

From the “typical” to the “atypical” works, from the low fertility to the late fertility

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies carried out in Europe (Brinbaum *et al.*, 2004; Giesecke and Groß, 2004), have pointed out the existence of a relation between work and fertility choices, uneven in the EC countries. In a large part of Europe, the increasing participation of women in the labour market is, potentially, the key for having at least one child, while in Italy the female participation to the labour market may represent an obstacle to the possibility to become parents. Probably, the reason of the different behaviour of Italian women is due to the fact that domestic role is still a “*woman affair*”, and the contribution of men to the child-rearing is low. Consequently, for working women the domestic job is very heavy, in a society characterized by the lack of public services. In this situation, it is very hard to realise the own desires of fertility. In other European countries the situation is a bit different: particularly, in the northern countries the equality between males and females is greater and, in general, the welfare state is more “*family friendly*”.

In the last decade in Italy, as in other European countries, beside the traditional work agreements, new contractual forms have born - more flexible and with a limited duration. These types of jobs, characterized by a partial legislative protection as it concerns maternity leave, paid holidays etc., contribute to the insecurity in the future of the young generations, particularly of young women. These forms of agreements surely increase the participation into the labour market, but probably produce, at individual level, a great economic uncertainty that is badly conciliated firstly with the idea to exit from the parental home, then with the building of an own family, and, finally, with the propensity to have a child.

The knowledge about the way in which flexible jobs influence the strategies of the life course in Italy is not consolidated, because of the fact that the spread of atypical contracts is recent, even if the literature on this topic is increasing (IRES-NIDIL, 2005; Petrongolo, 2004; Salvini and Ferro, 2005 (a) and (b)).

2. Aim of the paper and data used

Up to now, the debate on the relationship between work and fertility was concentrated on the role that the female extra-domestic activity could have on the low level of fertility. We want to add to this topic the role of the change of the characteristics of labour market in Italy, so to analyse the effects of choices and professional constraints of men and women on family formation.

We focus our attention on the Italian situation, using data deriving from two recent surveys. The first, conducted at national level, has regarded about 3000 young people of both sexes belonging to generations aged 23-27 and 33-37 years in 2003. Through these data, we want to compare the professional and family choices of typical and atypical workers. The second survey, carried out in Tuscany interviewing a sample of about 1000 atypical workers of both sexes in age 25-39 years, has the aim to deepen the relations between the constraints of working instability and the formation of the family.

3. Some preliminary results

Data deriving from the Italian Survey suggest the importance of work situation and the delay in the family formation for young people involved in atypical works. We have analysed these data using a life course approach through Proportional Hazard Models (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995).

For the younger cohort, the crucial role of the educative curriculum in the delay of building family emerges. The variable “gender” seems very significant, with the women who present a greater chance to the entry in marriage or union. Also the contractual form has a significant role: the probability to enter into a partnership is 50% lower for people having an atypical work than for people occupied in a traditional one. For the cohort 33-37, the variable “gender” is less significant: for women, the probability to marry is 23% higher than for men; the weight of the contractual form, also important, is a bit lower than in the younger cohort, even if still significant. In conclusion, the relations between working pattern and family choices seem well defined, so as the consequences of working flexibility on the phases and the “*timing*” of transition to adulthood.

These preliminary results have suggested to deepen the “*atypical workers world*”, using the survey carried out in Tuscany.

Tuscany is among the Italian regions with the lowest levels of total fertility rate, with values around 1.2 children per woman. Factors affecting fertility, as the large literature suggests, are economic and cultural. In this framework, the spread of atypical contractual works may regard both these groups of factors, influencing, on one side, the current level of income of young people and, on the other side, their perception of the future.

This survey has been preceded from a series of “meetings” with young atypical workers (*focus groups*), aimed to understand the problems linked to the instability of the working contracts in relation to the strategies of life, in particular with the choice to continue to live in the parents’ home and to delay the building of an own family and the birth of a child. The focus groups have suggested the building of the questionnaire to be used in the survey.

The first interesting result of the quantitative survey is the cohorts difference in the age of leaving parental home. The youngest cohort presents a higher age, evidencing a delay in living alone or with a partner (Figure 1).

Exit from the parental home is strongly related with entering into a partnership: single young people exit later than people in union. Again we note the important cohorts difference (Figure 2).

Future perspectives are very different between young workers living in the parental home and those who left it. For the first group, it seems to emerge the "*fear of the future*", that is the fear of not being able to exit from the parental home due to the lack of economic resources, to buy or rent a house, to build a family because "the flexible" job often urges a lot of energies and time for itself and the professional formation. For the second group (often with older age), living with a partner does not seem to provoke strong fears, as instead it appears for parenthood projects. These results are common to both some affirmations of the participants to the focus groups, and to the survey. About a half of respondents does not preview to have children in the next three years, demonstrating the role that the working condition has on the delay of the assumptions of the responsibilities of the adult state. Who lives outside the parental home, independently from marital status, has already made a choice, running a stage of transition to the adulthood. Consequently, the other stages may be perceived as easier.

Although the main cause of exit from the parental home is marriage or union (see also Figure 3), the role of having a job is nonetheless remarkable, and appears a necessary condition, even if not sufficient, to live alone or in a partnership. Five years after having begun to work, 40% of the young people are still living with the parents, while only 28% has left parental home before having a job (for the largest part, students) (Figure 4).

The last event of the life course analyzed is the birth of a child. For 51% of those who live out of the parental home, fertility projects are conditioned by the type of contract and percentage increases to the 71% for those living with parents. Obviously, results are dependent from age and marital status structures of the groups. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that for the generation born in 1965-1969, median age to the first birth is around 32 years, while a further delay is found in the younger generation, born in the years 1970-1979 (Figure 5).

4. Conclusive remarks

Changes in the labour market will hardly invert their trend: in other words, the flexibility seems unavoidable up to now. In this paper we focussed on the consequences of these modifications on the life cycle choices in Italy. Beside some positive aspects, the costs that instability has at individual level clearly emerge both from qualitative and quantitative surveys.

Consequently, the role of the change of the characteristics of contractual forms would have a main role in the agenda concerning social policy at national and regional level, both in terms of support to the families and to the young people. The indirect influence of these policy choices regards the eventual increase of fertility level and the generations equilibrium.

Figure 1 - Event: exit from the parental home - Life curves by gender and birth cohort, not weighted data.

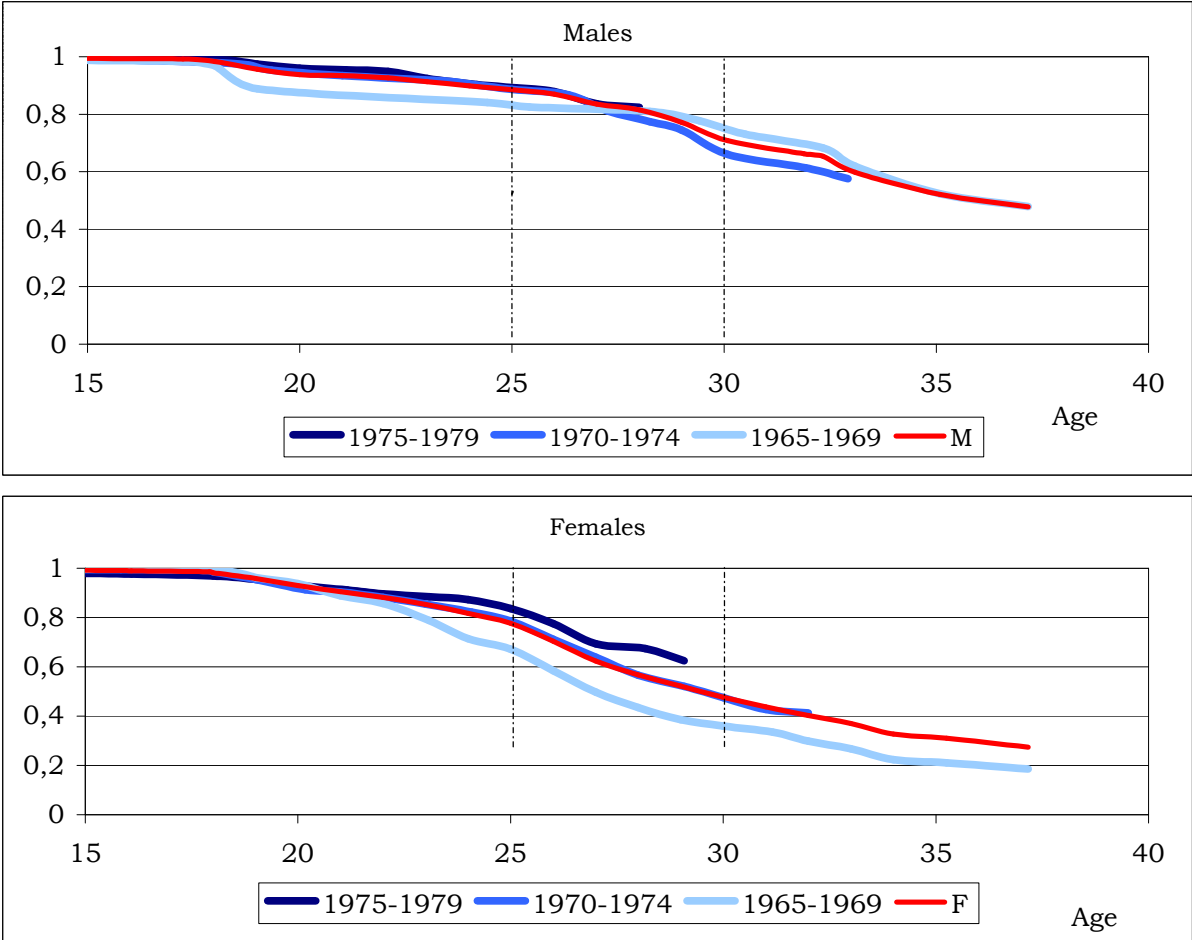
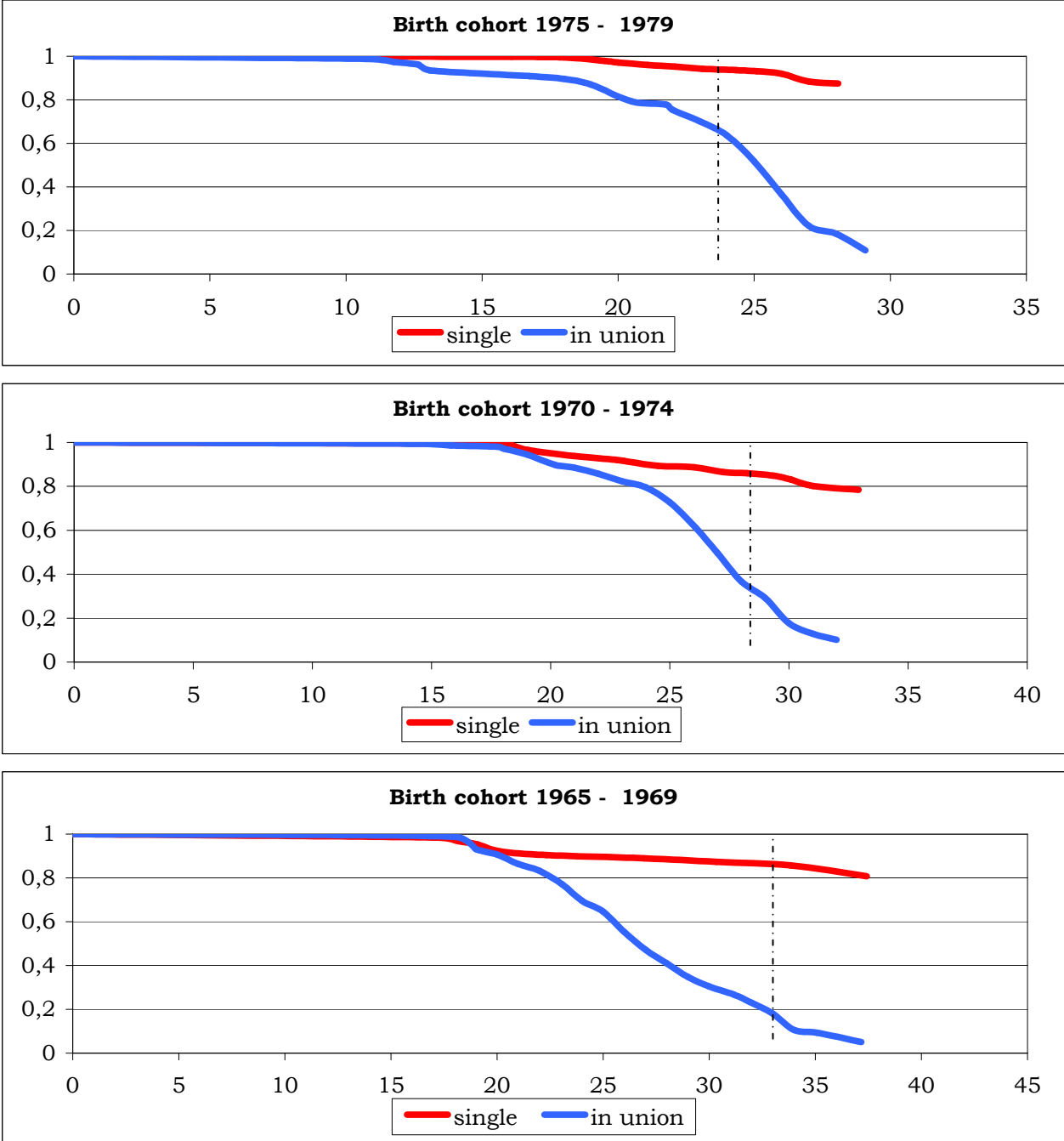


Figure 2 - Event: exit from the parental home - Life curves by birth cohort and “marital” status, not weighted data.



In union= married or cohabiting with a partner

Figure 3 – Events: exit from the parental home – Entry into a partnership. “Mirror” life curves, not weighted data

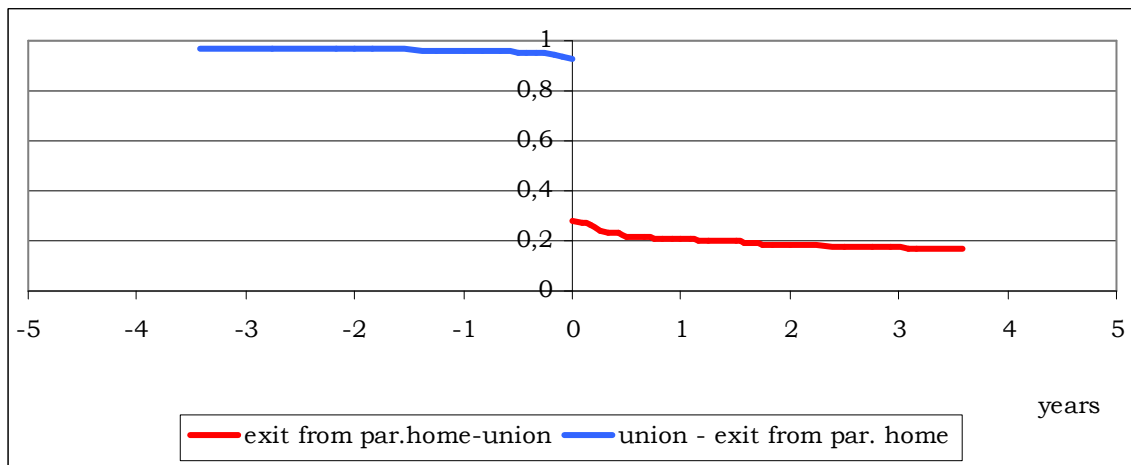


Figure 4 – Events: exit from the parental home – Entry into the labour market. “Mirror” life curves, not weighted data

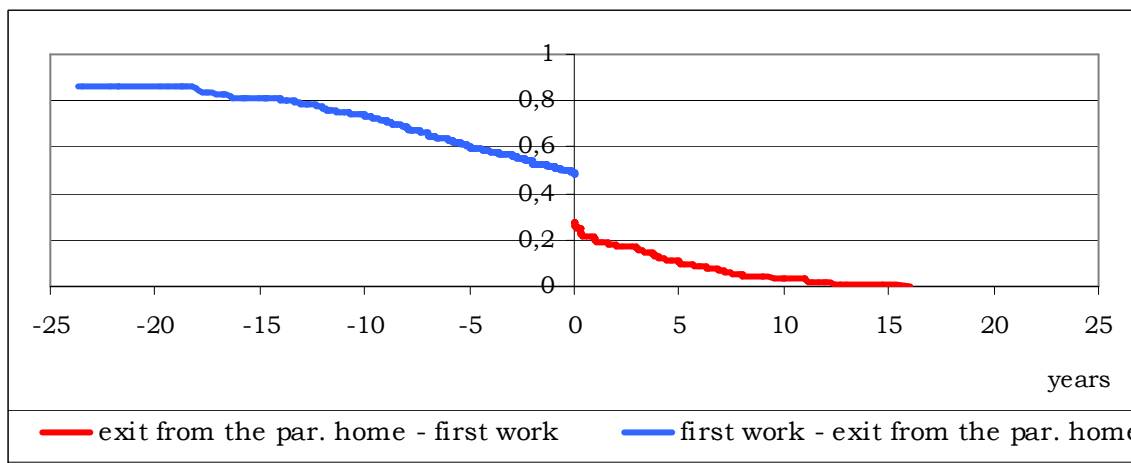
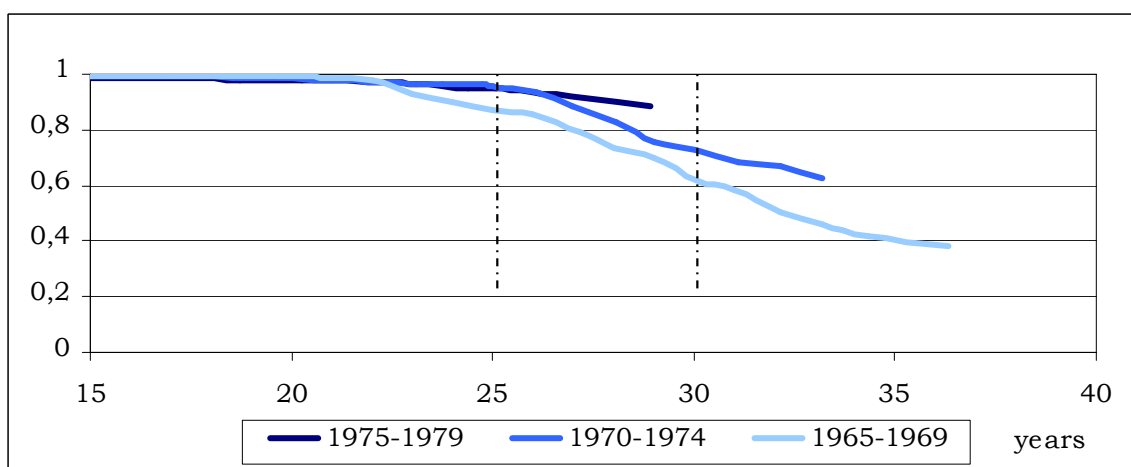


Figure 5 – Event: having the first child - Life curves by birth cohort, not weighted data.



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