Familistic Attitudes, Dual Burden and Fertility in Italy

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Extended Abstract

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Introduction

Among the closely watched trends of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been a pronounced drop in fertility rates throughout much of the developed world. The overall decline of fertility in Europe has been particularly dramatic; as of 2001, 57% of the population lived in countries with a fertility rate of 1.3 or lower (Sobtka 2004). Italy presents a particularly interesting case for study, as it had the world's lowest fertility rate during the 1990s. As recently as a few decades ago, not many would have envisioned the extreme decline of fertility in Italy. Yet after Italy's baby-boom reached its peak in 1964, with a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 2.7, the average number of children per woman consistently decreased. In 1977, fertility fell to replacement level (2.1) for the first time, and by 1993, it had plunged to a critical level of 1.3 children per woman. The TFR reached a record low of 1.18 children per woman in 1995. Although the figures have been consistently well below replacement levels since, there has been a slow increase in births, to an estimated TFR of 1.26, in 2002. Such rapid fertility decline in Italy took many population experts by surprise, given the dominant presence of the Catholic Church and the country's strong familial values, according to which "traditionally the family group has had priority over the individual" (Reher, 1998), and which are expected to further fertility.

Over the last decade a number of explanatory frameworks have been proposed for explaining very low fertility rates. Among these, the Second Demographic Theory stresses the importance of ideational changes and their effect on demographic behavior. More specifically, the adoption of values geared towards autonomy and self-fulfillment have encouraged both the economic independence of women and influenced such behaviors as non-marital childbearing, divorce, and low fertility (Lesthaeghe 1995). A second important related theory is that proposed by McDonald (2000), who suggests that fertility decline can be explained by inconsistencies between levels of gender equity in 'family-oriented institutions' such as domestic tasks and childcare and in 'individual-oriented institutions' such as education and market employment. The former change quickly and are characterized by higher levels of gender equity, bringing them into conflict with family-oriented institutions, which tend to change more slowly. Women, unable to find a happy medium between the two, have a propensity to limit fertility and adjust responses to family-oriented demands accordingly. Related to this phenomenon, there has also been a growing interest in issues relating to the so-called dual burden, given the aforementioned changes related to the second demographic transition and to evolving family structures. Certainly research on Dual Burden (or second shift) forms an essential part of McDonald's theory, which points to the disproportionate work burden carried by woman with families (Hays 1996, Williams 2000, Bianchi 2006).

The Second Demographic Transition theory and the McDonald's theory are not mutually exclusive. "The SDT occurs in tandem with the growth of "postmaterialism" (e.g. Inglehart, 1990) and political or religious "depillarization"(e.g. Lesthaeghe and Moors, 1995), the disengagement from civic, professional or community-oriented associations, a critical stand *vis à vis* all forms of authority, the stress on expressive values in socialization and in work, and, of course, a quest for far more egalitarian gender relations." (Lesthaghe, 2002)

Aim

The objective of the paper is to explore variables pertinent to contemporary lifestyles and attitudes in Italy in order to evaluate their relationship/effect on dual burden outcomes and the desired number of children. More specifically, we are interested in understanding how both attitudinal variables related to the SDT and indicators of gender relations affect women's level of satisfaction with the division of domestic work and the desired to have a child within three years. Intermediate variables and control variables, such as women's education, women's cohort, women's external work, their proximity to their families, and the presence of young children are also taken into account. Given the dramatic geographical differences which characterize Italy, regional and cohort variation is examined in order to gain further insight into the effect of attitudes on dual burden outcomes and the expressed desired number of children. Given these objectives, the nationally 2003 representative survey, *Famiglie Soggetti Sociali* provides an interesting dataset with which to work, given its national coverage of demographic events as well as the presence of attitudinal variables not available in the first version of the FSS.

Operationalization of concepts and the conceptual framework

- In the FSS questionnaire respondents are asked eight questions about attitudes concerning family and demographic behavior. We used principal component factor analysis to derive two factors that describe two dimensions of familistic attitudes.

  F1: *Familistic attitudes* concerning marriage, cohabitation, single parenthood, adult children's autonomy
  F2: *Gender attitudes* concerning possibility of divorce with children, the attribution of children to divorced mother, old parents care by daughter, housewife fulfillment

The first principal component (F1) captures familistic attitudes, with larger values indicates stronger expression of familism. The second component (F2) reflects position the dimension of gender attitudes, with higher values indicating more equality. The factors and the underlying questions are plotted in Figure 1.

We also calculate a dual burden indicator, drawing on reported data for hours worked (H) and reflecting the relative effort in total hours (household plus external work) contributed by the woman (w) or the man (m). The index varies between -1 and 1, and it assumes positive values when woman's total hours exceed man's total hours. The index has a right skewed distribution in Italy, meaning a heavier total work load for women. Figure 2 plots the distribution of the dual burden index. Also relevant to our model is a conventional ordinal variable indicating the woman's satisfaction with her overall workload.
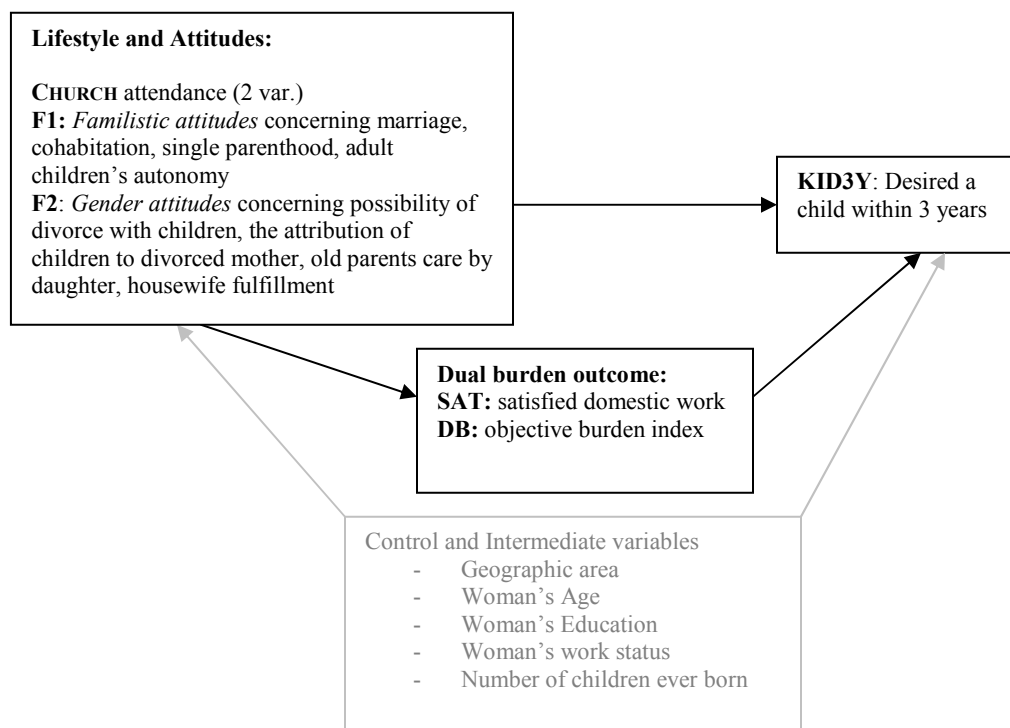
Fig. 1 – Principal component analysis on attitudinal variables

Fig. 2 – Dual Burden Index distribution

Component loadings

Dual burden indicator DB = (Hw-Hm)/(Hw+Hm)

H= domestic work+external work
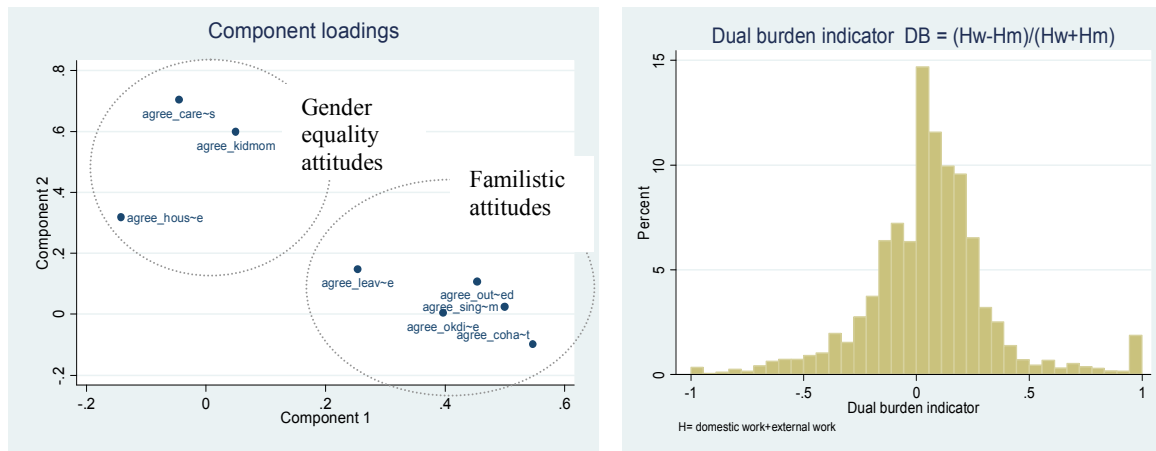
The conceptual framework

Figure 3 depicts our model, and its underlying conceptual framework. We assume that familistic attitudes, gender equality attitudes and church attendance have a direct effect on desired fertility. We also assume that attitudes have an indirect effect through dual burden perception.

Fig. 3 – The Attitudes-Desired Fertility relation and the Dual Burden mediating effect

Lifestyle and Attitudes:

CHURCH attendance (2 var.)
F1: *Familistic attitudes* concerning marriage, cohabitation, single parenthood, adult children's autonomy
F2: *Gender attitudes* concerning possibility of divorce with children, the attribution of children to divorced mother, old parents care by daughter, housewife fulfillment

KID3Y: Desired a child within 3 years

Dual burden outcome:
SAT: satisfied domestic work
DB: objective burden index

Control and Intermediate variables
- Geographic area
- Woman's Age
- Woman's Education
- Woman's work status
- Number of children ever born

Preliminary results

We estimate an ordinal logistic regression for the desire to have a child in the next three years (Table 1). Model 1 shows a positive, strong and statistical significant effect of daily church attendance. When the control variables are account for, church attendance at any degree is positively and significantly associated with the desire to have a child in comparison to non-attendance (Model 3 and 4).

A weaker but significant effect is also shown for the gender equity attitudes indicator (constructed from the factor analysis) which is positive correlated with the desire to have a child (Model 1). However when control variables such woman's age and woman's education are controlled for the effect strongly reduced and it is no longer significant (Model 3 and 4).

When dual burden variables are added to the model, the familistic attitudes factor effect and the gender attitudes factor effect changes slightly. This indicates that these attributes could partially mediate the attitudes effect on desired fertility.

Our results to date are consistent with the dual burden notion, that is, women who have a higher share of overall productive hours (inside and outside the house) are less likely to wish for more children. We also see some evidence of the Second Demographic Transition notion, in that some models show evidence of the influence of attitudes and behaviors, such as our gender factor index and church attendance.

Future works

Further work with variables and models are planned. We anticipate further refinements in the construction of attitudes index. We intend to account for some available partner information. Further model specifications will be investigated, most notably, estimating models specific for woman's parity and limiting our analysis to working women. Each of these refinements should improve the match between theory and empirical analysis and she more light on the underlying questions about the links among attitudes, the dual burden, and fertility.

Tab. 1 - Ordinal Logistic Regression for the desire to have a child in the next 3 years

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef.		Coef.		Coef.		Coef.	
ATTITUDINALS AND LIFESTYLES VARIABLES								
Familistic attitudes factor	-0.0158		-0.0094		-0.0113		-0.0375	
Gender equity attitudes factor	0.0827	**	0.0728	**	0.0310		0.0010	
Woman's church attendance (ref. category "Church neve attended"								
Church attendance every day	0.8868	**	0.8320	*	1.3568	***	1.2090	**
Church sometimes per week	-0.0903		-0.0653		0.4984	**	0.6390	***
Church once per week	-0.0691		-0.0469		0.4263	***	0.5834	***
Church sometimes or once in the month	-0.1378		-0.1074		0.2337	*	0.3825	**
Church once or sometimes in the year	0.0482		0.0795		0.3648	**	0.4316	***
DUAL BURDEN VARIABLES								
Dual Burden Index			-0.6007	***	-0.4606	***	-0.3470	**
Woman's satisfaction with housework organization (ref. category "No satisfied")								
Little satosfied with domestic work organisation			0.2804		0.1678		0.1744	
Somewhat satisfied			0.5241	***	0.3315	*	0.3467	*
Satisfied			0.6744	***	0.2565		0.2301	
CONTROL AND INTERMEDIATE VARIABLES								
Woman's education (ref. category "Middle educated")								
Woman higlhly educated					-0.5111	***	-0.4637	***
Woman low educated					0.6603	***	0.5431	***
Woman's age (ref. category "Woman 40-45"								
womoan less 30 years old					2.9974	***	2.4090	***
woman 30-34					2.1049	***	1.7811	***
woman 35-39					1.0365	***	0.9414	***
Italian Geographic area (ref. category "Center")								
north-west					0.0257		-0.1177	
north-east					0.2386	*	0.1740	
south					0.0778		0.1174	
islands					0.0883		0.0453	
Proximity with woman's mother (ref. category "Less than 1 km")								
Cohabitation or in the same building					-0.1093		-0.0794	
1-16 km					0.0198		0.0355	
16- 50 km					0.0742		0.0683	
Mother abroad					-0.0427		-0.0704	
Mother dead					-0.1054		-0.1236	
Proximity with woman's mother-in-low (ref. category "Less than 1 km")								
Cohabitation or in the same building					-0.0378		-0.0441	
1-16 km					-0.0817		-0.0702	
16- 50 km					0.1343		0.1173	
Mother-in-law abroad					-0.0430		-0.0570	
Mother-in-law dead					-0.2320	*	-0.2794	**
Woman's occupation status (ref. category "housewife")								
Woman occupied					0.3726	***	0.1683	*
Looking for a job					0.3550	*	0.1738	
Student					-0.0599		-0.4523	
Not occupied					-0.0816		-0.1577	
Presence of young children (ref. category "No child")								
Children but none less than 6 years old							-2.1738	***
At least one child less than 6 years old							-1.7821	***

*** = p < 0.001, ** = p < 0.01, * = p < 0.05, # = p < 0.10