

**Resilient or newcomer?**

**Female breadwinners in Spain and the impact of the economic crisis**

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***SHORT ABSTRACT (300 words)***

Spain is a unique country in the European context with regards to the impact of the crisis on income roles within households, particularly due to the increasing prevalence of female-breadwinner couples as a consequence of greater male unemployment. Using panel data from the Spanish Labour Force Survey for the crisis period (2008-2015), we longitudinally investigated flows between household types in order to establish the extent to which the shift towards female-breadwinner couples reflects a greater resilience of women's employment. Specifically, we sought to find whether it stemmed from a sectorial and occupational pattern of job losses within a gender-typed labor market or rather was due to added worker effect, with previously non-active women entering the labour force. Through logistic regression models with random effects, we observe intra-couple dynamics from one observation  $t$  to the following  $t+1$ . In the first group of transitions to female breadwinner, couples began as dual-earner partnerships, whereas in the second transition group they were formally either male-breadwinner couples or couples where neither partner was employed. We also analyze the sociodemographic, and labor characteristics associated with each type of flow. The underlying assumption is that differences exist in the education level, job characteristics and national origin of female-breadwinner couples. In those cases in which the female partner is the primary earner, a better socioeconomic performance is expected, while in couples where she is an added worker more precarious labor conditions are supposed. For the latter, the analysis will differentiate labor force entry from inactivity and unemployment. The understanding of the diverse paths towards new female economic roles due to the crisis is of central importance in order to forecast possible implications for gender equality.

## ***EXTENDED ABSTRACT***

### ***1. Introduction***

The traditional division of labor based on a male breadwinner model is no longer the predominant economic family system in Western societies. Dual-income households are nowadays the prevailing norm. The need for a higher income - one salary is not sufficient to cover family expenses - but also the gender ideological commitments - women want to develop their professional careers - are the explanations behind this change. However, how vulnerable is the dual-earner model in the context of an economic crisis?

Spain is a unique country in the European context in which to analyze the impact of the crisis on the income roles within households for several reasons. First, because it allows us to understand women's labor force participation patterns. The labor behavior of women has changed noticeably in recent years, and female participation rates have increased from 33% in 1976 to 62% in 2008, just prior to the beginning of the crisis. However, the labor force participation of women in Spain is particularly low when it is compared to other European countries. This is partly attributed to the familistic nature of its Welfare State ([Esping-Andersen, 1990 and 1999](#)) and to the low levels of institutional support to conciliate work and family spheres of life ([González, 2006](#)). Spain represents one of the examples of the transition from a traditional male breadwinner regime to a dual-earner regime. Moreover, the present position of women in the labor market has changed dramatically compared to previous economic crises, which makes the current economic context the perfect scenario to evaluate the gender impact.

Second, the country has been strongly affected by the global economic crisis since the year 2008, just after an important period of economic boom, and the number of job losses has been dramatic from that year onwards, which hit men harder than women. Effectively, the overall unemployed population increased by more than 4.1 million between the 3rd quarter of 2007 to the 4th quarter of 2014. The male unemployed population increased by 2.3 million (+284%), whereas the number of female unemployed increased by 1.8 million (+183%). The gender gap figures in job loss are even more impressive. Male employment decreased by -24.7% whereas the female employment reduction was merely -9.2% ([Gil-Alonso and Vidal-Coso, 2015](#)). Female employment has been sheltered in this crisis as employment contractions have been larger in construction and manufacturing and other sectors where women are under-represented. In this scenario, the economic resources of many families in Spain were deeply damaged and, as a consequence, many inactive women found it strategic to enter the labor force, increasing their role as economic providers. However, this was mainly true during the first years of the crisis. By 2010 measures for fiscal consolidation had been involved in job cuts in feminized areas such as public social services, health and

education. Thus, it is necessary to consider the evolution of job losses during the entire crisis period to account for dynamics in the intra-household economic roles.

An increasing prevalence of female breadwinner couples in Spain after the economic crisis started in 2008 has been observed, which is a consequence of the profoundly gendered patterns concerning job destruction. In our opinion, the increasing female economic headship could deepen the economic vulnerability among families, but also could have implications regarding the intra-household gender roles. Thus, the understanding the diverse paths towards females' new economic role is of central importance in order to forecast possible implications regarding gender equality. Consequently, using the panel version of the Spanish Labor Force Survey (SLFS) during the crisis period, from 2008 to 2015, we pursue a twofold aim:

1) To sort out to what extent the shift to female breadwinner couples reflects a transition from one of two possible original family economy models. The transition might come from the dual-earner couples model (both partners were employed at the previous observation); or, on the contrary, it might represent cases of the added worker effect, either from male breadwinner couples (only the man was employed) or from non-working couples (neither the woman nor the man was employed in the previous observation). The first assumption suggests a greater resilience of female employment, due to the sectorial and occupational pattern of employment losses within a gender-typed labor market. The second assumption, on the contrary, implies a countercyclical economic behavior where the incorporation of females to the labor force during a recession is the direct effect of male unemployment. In the first scenario the income role of women during the recession is that of co-primary earner, whereas in the second scenario, women act as marginal and secondary earners.

2) To explore the role of women's human capital in transitioning to female breadwinner families by looking at their sociodemographic and labor characteristics associated with both types of transition. The assumption here is the existence of differences regarding educational level, job characteristics and national origin in the profile of female breadwinner couples. In those cases in which she is a primary earner, a better socioeconomic performance is expected, while in couples where she became an added worker more precarious labor conditions are supposed. For the latter, the analysis will differentiate inflows to employment from inactivity and unemployment.

In addressing this research, we aim to answer three specific questions: 1) How have intra-household income roles in Spain evolved during the different stages of the economic crisis? 2) Is the major resilience of women in employment or the entrance to employment of inactive women the main reason for the increasing prevalence of female economic headship within couples? 3) Are there differences between these two typologies of inflows regarding the couple's sociodemographic, labor and national origin profile?

It is still to be determined which implications this phenomenon might have from a gender perspective. The experience of gender inequality during previous economic recessions tell us that women have often ended up in a more precarious situation than men in terms of labor market conditions and regulations (Gálvez, 2012). However, from the current scenario we might think that it might imply a path of no return to the traditional division of labor.

## **2. Background**

Over the past few decades, family economic models have experienced important transformations. The male breadwinner model has long been the normative family model (Becker, 1981). Today, this traditional division of labor is becoming obsolete for many post-industrial Western societies (Janssens, 1997; Lewis, 2001) in which women have entered the productive sphere, thus generating more egalitarian couples (McDonald, 2013). The empowerment of women resulting from their expanded access to education and increased labor force participation, the normalization of separation and divorce, and changing perceptions of single motherhood and non-marital cohabitation are key referents for these changes and are framed within the theory of the Second Demographic Transition (Van de Kaa, 1987). Given that dual-earner families have now become widespread (Blossfeld and Drobnic, 2001), a new model is emerging: the female breadwinner model (Oppenheimer 1994). Current studies on female breadwinner couples usually define them as females in couples in which she is the sole provider or she out-earns her partner (i.e., she earns the majority, or more than 50%, of the total household income) (Brennan *et al.*, 2001; Winkler, *et al.* 2005; Vitali and Mendola, 2014; Klesment and Van Bavel 2015). According to these definitions, it has been estimated that one in four US households (Wang *et al.* 2013) and one in six French households (Bloemen *et al.*, 2013) have female breadwinners. Winkler *et al.* (2005) note that these proportions may vary depending on where the threshold of earnings is set (i.e., 50%, 60%). In the European context, a cross-country analysis of the emergence of female breadwinners showed an important heterogeneity in the presence of this family model, which was at least 10% for all countries, and found that the male breadwinner model has declined in two-thirds of countries between 2004 and 2010 (Vitali and Mendola, 2014). The reversal of the gender gap in education is one of the main reasons associated with the growing proportion of couples in which women out-earn their partners (Klesment and Van Bavel, 2015). In this work, we opt for a specific definition. Thus, we refer to “female breadwinners” as those households of couples with or without children in which the woman is the unique economic provider; that is, she is the only employed household member.

Drago *et al.* (2005) distinguish between those female breadwinners couples were the consequence of an ideological commitment to gender equity from those that responded to a male disadvantage in the labor market. This distinction represents the two main causes associated with the rise of female-earner couples in Western countries. Among the latter, the suppositions are that in some cases, women working part time increased their working hours, while in others, previously inactive women in male breadwinner

families entered the labor market (Mattingly and Smith, 2010). For such cases, the economic theory of the family labor supply has developed the concept of the “added worker effect”. The concept refers to the labor supply of the female partner as a couple’s strategy to overcome male partner unemployment (see Humphrey, 1940; Mattingly & Smith, 2010). Bettio et al. (2012) emphasize that female economic headship often becomes a consequence of the onset of a period of economic crisis, and it can easily fit the context of job segregation by gender, as in the Spanish case. The segregation hypothesis argues that female employment has been sheltered in the current economic crisis due to the distinctive sectoral impact of job losses. For these authors, women are less vulnerable compared with men in all European countries due to their under-representation in the most affected industries, consequently causing male breadwinner households to lose ground in favor of female breadwinner households. Indeed, some previous studies have already characterized the socio-demographic profile of female-earner couples.

Nevertheless, the role of women’s human capital on determining their resilience on the labor market in facing an economic crisis is ambiguous. A very recent study from Klesment and Van Bavel (2015) states, “the proportion of female breadwinners increased after 2008 for couples who were low educated, particularly in countries that were hit badly by the crisis.” These results support and reinforce our research interest. Moreover, in a study focused on “maternal breadwinning” among couples and single mothers in Europe, the authors conclude that this particular economic arrangement is more frequent among older mothers (and mothers of older children), women working in the public sector and in the service sector, women in low-middle income households, and women who hold a tertiary education degree (Cory and Sterling, 2015).

In a country like Spain which has recently become an immigration country, the national origin plays a role that has to be considered in this regard. In the case of the migrant population, the economic recession has had more serious consequences on families. Migrants – especially low-skilled migrants – have a more precarious and marginal position in the labor market (Tilly, 2011). Consequently, they are expected to be more vulnerable than natives during an economic crisis (Papademetriou and Terrazas, 2009). Within this context, some authors have recently confirmed a “feminization” of job stability among foreign women in Spain (Zugasta, 2014).

### **3. Data and Methods**

The data for this study are obtained from the 2008-2015 Spanish Labour Force Survey (SLFS). This survey is a unique source for studying yearly household composition and the characteristics of household members in the inter-census period (Garrido et al. 2000). Because SLFS interviews every individual during 6 consecutive trimestral observations, the use of this data source facilitates longitudinal analyses. SLFS is a rotating panel in which 1/6 of the sample is removed in each wave, leaving 5/6 remaining in the sample, so a new panel is formed after six trimesters. Therefore, we follow women and their partners over 18 consecutive months (six trimesters) to observe changes and intra-couple dynamics over time with regard to employment status. Our

target group in this study is heterosexual couples living with or without children in which both members are 20-60 years old.

We longitudinally explore the *economic arrangement within the couples* by focusing on the transitions of women to a female-earner partnership in a wave ( $t+1$ ) as a consequence of their partner's unemployment or inactivity. To a female breadwinner model, couples may arrive from three possible economic arrangements in the previous observation ( $t$ ): dual-earner partnership, male-breadwinner or unemployed couples.<sup>1</sup>

The obtained models are logistic regression models with random effects. In these models, we assume that the aggregated heterogeneity due to the multiple observations  $t$  of every individual  $i$  is randomly correlated to the explanatory variables. This aggregated heterogeneity is captured by the random-intercept  $\zeta_i \sim N(0, \varphi)$ :

$$\log \text{it} \{ \Pr(y_{it+1} = 1 | x_{it}, \zeta_i) \} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{it} x_{it} + \zeta_i$$

where  $y_{it+1} = 1$  denotes the transition to female headship by  $t+1$ ;  $y_{it+1} = 0$  refers to no transition (i.e., those who remain dual-employed couples);  $\beta_{00}$  is the constant;  $\beta_{it}$  represents the vector of the coefficients of the explanatory variables associated with every individual ( $i$ ) in every observation ( $t$ );  $\beta_{it}$  represents the vector of the explanatory variables associated with every individual ( $i$ ) in every observation ( $t$ ); and  $\zeta_i$  represents the aggregated heterogeneity due to the multiple observations  $t$  of every individual  $i$ .

#### 4. Preliminary descriptive findings<sup>2</sup>

Preliminary findings in Figure 1 show the evolution of different couple's economic arrangements for all women in Spain by women's educational attainment during the observed period (1999-2012). The decline of the male-breadwinner model is present in all cases during the period of economic expansion –before 2008– as well as a drastic trend change for dual-earner couples in 2008 when the economic crisis started. As a consequence, the two remaining family economic arrangements each experienced an inflection in their tendency starting in 2008: female breadwinners' couples and non-working couples, both increased their presence in Spain.

However, these patterns did not happen similarly for all women. Once we broke down this data by the female partner's educational level, we noticed important differences. It is remarkable that the relative share of female breadwinners barely differs among educational groups being slightly higher for primary educated women. This fact does not tell us very much about educational differences. But the parallel downturn for male breadwinner and dual-earner economies for primary educated women's couples tell us that the added worker effect was stronger for them than for the more educated women. For secondary and tertiary educated women the jobs losses from dual-earner couples

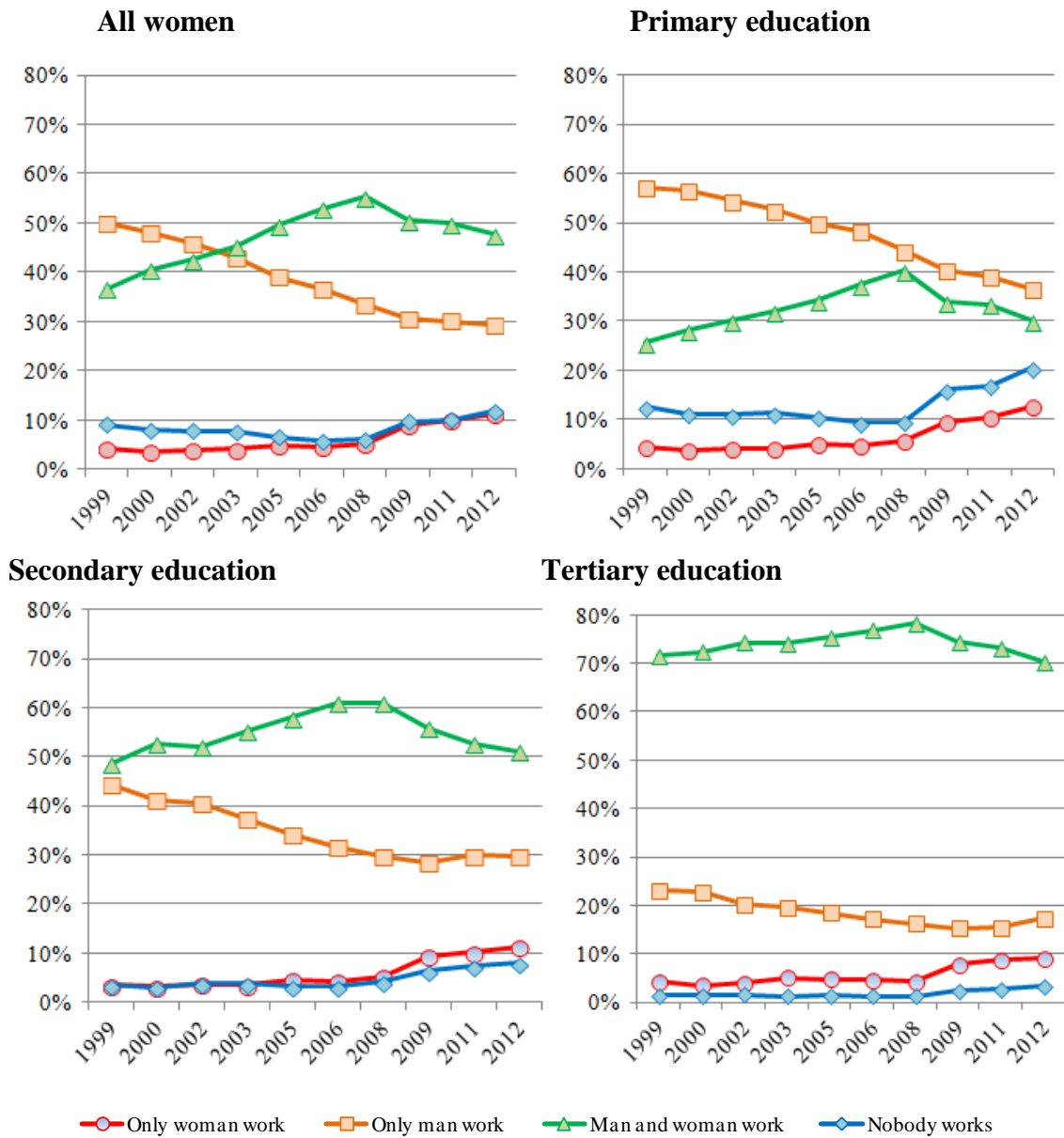
<sup>1</sup> Note that we only consider partners aged 20-60 to exclude transitions to inactivity due to early retirement, which are very common in Spain for workers aged 61-64.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this abstract preliminary results has been calculated for the period 1999-2012 but it will updated to 2015 in the further develop of this work.

turned into the resilience of female partners. To become a resilient female worker or a female added worker as a result of the crisis is obviously determined by the dominant economic arrangement during the crisis. For primary educated woman the dominant scenario was the male breadwinner, representing more than half of the couples until 2006. In contrast, seven out of ten tertiary educated women have been in dual-earner couples during the whole period. As expected, we observe that the less educated women are the ones who experienced the worst consequences, not only of male unemployment in their households but also her own unemployment. As a matter of fact, in 2012 in 20% of the households in which she has primary education, both partners were unemployed. On the other extreme, the same results only happened in 3% of the couples where she has tertiary education.

In figure 2 we present the distribution of the transitions toward a female-earner couple in  $t+1$  according to the type of couple in the previous observation  $t$  by women's educational level, reinforcing from a longitudinal approach previous cross-sectional results. There are three original situations from which the economic arrangements of a couple can become female sustained. These three starting points are dual-income couples, male breadwinner couples and couples in which neither partner works. Figure 2 shows that most of the movements to female-earner couples come from dual-earner couples (6-7 out of 10 overall). This specific type of employment transition reaches 66.1% of the total flows toward female-earner couples for Spanish couples during the crisis period from 2008-2012, whereas transitions from non-employed couples represents the 26%, and from male-breadwinner the 8%. However, we can also see interesting patterns by educational level. Although flows are more likely to come in all cases from dual-earner couples, pointing to the female resilience hypothesis, the higher the women's educational level, the more likely they are to transition from more equalitarian couples. On the contrary, the hypothesis of the "added worker effect" seems to be more probable for less educated women.

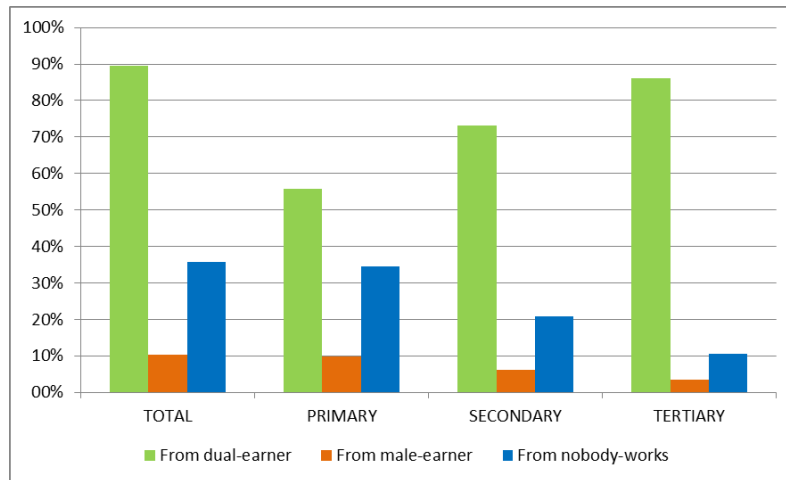
**Figure 1: Evolution of couples with or without children with both partners aged 20-60 by educational attainment of the woman of the couple according to the type of economic headship of the household.**



Source: Spanish LFS, 1999-2012



**Figure 2: Transitions to female-breadwinner couples by couple's previous employment arrangements by woman's educational level. Crisis period (2008-2012)**



Source: Spanish LFS, 1999-2012

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