

Does more support in children care make a difference in working women fertility?

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Introduction

Italy is a country characterised by a very low fertility, far below replacement level, which is mainly attributable to the delay and scarcity of marriages not replaced by informal cohabitations and by the fall in the proportion of births of second and higher order.

Between the factors which have been regarded as constraining fertility levels not only below replacement level, but even below the desires and the expectations of Italian couples, there is a very traditional gender-system, scarce support from the institutions, perhaps mitigated by the support of the family network. Women, in fact, have always been devoted to the care of their children, and they keep being the main responsables even when involved in the labour market. But not much has been done to help them in the conciliation of times for care and times for work. As a consequence many of them have to sacrifice their fertility, giving birth often to a single child. In the last thirty years, women participation to the labour market in Italy has been increasing, becoming very remarkable; the trend has been even more accentuated as regards to mothers. The negative influence of the lack of support should be greater in the case of working mothers.

Objectives and hypotheses

Specifically, in this paper we study the intention of giving birth to a second child for women who recently had their first child, in order to highlight the influence of different aspects related to father's involvement in child care and other forms of collaboration, to institutional support, and the support of the family network in caring the child. We hypothesize that every form of support is positively associated to a greater inclination toward the transition from first to second birth. We control for demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the woman and the partner, the existence of problems related to the delivery and health condition of the child, the availability of paid domestic help, contextual characteristics as regard the gender system and the availability of childcare services.

Data, variables and methods

The study is based on data from the Survey on Births, carried out by ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) in 2002. The sample consists of 50000 mothers who had a child in 2000-2001, i.e.

from 18 to 24 months before the interview. Specifically, on a sub-sample of around 15.000 women - who represent our units of analysis- , the survey provides a good deal of information related to mothers' working arrangements before and after birth and the conciliation of work and care activities, to the role of partners and the gender-system (partner participation in household tasks and in the care of children, father attendance to delivery), to the existence of a network of family support (economic help from family members or assistance in the care of children) and finally to institutional support (paid parental leave, paid leave when the child is sick, attendance to nursery school).

The survey allow also to control for main socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the woman and her partner such as age, educational level and occupational status, as well as for problems related to pregnancy, delivery, health of the newborn and breastfeeding.

The multivariate statistical analyses are carried out by means of binary logistic regressions; the dependent variable is:

- Do you intend to have other children in the future (yes/ no)

Main findings

Preliminary analyses and first results show that :

Working women enjoy more support from the partner, family network and institutions. Fertility expectations of working and not working women do not differ significantly. Expected fertility increases if there is a greater fathers' involvement in child-bearing and child-rearing, (fathers was present at delivery, father took parental leave, father helps in many kind of childcare activities) while other aspects of gender relations are not important (as help in domestic tasks). The support of family network and institutions does not influence the probability of transition from the first to the second child.