

**The heterogeneity of the impact of labour
market flexibilization on the transition to adult
life in Italy: when do young people leave the
nest?¹**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper starts from the premise that the impact of the de-standardisation of work patterns and occupational trajectories on the early processes of family formation and on the transition to adult life differs according to national institutional context. Several authors have emphasized the central role that work plays in structuring the life course. It has been shown, for example, that young adults in temporary employment tend to postpone important decisions in their private lives, and that the institutional context influences the length of this postponement (Blossfeld et al, 2005, Schizzerotto and Lucchini, 2002). However, the idea that the effects of precarious employment on family formation may also vary according to social class and level of education has received less attention in the literature. We therefore examine whether and how different types of Italian employment contracts influence the first transition to adult life, i.e., leaving home, and if this varies according to age, level of education or gender. The study combines micro and macro level analysis. At the macro level, it consists of quantitative analysis of data from the Italian Labour Force Survey (2005, II term). At the micro level, it considers data from two qualitative studies based on interviews and focus groups exploring the mechanisms at the basis of decision-making processes of twenty-five to forty year old male and female Italians.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATYPICAL WORK AND FAMILY FORMATION: HYPOTHESES FROM THE LITERATURE

Only in the last ten years, existing literature has emphasized the interaction between work and family (Voydanoff, 1988; Edwards and Rothbard, 2000,

Scherer, 2004). Several authors have underlined the central role that work plays in structuring individuals' life courses (Blossfeld 1995; Mayer, 1997; Galland, 2001; Heinz, 2001; Schizzerotto, 2002). In particular, according to Scherer: 'studies on the impact of atypical working arrangements on patterns of family formation are still scarce and sometimes contradictory' (Scherer, 2004).

The relation between market flexibilization and family formation has been analysed in two directions by Italian labour sociologists. On the one hand, the role of the family has been emphasized as having a function of protection in times when having an unstable job and in the absence of adequate institutional support (Reyneri, 2005; Fullin, 2005; Semenza, 2004; Addabbo, 2005; Migliavacca, 2002; Zucchetti, 2005). Family relationships (and strong personal relationships in general) above all are a source of economic protection and a protective measure throughout periods of unemployment. In this sense, it can be stated that in Italy, the family substitutes the welfare state.

On the other hand, it has been pointed out that unstable jobs can slow down family formation among young people. For young adults, one of the consequences of remaining in atypical employment is the postponement of important decisions in their private/family lives, whereas the length of postponement depends on institutional context (Rizza, 2002, Bertolini, 2005, 2006.)

Indeed, cross-national comparative studies show that long abidance in the educational system and a lack of permanent jobs often restrain union formation and marriage (Blossfeld, 1995; Blossfeld et al, 2005, De Sandre et al., 1997, Iedema et al., 1997). As Scherer (2004) points out: 'The undertaking of long term commitments like marriage or parenthood requires some stability in the life circumstances and a secure economic basis' (p. 10). Several studies have provided support for this hypothesis in different countries. For example, Golsch (2003, for Spain) and Bernardi and Nazio (2005) and Bratti et al (2004; both for Italy) find evidence for this phenomenon. However, similar evidence has been reported for countries such as Great Britain where flexible jobs have existed since the 1970s (Golsch, 2001; Del Bono 2002). In particular, Golsch (2001) reports 'some evidence that individuals experiencing economic uncertainty and/or temporal uncertainty postpone entry into cohabitation and that they are more reluctant to transform cohabitation into marriage. Furthermore, [...] a postponement of first parenthood becomes more likely' (p.1) A comparison between Great Britain and Italy (Schizzerotto and Lucchini 2002) shows that postponement takes longer in Italy and that this might be due to the fact that this country has a less universalistic welfare state. Schizzerotto (2002), for instance, states that this outcome is due to the worsening of economic conditions and of prospects of job instability in Italy: 'and, therefore, the longest period of time needed to reach full material independence produces ,the well-known lengthening of the calendars of transition to adult "roles" in the groups born after the second half of the Fifties' (p. 53; authors translation). The age of first marriage has continuously decreased between the 1930s and the end of the

1970s, but has started to rise again in the subsequent period until recent years (Pisati, 2002, p.104). Similar trends have been found for most Western European countries, though with country-specific differences in the timing and pattern of this development. For instance, in Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and France, postponement is reported already for those women born around 1945; while for Italy and Spain, this process only has started ten years later (Blossfeld, 1995).

According to Bernardi (2000), in Italy, the decision to form a family or to have a child is related to the attainment of a socio-economic status similar to the one of the family of origin and a rigid job market (Schizzerotto and Lucchini, 2002). Others studies, such as Scherer (2004) for West Germany, find out that the employment and occupational status of men is crucial for determining the process of family formation.

It is, however, also likely that the effects of the above socio-economic determinants strongly depend on the institutional context. Ahn and Mira (2001), who focus on the Spanish case, point out that male career expectations are affected by their previous unemployment or temporary job experience and, as a consequence, that men often tend to postpone the formation of a family. In Italy, for women, getting the first job does not significantly affect their propensity to marry, while the reverse is observed for men (Pisati, 2002). In general, in countries: "...where the male-breadwinner model is predominant, it will be more important for males to establish themselves in a secure job as opposed to females..." (Blossfeld et al, 2005, p.19). Studies that focus on the case of Italy have drawn attention to how the attitudes of unstable female workers change according to whether they are in their first job or in subsequent ones (Bassanini and Donati, 2001; Semenza, 2004). Younger women with higher levels of education do not attribute particular importance to temporary jobs, due to the fact that they prefer to focus their attention on present daily life while, simultaneously being concerned with improving their professional skills. As women get older, they consider their situation with more anxiety (Rizza, 2003). If they continue in temporary positions, it is only afterwards that problems of reconciliation become more pronounced (Bertolini, 2006).

In addition to the above, the effects of employment precariousness on family formation vary according to social class and to the level of education attained. This issue, however, has been explored comparatively less from a comparative perspective. Some labour market studies point out that the process of employment flexibilization increases the polarisation between secure and comfortable employment, on the one hand, and job insecurity and risk on the other hand (Yeandle 1999; Bernardi, 2000). For instance, Galland (2001), who analyses the effect of work precariousness on the family life in France, argues that job instability can have either a 'delaying' or a 'creative' effect. For children of blue-collar workers, job stability represents real economic independence while situations of job precariousness act to postpone this whole process. On the other hand, for those originating from middle class families, job precariousness has a

delaying effect that is partly externally imposed and partly self-chosen. People with a middle-class family of origin leave their families earlier even if they do not yet have permanent employment, while still being partly dependent on their parental support. For them, employment instability can be described as having a 'creative' effect. In Italy, the strategy of leaving home late thus can be interpreted as a way for middle class sons' (Barbera, Negri, Zanetti, 2008) to wait for entering into a high quality job position (Reyneri, 2007)

Many Italian researchers also have interpreted late departure from parental homes in Southern Europe as the result of long-term stable cultural factors. Dalla Zuanna (2001) and Saraceno (2004), for example, argue that strong ties and mutual help between parents and children are very important factors in explaining both late home-leaving and low fertility.

However, young people in Southern Europe not only leave parental home later. Despite recent increases in their incidence, consensual unions are also comparatively less common than in other European countries (Billari et al., 2002; Nazio and Blossfeld, 2003). Thus, late home-leaving may also be related to the fact that young people less frequently choose to form a partnership through a consensual union.

THE FLEXIBILIZATION OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN ITALY.

In order to study the effects of atypical employment on family formation and family trajectories, it is crucial to investigate when and how atypical employment contracts have been introduced in a specific country context and to identify those who are employed in atypical job contracts and for how long they remain in these types of jobs. In Southern European countries such as Italy, a very rapid introduction of temporary employment combined with very low and targeted social protection, may differently affect the life of young people than in other countries where such changes have been slower or accompanied by higher levels of social protection. Thus, the meaning and the perception of job precariousness mainly depends on the type of welfare regime and the regulation of labour markets (Pochic, Paugam, and Selz 2003: p.8). A study by the North West Observatory (Barbera, Bertolini, Dancelli, Ferragutti, 2005), however, shows that job uncertainty is seen as one of the greatest threats to their existence by 41% of Italians.

Moreover, the introduction of unstable work forms has produced a strong segmentation of the Italian labour market into 'outsiders' and 'insiders' (Regini, 2000): permanent workers often enjoy a high level of protection both when working and when not working (e.g. through state unemployment funds, sick leave arrangements etc.) while there is only a low level of social protection for fixed-term workers (e.g. no unemployment benefits between one contract and another).

In fact, two recent laws have led to an even steeper increase in many forms of fixed-term employment², without the creation of an adequate system of new forms of social protection.

Furthermore, social protection is low not only in terms of income, but also in terms of job guarantees (Saraceno, 2002, 2005). Between employers and employees, there often is an exchange between expectations and commitments beyond the contractual terms (Bertolini 2002, 2005): a pregnancy, for example, could also mean that a temporary contract may not be renewed or that it will not be transformed into a permanent one. As a consequence to these employment risks associated with fixed-term and temporary contracts, workers often have fallen back on informal protection strategies, including family protection and the creation of professional networks.

One of the most important phenomena relating to changes in the Italian labour market is the recent increase in women's labour force participation which mainly has occurred during the last three decades. Nowadays, women clearly are more active on the labour market and are better qualified than decades ago. However, there are important differences according to the women's educational level. Currently, almost all highly educated women participate in the labour market, irrespective of their civil status: as in Scandinavian countries or the United States, where female employment participation is high, better-educated women remain in the labour market even when they get married or they become mothers. However, the proportion of less educated women who work is much lower in Spain and Italy than in the afore-mentioned countries, especially among low educated women with young children (OECD, 2001). Moreover, in the last decade, a large part of the increase in women's employment has been in atypical forms of employment (see Scherer, 2004).

Though a number of recent public reconciliation measures to combine work and family life have been introduced, these policies often do not apply to atypical workers. Likewise, many similar services provided through the employer, such as for example company crèches, apply to permanent employees only. Thus, one could say that recent changes in the Italian labour market actually exclude a large percentage of young people, particularly women, from the innovative reconciliation policies (Saraceno, 2003).

²Treu Law of 1997, which introduces temporary labour and coordinated and co.co.co. contracts (a cross between "dependent" and "independent" work without fixed hours and the potential for having more than one employer) Law 30 of 2003, only partially applied, which envisages job sharing, job on call, and Project collaboration contracts in certain sectors.

EXPLORING MACRO RELATIONS.

The first quantitative study builds on analyses of data from the Italian Labour Force Survey (2005, II term). It focuses on the behaviour of young people below thirty and between thirty and forty years of age who are about to make their first transition to adult life, i.e., leaving home. In the following, results are structured by the subjects' employment type, gender and level of education. The aim of the analyses is to explore empirically the relationship between fixed-term or permanent contracts and the transition to adult life and to test the hypothesis that young adults in temporary employment tend to postpone important decisions in their private lives, and that this is especially the case in conservative and family-oriented welfare regimes.

Table 1 Family condition by employment condition.

		FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still living in family	Children who left home	
EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	Permanent contract	65.7%	34.3%	100.0% 5561
	Fixed-term contract	74.2%	25.8%	100.0% 1991
	Entrepreneurs (Imp., lib.prof)	69.8%	30.2%	100.0% 490
	Self-employed	64.5%	35.5%	100.0% 928
	Semi-dependent contracts (collaborators)	77.1%	22.9%	100.0% 389
	Unemployed	74.5%	25.5%	100.0% 1917
	Inactive	74.4%	25.6%	100.0% 6995
	Total	71.1%	28.9%	100.0% 18171

Source: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

The first table above ³ shows the percentage of twenty- to twenty-nine year olds who made the transition "leaving home" compared to those who didn't make the transition, broken up by employment condition (type of contract). Notably, in the age group under study, the percentage of young people making the transition was

³ Analysis were performed and financially supported within the Equalsoc Project, a Network of Excellence funded by the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme.

nine percent higher for those with permanent posts (34.3%) than for those with fixed-terms contracts (25.8%). The gap was even greater between those with permanent contracts and collaborators (34.3% vs. 22.9%)

The difference not only persists but actually increases when one additionally takes into account the entire group of twenty- to thirty-nine year olds. Out of those with permanent contracts, 67.9% made the transition, as opposed to only 49.5% of fixed-term and 47.5 % of collaborators. Interestingly, a full 71% of the self-employed aged twenty to forty made the transition, whereas only a mere 35.5% of those between twenty and twenty-nine did so. This may indicate that after a certain age, self-employment is considered a viable alternative to a subordinate job and therefore turns into a choice rather than a necessity. More mature workers may have learned to better cope with the risks associated with non-permanent positions, making the transition more acceptable even under conditions of uncertainty.

Table 2 *Family condition by employment condition (men and women aged 20-39)*

		FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family	Children who left home	
EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	Permanent contract	32.1%	67.9%	100.0% 16754
	Fixed-term contract	50.6%	49.4%	100.0% 3598
	Entrepreneurs	32.4%	67.6%	100.0% 1946
	Self-employed	28.3%	71.7%	100.0% 3648
	Semi-dependent contract	52.4%	47.6%	100.0% 758
	Unemployed	54.6%	45.4%	100.0% 3171
	Inactive	50.8%	49.2%	100.0% 11629
	Total	40.7%	59.3%	100.0% 41504

Source: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

Gender-related differences are also significant. Although the differences related to contractual forms persist even in gender specific-analyses, generally a greater proportion of women of all ages holding the same type of contract tend to make the transition than men: the percentage of women aged twenty to twenty-nine with permanent contracts who made the transition was 40.9%, as opposed to only 29.9% of the male cohort of the same age. Women with fixed-term contracts left home at a rate of 31.1%, compared to 20.9% of men.

Table 3 Family condition by employment condition (women aged 20-29)

		FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family	Children who left home	
EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	Permanent contract	59.1%	40.9%	100.0% 2246
	Fixed-term contract	68.9%	31.1%	100.0% 961
	Entrepreneurs	53.8%	46.3%	100.0% 160
	Self-employed	58.8%	41.2%	100.0% 255
	Semi-dependent Contract	74.5%	25.5%	100.0% 212
	Unemployed	70.6%	29.4%	100.0% 927
	Inactive	67.0%	33.0%	100.0% 4160
	Total	65.3%	34.7%	100.0% 8921

Source: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

Table 4. Family condition by employment condition (men aged 20-29)

		FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family of	Children who left home	
EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	Permanent contract	70.1%	29.9%	100.0% 3315
	Fixed-term contract	79.1%	20.9%	100.0% 1030
	Entrepreneurs	77.6%	22.4%	100.0% 330
	Self-employed	66.7%	33.3%	100.0% 673
	Semi-dependent Contract	80.2%	19.8%	100.0% 177
	Unemployed	78.7%	21.3%	100.0% 890
	Inactive	85.2%	14.8%	100.0% 235
	Total	76.8%	23.2%	100.0% 9250

Source: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

The reason for this behaviour may be both cultural and rational. On the one hand, women may have a higher propensity for autonomy. At the same time, official data (Istat, Indagine multiscopo, 2002) indicate that women aged 25-40 years do more domestic work than their male peers⁴. Thus, staying at home is a more rational choice for young men, who remain free of many responsibilities (including financial burdens) and can enjoy the advantages of living in their parental home. Women, instead, are more likely to live on their own.

Further analyses show how the effects of precarious employment on transitions differ according to the level of education attained. As pointed out in the literature, educational attainment can lead to postponement of partnership and parenthood across cohorts (Blossfeld, 1995, Mills, 2000, Becker, 1981). Our data confirm this hypothesis stating that the percentage of people who made the first transition to adult life decreases as their level of education increases.

Table 5: level of education according to family condition (men and women aged 20 – 39)

		FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family	Children who left home	
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	No certificates / compulsory school	27.6%	72.4%	100.0%
	High school (diploma superiore)	48.7%	51.3%	100.0%
	University Degrees/ Post	44.5%	55.5%	100.0%
	Total	40.7%	59.3%	100.0%

Source: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

Table 6 additionally shows the relationship between educational attainment and employment condition and family condition. Even when considering people of the same age and the same level of education, there still is a percental difference between young people who made the transition and the ones who did not, with regards to their employment condition. In particular, the results suggest that the lower the level of education, the less influence the kind of contract has on choosing whether to make the transition or not. This holds true for women, although a higher proportion of women make the transition than men, consistent with the gender differences already noted above.

⁴ Men aged 25-40 years on average do 1.13 hours for day of family work, women 5.08.

Table 6: Level of education and employment condition by family condition
(men aged 20 – 29)

LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL	EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family	Children who made the transition	
No certificates / compulsory school	Permanent contract	63.9%	36.1%	100.0% 1290
	Fixed-term contract	67.7%	32.3%	100.0% 288
	Semi-dependent contract	70.7%	30.0%	100.0% 20
High school	Permanent contract	73.7%	26.3%	100.0% 1893
	Fixed-term contract	87.7%	16.3%	100.0% 638
	Semi-dependent Contract	78.0%	22.0%	100.0% 100
University Degrees/ Post	Permanent contract	78.0%	22.0%	100.0% 132
	Fixed-term contract	82.7%	17.3%	100.0% 104
	Semi-dependent Contract	87.7%	12.3%	100.0% 57

Source: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

It therefore seems that job stability matters with regards to the timing of the first transition to adulthood, even when taking into account the effects of educational attainment and cohorts of same-aged peers.

Table 7 shows that this effect decreases, but does not disappear for men aged thirty to thirty-nine years, at least not for those with higher education. Yet the effect for lower levels of education is almost zero, indicating that the transition to adult life for these men is no longer a choice, but a necessity. As Table 8 shows, the same is true for women.

Table 7: Level of education and employment condition by family condition (men aged 30 – 39)

LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL	EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family	Children who made the transition	
No certificates / compulsory school	Permanent contract	14.9%	85.1%	100.0%
	Fixed-term contract	15.6%	84.4%	100.0%
	Semi-dependent	23.3%	76.7%	100.0%
High school	Permanent contract	19.8%	80.2%	100.0%
	Fixed-term contract	32.4%	67.6%	100.0%
	Semi-dependent	45.8%	54.2%	100.0%
University Degrees/ Post	Permanent contract	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
	Fixed-term contract	45.2%	54.8%	100.0%
	Semi-dependent	38.6%	61.4%	100.0%

Sources: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

Table 8: Level of education and employment condition by family condition (women aged 30 – 39)

LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL	EMPLOYMENT CONDITION	FAMILY CONDITION		Total
		Children still in the family	Children who left home	
No certificates / compulsory school	Permanent contract	8.9%	91.1%	100.0%
	Fixed-term contract	9.5%	90.5%	100.0%
	Semi-dependent	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
High school (diploma superiore)	Permanent contract	12.2%	87.8%	100.0%
	Fixed-term contract	16.3%	83.7%	100.0%
	Semi-dependent	12.8%	87.2%	100.0%
University Degrees/ Post	Permanent contract	16.1%	83.9%	100.0%
	Fixed-term contract	26.8%	73.2%	100.0%
	Semi-dependent	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%

Sources: Italian Labour Force Survey 2005, II term.

Taken together, the results from the quantitative analysis indicate a correlation between the type of contract and the decision to leave home. We hypothesized that the lack of universal welfare in Italy contributes, *ceteris paribus*, to the strong influence of the type of employment contract on the decision to leave home. Our results show that young people are acutely aware of the lack of institutional protection available in Italy, favouring postponement of the transition. This effect clearly is greater for men. Notably, the postponement effect is greater for young people with higher education. Several studies have shown that educational level is a good proxy for predicting the social status

people will achieve (Ballarino, Checchi, 2006; Verzicco, 2003). In turn, the attitude towards investing in higher education, particularly in Italy, is often affected by the economical status and cultural level of the family of origin (Schizzerotto, 2002; Ballarino, Checchi, 2006, Goglio 2009).

Data reveal this correlation at the macro level; however, they cannot state with certainty how or why such a correlation comes about. In the rest of this paper, we thus intend to investigate these mechanisms operating at the micro level. Based on previous literature, we can hypothesize that the level of education as well as gender generate different expectations and strategies related to work and family as well as different levels of access to informal protection. The latter is very important in Italy, in the absence of an adequate formal system of social protection. Furthermore, different social classes are influenced by different cultural factors (values and preferences) and opinions determining the age that is considered appropriate for making such a transition.⁵ The expectations relative to the quasi-legislative transitions in Italy are still of a very traditional type (Schizzerotto, 2002) and probably differentiate on the basis of social class and educational level. This can push young workers into not embarking on family transitions before work-related ones.

In addition to education and class-based differences, in the following, we shall also consider gender aspects to explain the fact that the effect of postponement is greater for men than for women. In a male-breadwinner system such as Italy, having a permanent contract is more of an issue for men than for women with regards to making the transition. Either women have a greater propensity for autonomy, or, since they do more domestic work at home than men, they prefer to move more frequently between different types of contracts.

EXPLORING MICRO MECHANISMS: THE RESULTS OF TWO QUALITATIVE STUDIES.

First study

To explore the above hypotheses and mechanisms, we consider the results from two qualitative studies. In the first study⁶, we conducted six focus group

⁵ In fact, Cardano (2008) identifies transitions due to quasi-legislative events that: “are not actually laws, but are governed by conventions and social pressure and that therefore become relatively predictable, especially for certain age groups (leaving home...) and generate sanctions or psychological and social costs for those that find themselves out of sync” (Olagnero, 2005b).

⁶ Four of the focus groups included women of different ages (under 30 or 25-40) and levels of education. (Low level of education = No certificates / compulsory school or high school without any further training; high level of education = university degree or higher, high school and further training.) The variables were combined, i.e., the first focus group contained women under 30 with low levels of education, the second had women under 30

discussions and 50 interviews with young people of different levels of education, younger than 30 years or between 30 and 40 years, who were working in temporary positions. The participants were asked about the expectations, career paths and forms of informal protection available to them. Several important differences emerged, according to their level of education and gender. These differences seem to be related primarily to the significance these individuals attribute to work, and the extent to which work contributes to defining their identity. For female employees with lower levels of educational attainment, work is primarily an economic necessity. Women in this category do not have specific career goals, and their main concern is to find some form of income. Their career paths typically lack a clear direction, and they often move from job to job in totally unrelated fields and to positions that require only a low to middle-range of skills.

Twenty-nine year old Nicole, a single mother living on her own with her two daughters is a typical example. She started working with her parents selling household wares at an open-air market, and later worked at two different constructions sites. She worked for four months in a public school as a teacher's aide. After some time on social welfare, she got a contract with a co-op working as a cleaner for open-air markets. She is now working on a four-month contract as a recyclable waste collector. Twenty-three year old Giovanna, on the other hand, is unemployed. Her employment history is spotty: after having completed a three-month internship, she alternated between periods of unemployment and temporary jobs, first in a supermarket and later handing out flyers. She recently moved in with her boyfriend and is looking for a job.

Some of these women are passive in their efforts to seek employment; they expect others to help them or find jobs for them, and complain that employment agencies or social workers have failed to provide them with opportunities for stable work.

Contractual instability is perceived as yet another obstacle. After finally finding employment, these women still have to deal with the problem of precariousness: once their contract has expired, they have to start looking for a job again:

"I like working, but the problem is the kind of jobs available nowadays, they say, "Sorry, but your contract is up."

These workers lack the resources and skills necessary to plan and create self-made career paths out of the various short-term jobs they do. In these cases,

with high levels of education and so on. The other two focus groups included men of different ages living in Turin and enrolled at the "Centri per l'Impiego" in 2004. They all had high levels of education.

precarious employment coincides with a history of reliance on social assistance and with poverty and problems with social integration, suggesting that precarious employment can be a part of a vicious cycle increasing social vulnerability.

It is much less likely today to be able to “settle down” into a career based on a permanent job, which was the traditional channel not just for economic but also social integration, even to those with lower social background and educational status (and thus correlated to higher-risk social conditions). As Paugam (2003) claims, integration into the workplace is achieved through stability and a sense of professional satisfaction. However, if neither of these conditions is being met, the chances for attaining professional integration are being reduced, with potential negative effects on social integration as an outcome. For the above group of women, employment problems thus by their precarious nature exacerbated risks and social problems.

For these groups of women, families do not represent a resource for possible protection. In most cases, if they live with their family of origin, their parents frequently lack the resources to adequately support them. If they live with a partner, the partner often is also employed in a non-stable job or has a fixed-term contract, and hardly ever earns enough to pay for all the couple’s living expenses.

“You can’t move out on your own, you can’t move in with your boyfriend or girlfriend, unless they have a permanent contract. You can’t afford rent or furniture. It’s alright as long as you live at home, but you can’t have a normal life if you work in atypical jobs.” (Miriam)

Females below thirty with low levels of educational attainment – paradoxically, the people who need it the most – thus are the least likely to be able to rely on family protection. For these women, the transition to adult life therefore is seen as leaving the family of origin and forming a new family, which logically translates into leaving home at a younger age than their peers with higher levels of education, pointing to different education-specific values and norms concerning the timing of transitions.

Many of the lower-educated women choose to leave home no matter what form of contract they have, even if they would prefer a stable job.

“...because you can’t possibly live at home with your parents when you’re twenty-two years old”.

“...of course everybody wants to leave home sooner or later – especially when you’re twenty, twenty-one or twenty-two - but if you don’t have a permanent job, you don’t have anything”.

Women with high levels of educational attainment have quite different objectives. Most would like to find employment in a particular field, usually one related to their studies and matching their career aspirations. For them, work acts

as an important element for the construction of their identities. However, since finding such a job is often not easy, women with high levels of education often face an arduous career path, and alternate between periods of work and study. They sometimes work in two different jobs, one which is badly paid but is in their field of interest, and another which allows them to earn some money.

This is the case with Julia, who has no problem finding job opportunities in the sales sector; although she does well in sales, it is not what she really wants to do. After working for a real estate company and then in car sales, she went back to school to study education. She now has a part-time "semi-dependent contract" job in a school, but also works in a call centre in order to make ends meet.

Moreover, some female college graduates are persistent about looking for their "ideal" job and are therefore willing to accept any type of contract related to that goal.

Claudia, a foreign language graduate, gave up her permanent job: "because I wasn't satisfied with the work I was doing." She worked for a company in the logistics department, "I quit because I wanted a job in my field of studies, even if three years down the road I'm earning less than a third of what I earned before... some people think I'm nuts, but I made the choice to follow my goals... and time has proven me right."

Some women also want to start families and spend time with them. For these women, the problem is not whether to choose between a family and a career, but how to reconcile the two.

Most highly-educated women prefer permanent forms of work, but are willing to accept fixed-term contracts if they offer some measure of continuity and access to credit. In fact, the lack of a regular income is exacerbated by the fact that they cannot access traditional forms of credit, which are based on guarantees such as a regular salary. Since they are locked out of such forms of financing, unstable employees make recourse to one of two strategies: either they save as much as they can, or they rely on financial assistance from their family of origin, to support them through periods of low income or unemployment.

The second strategy is to rely on the family of origin for loans and protection. For most young workers, and especially for flexible workers, this is considered absolutely normal. Women in atypical jobs sometimes rely on support from their husbands who might have good, permanent jobs. For some women, having a partner with a stable job allows them greater choice in terms of career and work. Married women explicitly mention this protective function.

Their timing for transition is different from women with low level of education, 30 years is the threshold for them:

“I always thought that a permanent job, a house and a family were boring, and I always wanted a dynamic lifestyle, full of new and exciting events. Perhaps because I always thought that when I wanted to, it would be easy to move back into the fold. Instead, I ran into a lot of problems. It almost seems that now that I’ve turned 30 and want to build something permanent, the world around me wants to give me flexibility, instability, and dynamism”(Fabiana, 30, a Turin University graduate working on a short-term contract at a design agency)

Gender differences were also apparent. Women with high levels of education had more fragmented and less focussed career paths than their male peers. They spend more energy and resources, adopt multi-pronged strategies and invest more in their career efforts, and the result may seem somewhat chaotic. They hardly ever spend time unemployed, prefer to accept low-profile positions if needed, and they often have more than one job. Nonetheless, women often achieve less reward for their efforts than men: women’s career paths rarely rise to the same levels as men, neither in terms of status nor of income. Maternity, when desired, is often delayed, but its prospect often damages women’s chances for career growth.

In contrast, the careers paths of men with high levels of education are usually more stable and focussed, though often less dynamic. Men tend to choose a specific career track, invest in it and then wait; they are less likely to start their own business. Yet their feelings about finding themselves in an unstable job after a certain age often prove to be much more negative than women’s, perhaps because they cannot fulfil the traditional role of the ‘family breadwinner’. During periods of unemployment, for example, they tend to avoid socializing because they are embarrassed about not being able to afford the same level of lifestyle as their friends. Literature evidence suggests that these effects of uncertainty on males are significantly stronger in Southern European male breadwinner societies than in other models of society (Mills, Blossfeld, Klijzing in Blossfeld et al., 2005).

Second study: reconciling working and family careers: interdependence of careers

Additional findings originate from a qualitative study with a sample of young women, resident in Turin and Naples and shed further light on this issue. The group attended a course entitled “Women-on-line”⁷, and was made up of 50 young women aged 25-40, with mid- to high level qualifications, most with degrees or post-graduate specialisations in the humanities⁸. All of the women had

⁷ See note 1 for references to the course.

⁸ The data was gathered through video-recorded interviews and questionnaires, a general forum and practical exercises on-line. In the *video-recorded interviews* the interviewees were encouraged to recount critical positive and negative aspects regarding various topics,

jobs in the service sector, in which the co.co.co. or the co.pro. collaboration contracts have become particularly widespread. Two-thirds of them currently have semi-dependent contractual forms and one-third typical ones.

Both the life course approach⁹ and the concept of biographical transitions (Elder, 1984, Olagnero, Saraceno, 1993, Olagnero, 2008) provide us with tools to analyse the above data. Even though we did not investigate the entire life story of those interviewed, we do have information regarding several transitions of their working, family and economic careers.

In particular, three concepts deriving from this tradition are central to our study: that of the trajectory – referring to the course taken after a specific experience or as a person gets older, that of a career - referring to a specific sequential model of evolution - and that of transition - referring to change of status, which may be more or less radical or unanticipated, within a trajectory or a career. Furthermore, when analysing life course transitions, it is important to take into account the interdependence of the trajectories.¹⁰

The main results of the study show that the trajectories¹¹ of the women in the sample are not arbitrary, and that transitions occur at fixed times/ages (see tables 9 and 10 in the appendix). For this reason, we will in the following use the term career, which implies that there is a sub-conscious sequential order. Furthermore, results indicate that careers for fixed-term and permanent workers are different. The analysis of the interviews and of the messages of the forum show that, given the same age and the same level of qualifications, the aspect that most influences

including reconciliation. The *questionnaire* collected detailed information on their work, family and economic careers. In the *general forum*, a fictional story was recounted, featuring a young woman, Fiammetta, with very similar characteristics to those attending the course. For each episode of her life, which dealt with a job, family or economic transition, the participants were asked to recount their personal experiences (if they had found themselves in a similar situations, what course of action they took, how the experience had affected them etc.). The structure of the forum was similar to that of an on-line focus group. For each episode of the story, the attendees completed a practical exercise in which Fiammetta's situation had to be analysed and solutions proposed, through the material provided on the course. The methodology was similar to that of an experiment or simulation.

9 The life course is (Elder 1984) the set of life models organized by age, embedded in social institutions and subject to historical changes. "The focus of the life course enables us to verify both how social change interferes with the life course of individuals by changing objectives and expectations, and, vice versa how the life choices of certain groups have consequences for the subsequent ones". In particular, I intend to examine how the: "transformations of the rules and/or of the requests of the labor market, transformations at legislative level change the context in which individuals find themselves living and the rhythm of their lives "(Olagnero, Saraceno, 1993, p.60)

10 "The risks depend on the interweaving of the trajectories present in the life course and on the difficulty of managing them simultaneously through decisions, risks and retreats" (Olagnero, Saraceno, 1993, p.74)

financial decisions (house purchase, investments in additional pension schemes, etc.) and family life (leaving parents, marriage, cohabitation, first child, etc.) is not so much the location of a woman but the contractual nature of the job: semi-dependent workers are systematically “a few years late” in achieving their private life milestones with respect to those on permanent employment.

Qualitative evidence also points to the interdependence between the different careers. The para-subordinate workers that attended the course emphasised the difficulty or impossibility of planning their working careers, and as a consequence their private lives, from a long-term perspective. The problem is not so much entering the world of work with flexible contractual forms, but rather, if this situation extends over time, the resulting uncertainty regarding the future. Thus the contractual form of women’s work contract explicitly affects how they plan their private lives. For most of them, having to suspend their plans with regard to their work leads to similar behaviour also in the other dimensions of their private lives.

If one can only plan one’s future working career in six-month steps, it is difficult to embark on projects that last a lifetime such as getting married, or especially having a child. Therefore, Italian women often live with short-term planning:

“I can identify with Caterina’s comments regarding semi-dependent workers: economic fragility .. treated like consultants, but paid possibly less than the others makes any future planning difficult, the sensation of a continuous shaky situation, and in my opinion also psychological insecurity”(Paola, 33, training agency, co.co.co., Degree in Science of Education, Turin)

The way in which the changes between one status and another are subjectively experienced varies with age, but is very similar among typical and semi-dependent workers.

“If I think back to when I started working ...I was willing to make trips that were then not required, I was more interested in working for a company than being freelance. I had very definite plans and timing both on a professional and personal level, they were rather utopian by virtue of my inexperience! Now I am not at all certain about my future working career”(Luisa, 33, Graduate, co.co.co. cooperative, Naples)

The working career

One factor common to the semi-dependent workers that took part in the study was the high correlation between their age/length of service, the approach to work and the number of employers. Younger female workers (under the age of 30) tend to have a single employer, with whom they have short-term co.co.co contracts, which in some cases have been renewed more than once. Their

behaviour reflects that which has emerged from other studies: they tend to be focused on the present and on the work dimension. They are satisfied with the content of their work and because they feel that they are learning a profession, they are still little aware of the work-related risks and of the protection offered by the various contractual forms. Confronted with the question of whether they would be willing to earn less by working less hours, those with a single employer almost all said no, while only a few said that they didn't know yet. The "young-adults" (30 plus), on the other hand, who were working for more years, tended to have more than one employer. At the start of their working career, they preferred to work for a single employer, but over time, they have decided to diversify. These young women have developed an awareness of their working situation and this has led them to initiate strategies to protect themselves against the uncertainties and risks of temporarily being without work. This strategy is facilitated by the fact that they have already acquired professionalism, both in terms of skills and in terms of the ability to manage more than one project at a time that can be assigned by more than one employer. They are less satisfied than their younger single-employer colleagues because they feel the precarious nature of their jobs and many would prefer a contract that gives them more guarantees of job security and better protection. As an alternative, they would expect to earn more, an outcome which they attempt to achieve through multiple-employers. Working in this way, however, involves rather high work loads. Many of them thus would be willing to work less hours and earn less in order to be able to have more free time.

The strategy to protect against job uncertainty that the older course attendees recommend to the others is to acquire professional skills that can be easily sold on the market. In this context, the female workers need to make very deliberate choices both with regard to the jobs they accept and in terms of investing in their training:

"I no longer trust the current "certainties", but I believe that gaining professional skills is worth it even if it often means lots of sacrifices" (Giovanna, 35, instructor co.co.co, Naples).

The geographic factor unexpectedly did not appear to particularly influence the way in which young women worked nor the type of jobs held by those with medium-high qualifications that work in the service sector. The needs and strategies of women from the north and south of Italy in fact are largely similar. The only difference is that in line with what national statistics demonstrate (Ires, 2002, Istat, 2004), Neapolitan workers more likely tend to have only one single employer.

Economic career

Instability in terms of one's job also implies uncertainty about the continuity of income. Those with co.co.co. and co.pro. contracts often suffer from the

irregularity of payments: they are often paid at the end of their contract in a single lump sum, while 'the world they live in' is based on monthly deadlines.

With the lack of institutional protection, and the impossibility of being able to set up financial security, e.g. through loans, semi-dependent workers activate individual protection strategies. These are essentially of two types: first precautionary saving; second asking their families for help. The first involves saving money for periods in which there will be no income, without spending it or investing it:

"As I don't have a permanent contract (co.co.co., also close to expiry), I also prefer not to take on any form of too demanding payment obligations, but in the long run I have realised that things tend to drag on ... in the end the solution I have adopted is to make temporary sacrifices, putting a bit of money to one side and asking relatives for a loan, if possible, paying it back gradually" (Carmela, 28, classroom tutor, Naples)

Sometimes this precautionary saving may be excessive as compared to the real possibility of experiencing periods "without any money". However, the situation of income uncertainty that stems from both the lack of a guarantee of job continuity and possible delays in payments, very often blocks the action of these workers, who postpone investment decisions. This also holds true with regard to additional pension funds, even though, as shown, these workers in principle would have the greatest need to set up a suchlike scheme. The study showed that when these women are close to age 40, semi-dependent workers acquire a real awareness of their work situation and put into action other protective strategies against present and future risks: they make financial investments, they stipulate additional social security arrangements, or at least they are intensively thinking about it. Furthermore, some of them have drawn up arrangements with their banks to cover late payments.

The majority of the course attendees consider asking parents for help in the event of financial necessity as "normal":

"I am looking for a house with my boyfriend and we want to buy it, so we are looking at mortgages. At the moment we are just at the beginning also because (perhaps) we have found a house, but what prices, luckily we can get a mortgage without having to ask our parents to mortgage their home as they are helping us with a tidy initial sum ... but what a palaver!" (Eleonora, 31, instructor, co.co.co., Turin)

Some of them, when pushed, mentioned the fact that in this way they are delaying their entrance into the adult world.

There is also a risk of an increase in social inequality between those that have a family that can support them in buying a house or in arranging a mortgage and those that do not.

Geographic factors indeed do affect economic careers: all of the Neapolitans, regardless of their age, still live with their parents. However, they do not seem to rely on their parents for financial support more than the Northern ones do. The main way in which they handle the irregular nature of payments is through savings and only in second place, through the support of their families.

As regards the management of money within a couple, it appears that there is a clear model of young couples with a high level of education that generally tend to take financial decisions together. However, the two partners keep separate accounts and share expenses, almost as if they wished to maintain a certain margin of independence.

The partner or husband is not seen as a protection against work and economic discontinuity, perhaps because the course attendees are fairly young and do not live with their partners or perhaps because they are women for whom job satisfaction is important to them and they find satisfaction in being able to rely on their own income to support them. Their behaviour is different compared to that of other, less well-educated women who “accept a job not so much on the basis of their aspirations and personal interest, as on the basis of its flexibility and the working hours requested” (Magatti, Fullin, 2002 p.136). In the latter situation, the stable work situation of a partner represents a form of protection for many women.

Family career

Similarly, family decisions are often postponed. Under the age of 30, semi-dependent workers predominantly tend to live with their parents or share a house with friends. At the age of 30, they start living on their own and then often start to worry about the uncertainty of their contractual situation. Over the age of 35, they are often married or living with their partners and are either thinking of having children or already have one. If so, they experience considerable difficulty in reconciling their private lives with their working ones.

Those workers with permanent contracts who can count on regular and continued income, are ahead of their semi-dependent colleagues: none of them still lives with their parents, they get married or go to live with their partners a few years earlier, they have children slightly earlier, and they tend to invest in pension funds when they are younger:

“I work in a training agency and I also like the work I do, but each year during the summer I ask myself whether I will still be working the next autumn. My job is linked to several funded courses and, from year to year, if the funds don’t arrive, some of us are forced to look for another job to pay the rent. The fact of not ever knowing if you will be working the next year certainly influences decisions such as taking out a mortgage

or starting a family” (Marinella, 32, training agency, co.co.co., Degree in Science of Education, Turin).

In particular, for those that have made a big investment in their jobs, postponing childbirth can mean taking the risk of generally foregoing fertility due to the restrictions of biological child-bearing age. Today’s challenge is that of permitting semi-dependent workers to reconcile the milestones of their private lives (children, family commitments) with those of their working lives, not only without losing their jobs, but without being professionally declassified and without having to give up the possibility of a working career.

CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in this paper confirm some of the original hypotheses, but also open up further research questions. In line with previous research (Blossfeld et al, 2005, 1995; Mayer, 1997; Galland, 2001; Heinz, 2001; Schizzerotto, 2002, Scherer, 2004, Bernardi, Nazio, 2005), they point to a strong relationship between fixed-term contracts and personal life-decisions in institutional contexts providing low levels of social protection, such as in Italy. In particular, the results of the first study demonstrate that, even within a single institutional context, youth and young adults of different levels of education with fixed-term contracts tend to rely on different family and career strategies. As underlined in previous literature, white-collar workers are not immune to unstable job forms, but unstable work can serve as a bridge for them (Barbieri, Scherer, 2009 forthcoming). On the other hand, the lack of human capital increases the risk of finding oneself in a more precarious job situation (Blossfeld et al., 2005). The higher the level of education, the likelier it is that defensive strategies against precariousness will be employed.

The results of other studies show that higher educational attainment, though it is no guarantee for immediate access to a good and stable job, nonetheless continues to play a key role in the individual’s ability to tie together a variety of different work experiences (Bertolini, 2002). The highly-educated children of the upper classes often have more of a choice to accept poorly-paid, but more rewarding positions.

Family serves as a form of protection only for young people from higher social classes, who can activate a strategy of “biding one’s time”. People with higher levels of education, usually children of higher social classes, can more easily afford to wait before accepting a position, using family protection until they are able to find a high-quality and stable job. Because they can rely on their families’ economic resources while working under fixed-term contracts, they can accept contracts in their sector of choice - even those offering dismal remuneration -

and can confidently turn down unsatisfactory job offers, knowing that they can financially survive periods of unemployment.

The fact that these young people stay at home may also be explained by the fact that direct and indirect economic family support after age thirty may be perceived negatively for children living outside the parental home, but as normal for those still living at home.

In contrast, young people with lower levels of education, from lower social classes, lack family protection, have less of a choice and therefore have to accept almost any type of job and contract, in any sector. They usually leave home earlier than their peers, regardless of their contract conditions and with all the risks this entails, owing to different values and norms regarding the expected timing of transition.

Notably, postponement in the departure from the parental home might also serve to accentuate social inequalities (Bernardi, 2000). The capability of accumulating financial resources might then depend, to a great extent, on the amount of economic and cultural capital that is available within the family. The previous analyses show that in Italy, informal forms of social protection for unstable workers are weak and that social structures thus act to reproduce inequality.

The women of the second study which came from the middle class, tended to stay longer with their parents and experienced job instability less as a choice than an imposition. The statements made by the course attendees show that, in some cases, a precarious job and the need to rely on the family for support slows down their family careers, forcing them to postpone a desired transition for several years. In other cases, the desire to invest in an economic career makes it difficult to reconcile the situation with an investment into their family development. For example, workers over age thirty with more than one employer are satisfied with their jobs and their earnings, but lack the time and energy to invest in creating an own family. Vice versa, a strong desire for transition to adult life (moving in with a partner or having a child) may cause women to give up on their career ambitions and to accept any stable job.

If, as comparative evidence suggests, young-adults in other European countries are better able to anticipate several steps in their transition into adulthood, this is mostly due to better social protection, such as higher material transfer payments and protective measures during periods of unemployment or job transitions.¹² Atypical workers in Italy are more dependent on the logic of de-commercialisation and de-familisation, as identified by Naldini (2006). This result underlines that the welfare system (Mayer, 1997, Heinz, 2001) radically

¹² To this it is worth adding that the credit system in Italy, which is based on traditional-style guarantees, does not grant mortgages or loans to semi-dependent workers, except within the scope of experimental

determines the situational context in which individuals take their decisions and make the different life spheres reconcilable.

Taken together, the results of this study show that the effect of the proliferation of unstable jobs in the Italian context depends on one's level of education and gender, and can increase inequality. Such heterogeneity will be an important consideration if the Italian government is to create an adequate system of labour policy and institute social protection policy reform.

APPENDIX

Table 9: *The Careers of Permanent Workers*

AGE	25	30	35	40	45
FAMILY CAREER	Lives with parents	Lives alone	- Lives with partner (married or cohabits); - Has a child		
WORKING CAREER	Atypical contract	- Permanent contract; - Fairly satisfied or fully satisfied			
ECONOMIC CAREER	Lives with parents	- Rented or owned house; - Has a social security and/or investment plan			

Table 9: *The Careers of Semi-Dependent Workers*

AGE	25	30	35	40	45
FAMILY CAREER	Lives with parents or shares house with friends		Lives alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lives with partner (married or cohabits); - Is thinking of having or already has a child 	
WORKING CAREER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single employer; - Work-oriented, directed towards acquiring professionalism; - Fairly satisfied with work 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worried about the future and about contractual insecurity; - Aspires to diversify employers; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than one employer; - Fairly high professionalism - Extreme difficulties in conciliating family and working lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fully aware of personal working position; - Activation of strategies to protect against present/future risks
ECONOMIC CAREER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lives with parents; - No social security and/or investment plan 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rented or owned house; - No social security and/or investment plan 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Negotiation of a bank loan; -Additional social security; - Rented or owned house

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