of one child mothers and 44% of two children mothers) or of personal sacrifice (30%, 31% and 35% respectively), but also in financial terms- the direct cost of a child - especially for mothers with already two children (38% against is cited as important by only 16% of childless women, but by 28% of women of parity one and 38% of parity two).

The reason relating to life style changes ("giving up too many things") seems to reveal that a percentage of women did not want to become a mother, or to have one more child, because of the numerous sacrifices that a (another) child would involve. This response may reflect an orientation towards individualism, whereby motherhood is difficult to reconcile with other personal aspirations, such as the desire for individual freedom, career concerns, or a preference to maintain a certain standard of living. Alternatively, it might simply be attributable to the fact that Italian women are generally expected to carry most of the burden of looking after children, a condition which frequently leads to a worsening of their status and the loss of rights and positions within the couple and in society (McDonald, 2000). In fact, the potential conflict between reproduction and the

demand of the labour market also emerges rather clearly. Forgoing work entailed negative economic consequences, both if dealing in a simple job is necessary to make ends meet (more than 20% for all interviewees) or a professional career (about one fourth of all groups, but more important for childless women). These women did not want to stop working. In fewer cases (15% of childless women and only 5% of one child mothers and 8% of two child mothers) it was apparently the partner's career that would have been hindered by a child.

Reasons relating to partnership problems seem to be highly relevant only for childless women: more than one third claim that their union was too weak to contemplate having offspring (against 24% of mother of one child and 17% of two children). Moreover, partners separating soon after the beginning of marriage or cohabitation prevented the couple from trying to have a child in 18% of childless couples (12% of one child couples and 3.5 of two children ones). Differences of opinion between partners are a further significant reason for totally forgoing motherhood or not having one more child: this reason is reported as more important by one child mother (in 18% of cases she would have liked to have one more child, but he did not; in 17% he would have liked, she did not; see table 2). Where disagreement exists, it is slightly more frequent – according to what these women reported - for the man to be reluctant, in spite of the fact that in Italy the burden of looking after children is still disproportionately carried by women (Mencarini & Tanturri, 2004).

Results seem to indicate that childlessness or low-parity fertility appear to have many factors in common, whereas economic costs and constraints are perceived more by women with two children.

Moreover, results further suggest that the deliberate refusal of maternity, or of one more child, is likely to be the result of placing other priorities first, such as the importance of personal self-fulfilment through couple relationship and work activity, as well as the unwillingness to accept sacrifices that childbearing necessarily implies. In many cases, however, it is also the result of some constraints, such as the lack of time for raising a child and couple instability.

It is important to note that childlessness seems to be very rarely related to mere financial constraints, whereas the importance of the cost of children rises for not having the second and especially the third child.

Among mothers the well-being of existing child could be threatened by one more child both in terms of economic resources (17% of mothers of parity one and 25% of parity two) and time to dedicate to look after both the newborn and the other child/children (34% of mothers of parity one and more than 44 for mothers of parity two). Difficult experiences in rising children prevent mothers to desire one more child in one fourth of cases for parity one and one third for parity two

5. Any role for policies?

In the previous paragraphs we have evidenced that women having different parities present different characteristics and different motivations to refrain maternity or further childbearing. It seems thus plausible that their response to possible family-friendly policies may be also very dissimilar. So, what are the circumstances or, better yet, the policies that could favour a different choice toward parenthood among different groups of women? In order to investigate this socially relevant issue, interviewees have been asked if they would have considered to have a child or to have one more child, under various hypothetical scenarios of family-friendly policies. The answers, showed in table 3, provided by all women at the end of their reproductive life, are fully hypothetical given that the parity these women have reached, for the most part, can be considered definitive. The replies seem to indicate that the proposed measures, although generous, would have reoriented the choices of only a small minority of childless women (the percentage is between 10 and 20% for different policies), whereas policies would have been theoretically more effective for mothers with one or two children. The measures that were deemed more beneficial from a theoretical perspective for childless women were fully paid maternity leave for three years from birth, and the availability of reasonably priced full-time kindergartens and nursery schools with flexible opening hours. Child grants proved less effective.

Women with one child would be the most "sensitive" to family-friendly policies, particularly in terms of measures that reconcile childbearing with work: 62% of women belonging to these group would have changed their mind if the job post is maintained after three years of full paid parental leave (actually not a very feasible measure).

The answers to these questions on hypothetical policy measures have been analysed according to women's and couples' characteristics and answers to questions on motivations for not having had a/another child (Castiglioni, 2004). This kind of study has clearly showed that among women with two children the theoretical propensity to reconsider fertility choices is stable and not varying according to motivations adducted: this suggests that the two children model is the result more of a choice than of constraints of some kind. Among childless women, on the contrary, although the percentage of those declaring that they could have reconsidered their choice is quite low, there are profound differences according to the motivations. In fact, women adducting motivations such as late age or couple instability wouldn't have changed their behaviour, whereas in 46/60% of cases women indicating as important the direct and indirect cost of children would have been more sensitive to generous policy measures. Again, also from this kind of analysis, the conclusion is that mothers with only one child, especially those indicating motivations linked to

cost of children and difficulties to re-conciliate job and motherhood, and especially if belonging to low-medium social classes, would have been particularly keen to have that second child that seems to correspond to Italian social norm for reproductive behaviour (in all survey, the modal value for number of children desired is still two).

Table 2: Motivations for Never Having Tried to Have Children. Percentage of Indication of the Motivation as Important, by parity.

MOTIVATIONS	Childless	Mother of 1 child	Mother of 2 children
Economic costs and other constraints			
It was too costly to have a child	16.2	28.0	38.1
She would have had to sacrifice too many things	30.2	31.3	34.8
They would not have had enough time to look after a child properly	35.1	33.9	44.4
Job or career's related motivations			
She needed to work to make ends meet and with a child it would have been impossible to continue	21.5	23.0	24.4
With a child she would have had to make job sacrifices (job important not only economically)	27.5	24.7	26.7
With a child her husband/partner would have had to make job-career sacrifices	14.7	4.9	8.0
Couple's situations or instability			
She and her husband/partner often lived apart for study or work reasons	17.7	-	-
The relationship as a couple was not all that strong	34.3	23.7	16.9
The relationship ended soon after the beginning of marriage/cohabitation	17.7	11.9	3.5
She would have like a child, but her husband/partner did not	17.0	18.1	12.8
Her husband/partner would have liked a child, but she did not	14.7	17.2	11.7
Health/aging problems			
She and/or her husband/partner had serious health problems	4.9	10.7	7.4
They felt she was too old to have a child	12.8	17.2	30.1
They had to look after relatives with serious health problems			
Existing children motivations			
A new child would damage economic well-being of existing child/children	-	17.0	25.1
Childhood of existing child/children was too hard for them and it prevent them to desire one more child	-	25.0	33.9
They would not have had enough time to look after both the newborn than the other child/children	-	33.9	44.4

Table 3: Women who would have had one (more) child: hypothetical reactions to possible family-friendly policies, by parity

They would have had a child (probably or certainly) if the state had provided…	Childless	Mother of 1 child	Mother of 2 children
- conspicuous family allowance from birth to the third birthday	9.5	41.8	45.9
- family allowance from birth to the 16th birthday	12.1	47.8	38.6
- parental leave for three years on full pay	20.0	61.9	35.9
- kindergartens and schools low cost, full and flexible time	15.6	44.8	34.4

8. Concluding remarks

The hypothesis that women having different parities are differentiated by a plurality of characteristics seems to be corroborated by empirical evidence. Features that in the traditional studies of differential fertility are associated to low fertility – e.g. higher education and secularisation – are found to be still relevant in differentiating reproductive behaviour of younger women, born around the 1960. Therefore, even if the Italian fertility is lower and lower, and families are shrinking, fertility differentials are still present across the usual classifications: higher education increases the probability of remaining childless, while religious observance decreases it substantially.

Our results are not suitable to test the Hakim's thesis about fertility preferences unequivocally, but they can give some suggestions in this sense. In our models, a variable that takes into account the experience of early socialisation is the number of sibling. *Ceteris paribus*, women (but also men) coming from large families tend to reproduce the model they experienced in their childhood and to have a larger offspring. This remains true, also controlling for a number of other variables, both personal and couple's. Intergenerational transmission of family models, could generate an acceleration of fertility decline for the future generations, given that living in smaller families seem to reduce the propensity to have children.

Partners' characteristics, far from being negligible, seem to play an important role in determining reproductive choices. Our results encourage taking them into account also in the analysis of fertility determinants, especially with regard to religious observance and education.

Couple's economic conditions, living arrangement, gender role-set, labour market participation in the first period of the union seem also to have affected the subsequent fertility behaviour, as it results from our model. The association, however, should be interpreted with caution, as information are gathered at the moment of the interview and might reflect all the problems related to retrospective data (telescoping, ex-post rationalization, …). It is not surprising, however, that a delay in the entry into a union increases considerably the probability of remaining childless, while conversely a more precocious marriage or cohabitation increases the chance to have three or more children.

Motivations provided for not having a first, a second or a third child are usually different among women having diverse parities. Nevertheless, a very similar proportion of women in each group appears to perceive sacrifices related to childbearing, the lack of time for caring, the difficulties in role reconciliation. This is partly inconsistent with responses given about policies: parental leave is required essentially by women having one child, rather by the other groups.

Economic costs of children represent a constraint for a high percentage of women having two children, who consistently require more conspicuous family allowances. Couple fragility is among the major reasons to refuse maternity, but policies prove to be ineffective to solve this problem.

In conclusion, results seem to confirm that different women give different motivation for having a certain number of children, as well as different responses to various family-friendly tools. According to our results, women having just one child seem to be the group for which policies might be more successful: policy makers should take into account it in order to use resources more efficiently and effectively.

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Appendix

Table A1: Characteristics of the sample, by parity (possible explanatory variables)

Covariates	Childless	Mothers of 1 child	Mothers of 2 children	Mothers of 3 + children
City				
Udine	22.8	20.9	16.1	17.2
Padua	22.2	21.3	20.5	17.2
Florence	25.2	29.8	16.8	11.2
Pesaro	12.6	16.6	14.3	11.6
Messina	17.2	11.5	32.3	42.7
Religious observance at age 25				
non observant	36.9	17.9	11.4	12.2
occasionally observant	33.7	40.4	40.1	29.7
regularly observant	29.4	41.7	48.5	58.2
Education				
degree or more	29.4	18.8	21.4	19.6
compulsory school	16.0	21.4	23.1	40.2
high school diploma	54.7	59.8	55.6	40.2
Work experience				
never worked	5.6	3.4	8.7	16.9
N. Siblings				
0	14.1	8.4	9.0	6.5
1	39.8	38.3	32.7	23.4
2 or more	46.2	53.3	58.3	70.1
Partner's religious observance				
Non observant	61.6	31.2	25.6	28.0
occasionally observant	22.5	44.0	43.9	32.4
regularly	15.9	24.8	30.4	39.6
Partner's education				
degree or more	28.0	19.5	25.2	20.6
compulsory school	18.1	28.3	28.9	41.2
high school diploma	54.0	52.2	45.9	38.2
Partner's N. of siblings				
0	14.8	12.8	8.6	6.4
1	38.0	39.2	35.4	22.2
2 or more	47.2	48.1	56.0	71.4
Age at first union				
below 25	27.4	58.2	62.5	78.9
26-30	31.8	39.7	36.7	20.4
above 30	40.9	2.2	0.9	0.8
Economic condition				
Good or very good	62.3	74.8	65.6	51.4
Cohabited during first union				
yes	35.0	18.3	11.6	15.4
Leisure time				
much or enough	69.9	77.2	73.9	67.2
Partner's leisure time				
more than her	24.8	50.2	51.4	48.5
less than her	49.2	33.6	33.9	33.9
As much as her	26.1	16.1	14.7	17.7
Type of position				
fixed term	20.2	9.6	9.2	14.0
permanent	79.8	76.5	65.4	42.8
did not work	0.0	13.9	25.4	43.2
Working time				
rigid	62.6	54.1	48.3	36.4
Partner's type of position				
fixed-term	5.9	5.9	8.8	15.8
permanent	94.2	93.7	90.8	82.3
Partner's involvement in domestic task				
often/very often	35.4	26.2	28.5	22.2

*** $p <= .001$ ** $p <= .005$ * $p <= .1$

Table A2: Results of Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis for Characteristics Predicting deviant case from the mode (2 children). Women's and men's variables.

Covariates	Mothers of 2 children versus					
	Childless		Mothers of 1 child		Mothers of 3 children or more	
	MOD1	MOD2	MOD1	MOD2	MOD1	MOD2
City (Udine)						
Padua	-0.4585 **	-0.466 *	-0.2012	-0.228	-0.3066	-0.3588 *
Florence	-0.5929 **	-0.6615 **	0.28882	0.2779	-0.4297	-0.4326 *
Pesaro	-0.6818 **	-0.76 **	-0.0837	-0.132	-0.3	-0.3363
Messina	-1.085 ***	-1.2034 ***	-1.1632 ***	-1.23 ***	-0.0912	-0.1508
Religious observance (non observant)						
regularly observant	-1.4868 ***	-0.655 **	-0.2625	-0.013	0.11497	0.07182
occasionally observant	-1.1912 ***	-0.5783 **	-0.2545	-0.164	-0.3747 *	-0.2068
Education (degree)						
compulsory school	-0.5959 **	-0.5053 *	0.07423	-0.076	0.43353 **	0.2097
high school diploma	-0.3219 **	-0.3538 *	0.10292	-0.015	-0.2956 *	-0.4117 **
Work experience (ever worked)						
never worked	0.0321	0.0316	-0.4861	-0.473	0.46195 **	0.41093 **
N. Siblings (1)						
0	0.3817 *	0.3747 *	0.19724	0.1957	0.27862	0.2881
2 or more	-0.0896	-0.0379	-0.0216	-0.021	0.50958 ***	0.50548 ***
Partner's religious observance (non observant)						
regularly		-1.1397 ***		-0.421 **		0.23313
occasionally observant		-1.1518 ***		-0.177		-0.2588
Partner's education (degree)						
compulsory school		-0.2365		0.2323		0.34936 *
high school diploma		0.3318 *		0.3536		0.18062
Partner's N. of siblings (1)						
0		0.2599		-0.328		0.12659
2 or more		-0.0883		0.0021		0.41404 **
Constant	0.2404	0.2455	-0.7197 **	-0.76 **	-1.1192 ***	-1.4248 ***
LR Chi2 (33)	288.91 ***					
LR Chi2 (51)		362.69 ***				

*** p <= .001   ** p <= .005   * p <= .1

Table A3. Results of Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis for Characteristics Predicting deviant case from the mode (2 children): All variables.

Covariates	Mothers of 2 children versus:						Wald Test	
	Childless		Mothers of 1 child		Mothers of 3 children or more			
	MOD3	S.E.	MOD3	S.E.	MOD3	S.E.	Chi2	d.f.
City (Udine)							63.56 ***	12
Padua	-0.414 *	0.325	-0.257	0.205	-0.300	0.217		
Florence	-0.595 *	0.333	0.241	0.194	-0.374 *	0.233		
Pesaro	-0.428	0.379	-0.140	0.218	-0.258	0.239		
Messina	-1.679 ***	0.376	-1.311 ***	0.254	-0.317 *	0.215		
Religious observance (non observant)							5.53	6
regularly observant	-0.330	0.351	-0.060	0.234	0.236	0.240		
occasionally observant	-0.365	0.315	-0.185	0.219	-0.077	0.235		
Education (degree)							11.43 *	6
compulsory school	0.246	0.385	0.053	0.242	-0.025	0.230		
high school diploma	0.295	0.281	-0.010	0.187	-0.440 *	0.191		
Work experience (ever worked)							0.53	3
never worked	0.032	0.465	-0.240	0.371	-0.047	0.226		
N. Siblings (1)							24.32 ***	6
0	0.443	0.354	0.184	0.219	0.443 *	0.269		
2 or more	-0.582 *	0.249	-0.013	0.144	0.522 ***	0.153		
Partner's religious observance (non observant)							28.72 ***	6
regularly	-0.944 **	0.364	-0.364 *	0.216	0.309 *	0.203		
occasionally observant	-1.072 ***	0.296	-0.158	0.178	-0.282 *	0.185		
Partner's education (degree)							13.40 *	6
compulsory school	-0.007	0.363	0.309 *	0.214	0.219	0.213		
high school diploma	0.517 *	0.281	0.449 *	0.178	0.105	0.182		
Partner's N. of siblings (1)							17.83 *	6
0	0.693 *	0.367	-0.385 *	0.249	0.255	0.273		
2 or more	0.155	0.243	0.019	0.140	0.473 **	0.150		
Age at first union (above 30)							173.85 ***	6
below 25	-0.789 ***	0.239	-0.806 *	0.314	0.458	0.359		
26-30	4.162 ***	0.473	-0.439	0.318	-0.321	0.374		
Economic condition (good)							16.35 **	3
poor	0.393 **	0.236	-0.335 *	0.153	0.315 *	0.137		
Cohabited during first union (ever)							14.20 **	3
never	-0.912 ***	0.261	-0.232	0.199	-0.444 *	0.207		
Leisure time (much or enough)							5.69 *	3
few or very few	0.358 *	0.255	-0.078	0.158	0.268 *	0.147		
Partner's leisure time (more than her)							44.50 ***	6
less than her	1.840 ***	0.311	0.304 *	0.192	0.060	0.189		
As much as her	1.467 ***	0.270	0.023	0.149	0.155	0.150		
Type of position (fixed-term)							120.15 ***	6
permanent	-2.399 ***	0.276	0.107	0.215	-0.658 ***	0.201		
did not work	-1.805 ***	0.322	-0.298	0.267	0.260	0.215		
Working time (flexible)							15.86 **	3
rigid	-1.029 ***	0.273	-0.096	0.149	0.124	0.171		
Partner's type of position (fixed-term)							3.98	3
permanent	0.414 *	0.385	-0.230	0.223	-0.197	0.185		
Partner's envolvement in domestic task (yes)							10.31 *	3
no	0.235	0.239	0.312 *	0.146	0.429 **	0.153		
Constant	0.214 ***	0.592	0.083	0.471	-1.424 **	0.518		
LR Chi2 (87)	926.99 ***							

*** p <= .001   ** p <= .005   * p <= .1