

## A shock is not enough.

### The persistence of gender inequality in childcare among Italian couples during the Great Recession.

Annalisa Donno, Maria Letizia Tanturri

(Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Padova)

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND OBJECTIVES

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

Women and men have been differently affected by the economic downturn: the financial crisis has been in fact defined as *Mansession* (Perry, 2008) because it had a greater detrimental impact on men's employment than it did on women's. In Italy during the Great Recession men's unemployment rates have increased, while women's unemployment level has remained almost stable, and in many sectors even declined. As a consequence, an increase in the proportion of female breadwinner households has been registered (De Rosa 2018, Addabbo et al. 2017, Bryan and Longhi, 2017). Despite long-standing interest on gender roles, in a general context of women's increasing educational and labour force participation, much remains to be known on the multiple ways in which the economic downturn (hitting men harder than women, and thus favoring the so called *added worker effect*) has shaped family lives in Italy, as in many other Developed countries (e.g. in the US, Aguiar, Hurst, E. and Karabarbounis 2013; in Europe, Dotti Sani 2017).

In this work we want to understand if and to what extent the changes in the labor market, induced by the economic recession, have fostered less traditional schemes of couples' unpaid work negotiation, in a new, de-gendered scenario. A specific analysis will be focused on work-family arrangements in order to understand if they have changed from before to after the beginning of the recession, and to paint a more encompassing picture of Italian gender-roles definition/re-definition for facing the economic crisis. We aim at understanding whether new models of female labour market participation and household work allocation have been taking place during the downturn phase of the business cycle. Specific attention will be given to changes in parental time, as they do not only help us to understand the recession's effects on the organization of households, but also offers a window on understanding the potential impacts on children's development that may unfold in the future. The picture resulting from the joint analysis of the allocation of time between paid work and childcare activities within the couples, and their changes over time as a consequence of the Great Recession could be a starting point to reflect on the permanent changes in the division of roles and responsibility in the couples.

Several theories have been elaborated in order to try to explain the mechanisms driving the way couples handle with the division of both paid and unpaid work. According to the *New household economic theory* regarding the division of labor at home (Becker, 1991) and the *time availability theory* (Coverman, 1985), couples' time allocation in unpaid work is constrained and shaped by each partner's employment demands. Specifically, the time availability hypothesis suggests that the division of household labor is allocated according to time each member of the couple spends in market work (e.g., Barnett, 1994; Presser, 1994). The more a couple member works, the less care he/she will provide. Such a theory assuming men and women as perfect substitutes for domestic and parental tasks, neglects to take into account the role that socio-cultural norms have in shaping social roles. Gender ideologies represent what individuals view as appropriate roles for men and women, which in turn affects their own behavior. According to those theories, the division of household work is determined by the attitudes toward gender equality and family roles (e.g., Blair & Johnson, 1992; Greenstein, 1996). Specifically, according to the '*gender display/doing gender*' theory unpaid work is a process by which each partner demonstrates/affirms his/her gender identity. Further, doing gender through unpaid work may also constitute an attempt

to neutralize the gender deviance created by violating gender expectations in other realms of social life - such as paid work. In a traditional male breadwinning context, men who participate less than their partner to the labour market actually do not increase their participation in unpaid work activities, in an effort to reassert their masculinity in the face of their 'failure' as good providers; while women who participate more than their partners refrain from using their economic superiority to gain power in the relationship, perhaps in an effort to counteract the normative masculinity of breadwinning. Which of those mechanisms has prevailed during the Great Recession?

Previous studies carried out in other Developed countries (e.g. Pailhé and Solaz 2013 in France; Kalils and Ziol-Guest 2013 in the US) reveal that unemployed men are reluctant to increase their involvement in family life. Fathers' job loss has thus negative implications for family life and child development, while mothers' job loss does not: indeed, mothers tend to use free time in childcare and household production, while fathers are more likely to spend it on personal care and leisure. A study focused on couples' time use Italy during the Great Recession (Zannella and De Rose 2019) shows a positive association between the recessionary period and male levels of unpaid work (increase in the time men spent on child care and housework). The increase in the time women devoted to child care is similar between men and women, whereas the time women spent on housework decreased in the 2008–2014 period.

## DATA AND METHODS

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

We select a subsample of 2,157 married or cohabiting couples, with at least one child aged 0-14 years, and focus on two kind of activities: paid work and childcare. In a micro-level perspective, in addition to a time budget approach describing time use in terms of average duration of the analyzed activities, we propose an original chronological approach to the analysis of time use surveys, taking into account the importance of 'timing' and "sequences" in the organization of couples' everyday life. Italian time use data allows to combine the information on both partners in the couple – as both filled in the time diary -, thus representing an important source of detailed information on how they manage the allocation of time in work and childcare activities.

We use the Dynamic Hamming Approach (Lesnard, 2009) to Sequence Analysis for understanding if new work-family arrangement typologies have emerged as a consequence of the recession.

Empirical analysis are carried out in a two-step procedure.

Step 1: We apply sequence analysis techniques to the couples' time use on the pooled data, by taking into account the time they devote to paid work, allowing us to exactly reconstruct the way the partners allocate their time in paid work activities, in each moment of the 24-hours observational day. Cluster analysis techniques (Ward method) are then used to identify homogeneous typologies of couple work arrangements. Moreover, multinomial logit are used to characterize clusters, thus trying to understand which factors influence the risk to be included in the groups identified. And to understand if such 'profiles' are equally spread during the starting phase of the economic crisis and five years later, or if some profiles are typical of the recessionary period.

Step 2: By following the strategy used in step 1, we focus on time devoted by the couples' to childcare activities. We first use sequence analysis to understand how couples allocate their time in childcare. Cluster analysis techniques are then used to identify homogeneous profiles of childcare negotiation.

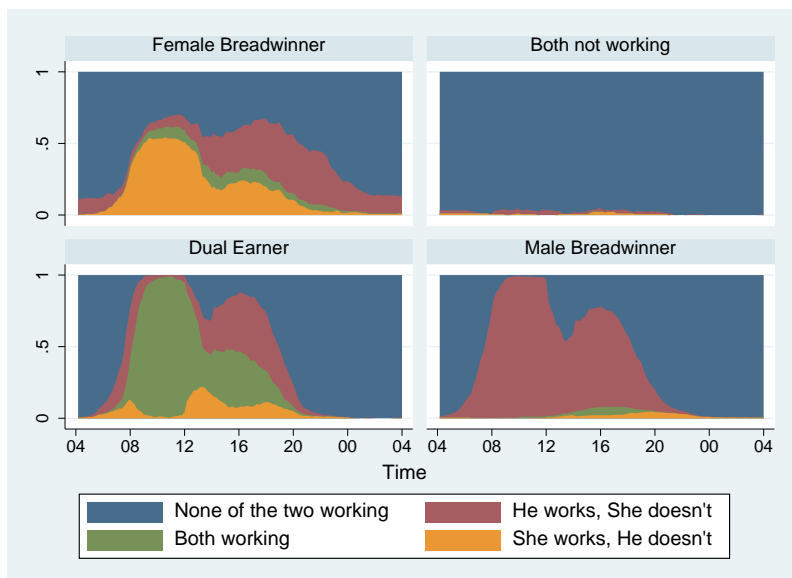
Moreover, logit models are used to test if different childcare patterns are associated to the different work-typologies previously identified, and to understand if new de-gendered forms of childcare management have emerged as a consequence of the Great Recession.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Step 1. When analyzing time devoted to paid work, four state are taken into account: none of the partners works, both work, she works only, he works only.

Four groups emerged (Figure 1): the male breadwinner couples, representing the 44.6% of our sample; the dual earner couples, representing the 35.9% of the sample, and characterized by couples in which both the male and the female partner are engaged in paid work activities, with a high level of synchronization in the morning, and a lower level of synchronization in the afternoon and evening hours; the group in which none of partners works, representing 8.5 % of the sample. The last group identified, composed of the 11.7% of the couples in the sample, includes those couples in which both partners work (with a higher participation of women in paid work related activities), in a totally desynchronized way (indicated as female breadwinner in the Graph): women work mainly in the central part of the day, men in the late evening and in the night. Multinomial regression results show that couple patterns of labour market participation changed significantly before and after the economic recession, other things being equal: the male breadwinner patterns decreased its relevance, while atypical (or mainly female breadwinner patterns) have increased.

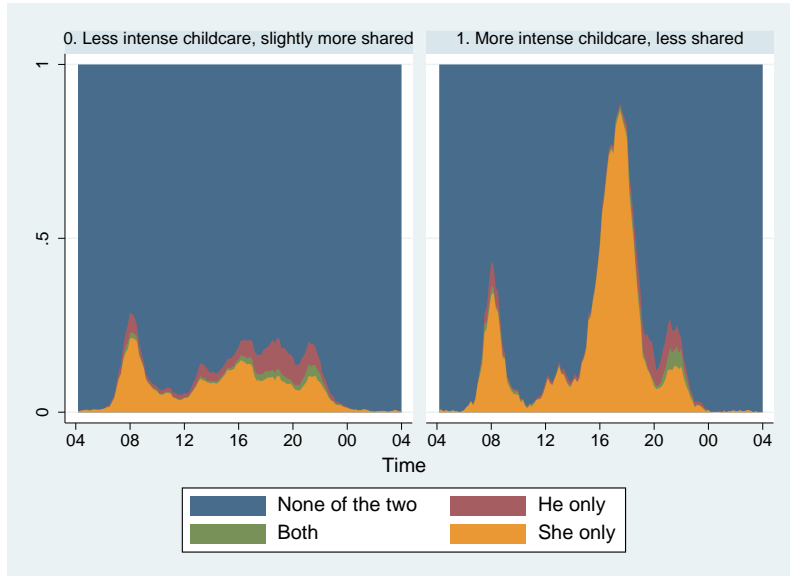
Figure 1. Italian couples work arrangement clusters. Chronograms.



Step 2. When analyzing time devoted to childcare, four state are taken into account: none of the partners does childcare, both do childcare, she does childcare only, he does childcare only.

Two main groups have emerged (Figure 2). The first group is characterized by couples (84% of the sample) performing childcare activities in a less intense way. Women in this group spend on average 106 minutes in childcare, while men only 49 minutes. The second group is characterized by couples (16% of the sample) performing childcare activities in a more intense way. Women in this group spend on average 233 minutes in childcare, while men spend only 39 minutes. Both groups show a great gender asymmetry in the management of childcare, even if at different extent. No groups have emerged, showing de-gendered behaviors in childcare activities organization.

Figure 2. Italian couples' childcare arrangement clusters.



A logistic regression model estimates which pattern of childcare (0 less intense/1 more intense) is more likely to be adopted by the couples identified with the sequence analysis and whether changes are observed across the Recession. Results reported in table 1 evidence that female breadwinner, dual earner and couples where none of the partners works, have a lower probability to adopt a more intensive childcare model, with respect to the male breadwinner couples. However, the association does not change across the Recession.

In conclusion, in Italy the Great Recession had a deep impact on the way partners organize their working time: indeed, new couple typologies emerge, e.g. where women are the main earners or where partners desynchronize their working time, or where both partner do not work. These couples are in fact more likely to adopt a less intense and slightly more shared model of childcare than the traditional male breadwinner typology. However, this great shock was not sufficient to foster new, generalized, de-gendered behaviors in the division of childcare after the Recession, as it could be expected.

Table 1. Logistic regression results. Determinants of more intensive childcare model.

	OR	
Work Arrangement Type (Ref. Male breadwinner)		
Female Breadwinner/desynchronised workers	0.635378	***
Both not working	0.30558	***
Dual Earner	0.606615	***
Year (Ref. 2008)		
2013	1.096714	

Controlling for age, education level, number and age of children, geographical area