

Intergenerational downward ties and fertility intentions in Italy

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Extended abstract

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When norms that regulate relationships among members of the nuclear family and kinship are *familistic*, people “consider their own utility and family utility as being one and the same thing” (Dalla Zuanna, 2001; see also Banfield 1958, Saraceno 1994, Ginsborg 1998,). *Familistic practices* related to these familistic norms have been described by Reher (1998) - with reference to the *strong family* in the Mediterranean area - and reinterpreted by other authors according to more recent trends in the Italian family (Dalla Zuanna 2001, Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004). These practices concern downward (toward children) and upward (toward the old) intergenerational ties and can be summed up as follow: long permanence of children in the family of origin; exit from the family of origin almost exclusively for the marriage; co-residence or proximity of married children to the families of origin; high frequency of contact between generations and, accordingly, frequent instrumental, financial and/or emotional help.

Livi Bacci (2001) focuses on familistic practices of the strong family as well. His expression “too much family” is especially referred to the “delay syndrome”, keeping Italian young adults in the family of origin for a longer time than other European young adults.

Other studies at the micro level that focus on specific aspects of intergenerational ties, as the high frequency of contact between non co-resident generations and monetary transfers toward children, also contribute to identify features of the Italian familistic system (Tomassini et al. 2003, Tomassini et al. 2004).

Familism has been associated to Italian couples’ reproductive behavior (Livi Bacci 2001; Dalla Zuanna 2001; Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004). Analysis accomplished at the aggregate level show, for developed countries, that a higher degree of familism is related to lower levels of fertility. One explanation is that familism could produce a delayed adaptation of social institutions, as scarce and low quality public services which are negatively related to the family (Saraceno 1994, De Rose et al. 2008).

At the individual level opposite results are obtained. As to familistic attitudes, Kertzer et al. (2009), Rizzi et al. (2008) give evidence for a positive association with women’s fertility intentions. As to familistic practices, some studies show that, for example, informal child care through grandparents is positively associated to the likelihood of childbearing (Del Boca 2002; Hank and Kreyenfeld 2003).

This paper will focus on the relationship between familism and fertility on the base of micro data. Particularly, we are interested on intergenerational downward (toward children) ties and fertility intentions in Italy. The controversial term “familism” will be, firstly, defined in connection with other expressions like “strong family”, “stem-family” and “too much family”. Intergenerational downward ties and related practices, specified as part of the broader frame of familism, will be, then, operationalize. Finally, intergenerational downward practices will be

considered in connection with Italian couples reproductive intentions with a multivariate analysis.

Data and methods

We will analyze data from the “Generations and Gender” survey for Italy. Our dependent variable is the couple intention to have a child (or another child) in the next three years. Intergenerational downward ties will refer to grandparents’ informal childcare, monetary transfers toward children, and satisfaction with relationship with parents. Grandparents’ attitude toward another grandchild – as perceived by interviewer - is also considered.

We will control for variables that can affect grandparents’ involvement and fertility intentions, as the life stage of grandparents and grandchildren (Silverstein and Marengo 2001), along with classical control variables (partners’ education, partners’ working status, region of residence).

Geographic proximity and frequency of contact are supposed to be highly and positively correlated to intergenerational downward ties. In a multivariate analysis, any net residual effect of these variables on fertility intentions, once controlling for practices of intergenerational downward solidarity, could represent the effect of emotional ties or of a normative pressure of family of origin on children’s reproductive behavior.

Preliminary results

According to preliminary analyses that we have conducted on a data set (“Famiglie e soggetti sociali” 1998 Istat Multipurpose Survey) to some extent similar to the “Generations and gender” data, geographical proximity of mother-in-law seems to have a negative effect on woman’s intention to have a second and a third child (table 1). If we assume that, generally, downward intergenerational practices have a positive effect on fertility intentions, a negative effect of mother-in-law proximity could represent the prevalence of a negative normative influence on childbearing, i.e., if taking care of grandchildren is a norm for grandparents, they could express their preference, and make pressure, for a limited fertility in order to be able to accomplish their familistic role. The Generations and Gender survey will give further insight into intergenerational relationships and their effect on reproductive behavior.

Table 1 – Woman’s fertility intentions, familistic attitudes and proximity to mother and mother-in-law (working women less than 45 years old, at least one child less than 6 years old)

<i>Independent Variables</i>		Couples with 1 child			Couples with 2 children		
		Log-Odds	RSE	exp(b)	Log-Odds	RSE	exp(b)
Proximity to woman’s mother	Cohabitation or same building	-0.10	0.31	0.90	-0.01	0.32	0.99
	More than 50 km	0.19	0.31	1.21	-0.40	0.44	0.67
	Abroad or dead	-0.39	0.34	0.68	0.16	0.37	1.18
Proximity to woman’s mother-in-law	Cohabitation or same building	-0.47 †	0.28	0.63	-0.16	0.34	0.86
	More than 50 km	-0.29	0.31	0.75	0.71 †	0.41	2.03
	Abroad or dead	0.55	0.35	1.74	-0.09	0.34	0.91
Familistic attitudes		0.02	0.07	1.02	0.12	0.08	1.13
Traditional gender attitudes		0.02	0.08	0.98	0.03	0.10	0.97
Church attendance	At least once per week	0.87 *	0.36	2.38	0.77 †	0.45	2.16
	At least once per month	0.28	0.34	1.32	0.35	0.46	1.43
	At least once per year	0.13	0.32	1.14	0.52	0.44	1.68
Trust in other people		0.44 †	0.23	1.55	0.37	0.24	1.45
Woman’s full-time		-0.29	0.20	0.75	-0.08	0.22	0.92
Woman’s education	High	0.18	0.25	1.20	0.43	0.29	1.54
	Low	-0.27	0.24	0.76	-0.84 * *	0.27	0.43
Woman’s age	Less than 30	0.27	0.23	1.30	0.15	0.39	1.16
	35-39	-0.71 * *	0.23	0.49	-0.87 * * *	0.24	0.42
	40-44	-1.46 * * *	0.42	0.23	-1.72 * * *	0.38	0.18
Region of residence	Northwest	-0.49	0.25	0.61	-0.32	0.29	0.73
	Center	-0.18	0.25	0.83	-0.13	0.30	0.88
	South	0.03	0.26	1.03	-0.20	0.31	0.82
Constant							
	/cut1	-2.84	0.48		0.01	0.54	
	/cut2	-1.33	0.46		2.40	0.56	
	/cut3	0.82	0.46		3.95	0.64	
	Log-likelihood	-535			-350		
	n	442			405		

† p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Note: Reference categories are: woman unsatisfied with the role-set, woman occupied part-time, woman mid-level education, woman 30-34, residence in the North-East, residing less than 50Km from woman’s mother, residing less than 50Km from woman’s mother-in-law, never attend to Mass, no trust in others.

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