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UN NUOVO INIZIO? FECONDITÀ E DINAMICHE FAMILIARI IN ITALIA

Presentazione dei risultati del Protocollo di ricerca e PRIN “The Great Demographic Recession”

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Lucia Coppola, Eleonora Meli, Daniele Vignoli, Agnese Vitali

AGNESE VITALI

Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale | Università degli Studi di Trento

Motivation

- Italian women face the largest **gap** between intended and actual fertility in Europe (Beaujouan et al. 2019; Miettinen et al. 2014)
- Low fertility may be largely involuntary and linked to the existence of **barriers** to becoming parents and having large families (Regniér-Loilier and Vignoli 2011)
- Among such barriers, **economic resources** are frequently mentioned, but their association with fertility is only seldom assessed in Italy (Vignoli et al. 2012; 2020) – largely due, until now, to lack of suitable data
- We aim at closing this gap in knowledge

Background

- According to “New Home Economics” (Becker 1960, 1991):
 - A reduction in the cost of children or an increase in income → higher fertility (**income effect**)
 - A reduction in the cost of children or an increase in income → constant fertility, but higher investment in children’s human and social capital (**substitution effect**)
 - **Gender-role specialization** is a pre-condition for fertility: fertility is highest when one partner –typically the man– specialized in market work and the other –typically the woman– specializes in home activities
 - Women’s employment competes with fertility (**opportunity costs**)

Background

Limitations of previous literature:

- Predictions flawed: fertility now positively associated with women's employment (Ahn and Mira, 2002; Engelhardt et al. 2004), also in Italy (Vitali and Billari, 2017)
- Past literature operationalized economic resources via employment status, downplaying the role of income
- The relationship between economic resources and fertility focused on either women and men, disregarding that fertility is generally the outcome of a joint decision among partners and **both partners'** economic resources matter

Background

- Employment also has a **symbolic meaning** that goes beyond simply earning an income and its meaning is gendered
- For men, being employed and a provider for the family constitute the essence of what it means to be a man and a **'good father'** (Townsend, 2002). For women, intensive motherhood embeds ideals of what being a **'good mother'** means (Demantas and Myers, 2015)
- Fertility also linked to men's declining ability to sustain a family (Oppenheimer 1994, 2003)
- When social norms regarding **gender-role ideologies** clash with the actual couple's employment and relative income situation, fertility may be postponed or forgone
- Indeed **female-breadwinner couples** where only the woman is employed or she is the main or sole income provider, have lower subjective wellbeing (Kowalewska and Vitali, 2023), lower marital quality (Coughlin and Wade, 2012; Blom and Hewitt, 2020), higher risk of union dissolution (Cooke 2006) and men have a higher likelihood of cheating (Munsch 2018) – all factors associated with lower likelihood of having a(n other) child

Contribution

- **RQ: Is there an association between couples' economic resources and fertility intentions?**
- We take a **couple-level perspective**
- We consider as economic characteristics:
 - the **employment status** of both partners
 - the equivalised disposable **household income** (in quintiles)
 - the **partners' relative incomes**, measured by the woman's share of the couple's total labour incomes
- In lack of longitudinal data for Italy, we focus on fertility intentions and not on realized fertility because employment and income vary over the life course, especially for women and around childbearing & fertility intentions are the **best predictor for actual fertility** (Thomson and Brandreth 1995; Testa and Grilli 2006)

Data

1. Italian surveys on Family and Social Subjects, carried out in 2016

○ Partners' employment status and dependent variable:

Do you intend to have a/another child during the next three years?

1 Definitely not 2 Probably not 3 Probably yes 4 Definitely yes

2. Income Statistical Register: individual and household income, reference year 2015

○ Disposable equivalized household income and partner's relative incomes provided by "BDR-I"

▪ **BDR** – "Banca dati reddituale" MEF (*individual tax return*)

▪ Integrated with other sources (*income register estimates and other admin data*)

Sample and Methods

Final integrated subsample:

- Individuals living in a couple
- 18-49 years old (5,750)
- both surveyed partners are also in the population register household (5,107)
- at least one partner is a recipient of labour income (4,871 – Models 1 & 2)

Method:

- Ordered Logistic Regression
- Separate models by gender and parity (0 vs. 1+)

Model 1: Ordered Logistic Regression on Fertility Intentions by household incomes and partners' employment status

	Parity 0		Parity 1+	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Quintiles of hh income (ref=3):				
1	0,150 0,429	-1,144 0,449 *	-0,281 0,169 *	-0,656 0,169 ***
2	-0,398 0,375	-0,289 0,360	-0,274 0,148 *	-0,256 0,153 *
4	0,161 0,331	0,359 0,352	-0,155 0,156	-0,172 0,162
5	-0,182 0,314	-0,034 0,344	0,133 0,170	-0,247 0,186
Partners' employment status (ref=Both employed):				
Both not employed	0,625 0,591	-1,388 0,801 *	0,017 0,306	0,565 0,292 *
Male breadwinner, woman inactive	-0,574 0,333 *	-0,476 0,316	0,111 0,126	0,377 0,128 ***
Male breadwinner, woman unemployed	0,323 0,457	0,522 0,441	0,703 0,189 ***	0,708 0,271 ***
Female breadwinner	-0,432 0,478	0,131 0,518	-0,271 0,294	0,284 0,255
At least 1 self-employed	-0,075 0,249	0,228 0,250	0,187 0,113 *	0,029 0,116
N. children (ref=1):				
2+			-1,627 0,104 ***	-1,587 0,111 ***

Note: <0,01 ***; 0,01-0,05 **; 0,05-0,1 *. Includes controls for: Woman's age; Woman's and man's education; Union type (marriage vs. non-marital cohabitation); Region of residence.

Model 2: Ordered Logistic Regression on Fertility Intentions by household incomes and partners' relative incomes

	Parity 0				Parity 1+			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Coef	S.E.	Coef	S.E.	Coef	S.E.	Coef	S.E.
Quintiles of disposable household income (ref=3):								
1	0,446	0,414	-1,320	0,435 **	-0,224	0,173	-0,741	0,172 ***
2	-0,221	0,377	-0,465	0,363	-0,214	0,151	-0,306	0,154 **
4	0,158	0,343	0,290	0,349	-0,229	0,155	-0,141	0,162
5	-0,190	0,344	-0,153	0,350	0,071	0,171	-0,275	0,186
Woman's share of couple's total labour income (ref=0-40%):								
0%	-0,142	0,341	0,041	0,318	-0,120	0,131	0,228	0,134 *
40-60%	0,175	0,277	0,534	0,289 *	-0,079	0,142	-0,563	0,153 ***
>60%	0,148	0,359	0,663	0,373 *	-0,004	0,191	-0,160	0,215
100%	-0,384	0,466	1,163	0,491 **	-0,062	0,260	0,459	0,242 *
Number of children (ref=1):								
2+	-	-	-	-	-1,620	0,104 ***	-1,637	0,112 ***

Note: <0,01 ***; 0,01-0,05 **; 0,05-0,1 *. Includes controls for: Woman's age; Woman's and man's education; Union type (marriage vs. non-marital cohabitation); Region of residence.

Summary and conclusions

Household **income is positively related to fertility** intentions, especially for women

For childless men, **women's employment is a pre-condition** for intending to become parents. Instead, among parents, intentions to have another child are higher when mothers are not employment

For men, it does not matter for fertility intentions whether the income is solely earned by the man, the woman, or both partners. For women, **the intention to become a mother increases with her contribution to the household's incomes**, and the intention to have another child increases among non-employed as well as female-breadwinner women

Taken together, results in this paper suggest that:

- These findings are novel for Italy, and challenge classical micro-level assumptions based on the “New Home Economics” approach as well as assumption based on traditional gender norms that would predict fertility to be associated with a traditional gender division of roles among partners

grazie

AGNESE VITALI | agnese.vitali@unitn.it