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Involved Fathers and Egalitarian Husbands: by Choice or by Constraint? A Study on Italian Couples with Small Children

Giulia Fuochi
Letizia Mencarini
Cristina Solera

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**INVOLVED FATHERS AND EGALITARIAN HUSBANDS: BY CHOICE OR BY CONSTRAINT?
A STUDY ON ITALIAN COUPLES WITH SMALL CHILDREN**

Giulia Fuochi*, Letizia Mencarini and Cristina Solera*****

Abstract

There is a large debate on new models of fatherhood. By drawing from the 2003 Italian survey "Family and Social Subjects", we explore how many and who are these "new" fathers, whether they are "undoing gender" through an equal share of housework, and whether this occurs more out of choice or constraints. Results show that Italian fathers daily involved in childcare are a minority and male partners sharing equally housework are even less. Besides, they present specific profiles: they belong to well educated, dual-earner and homogamous couples (in terms of working time, occupational position and sector), living in North or Center Italy. Gender role attitudes matter less, affecting only the probability of being involved fathers and only in couples where both partners are traditional. In the other types of couples, where a traditional division is not "taken for granted", gender practices appear to respond more to resources and constraints.

Keywords: domestic chores, housework, childcare, new fathers, gender equality, work-family reconciliation

* Giulia Fuochi, Collegio Carlo Alberto, giulia.fuochi@carloalberto.org

** Letizia Mencarini, Collegio Carlo Alberto & Dept. Economics and Statistics, University of Turin, letizia.mencarini@unito.it;
webpage: <http://www.carloalberto.org/people/faculty/fellows/mencarini/>

*** Cristina Solera, Department of Cultures, Politics and Societies, University of Turin, cristina.solera@unito.it

1. The sharing of unpaid work: has something changed?

With the massive entry of women into education and the labour market, and the parallel spread of new models of family and gender, there is no doubt that in recent years the scenario of the 'private' sphere, and its interweaving with the 'public' one, has changed markedly. And it has done so not only for women, for whom reconciling motherhood and work has become increasingly normal, but also for men, who have begun to address the problem of conciliation by concerning themselves with their children not only as male breadwinners but also as fathers involved in childcare. Nevertheless, the so-called 'dual-earner dual-carer couple' (Gornick and Meyers 2003, Crompton 2006) is still far from being a reality, especially in Italian families (Mencarini and Tanturri 2004). The expressions used to describe this shortfall are 'stalled revolution' (Hochschild and Machung 1989) or 'incomplete revolution' (Esping-Andersen 2009), not only because the masculinization of the female life-course has not been matched by an equivalent feminization of the male one (i.e. the revolution has stopped at the threshold of the home), but also because the revolution has been restricted to certain social groups (i.e. higher-educated couples with stronger positions on the labour market). This is particularly the case of the Mediterranean countries, where the gender gap is wide, and where education still strongly influences attitudes and behaviours in both the labour market and the family (Mencarini and Tanturri 2004; Del Boca et al 2012; Solera 2012, Solera and Bettio 2013). In fact, figures drawn from the comparative database deriving from surveys on time use (HETUS) show that Italy is one of the European countries with the greatest difference between men and women in the average amount of time per day devoted to unpaid work, whether consideration is made of couples without children (with a gender gap in Italy of almost three hours compared with, for instance, less than two in France or less than one in Germany) or of couples with at least one child aged under 6 (with a gender gap for Italy of almost six hours compared with more than three in France and almost four in Germany). If one distinguishes by education level, and considers adults aged between 20 and 74 years old, it emerges that in Italy the gap between men and women with lower-secondary certificates is more than four hours a day, compared with the two and a half for graduates. The difference is smaller in the other countries (Francavilla et al. 2010).

Yet it is equally undeniable that something has changed. Also in Italy couples are today more egalitarian than they used to be, and men have increased their participation in unpaid work. In fact, one notes from ISTAT data on time use that, whilst in 1988-1989 some 85% of the hours of unpaid work were undertaken by mothers, in 2002-2003 the asymmetry diminished to 78%, with a paternal collaboration that, albeit slowly, increased in terms of both the number of fathers involved (6 points

more) and the amount of time (on average 20 minutes more) (Sabbadini and Cappadozzi 2011). As various research studies report, the participation and presence of men has increased not so much in housework, which remains a female monopoly, as in childcare (Bruzzese and Romano 2006; Dotti Sani 2012; Todesco 2014). Thus apparent are new models of fatherhood, those that the literature calls of the ‘involved’ father as opposed to the ‘detached’ father – who performs only or mainly the role of an ‘income and norms provider’ (Maggioni 2000; Gillis 2000; Finn and Henwood 2009). Nurturing, participative, and emotionally involved fathers are not only more common, but they also seem to be part of a new model of masculinity, albeit with intersections and tensions with respect to the ‘traditional’ model (Magaraggia 2013). However, these new fathers seem to have particular “selective” profiles: they are higher-educated, younger men resident in central-northern Italy, who are dependent employees, especially in the public sector, and who have highly-educated wives in employment (Tanturri 2006; Canal 2012; Menniti and Demurtas 2013).

Our work is framed within this literature and within this debate on the new models of fatherhood and of division of unpaid work. In fact, using data from the ISTAT "Family and Social Subjects" survey of 2003 and focusing on couples with small children (0-3 years old), we seek to answer the following questions: How many involved fathers and egalitarian husbands are there? What profiles do they have? What is the weight of ‘preferences’, that is their view on the “proper” gender and parenting roles, or ‘constraints’, seen as resources and work conditions, in determining their degree of participation in unpaid work?. Do new models of fathering also imply new gender models? Or, as recent qualitative studies have shown (Bertolini et al., 2014), being an involved father does not necessarily mean being an egalitarian husband?

In the analysis of gender division of unpaid work, the majority of the quantitative studies conducted to date have considered the effect of individual variables on the likelihood of devoting time to domestic or care work. In other words, although concerned with couples, they have analysed the weight of the characteristics of the wife net of those of the husband, or vice versa (Bruzzese and Romano 2006; Canal 2012; Dotti Sani 2012; Menniti and Demurtas 2013). Moreover, whilst the attention has shifted to the profiles of couples and the intersection between the partners’ characteristics, analyses have included only objective dimensions and not subjective ones (Tanturri 2006). In this study we try to overcome these limitations of the existing literature by putting the couple as unit of analysis and by using a dataset that, although not the most recent one available has the advantage of being the only one at national level that contains information on both attitudes and behaviors in the family and in the labour market, and on both partners.

2. New models of fatherhood, new models of gender? The debate

The two dominant economic theories – that of specialization (Becker 1981) or that of bargaining and economic dependency (Brines, 1994; Blood and Wolfe 1960) – consider investment in the labor market, and the time and income that derive from it, to be crucial resources in determining the allocation of time between the family and the labour market. It is indeed a well-established finding in the literature that income gives bargaining power and that the opportunity costs of devoting time to unpaid work are greater for those who have invested in the labour market and occupy positions important because of prestige, responsibility, income or security.

However, as various studies show, these theories are based on strong assumptions concerning how individuals and couples function, and on assumptions gender-neutral. In fact, couples are treated either as harmonious units that maximize the same utility function and decide solely on the basis of instrumental rationality or as conflictual units in which the two partners, man and woman, share the same ‘tastes’ and therefore use their superior income to make the other do what they do not want to do. Various researches instead show that gender matters – that women, even when they have resources similar if not superior to those of men, do not have either the same ‘tastes’ or the same legitimation to invest in one or the other sphere. As Bittman et al. (2003) and Kuehrt (2012) put it, “gender trumps money”: in couples where the woman is stronger than the man in terms of education or labour market position, it is not the man who does more in the home, as the economic theories would predict, but the woman. The allocation of time between market and family, in fact, has not only material implications but also symbolic ones, which involve individual and social definitions of what is required of a man and of a woman. When children are born, these gender models intersect strongly with those on motherhood, fatherhood, and what is the best for a child. Moreover, according to the ‘doing gender approach’, these models change during the life-course. They are influenced by the culture predominant in the country or in the social group of reference, but they are constructed in everyday discourses and practices in response to both constraints and preferences, to both instrumental and moral rationality (West and Zimmerman 1987; Duncan 2005).

“Doing” or “undoing” gender, like constructing models of motherhood and fatherhood, or of mothering and fathering, is a complex process not only because of the interdependences between one’s own preferences and constraints and those of the persons with whom one has life-ties (primarily the partner or the family of origin), but also because of interdependences between the micro and macro level. Many studies have shown that the institutional context is crucial in shaping level and type of women’s involvement in the labour market over the life course, and especially over family formation. Social policies and the organization of the labour market may also influence

participation by men in unpaid work and whether and how men want and can reconcile fatherhood and work: policies can do so by reducing working hours for all, giving also fathers, and not just mothers, the right to leave and working-time flexibility, promoting ‘dual earner-dual carer’ models (Gornick and Meyers 2003, Geist 2005; Smith & Williams 2007; Solera 2009; Van der Lippe *et al.* 2011; Anxo *et al.* 2011; Aassve *et al.* 2014^b).

Thus, the institutional context affects the possibility of practicing different models of gender and care, or simply of following one’s own preferences, be they for ‘traditional’ or ‘innovative’ models. As Crompton *et al.* (2005) underline, the linkage among gender attitudes, labour-market participation by women, and the gender division of domestic work is however rather weak. Women everywhere have become less traditional in their attitudes, and so too, albeit to a lesser extent, have men. Yet the allocation of domestic work in couples is still rather unfair, and its association with attitudes has weakened over time. According to Crompton *et al.*, this has mainly been the result of a “structural” rather than a “cultural” effect, namely the progressive work intensification. This is consistent with the finding of research on the so-called ‘work-life conflict’ that the strain of reconciling work and family is strong not only among women but also among men, especially if they have high professional positions or are self-employed. Men increasingly want to be involved fathers but this seems to clash with the demands of their jobs and with the perception that they can only shed the image and the expectation of the ‘unconditional worker’ by incurring strong career penalties (McGinnity and Calvert 2009; Nazio and MacInnes 2007; Musumeci and Solera 2013)

Social policies and the organization of the labor market contribute to design not only opportunities and constraints, but also preferences. By favoring or not some possible courses of actions, they also define normative models. Various studies show, in fact, that the relative contribution of fathers increases in the presence of ‘good’ policies on leave, early childhood services, and organization of working time, but their success also depends on their specific configuration and on the discourses around them: if policies are framed in terms of supporting gender equality, as in Scandinavian countries, or more of fertility, as in France, where, despite equally generous family policies, gender division of labour is more traditional and work-life stress higher than in Scandinavian countries (Pfau Effinger 2005; Crompton 2006)

This interweaving among structural, institutional and cultural dimensions also holds for the social construction of fatherhood. As Ruspini (2006) emphasises, whilst in Italy private and public discourses have placed great emphasis on motherhood, defined as natural and as necessarily intense for the well-being of the child and society as a whole, fatherhood has been ignored or only related to such ideas as virility, authority, success, or the transmission of income and social norms. In its traditional construction, in fact, fatherhood has a normative nature: the ‘good father’ provides

economic support for the family and helps his children become responsible adults. With the massive entry of women into education and the labour market, also ideals concerning fatherhood have started to change, albeit more slowly and with more than a few ambivalences. On the one hand, as women become increasingly less caregivers and as families grow more and more unstable, fathers participate more in the care of their children: they want to do so, and they thus form closer emotional bonds with their children. On the other hand, their participation in unpaid work is scant: it is devoted to care work more than domestic work, and it involves play with the children more than their everyday material care. ‘New’ models of fatherhood and fathering therefore cohabit with the ‘old’ ones. This cohabitation is not exempt from tensions, though. As Gillis shows (2000), in many European countries the role of the ‘unfocused and peripheral father’ is increasingly rejected by men, being described as not chosen but imposed – both by work, when responsibilities and hours increase excessively, and by the couple, when the wife-partner seeks to maintain control over childcare, following a fantasy of female self-sufficiency in the maternal sphere (Fraire 2009; Gonzalez et al. 2013). As a recent study by Magaraggia (2013) shows, Italian fathers who reject the model of the ‘unfocused and peripheral father’ and want to be nurturing, participative, and emotionally involved encounter, besides structural constraints, also cultural norms still oriented to the past, which do not even offer a term with which to describe them, except that of ‘mammo’.

The interweaving between preferences and constraints, among structural, institutional and cultural dimensions, may also operate in reverse. As various studies have shown, in contrast to Hakim’s (2000) preference theory, cultural orientations and behaviours not necessarily coincide, both when looking at the gender division of domestic work (Aassve et al. 2014a), nor at work-care reconciliation. It may happen that fathers more traditionally anchored to the role of male breadwinner are forced by necessity to replace wife-mothers as principal caregivers, or traditional mothers to work as main income providers. Yet, while following new routes that have originally responded more to constraints than preferences, both mothers and fathers experience new situations that might change their perceptions and definitions of masculinity, of fatherhood and motherhood, as well as their bond with their child (Walters 2005).

3. Data and methods

In order to delineate the profiles of the new Italian fathers and husbands and to evaluate the factors determining these profiles (coming from the theoretical framework discussed above: relative resources, time and family-friendly working conditions availability, gender attitudes), we used data

from the "Family and Social Subjects" sample-based survey of 2003, one of ISTAT's multi-purpose surveys on the family, and we selected the couples with at least one child aged under 4 (which amounted to a total of 1429 families in the around 20,000 original ones). The 2003 survey collects data on the individual's and family's life-course, on the organization of the family, the role and the characteristics of its members, and their everyday lives. This survey was preferred to the most recent similar surveys because it provides information on attitudes and behavior of the couple, both in the family sphere and in work sphere, allowing us to build indexes of sharing of unpaid work, and to see their relationship with different profiles of couples, due to "preferences" and "constraints".

More specifically, we employed two variables on behaviours in regard to unpaid work, constituting our dependent variables in the regression models. The first measured *the degree of the father's involvement in childcare*, and it was calculated by aggregating the information on the frequency with which a father performed the following activities: feeding the child, putting him/her to bed, dressing him/her, giving him/her a bath, and changing his/her nappy. As Tanturri suggests (2006), these are the 'routine' or 'instrumental' care activities that have traditionally been allocated to mothers and are still unlikely to be shared by fathers. The greatest involvement in care by fathers, in fact, mainly concerns 'interactive' activities, and especially those to do with play, which are more gratifying from the relational and affective point of view while not being constantly necessary like the others. Focusing instead on the involvement of men in the above-mentioned routine activities enabled us to identify 'innovative' fathers. A father was rated as 'involved' if he engaged every day in at least three of the five routine activities; he was rated as 'present' if he engaged every day in two or one of them; he was rated as 'little present' if he did not engage in every activity every day but did so sometimes during the week or once a week; finally, a father was rated as 'absent' if he never engaged in everyday activities, and he engaged in two of the five activities only on some occasions in a month, in a year or never.

The second variable measured *the degree of division of unpaid work*, by identifying three types of couples: 'egalitarian' couples if, on summing the hours of unpaid work declared separately by each member of the couple, the amount of hours undertaken by the woman did not exceed 60%; couples in which the husband was 'participative' if the percentage of hours of work undertaken by the woman was between 60% and 80%; 'traditional' couples if the division of work hours was strongly disproportionate in disfavour of the woman.

The independent variables selected were intended to capture the dimensions that the theoretical debate has defined as significant. To grasp the relative resources of each member of the couple and their differing capacities for negotiation, we constructed an indicator of the *couple's education*

profile (with four categories: both graduates, only the man, only the woman, both not graduates) and of its *occupational profile* (measured as the combination between the labour market positions of the man and the woman, compared according to their relevance¹). In order to grasp the constraints on participation in unpaid work due to working hours in the labour market and to the family-friendly conditions of the type of employment, we constructed an indicator of the couple's *participation in the labour market* (whether or not the couple was a dual-earner one), of *differences in terms of working hours*, and, for the couples in which both members worked, an indicator on *the sector of employment* (private or public sector).

In order to consider the cultural model, more able to reveal the preferences of the couple, we constructed couple profiles according to how each member responded to two statements expressing *views on gender roles*: “Housework lets a woman fulfil herself just as much as paid work”; and “If the parents separate/divorce, it is better for the child to remain with the mother”. The responses to these statements were arranged on a 5-value Likert scale from strong agreement to strong disagreement. The respondent was defined ‘egalitarian’ if the average of his/her responses to the above two statements was greater than 3; otherwise s/he was ‘traditional’. On the basis of this distinction, we defined couples as ‘egalitarian’ when both members had egalitarian gender attitudes; ‘traditional’ when both members were traditional; and ‘mixed’ when only the woman or the man approved of non-traditional gender roles.²

Finally, as control variables we included the *average age* and the *difference in age* of the two partners (the first captures the cohort of the couple, the second mirrors the traditional norm of the older man or an asymmetry in the processes of negotiation), the *number of children*, the *area of residence* (North, Centre and South of Italy) and the availability of *external assistance with domestic and care work*³. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of all the variables that will be part of the regression models.

¹ The classes were derived from the variable in the 15-category questionnaire that determined the types of occupational position declared, which, following Schizzerotto (2002), were grouped into four macro-classes: bourgeoisie, white-collar middle class, petty bourgeoisie, working class. Then, as in Bernardi and Nazio (2005), these classes were hierarchically ordered and used as proxies for individual resources. Combining the job positions of him and her (in three cases: same class, man in superior class, woman in superior class), we obtain an indicator of relative resources to test the *bargaining theory*. This was obviously a very weak indicator, but, in the absence of variables on wages or greater details on job position from which to derive at least a scale of occupational prestige (for example, the De Lillo and Schizzerotto scale or the Hope-Goldthorpe scale), this seemed to be the best measure of relative resources available.

² To explore the cultural models underlying the behaviours of fathers in childcare, it would be ideal to have also information on attitudes and opinions concerning the appropriate places for, and modes of, caring for a child, and what defines a ‘good’ father and a ‘good’ mother. Because such information was not available (to our knowledge, in any quantitative dataset), we had to be satisfied with an indicator on gender attitudes.

³ In the absence of information on the amount of support, the variable was simply inserted as a dummy, distinguishing between paid assistance, if it was provided by a domestic worker and child-minder, or unpaid assistance if, in the past four weeks, help had been given with the housework or the children by someone external to the household, mostly a parent or a parent-in-law.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the couple profiles (couples with children aged 0-3)

	%	N
<i>Degree of the father's involvement in childcare</i>		
Involved	17	245
Present	29	418
Little present	19	275
Absent	35	491
Total	100	1429
<i>Degree of the division of labour within the family</i>		
Egalitarian	11	158
Participative	25	342
Traditional	64	896
Total	100	1396
<i>Both involved fathers and egalitarian husbands</i>	4%	52
<i>Both involved-present fathers and egalitarian fathers</i>	6%	89
<i>The couple's education profile</i>		
Only the man is a graduate	6	89
Only the woman is a graduate	7	100
Both partners are graduates	6	84
Both partners are not graduates	81	1156
Total	100	1429
<i>Profile of the couple's labour market participation</i>		
Only the man works	42	604
The man works full time, the woman part time	19	274
Both partners work full time	32	463
Only the woman works	2	21
Neither member of the couple works	5	67
Total	100	1429
<i>Work profile (only for dual-earner couples)</i>		
Both public-sector employees	9	56
Only the man is a public-sector employee	4	24
Only the woman is a public-sector employee	10	58
Both work in the private sector	77	472
Total	100	610
<i>Man/woman difference in working hours (average)</i>	12	737 oss.
<i>Profile of the couple's job positions</i>		
Same class	25	363
Man in superior class	60	851
Woman in superior class	15	215
Total	100	1429
<i>Profile of the couple's gender attitude</i>		
Both partners are egalitarian	21	291
Only the woman is egalitarian	12	170
Only the man is egalitarian	15	204
Both partners are traditional	52	729
Total	100	1394

		%	N
<hr/>			
<i>Average age of the couple</i>		35	1429
<i>Difference in age between the partners</i>			
	Same age	50	708
	The man is older	44	633
	The woman is older	6	88
	Total	100	1429
<i>External help with domestic and care work</i>			
<i>Unpaid</i>			
	Yes	31	439
	No	69	990
	Total	100	1429
<i>Paid</i>			
	Yes	9	132
	No	91	1297
	Total	100	1429
<i>Number of children</i>			
	1	44	628
	2	44	624
	3+	12	177
	Total	100	1429
<i>Area of residence</i>			
	North	40	571
	Centre	18	252
	South	42	606
	Total	100	1429

Source: Istat, Family and Social Subjects, 2003.

4. The profiles of involved fathers and egalitarian husbands

The statistics on the presence of men in housework and childcare depict an expected situation: only a minority of fathers (17%) is heavily involved in the care of young children, while the majority (54%) is little present or absent. These asymmetries persist in the entire division of unpaid work, including housework: couples where she does not do more than 60% of the total workload are a minority (11%), particularly when compared to couples with a traditional division of labour (64%). Only 4% of respondents appears to be both an involved father and an egalitarian husband. Gender attitudes seem to follow the household work situation: most couples (52%) are entirely traditional; couples where both members have egalitarian attitudes are the 21%; couples where women are traditional and men are egalitarian represent the 15%.

Deepening the intersection between the presence of the fathers in the daily care of children and their participation to housework shows that on the total number of traditional husbands performing little household work, most of them are absent fathers (43%) or little present fathers (18%); on the

contrary, the majority of egalitarian husbands are involved fathers (33%) or present fathers (23%). On the other hand, fathers belonging to any level of involvement in childcare appear predominantly traditional husbands, concerning the division of household work. In other words, if it is likely that a traditional husband will not be an involved father, it is not very likely that an involved father will be an egalitarian husband. Tables 2 and 3 respectively describe the profile of egalitarian husbands and involved fathers in regard to the different dimensions of 'preferences' and 'constraints' discussed in section 3, which are then included as covariates in the regression models.

Egalitarian husbands belong more frequently to couples where one or both partners are graduates and only 13% belong to a couple where only the man works. As for couples where both work, a job in the public sector of one or both partners seems to encourage greater equality in the couple; the same happens for women with a superior or equal job position compared to her partner's. Consistently with the data on the access to the labor market of the couple, egalitarian husbands work on average a few more hours (8.6) per week than their wives; the difference is greater (10.5) for participative husbands and significantly higher (14.3) for traditional husbands.

In line with the more traditional cultural models of gender and family and the more difficult access to the labour market in the South of Italy, only 25% of egalitarian husbands live in the South, compared to 47% of traditional husbands. Finally, we notice that there is not a strong concordance between egalitarian attitudes and egalitarian division of domestic work and childcare: the husbands who appear egalitarian the division of household work belong more often to couples with egalitarian attitudes (26%) than participative husbands (21%) and traditional husbands (20%), but the gap between the categories is not so wide.

The profile of involved fathers and the profile of egalitarian husbands show more similarities than differences: belonging to dual earner couples characterised by medium or high education, homogeneity in the working conditions of men and women in terms of time and job position, residence in the North of Italy, tendency to have egalitarian attitudes.

Table 2. The profile of egalitarian husbands (couples with children aged 0-3); % per column

	Egalitarian	Participative	Traditional	
<i>The couple's education profile</i>				
Only the man is a graduate	8	7	6	
Only the woman is a graduate	14	8	5	
Both partners are graduates	10	7	4	
Both partners are not graduates	68	78	85	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>Profile of the couple's labour market participation</i>				
Only the man works	13	27	53	
The man works full time, the woman part time	25	25	16	
Both partners work full time	55	43	24	
Only the woman works	5	1	1	
Neither member of the couple works	2	4	6	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>Work profile (only for dual-earner couples)</i>				
Both public-sector employees	20	12	4	
Only the man is a public-sector employee	3	5	3	
Only the woman is a public-sector employee	7	8	12	
Both work in the private sector	70	75	81	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>Man/woman difference in working hours (average)</i>	9	11	14	
<i>Profile of the couple's job positions</i>				
Same class	37	35	20	
Man in superior class	35	48	68	
Woman in superior class	28	17	12	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>Profile of the couple's gender attitude</i>				
Both partners are egalitarian	26	21	20	
Only the woman is egalitarian	14	12	12	
Only the man is egalitarian	17	18	13	
Both partners are traditional	43	49	55	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>Average age of the couple</i>	36	35	35	
<i>Difference in age between the partners</i>				
Same age	50	55	48	
The man is older	44	42	45	
The woman is older	6	3	7	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>External help with domestic and care work</i>				
<i>Unpaid</i>	Yes	41	37	27
	No	59	63	73
	Total	100	100	100
<i>Paid</i>	Yes	13	10	7
	No	87	90	93
	Total	100	100	100
<i>Number of children</i>				
1	57	45	42	
2	34	44	45	
3+	9	11	13	
Total	100	100	100	
<i>Area of residence</i>				
North	51	42	37	
Centre	24	18	16	
South	25	40	47	
Total	100	100	100	

Source: Istat, Family and Social Subjects, 2003.

Table 3. The profile of involved husbands (couples with children aged 0-3); % per column

	Involved	Present	Little Present	Absent
<i>The couple's education profile</i>				
Only the man is a graduate	8	9	7	5
Only the woman is a graduate	5	7	7	5
Both partners are graduates	5	9	5	5
Both partners are not graduates	82	75	81	85
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Profile of the couple's labour market participation</i>				
Only the man works	29	41	43	50
The man works full time, the woman part time	24	18	19	18
Both partners work full time	43	33	34	25
Only the woman works	2	2	1	1
Neither member of the couple works	2	6	3	6
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Work profile (only for dual-earner couples)</i>				
Both public-sector employees	15	10	11	3
Only the man is a public-sector employee	2	6	3	4
Only the woman is a public-sector employee	5	8	12	13
Both work in the private sector	78	76	74	80
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Man/woman difference in working hours (average)</i>	11	11	12	15
<i>Profile of the couple's job positions</i>				
Same class	34	28	23	20
Man in superior class	46	58	62	67
Woman in superior class	20	14	15	13
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Profile of the couple's gender attitude</i>				
Both partners are egalitarian	25	20	22	19
Only the woman is egalitarian	15	13	12	11
Only the man is egalitarian	17	15	13	13
Both partners are traditional	43	52	53	57
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Average age of the couple</i>	35	35	34	34
<i>Difference in age between the partners</i>				
Same age	47	49	49	51
The man is older	46	44	46	43
The woman is older	7	7	5	6
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>External help with domestic and care work</i>				
<i>Unpaid</i>				
Yes	36	34	30	26
No	64	66	70	74
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Paid</i>				
Yes	9	11	7	9
No	91	89	93	91
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Number of children</i>				
1	49	44	48	40
2	44	45	40	44
3+	7	11	12	16
Total	100	100	100	100
<i>Area of residence</i>				
North	49	42	38	35
Centre	21	18	21	14
South	30	40	41	51
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Istat, Family and Social Subjects, 2003.

5. An effect of preferences or constraints? And for whom?

With the logit regression models in this section we evaluate the influence of "preferences" and "constraints" in determining an egalitarian husband or an involved father⁴, according to the theoretical perspectives previously discussed: relative resources, time availability, working conditions and gender attitudes. In Tables 4 and 5, the first three models estimate the effects of the variables related to each theoretical perspective, separately; the fourth model combines the different perspectives.

In Table 4, the results of the model that considered only the indicators on relative resources show that the medium-low education of both partners has negative effect on the division of domestic work, compared to a situation where both partners are graduates. Consistently with the economic theories, this negative effect can be seen also in the couples where the man has a superior job position compared to her partner. The results of the model focused on the indicators of time availability and family-friendly working conditions also show that, if one member of the couple does not work – and in the great majority of cases this is the woman, as shown by the descriptive statistics – it is more likely than the division of labour will not be egalitarian; and likewise when the differences in working hours between the man and the woman increase. The public sector – which, as said, in a context like that of Italy, with strong segmentations in the labour market and in social protection, has functioned as a surrogate for a universalist package of conciliation policies – induces a more egalitarian sharing of tasks in the couple, but only when both members work in the public sector. The results of the model that considered only gender attitudes do not show significant contributions to the equal sharing of family labour⁵. This seems to match the findings of the international literature discussed in Section 2, which evidence that in many countries the discrepancy between values and practices has grown, and that this is to a large extent due to increasing pressures in the labour market: what Crompton et al. (2005) call work intensification.

The results of the fourth model, which combined all the factors, show that relative resources lose part of their explanatory power; while the hypothesis of time availability and favourable working conditions appears to be the most valid one: besides the woman's belonging to a superior class compared to her partner, the other variables that significantly influence the probability of the husband of being egalitarian in the division of domestic labour are the sector of employment and working hours. Among the controls, the presence of a larger number of children and residence in

⁴ As we want to capture the determinants of innovative behaviour, in contrast to what has been done in the descriptive statistics, in the regressions the degree of involvement of the father in the household and care work is dichotomized: involved fathers are compared to all the other categories; the same applies to egalitarian husbands.

⁵ The same result is obtained by using another index of attitudes, based on 8 items, which includes not only opinions about gender roles, but also on the most "appropriate" forms of family and intergenerational relations.

the South of Italy are associated, in all the models, with a less egalitarian division of domestic labour.

Table 5 replicates Table 4, but concerns the effects on being an involved father. As regards relative resources, the only factor decisive for the father's involvement in childcare is the combination between the job positions of the man and the woman – a variable already significant for the division of domestic labour. Besides being an indicator of material resources, the occupational prestige may also signal types of investment and types of demands in the labour market tied to different degrees of responsibility, flexibility in managing working hours and workloads, and pressures to work long hours. This particularly concerns the upper class, free professionals or senior managers, in regard to whom the literature speaks of poverty of time, not of income, and who in fact record rather high levels of work-life conflict, also among men (McGinnity and Calvert 2009). Support for this finding is provided by the results of the fourth model, where, once also the variables relative to gender attitudes and time availability and family-friendly working conditions have been introduced, the negative impact of the man's superior job position on being an involved father disappears. Controlling for occupational homogamy, the couple's degree of educational homogamy seems instead not to count.

Unlike the division of unpaid labour, the father's involvement in daily care activities seems to have a link not only with the constraints of time and working conditions, but also with preferences: in couples where both have traditional attitudes, the father's involvement in children's care is smaller. On the contrary, both egalitarian husbands and involved fathers are favoured by situations where both partners work full-time, with a similar amount of working hours and where they both work in the public sector. Two interpretations are possible. The first, which is more obvious and connected to relative resources and time availability, is that when the wife and mother has more free time than her husband, or has a lower-paid and less prestigious job, she tends to concern herself more with the home and the children, as if her power of negotiation with the partner diminishes. The second interpretation refers to *ex-ante* homogamy: persons similar in attitudes or job positions meet and choose each other as partners. These *ex-ante* similarities between the partners then allow them *ex post* to have fewer conflicts of views and fewer asymmetries in their resources and labour-market conditions, promoting more equality in family roles.

Table 4. Effects on the degree of sharing of domestic labour within the couple: egalitarian husbands versus the others (couples with children aged 0-3; logit coefficients)

	M1 (Relative resources)	M2 (Time availability)	M3 (Gender attitudes)	M4 (All)
Relative resources				
<i>Education profile (ref.: both partners are graduates)</i>				
Only the man is a graduate	-0.06 (0.47)			-0.19 (0.49)
Only the woman is a graduate	-0.41 (0.48)			-0.20 (0.48)
Both partners are not graduates	-0.58* (0.36)			-0.43 (0.37)
<i>Profile of the couple's job positions (ref.: same class)</i>				
Man in superior class	-0.78*** (0.23)			0.07 (0.26)
Woman in superior class	0.37* (0.26)			0.46* (0.28)
Time availability and family-friendly working conditions				
<i>Profile of the couple's l.m.p. (ref.: they both work)</i>				
One of the partners does not work		-1.22*** (0.39)		-1.26*** (0.41)
<i>Work profile (ref.: both work in the public sector)</i>				
Only the man is a public-sector employee		-1.32* (0.71)		-1.51** (0.73)
Only the woman is a public-sector employee		-0.76* (0.51)		-0.95* (0.54)
Both work in the private sector		-1.01*** (0.33)		-1.03*** (0.35)
<i>Man/woman difference in working hours</i>		-0.02*** (0.01)		-0.03*** (0.01)
Gender attitudes				
<i>(ref.: both partners are egalitarian)</i>				
Only the woman is egalitarian			-0.27 (0.33)	-0.27 (0.34)
Only the man is egalitarian			-0.22 (0.31)	-0.18 (0.32)
Both partners are traditional			-0.27 (0.23)	-0.11 (0.25)
Control variables				
<i>Average age of the couple</i>	0.05** (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
<i>Difference in age between the partners (ref.: same age)</i>				
The man is older	0.24 (0.21)	0.26 (0.21)	0.20 (0.21)	0.24 (0.21)
The woman is older	0.43* (0.30)	0.49* (0.31)	0.51* (0.30)	0.43* (0.30)
<i>External help with domestic and care work (ref.: no help)</i>				
Unpaid	0.17 (0.20)	0.17 (0.21)	0.35* (0.19)	0.14 (0.20)
Paid	0.07 (0.32)	0.11 (0.31)	0.37 (0.29)	-0.02 (0.33)
Number of children	-0.33** (0.15)	-0.32** (0.16)	-0.44*** (0.16)	-0.30* (0.16)
<i>Area of residence (ref.: North)</i>				
Centre	0.27 (0.24)	0.19 (0.24)	0.21 (0.23)	0.25 (0.24)
South	-0.62*** (0.24)	-0.70*** (0.26)	-0.73*** (0.23)	-0.64** (0.26)
<i>Constant</i>	-2.69*** (0.89)	-1.25 (0.91)	-3.56*** (0.78)	-0.73 (1.02)
<i>N</i>	1247	1247	1247	1247
<i>Log-likelihood</i>	-379.1	-362.3	-391.2	-359.8

Source: Istat, Family and Social Subjects, 2003.

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 5. Effects on the degree of father's involvement in childcare within the couple: involved fathers versus the others (couples with children aged 0-3; logit coefficients)

	M1 (Relative resources)	M2 (Time availability)	M3 (Gender attitudes)	M4 (All)
Relative resources				
<i>Education profile (ref.: both partners are graduates)</i>				
Only the man is a graduate	0.008 (0.47)			-0.003 (0.48)
Only the woman is a graduate	0.19 (0.46)			0.31 (0.46)
Both partners are not graduates	0.31 (0.36)			0.43 (0.36)
<i>Profile of the couple's job positions (ref.: same class)</i>				
Man in superior class	-0.46** (0.18)			-0.03 (0.22)
Woman in superior class	-0.26 (0.24)			-0.13 (0.26)
Time availability and family-friendly working conditions				
<i>Profile of the couple's l.m.p. (ref.: they both work)</i>				
One of the partners does not work		-0.98*** (0.36)		-0.96** (0.37)
<i>Work profile (ref.: Both work in the public sector)</i>				
Only the man is a public-sector employee		-1.79** (0.80)		-1.66** (0.80)
Only the woman is a public-sector employee		-1.10** (0.50)		-1.06** (0.52)
Both work in the private sector		-0.69** (0.32)		-0.71** (0.32)
<i>Man/woman difference in working hours</i>		-0.008* (0.01)		-0.008* (0.01)
Gender attitudes				
<i>(ref.: both partners are egalitarian)</i>				
Only the woman is egalitarian			-0.10 (0.26)	-0.12 (0.26)
Only the man is egalitarian			-0.11 (0.25)	-0.06 (0.24)
Both partners are traditional			-0.42** (0.19)	-0.35* (0.19)
Control variables				
<i>Average age of the couple</i>	0.04*** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.06** (0.02)	0.04** (0.02)
<i>Difference in age between the partners (ref.: same age)</i>				
The man is older	0.13 (0.16)	0.15 (0.16)	0.15 (0.16)	0.17 (0.17)
The woman is older	-0.01 (0.26)	0.00 (0.27)	0.03 (0.26)	0.01 (0.27)
<i>External help with domestic and care work (ref.: no help)</i>				
Unpaid	0.19 (0.17)	0.13 (0.17)	0.21 (0.17)	0.16 (0.17)
Paid	-0.21 (0.31)	-0.44* (0.29)	-0.29 (0.29)	-0.32 (0.30)
<i>Number of children</i>	-0.35*** (0.12)	-0.30** (0.12)	-0.36*** (0.12)	-0.31** (0.12)
<i>Area of residence (ref.: North)</i>				
Centre	-0.11 (0.21)	-0.11 (0.21)	-0.10 (0.21)	-0.11 (0.21)
South	-0.53*** (0.18)	-0.41** (0.19)	-0.53*** (0.18)	-0.44** (0.19)
<i>Constant</i>	-2.55*** (0.74)	-1.31* (0.74)	-2.25*** (0.63)	-1.51* (0.83)
<i>N</i>	1270	1270	1270	1270
<i>Log-likelihood</i>	-547.9	-541.6	-548.9	-538.2

Source: Istat, Family and Social Subjects, 2003.

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

6. Conclusions

There is a wide debate in the current literature on the new models of fatherhood: that is, on the (few) fathers who reject the traditional role of the ‘unfocused and peripheral’ father mainly devoted to furnishing income and rules, and who instead include greater involvement in childcare among their desires and definitions of self and in their practices. However, there are a number of unanswered questions that have guided this work. How many and who are these ‘innovative’ fathers? To what extent are they so ‘by choice’ (cultural attitudes) or because of their own ‘constraints and opportunities’ or those of the wife-partner (economic resources, position in the labour market, time available)? And to what extent are the new models of fatherhood associated with new models of gender centred more on the fair sharing of care and domestic work?

The results, in line with the official data for Italy, reveal rather low proportions of both the former and the latter: only 17% of men in couples with at least one child aged under 3 engage on a daily basis in routine care tasks, such as feeding the child, putting him/her to bed, getting him/her dressed, giving him/her a bath, and changing his/her nappy. And only in 11% of couples does the woman undertake no more than 60% of the overall family workload (domestic chores, shopping, taking care of the other family members). These men are therefore less egalitarian husbands than participative fathers, given that men who deal with the children even on a daily basis do not seem to be equally involved in housework. This suggests, in line with the findings of various qualitative studies, that the models of fatherhood and the definitions on what is good for the child (having a father who looks after him/her) have changed more than gender models. Put otherwise, it seems that the new models of masculinity concern more being an involved father than an egalitarian husband.

In Italy, therefore, we are still distant from the “dual-earner dual-carer” model present in the Scandinavian countries and advocated by various scholars. The scenario, especially in the South of Italy, is certainly more one of a ‘stalled revolution’. The micro and macro levels reflect each other. Those few Italian couples that seem to be relatively egalitarian in the sharing of family responsibilities are matched by a society that records one of the highest levels of gender inequality in Europe: a relatively low level of labour-market participation by women; a wide wage gap even with equal human capital; a low presence of women in public decision-making (although it has recently increased); asymmetry in the use of time (Plantenga and Remery 2013; Del Boca et al 2012). Added to this is a stagnant labour market associated with long and rigid working hours, except in the public sector (but which is now undergoing drastic cuts), and a familistic welfare system that both in discourses and in practices has traditionally ignored, if not explicitly discouraged, gender equality (Naldini and Saraceno 2011), including incentives for fathers to be

more present and involved in care (except for the amendments to law 53/2000 on parental leave and law 54/2006 on shared custody). Thus fathers and ‘innovative’ couples that take their decisions on the extent to which and how to deal with the children and the home are faced by a hostile environment, both culturally and structurally, while more traditional fathers and couples are little exposed to other possible models of the division of labour and responsibilities.

As typical of all emerging social phenomena, those few ‘innovative’ fathers and husbands have selective profiles: they belong to higher-educated certainly dual-earner couples ; they are homogamous to their wives-partners’ working conditions in terms of time, occupational class, and sector; they reside in the Centre-North of Italy; at least one of the two members of the couple does not have traditional gender attitudes. However, whilst the indicators of time availability, family-friendly work conditions (as in the public sector), and differences in occupational class positions (a proxy, albeit rough, for income) influence the probability of both being an involved father and an egalitarian husband, gender attitudes seem to matter only for involved fathers and only in couples where both members are traditional. In other couples, where one of the two members, or both, have more egalitarian attitudes, and probably because they do not take a traditional division of labour for granted, gender and motherhood and fatherhood practices seem to respond more to the resources and constraints of one or the other partner, or both.

However, this finding on the scant importance of cultural factors at individual level should not be overestimated. Behaviors are always a mix of agency and structure, and of instrumental and moral rationality, that is difficult to separate out. In technical terms, preferences and constraints are often endogenous: behind the constraints of a shortage or abundance of time and income lie deliberate choices, such as women and men differently oriented towards own investments in the labour market or acceptance of the investment of the partner. The scant importance of the variables to do with cultural attitudes may also be partly an effect of the data. It may be that the measure used should be improved. It may be too simplistic and concentrated on gender dimensions, neglecting the individual and social definitions of the ‘good’ father, the ‘good’ mother, and the ‘well-being’ of the child. In order to better to grasp the processes and mechanisms behind the decisions on how mothers and fathers deal with the children and the housework, future research should endeavour to collect quantitative data with questions on behaviours but also on desires and normative beliefs, and not only on gender models but also on those of motherhood and fatherhood children wellbeing.

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