

Labour market insecurity, gender differences and union dissolution in Italy

Elena Chincarini

Bamberg Graduate School of Social Sciences (BAGSS)
University of Bamberg
Bamberg, Germany

Divorce is one of the most dramatic events that a family could experience, due to its possible long-term consequences for both partners and children (Braver and Lamb, 2013). Since union dissolution has been increasing in the last decades, the study of the possible causes has attracted scholars' attention. The literature is mainly focused on Northern European and Anglo-Saxon countries (Amato, 2010; Lyngstad and Jalovaara, 2010), although a dramatic increase of divorce, as well as cohabitation, has taken place in Italy in particular. Several studies have recently stressed the impact of partners' socioeconomic position on union dissolution, especially focusing on educational level, employment status and social classes (Jansen *et al.*, 2009; Cooke *et al.*, 2013; Jalovaara, 2013; Mäenpää and Jalovaara, 2014; Kaplan and Herbst, 2015). Following this line of study, this paper aims to clarify the impact of partners' unstable working position on dissolution of marriage and cohabitation in Italy, a context still dominated by a "familistic" welfare state (Saraceno, 1994; Naldini and Saraceno, 2008) where the family usually is left alone to cope with the negative outcomes of the segmented and insecure labour market (Barbieri and Scherer, 2009; Ferrera, 2015).

In particular, building on economic, psychological and sociological theories, this paper tests the possible impact of partner's employment instability, namely unemployment and atypical work, on union dissolution. With a model of cost-reward rational calculations, economists claim that the worrisome effects of economic losses and financial deprivation of unemployment (Becker, 1973; Lundberg and Pollak, 1996) might lead to a re-evaluation of the partner's capability of maintaining the previous standard of living and of providing sufficient resources for the survival of the family. Psychological theories underline the vulnerability of the family to a stressful event, such as unemployment, which firstly decreases the level of self-esteem and self-confidence of individuals, secondly the well-being of both partners and finally their marital satisfaction and quality (Clark and Oswald, 1994; Dooley *et al.*, 1996; Vinokur *et al.*, 1996).

Finally, sociological theories underline how unemployment causes a drastic reduction of life consumption and prestige due especially to economic losses and difficult social acceptance and social stigma attached to outsiders of labour market (Doiron and Mendolia, 2011). However, these theoretical frameworks are not gender neutral. Female labour market position and its impact on unions depends on the degree of gender equity within the couple (Lundberg and Pollak, 1996), the expected roles of both partners (Nye and McLaughlin, 1976; Becker, 1993) and gender values in the broader society (Oppenheimer, 1997; Cooke, 2006).

The Italian context is still characterized by a male bread winner model concerning the division of paid and unpaid work (Saraceno, 1994; Barbieri, 2010) and we therefore expect strong and persistent gender differences. Although female labour market participation has increased in the second half of the 20th century (Saraceno, 1994), female employment is still considered as a secondary and less prominent source of income and benefits for the family (Vignoli *et al*, 2012). Thus, *the unemployment of male partner is expected to increase the likelihood of union dissolution, while female unemployment might have no impact on the risk of union dissolution.*

While the existent literature in Italy has been mostly concerned with divorce (Rosina and Fraboni, 2004; Vignoli and Ferro, 2009; De Rose and Vignoli, 2011), this research additionally takes into account cohabitation dissolution, identifying the differences between the two forms of union. Cohabitation is a form less stable of union than marriage (Nazio and Blossfeld, 2003), especially in Italy where the marriage is still the predominant form of union and it is culturally more accepted (Rosina and Fraboni, 2004). Furthermore, in Italy married couples have stronger commitments, such as presence of children and sharing of goods, that might protect against the risk of divorce (Vignoli and Ferro, 2009; De Rose and Vignoli, 2012). Consequently, partners in cohabitation could more easily leave an unsatisfying union in case of unemployment. In addition, people with more egalitarian values are more likely to choose cohabitation than marriage (Jalovaara, 2013). Therefore, we also expect that gender differences regarding the partners' (un-)employment position are less strong than in marriages. Thus, *cohabitations are supposed to be influenced more by labour market insecurity than marriages. However, the gender differences in the above stated relation are expected to be less strong in cohabitations than in marriages.*

Analytically, retrospective data from an Italian Multipurpose Survey of 2009, Families and Social Subjects, are analyzed with event history analysis models. This survey, conducted by ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), provides representative data at national and regional level of households and individuals. In particular, it offers information across time about educational training, working career, family relations and household dynamics. Risks of marriage dissolution and cohabitation dissolution are studied separately. In order to estimate the effects of labour market instability, two different aspects are distinguished: unemployment and atypical work. In order to have a clearer image of unemployment influence, three unemployment forms are considered, namely unemployment from a permanent working position, unemployment from a temporary one and long-term unemployment. Moreover, adjusting the classification of employment by Barbieri and Scherer (2009) based on contractual status, a differentiation of “typical” and “atypical” working position is provided. The former consists of i) permanent dependent employment and ii) traditional self-employment or liberal professions. The latest is constituted by: iii) temporary dependent employment (fixed-term contracts, TWA and others); iv) pseudo self-employment (mainly, the continuous collaborators), v); and other nonstandard forms.

Our preliminary findings show that male unemployment increases the risk of divorce, while female unemployment seems to protect the marriage, highlighting the existence and the persistence of a traditional division of labour within the couple. Furthermore, cohabitation is more at risk to labour market insecurity than marriage. However, in cohabitations we do not find gender differences of the labour market insecurity influence on dissolution. As argued by Nazio and Blossfeld (2003), individuals who share more equal gender roles and models tend to prefer to cohabit instead of getting married. Therefore, in couples where there is a more equal division of tasks inside and outside the household, an unpleasant and unexpected event of job loss has the same impact on the risk of cohabitation dissolution if it is experienced by men or women. The central role of working position in shaping individuals’ life and household dynamics is not attached exclusively on men but it appears to be shared between the two partners.

References

- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 650–666.
- Barbieri, P. (2010). Italy: No country for young men (and women). In: Buchholz, S. and Hofäcker, D. (eds.). *The flexibilization of European labor markets: The development of social inequalities in an era of globalization*. Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Barbieri, P. and Scherer, S. (2009). Labour market flexibilization and its consequences in Italy. *European Sociological Review*, 25, 677 – 692.
- Becker, G. S. (1974). A Theory of Marriage: Part I. *Journal of Political Economy*, 82, 813 – 846.
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *A Treatise on the Family*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Braver, S. L. and Lamb, M. E. (2013). Marital Dissolution. In: Peterson, G. W. and Busch, K. R. (eds.). *The Handbook of Marriage and Family*. New York: Springer.
- Clark, A. E. and Oswald, A. J. (1994). Unhappiness and Unemployment. *The Economic Journal*, 104, 648 – 659.
- Cooke, L. P. (2006). “Doing” Gender in Context: Household bargaining and risk of divorce in Germany and the United States. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112, 442 – 472.
- Cooke, L. P., Erola, J., Evertsson, M., Gähler, M., Härkönen, J., Hewitt, B., Jalovaara, M., Kan, M., Lyngstad, T. H., Mancarini, L., Mignot, J.-F., Mortelmans, D., Poortman, A.-R., Schmitt, C. and Trappe, H. (2013). Labour and Love: Wives' Employment and Divorce Risk in its Socio-Political Context. *Social Politics*, 20, 482 – 509.
- De Rose, A. (1992). Socio Economic factors and family size as determinants of marital dissolution in Italy. *European Sociological Review*, 8, 71 – 91.
- De Rose, A. and Vignoli, V. (2011). Families all'italiana: 150 years of history. *Rivista Italiana di Demografia, Economia e Statistica*, 65, 121 – 144.
- Doiron, D. and Mendolia, S. (2011). The impact of job loss on family dissolution. *Journal of Population Economics*, 25, 367 – 398.
- Dooley, L., Fielding, D. and Levi, J. (1996). Health and Unemployment. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 17, 449 – 465.
- Ferrara, M. (2015). The 'southern model' of welfare in social Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 6, 17–37.
- Gabrielli, G. (2009). *Italy's non-negligible cohabitational unions*. Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Working Paper, 19.

Gabrielli, G. and Vignoli, D. (2013). The breaking-down of marriage in Italy: trends and trendsetters. *Population Review*, 52, 87 – 109.

Jalovaara, M. (2013). Socioeconomic Resources and the Dissolution of Cohabitations and Marriages. *European Journal of Population*, 29, 167 – 193.

Jansen, M., Mortelmans, D. and Snoeckx, L. (2009). Repartnering and (Re)employment: Strategies to Cope with the Economic Consequences of Partnership Dissolution. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 1271 – 1293.

Kaplan, A., & Herbst, A. (2015). Stratified patterns of divorce. *Demographic Research*, 32, 949 – 982.

Lundberg, S., and Pollak, R. (1996). Bargaining and distribution in marriage. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 10, 139–158.

Lyngstad T.H. and Jalovaara M. (2010). A review of the antecedents of union dissolution. *Demographic Research*, 23, 257 – 292.

Mäenpää, E., & Jalovaara, M. (2014). Homogamy in socio-economic background and education, and the dissolution of cohabiting unions. *Demographic Research*, 30, 1769–1792.

Naldini, M. and Saraceno, C. (2008). Social and Family Policies in Italy: not totally frozen but far from structural reforms. *Social Policy and Administration*, 42, 733 – 748.

Nazio, T. and Blossfeld, H. P. (2003). The diffusion of cohabitation among young women in West Germany, East Germany and Italy. *European Journal of Population*, 19, 47 – 87.

Nye, F. I. and McLaughlin S. (1976). Role Competence and Marital Satisfaction, in: Nye, F. I. and Bahr, H. (eds.), *Role Structure and the Analysis of the Family*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Oppenheimer, V. K. (1997). Women's employment and the gain to marriage: the specialization and trading model. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, 431 – 453.

Rosina, A. and Fraboni, R. (2004). Is marriage losing its centrality in Italy?. *Demographic Research*, 11, 149 – 172.

Saraceno, C. (1994). The Abivalent Familism of the Italian Welfare State. *Social Politics*, 1, 60–82.

Vignoli, D. and Ferro, I. (2009). Rising marital disruption in Italy and its correlates. *Demographic Research*, 20, 11 – 36.

Vignoli, D., Drefhal, S. And De Santis, G. (2012). Whose job instability affects the likelihood of becoming a parent in Italy? A tale of two partners. *Demographic Research*, 26, 41 – 62.

Vinokur, a D., Price, R. H., & Caplan, R. D. (1996). Hard times and hurtful partners: how financial strain affects depression and relationship satisfaction of unemployed persons and their

spouses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 166–179.