

Time use between work and family in the life cycle: a gender analysis^{*}

*Uso del Tempo tra Lavoro e Famiglia nel Ciclo di Vita:
Un'analisi di Genere*

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Riassunto: Il presente lavoro mette in luce le differenze di genere nell’uso del tempo tra uomini e donne in Italia simulando alcune fasi del ciclo di vita, con i dati dell’Indagine sull’Uso del Tempo (Istat 2002-03). Nel contesto italiano persiste una rigida specializzazione di genere. Le differenze sono accentuate nell’ambito delle coppie con figli, specie se i figli sono in età prescolare. In questa fase critica una quota consistente di donne lascia il lavoro, non potendo ridurne l’orario, per accrescere considerevolmente il tempo dedicato alle attività domestiche e di cura. Gli uomini aumentano il tempo per tali attività di poco e solo se i figli sono molto piccoli.

Keywords: time use, life cycle, gender roles, labour supply

1. Aim and data

The aim of this paper is to provide empirical evidence on time use over the life course in Italy, using data from the Time Use Survey. In particular, we focus on gender differences in the allocation of time to market work, domestic work and care, simulating various stages of life-cycle. This approach helps in understanding the evolution of time use according to the major events that can take place, such as exit the family of origin, entrance in union, childbirth, retiring from work,... It is plausible that gender division of both paid and unpaid work has to be bargained at every major change. Several studies carried out in several countries show that men and women profiles by life stages vary virtually everywhere, but with different degrees, according to the welfare regime, family and employment policies, as well as tax system (e.g. Anxo 2004 for France and Sweden; Apps and Rees (2005) for Australia, UK and Germany). In Italy, as well as in other Western countries, the burden of housework and care still remains mainly on women’s shoulders, in spite of their increasing participation to the labour market. Some authors referred to this unequal gender division of work as a relevant cause of low fertility (McDonald 2000). Time use data show that little changes have occurred in the last 15 years, a part from few minor signs of some advancements (Istat 2005): a slight increase in men time devoted to housework tasks (16 minutes more on average), together with an increase in the proportion of fathers participating in child care activities with very young babies.

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The cross-sectional data on time use, gathered with the Time Use Survey carried out by Istat in 2002-03, are one of the main source of information on gender family roles. The survey, along with an individual/familiar questionnaire, contains also a daily diary, to be filled by all the member of the family aged 3 years or over. The diary data are based on a grid of 144 intervals of time, each one of 10 minutes, with the description of the main activity carried out by the interviewee, the second (or contemporary) activity, the place and the presence of other persons. In order to describe the life cycle, we select the adult population between 18 and 80 years old, and we distinguish between nine typologies according to their age and family structure. These typologies, are not exhaustive, but they try to describe the main stages of life of most individuals in Italy. They include more than 70% of the whole sample between 18 and 80 years old. The different typologies, representing different life stages, are supposed to follow one the other and cover a sort of life-course path. However, the cross-section structure of the survey makes impossible to disentangle between age and cohort effects. Our longitudinal approach is then a simulation. We expect a great variation of time use for both men and women as the typology changes, but also modification of gender differences.

Table 1: *Typologies of individual life phases*

TYPOLOGY		DESCRIPTION	%
BEFORE UNION FORMATION			
1.	Single <36 with parents	<i>Young people not living in couple, but still living with their parents.</i>	22.1
2.	Singles <36 on their own	<i>Young people living on their own, not in couple</i>	3.0
UNION FORMATION - CHILDLESS COUPLES			
3.	Couples <45, no children	<i>People less than 45 years old, in couple, no children</i>	6.0
PARENTING, COUPLES WITH COHABITING CHILDREN			
4.	Couples, children 0-5	<i>People less than 45 years old, in couple, the youngest child is a pre-school children</i>	15.5
5.	Couples, children 6-13	<i>People less than 45 years old, in couple, the youngest child is between 6 and 13</i>	15.3
6.	Couples, children 14-17	<i>People less than 45 years old, in couple, the youngest child is a teenager</i>	7.0
OLDER COUPLES WITHOUT RESIDENT CHILDREN			
7.	Couples, empty-nest, 45-59	<i>People between 45-59, in couple, no co-residing children</i>	5.6
8.	Older retiring couples >59	<i>People over 60, in couple no co-residing children</i>	16.3
OLDER SINGLES			
9.	Older single >59	<i>People, over 60, living on their own</i>	9.0
			100.0

2. Labour supply along the life course

Figure 1 confirms that men and women have a very different profile of labour supply at different stages of life course. The gender gap is small before union formation and increases when individuals form a couple. As expected, a dramatic drop of employment rate occurs for women when they have a very young child (from 75% to 54%). On the contrary men, following the male breadwinner model, get more involved in the labour market as soon as they become fathers, and they almost keep the position until they retire. What is worth noticing is that women are not more present in the labour market, even when their children get older, and employment rate decrease even more for those whose children have left the family of origin. These further drops, however, are probably is a cohort effect. In general, women participate less then men to the labour market and, moreover, they work less hours per day, at every stage of the life course. If a consistent proportion of mothers abandons the labour market is probably because they

cannot reduce consistently their working time after a birth. Fig. 2 shows that working mothers with a child, still devote to market activity more than 5 hours a day on average, versus 7.21 of childless women in couple. As soon as children grow up, working hours increase slightly, but they will never get to the levels of the pre-children period. On the contrary, the profile of men's time devoted to work is rather insensible to the presence of children.

Figure 1: *Employment rate over the life course. All men and women.*

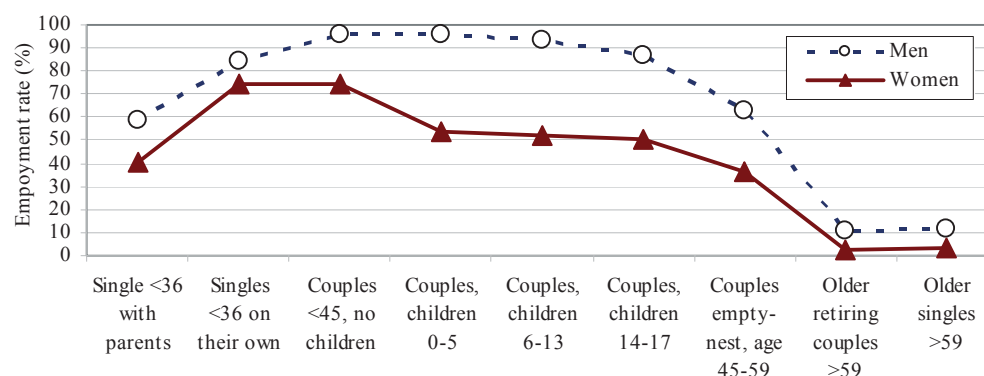
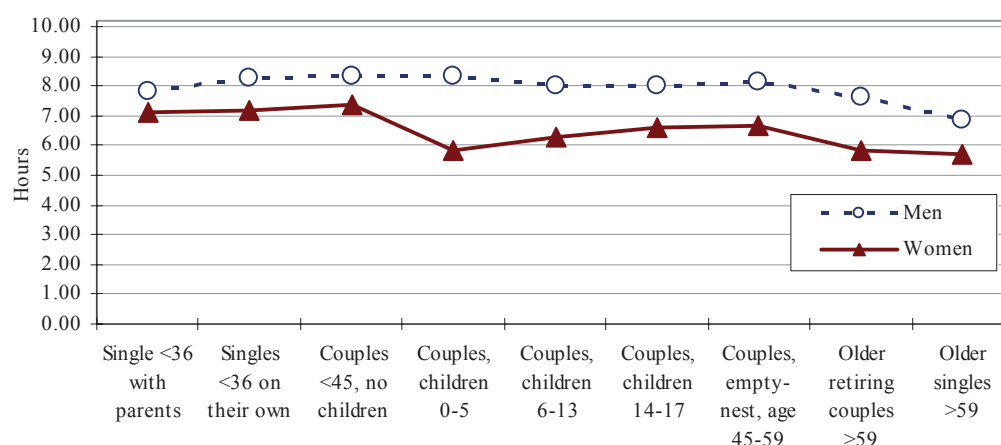


Figure 2: *Working hours in an average weekday. Men and women[†]*



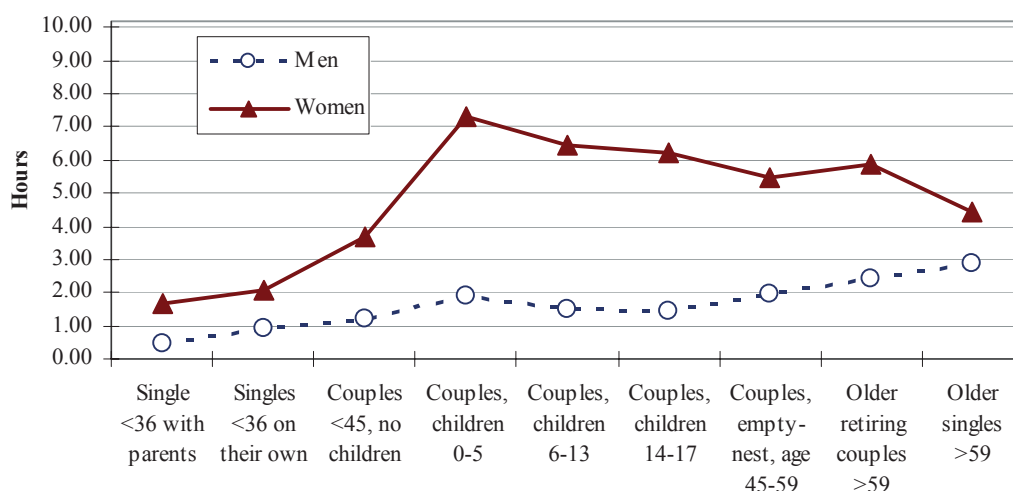
3. Housework and care: still a women's issue?

Figure 3 illustrates the profile of daily hours dedicated to housework and care activities for both men and women. The shape and the levels are remarkably different. Both men and women intensify time for housework and care, to some extent, as soon as they leave parental home, but the increase is more important when they form their own family. However, the greatest and impressive gender difference in unpaid work is in presence of children, when a kind of rigid “specialisation” takes place and women spend 3 hours and 37 minute more per day to take care of their child/ren, compared to childless women in couple, while fathers just 12 minutes more than childless men. For women,

[†] Among those who declare to have been working in the day of the interview.

time consecrated to these activities remains over 5 hours a day even when children are grown up.

Figure 3: *Hours devoted to housework and care in an average weekday. All men and women.*



The analysis allows us to assess the impact of a status change in the life course on gender division of work. Results confirm one of the main characteristic of the Italian context: the difficulty to reconcile work and parenthood. On the one hand, Italian women cannot reduce labour time and have to abandon their productive role. On the other hand, working fathers do not divert working time in domestic chores and child care even in presence of pre-school children.

We are aware that there are some caveats of our approach, as the life cycle stages considered are not (and cannot be) exhaustive, and they do not necessarily occur in the expected order. As much as the individual trajectories become more and more heterogeneous, the predictive value of average time-use profiles weakens. Moreover, families with children are not differentiated according to their number, but only with respect to the age of the youngest child. Nevertheless, the description of these simple time-use profiles can be a very useful basis for comparative studies, both across time and across countries.

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