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## Couples' First Child Intentions and Disagreement: An Analysis of the Italian Case

### La concordance des intentions d'avoir un premier enfant dans le couple: Une analyse du cas italien

Alessandro Rosina · Maria Rita Testa

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**Abstract** The aim of this article is to examine the determinants of couples' childbearing intentions, by explicitly taking into account the agreement or disagreement of the two members of the couple. The relevance of the partner's reproductive intentions has been well recognised in the literature, but few studies have provided in-depth analyses of the fertility plans of both partners. In our study, we used the household-level data from a survey on "Family and Social Subjects", carried out by the Italian National Statistical Office in 2003, which provides characteristics on both partners. We adopted a couple's perspective which allows us to give a unitary picture of the concordant or discordant nature of partners' first child intentions. We found that a lack of agreement in the reproductive decision-making process is likely to occur in the Italian couples where the role of the woman is less traditional. In particular, cohabitant, highly educated and working women are more likely to be in disagreement with their partners in the decisions concerning having a first child. Being religious may be also a source of discordance in the couples' reproductive plans. Our findings support the utility of taking a couple-based approach in studies on fertility intentions.

**Keywords** Fertility intentions · Couple's reproductive decisions · Partners' disagreement in first childbearing · Fertility decision-making process

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**Résumé** Le but de cet article est d'examiner les déterminants des intentions de fécondité, en prenant en compte de façon explicite la concordance ou la discordance au sein des couples. La pertinence des intentions de fécondité du partenaire est bien établie dans la littérature, mais à ce jour peu d'analyses approfondies des intentions des deux partenaires ont été réalisées. Nous avons exploité les données des ménages dans l'enquête Family and Social Subjects (famille et sujets sociaux) menée par l'Institut national de la statistique en Italie en 2003, qui renseigne les caractéristiques des deux partenaires. La perspective adoptée est celle du couple, ce qui a permis de fournir une vision unifiée des intentions concordantes ou discordantes au sein du couple. Il apparaît qu'un désaccord au sein des couples en Italie est à même de se produire lorsque le rôle de la femme est moins traditionnel. En particulier, les femmes cohabitantes, très instruites et actives sont celles qui ont la probabilité la plus forte d'être en désaccord avec leur partenaire concernant les décisions d'avoir un premier enfant. La religiosité peut également être associée à des désaccords en matière d'intentions de fécondité. Nos résultats mettent en lumière tout l'intérêt de la prise en compte des deux membres du couple dans les études des intentions de fécondité.

**Mots-clés** Intentions de fécondité · Décisions des couples en matière de procréation · Désaccords entre partenaires sur l'intention d'avoir un premier enfant · Prise de décision en matière de fécondité

## 1 Introduction

Reproductive intentions have recently received a growing attention in demographic studies. They are considered as central to purposive human behaviour and a crucial variable in the analysis of fertility trends (Schoen et al. 1997; Bongaarts 2001). They have been defined as the most proximate determinants of fertility behaviour (Ajzen 1985, 1991) and as the final common pathway through which motivations, attitudes, beliefs and desires affect reproductive behaviour (Miller and Pasta 1995). Given the freedom to control reproduction and broad access to contraception, people may decide to have as many children as they want and at the time they consider right for themselves. This is particularly true in modern societies where the normative pressure to follow socially prescribed models is weakening while the role of individual choice is increasing (de Van Kaa 1987; Lesthaeghe 1995; Sobotka and Testa 2008).

Having a birth is a dyadic decision (Beckman 1983) and family planning involves a dyadic unit (Hill et al. 1959). The agreement reached within the couple, in the decision whether or not to have children, may take a central role in the formation of childbearing intentions. The relevance of the partner's reproductive intentions has been well recognised in the literature, but few studies have provided in-depth analyses of the fertility plans of both partners (Fried and Udry 1979; Morgan 1985; Thomson et al. 1990; Thomson 1997; Thomson and Hoem 1998) and fertility research has continued to be primarily based on the views of women. This has to do with the lack of adequate data

sources: data have been often collected either on female respondents or on men and women separately, but not on both members of a couple. In some surveys, individuals have been asked to report their partner's childbearing intentions, but such responses have proved to be inaccurate because they strongly reflect the respondent's point of view (Testa and Toulemon 2006) and tend to underestimate the level of disagreement (Thomson and Hoem 1998). In the fertility studies adopting solely a female perspective, the choice to look at the characteristics of only one partner has been often justified by the way in which a partner selection process develops. Indeed, the fact that people usually prefer a partner who shares the same values and lifestyle causes a high degree of homogamy within couples, especially in education and religiosity. As a consequence, the social characteristics of the partners largely overlap, making it redundant to focus on the characteristics of both partners (Corijin et al. 1996). However, empirical research suggests that homogamy within couples is not complete and therefore looking at the characteristics of either the male or the female partner could give potentially misleading results (Corijin et al. 1996).

As part of the International Generations and Gender Program, the Italian survey on "Family and Social Subjects" provides both male and female partners' responses on the intentions to have a child. In this article, by exploiting these household-level data, we study the determinants of the partners' conflicting fertility intentions. Dissimilar couples' fertility intentions are analysed by taking into account the characteristics of both spouses. We restrict the analysis to childless couples with the aim of studying first child intentions. A parity-specific approach is required because the influence of wives and husbands in the reproductive decision-making process is strongly affected by the number of previously born children (Beckman 1983), and dissimilar intentions of the partners may have a different impact on couples at different parities (Miller and Pasta 1995). Parity-specific intentions also represent more concrete childbearing choices (Morgan 1985) according to the sequential decision-making approach (Namboodiri 1983).

Italy represents a very interesting case of study in the analysis of couples' childbearing intentions. In the last two decades, this country has been continuously showing very low fertility levels. The total fertility rate has remained below 1.4 children per woman. According to the Eurostat Yearbook 2006–2007, Italy is the European country with the lowest completed fertility by generation of the mother (1.5 for the birth cohort 1965). Moreover, in Italy there is a higher positive discrepancy between desired and actual fertility (ISTAT 2006) than in other European countries (Testa 2006). Finally, this country is characterised by the predominance of very traditional gender roles and a lack of adequate policy measures aimed at facilitating the reconciliation between family and working life (Saraceno 1994; Pinnelli 1995; Del Boca et al. 2004).

This article is organised as follows. In Sect. 2 we review the main literature on couples' childbearing intentions. Section 3 is devoted to the presentation of the data. The methodology and the results of the multivariate analysis are described in Sect. 4, while Sect. 5 contains a discussion of the main findings.

## 2 Background

Fertility decision-making is an extremely complex process. Part of this complexity is due to the heterogeneous nature of reproductive behaviour, which encompasses biological, psychological, dyadic, and social dimensions. The dynamic resulting from couple interaction represents a relevant component in that process (Beckman 1983). Considerable evidence indicates that men and women both make independent contributions to fertility decisions (Beckman 1984; Miller and Pasta 1995; Thomson et al. 1990; Thomson 1997). The strong correlation between male and female childbearing plans does not exclude the possibility of a disagreement within the couple. A disagreement can always arise given that intentions are not acquired once and for all but are frequently reassessed over the individual life course. This justifies the choice to analyse jointly decided couple intentions (Morgan 1985).

In the economic literature, a couple's perspective was adopted as women started to achieve higher levels of education and income and gained also a stronger authority in decision-making within the household. As a consequence, the unitary models developed in the 1960s were replaced by non-unitary models in the early 1980s. The former treat the family as a single decision-making agent with single pooled budget constraint and a single utility function that includes the consumption and leisure time of every family member. The latter rely on cooperative game theory, which assumes that players can make binding commitments and provide some help in identifying the determinants of the individuals' bargaining power (Lundberg and Pollak 2007)

The literature has shown that if the partners have conflicting fertility intentions, the resolution of the disagreement depends on the type of decision each partner wants to make, on the existing level of gender equity, both at the individual and societal level, and on the prevalent rule adopted by the couples in disagreement. Usually women prevail in positive fertility decisions and men predominate in negative childbearing plans. Townes et al. (1980), for example, argued that wives' opinions are more important than the husbands' in determining whether couples will seek pregnancy, if wives are in favour of a pregnancy. Similarly, Beckman (1983) pointed out that in case of disagreement, a male view prevails in anti-fertility decisions, while a female opinion is dominant in pro-fertility decisions. However, in a study on a sample of well-educated couples, Beckman (1984) found out that in couples with discordant opinions wives are less likely to desire another child in the short-run than husbands. In their 'Psychology of Child-Timing', Miller and Pasta (1994) found out that both the individual and his/her spouse are important in the formation of intentions, but that females consider their own desires to be more important, while males treat their own child-timing intentions as equal as that of their wives. They interpret this finding by the fact that women have a more central role in childrearing activities in the US, where their study was conducted. For the same reasons, a marital dissatisfaction or conflict would affect only men's child-timing desires, i.e. the intention to delay childbearing, but not women's child-timing desires (Miller and Pasta 1994). Similarly, Fried et al. (1980) and Beckman (1984) argued that the wife's characteristics can be more closely related to intentions than the husband's characteristics because contraceptive use and fertility are considered

as areas in which wives have legitimate power in the marriage. In the same line, Rindfuss et al. (1988) showed that men's intentions are more easily adjustable to the preferences of their partner than women's intentions.

In their study on couples' parenthood attitudes and their effects on the first childbirth, Jansen and Liefbroer (2006) discussed four different decision rules that may be adopted by partners in disagreement in order to arrive at a joint fertility decision: the power rule, whereby influence is determined by access to social and economic resources; the golden mean rule, where partners have equal influence in negotiation; the sphere of interest rule, whereby traditional gender ideology determines influence; and the social drift rule, where disagreement leads to a continuation of the status quo. The authors found out that in the Netherlands the partner's attitudes towards parenthood are not always identical, but in most of the cases they are equally important in joint decisions concerning first childbirth (i.e. the golden mean decision rule is operative). Whenever both partners are not very interested in changing their status quo the social drift rule may prevail.

In Italy, there are very few studies focussed on the process of negotiating fertility choices within the couple. The most influential in the Italian literature is the article written by Bimbi (1996). According to the author, in Italian couples the translation of child desires into concrete intentions may be hindered by the fear of compromising the achieved standard of living and—especially amongst the female partners—by the doubts concerning the possibility/feasibility of reconciling work and family life. This phenomenon, which is common to other European countries as well, may be more pronounced in Italy, because of the scarce public financial support to families with children (as several OECD reports have repeatedly highlighted) and the lack of adequate policy measures to facilitate the work–family balance (such as parental leave, childcare provision, and access to part-time employment). Bimbi (1996) suggested that unequal gender roles are positively associated with increasing postponement of childbearing, because in couples with unequal division of family tasks the negotiation of fertility choices is more difficult. As a consequence, amongst these couples the birth of a first child is postponed and only a few of them are able to make the transition to a second child (Bimbi 1996).

By selecting only childless couples, we focus our analysis only on couples' first-child fertility intentions. These are particularly relevant because they represent the start of the childbearing decision-making process that may influence the whole reproductive career, for example, if there is a considerable postponement of the transition to the first child. The topic of first child intentions is particularly relevant also because recent studies have shown that an increasing proportion of young Italian men and women intend to remain childless or are uncertain about parenthood (Sobotka and Testa 2008).

### 3 Data

We use data from the Multipurpose Household Survey on “Family and Social Subjects”, carried out in Italy by the Italian National Statistical Office (Istat) at the end of 2003. The survey unit is the household, so that information on both members

of the couple is available. Questions on fertility intentions are asked to people aged 18–49. We focus only on men and women living in a union, since the aim of this article is to study the factors of the partners' disagreement in the couples' childbearing intentions. Moreover, we restrict the analysis to childless couples because having a first child is a particular event that needs to be considered separately from higher birth order children (Testa and Toulemon 2006). Moreover, childlessness is increasing in all the Western countries and its contribution to the explanation of the Italian very low fertility is becoming more and more relevant (Frejka 2008). The final sample includes 1,083 couples.

Respondents were asked about fertility intentions as follows: "Do you intend to have a child in the next three years?" The response options were: 'Surely not', 'Probably not', 'Probably yes', and 'Surely yes'. For the sake of simplicity in the multivariate analysis we grouped together the two categories 'Surely not' and 'Probably not' and the two categories 'Probably yes' and 'Surely yes'. The same questions were asked to both partners. In the survey, the questions referring to intentions were included in the self-administered questionnaires. This ensures a high degree of independence between the partners' answers in comparison to other surveys in which both partners may be present at the interview (as, for instance, in the case of the BHPS, see Berrington 2004). Two other questions on fertility intentions were included in the questionnaire, one general "In the future do you intend to have a child?" and one aimed at capturing the child-number desires "How many children would you like to have over your life course?" We focussed only on child-timing preferences measures because they are supposed to be more predictive of future reproductive behaviour. It has been proved that the explicit reference to a certain temporal framework pushes individuals to give more realistic answers. This methodological choice has to be taken into account in the interpretation of our empirical results, because a negative fertility intention is simply an intention not to have a child in the short-term future, and therefore, is more linked to a childbearing postponement than to a definitive option for childlessness.

The degree of conflicting intentions is in general relatively low. The descriptive analysis (Table 1) shows that men's disagreement in first child intentions goes above 15% only at younger and advanced ages, whereas the women's disagreement is very low before 30 years of age.

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Model and Variables

A simple and straightforward way of analysing the couples' conflicting intentions is by using a binary response model contrasting agreement versus disagreement (Model 1). Since we are particularly interested to study more fully the impact of explanatory factors specifically on the male and on the female dimension of the couple, besides the first model we also apply two additional models. In the second one (Model 2), we focus only on couples where the woman wants to have a child and we consider the male intention (no versus yes) as the dependent variable.

**Table 1** Male and female disagreement in the intention to have the first child in the next three years (Childless couples, Weighted data)

	Male disagreement (as percentage of couples where the woman wants to have a child)	Female disagreement (as percentage of couples where the man wants to have a child)
<i>Age (her)</i>		
<30	9.72	2.70
30–34	6.11	9.78
35–39	6.13	9.12
40+	9.81	7.68
<i>Age (him)</i>		
<30	15.79	2.98
30–34	4.12	3.99
35–39	7.56	11.85
40–44	7.64	9.35
45+	18.91	16.63

Source: Family and Social  
Subjects survey

Conversely, in the third model (Model 3), we analyse the couples where the man desires a child and we consider the female intention as the dependent variable.<sup>1</sup> The aim of selecting this modelling is to study, in a unitary picture, the determinants of the partners' conflicting intentions, i.e. to evaluate the different effect of the male and the female characteristics on the couples' concordant and discordant intention to have a first child.

In all our three models the following explanatory variables are included: type of union (cohabitation versus marriage), education (of both partners), employment status (of both partners), female perceived satisfaction with the division of household duties between the partners, religiousness (of both partners), area of residence (North versus South of Italy), and age (of both partners). Age and area of residence are here considered only as control variables. The conditional distribution of the couples' intention and disagreement by each of the explanatory variables mentioned above is reported in Table 2.

## 4.2 Hypotheses

Our main hypothesis is that partners' conflict in the first child intentions is likely to occur more frequently in couples where the partners have equal power. In the traditional Italian society, where the predisposition to have (at least) one child is very pervasive, women may express fertility intentions in disagreement with their partners if they are more autonomous and more likely to achieve self-fulfilment outside the family. The level of female empowerment is captured in the analysis

<sup>1</sup> We also considered an alternative strategy: we applied a multinomial logistic model where the dependent variable has four categories that correspond to the four different combinations of his and her fertility intentions ("Both don't intend", "She intends, he doesn't", "He intends, she doesn't", "both partners intend"). The findings obtained with this model are consistent with those shown in Table 3. The complete results can be provided by the Authors on request.



**Table 2** Couples' intention to have the first child in the next three years and explanatory variables used in the multivariate models (Childless couples, weighted data)

Variables	Both don't intend	She intends, he doesn't	He intends, she doesn't	Both intend	N
<i>Type of union</i>					
Cohabitation	28.83	8.85	7.58	54.74	163
Marriage	18.59	5.41	4.51	71.49	920
<i>Education (her)</i>					
University	15.60	4.80	4.59	75.01	214
High school	19.07	6.06	3.75	71.12	556
Lower	25.10	6.46	7.39	61.05	314
<i>Education (him)</i>					
University	22.73	6.31	5.03	65.93	152
High school	19.26	5.97	4.07	70.71	506
Lower	20.25	5.74	6.03	67.98	425
<i>Mass attendance (her)</i>					
At least once a month	17.08	7.24	3.09	72.59	490
Less than one a month	22.65	4.85	6.52	65.98	593
<i>Mass attendance (him)</i>					
At least once a month	15.14	5.25	6.25	73.36	391
Less than one a month	22.95	6.31	4.25	66.49	692
<i>Female employment status</i>					
Other	20.99	6.09	1.18	71.74	122
Employed	18.41	5.89	5.76	69.95	786
Housewife	27.26	6.01	4.08	62.66	175
<i>Division of housework within the couple</i>					
Women satisfied	20.60	5.63	4.40	69.37	797
Women not satisfied (ref.)	18.83	6.75	6.57	67.85	287
<i>Area of residence</i>					
North	22.08	5.83	5.27	66.82	847
South	13.13	6.28	3.89	76.70	236
<i>Age (her)</i>					
<30	7.12	8.81	2.27	81.79	372
30–34	10.39	4.97	8.28	76.35	318
35–39	23.66	4.28	6.57	65.49	215
40+	60.56	3.60	2.75	33.08	178
<i>Age (him)</i>					
<30	13.48	13.32	2.18	71.02	179
30–34	3.14	3.84	3.71	89.31	383
35–39	18.09	5.51	9.05	67.35	250
40–44	37.36	4.37	5.45	52.82	172
45+	72.78	4.43	3.79	19.00	100

Source: Family and Social Subjects survey

through the variables marital status, educational level, and employment status. However, since the reasons for a disagreement between partners may also hinge on values and subjective factors, we include in the model two covariates on the religiousness of each of the partners and one covariate on female satisfaction with the gender division of the domestic duties. Specifically, our expected findings are the following.

#### *4.2.1 Cohabitation*

In Italy cohabitation is in most cases a temporary phase in the process of family formation. This phase is often characterised by high level of uncertainty concerning the dwelling and the employment conditions as well as the relationship with the partner (Di Giulio and Rosina 2007). On the other hand, people who choose to cohabit as an alternative to marrying do also tend to have less traditional family values and attitudes (Kiernan 2002; Fraboni 2005) and consequently they are more likely to express dissimilar childbearing intentions. Cohabiting women are presumed to be more emancipated and autonomous and with less traditional gender roles, so we anticipate that they may be more likely to express reproductive intentions that are discordant from those of their partners.

#### *4.2.2 Female Education*

Although highly educated women have driven the process of fertility decline, childbearing differences by educational level have been shrinking over time. Recently, the first signs of an opposite trend have been observed: couples with more human capital and economic resources do show, *ceteris paribus*, a higher propensity to have children (Rosina 2004; Dalla Zuanna and Tanturri 2007; Mills et al. 2008). Various studies highlighted the presence of a positive effect of female educational level on first childbearing intentions (Mills et al. 2008), but we may also expect a positive effect of female education on partners' disagreement. Couples in which women are highly educated tend to be more egalitarian in terms of gender roles and are more exposed to a disagreement between partners, if they do not share the same opinion. Indeed, highly educated women are more empowered in their decision-making both in relation to household labour and fertility and the higher level of human capital allows them to question traditional roles MacDonald (2006).

#### *4.2.3 Female Employment Status*

We suppose that working women are more likely to have negative first child intentions and to express them even in opposition to the childbearing plans of their partner. The association between female labour force participation and fertility is not necessarily negative (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000), especially in those countries whose institutions try to help women to combine work and family tasks, and several ad hoc policy measures have been implemented with this aim. But in Italy the reconciliation between family life and work is very challenging because childcare services are scarce and fathers only seldom contribute to care duties and domestic

work (Del Boca et al. 2004). In this context working women may see childbearing as a hindrance to their working career. On the other side, thanks to their job they make a financial contribution to the household and tend to be more autonomous in their choices and more determined in stating their point of view. This situation is often translated in a higher propensity of working women who do not agree with their partner's desire to become a parent.

#### 4.2.4 *Satisfaction with the Gender Division of Domestic Work*

We hypothesise that independently of whether women work or are highly educated, the perception of male contribution to housework tasks may influence the women predisposition to agree or disagree with the partner's intentions to have a child. More specifically, women who are not satisfied with the gender division of the household work are more likely not to share their partner's desire to have a first child. This hypothesis is consistent with that stated by Mills et al. (2008). Studies carried out in the US (Miller and Short 2004) and in Sweden (Olah 2003) show that a more equal division of family duties facilitates the arrival of a child. Similarly, in Italy a substantial participation of fathers in childcare tasks and childrearing activities has been found to be positively associated with the likelihood to intend (Testa et al. 2006) and to have (Mencarini and Tanturri 2004) a subsequent child. Although this covariate may be more relevant for the intentions of higher birth order children, we expect a significant effect also for the desire to have a first child.

#### 4.2.5 *Religiousness*

Since religion is associated with a positive attitude towards childbearing, we expect that religiousness of only one of the two partners may be a source of conflict within the couple.

### 4.3 Results

Table 3 reports the estimates of all our three models. In a first step (Model 1) we study the partners' conflicting intentions simply contrasting disagreement versus agreement. To evaluate the specific impact of the explanatory factors on each of the two components of the couple, in the second model (Model 2) we analyse the male intention (negative versus positive) in couples where the female partner desires a child. Conversely, in Model 3 the dependent variable is the female intention and the analysis is focused on couples where the male partner desires a child.

Cohabiting couples are less likely to make short-term childbearing plans as compared to married couples (see percentage of "both intend" in Table 2). Italian married couples are usually at a more advanced stage in the process of family formation (Billari and Rosina 2004), and therefore more "ready" to have a child. The results of our analysis show that, consistent with our research hypothesis, cohabiting couples do also show a relatively high risk of discordance in first child intentions (Model 1). In particular, we found a significant positive effect of

**Table 3** Logistic models on the intention to have a first child within the next three years (Couples aged 18–49)

	Model 1: Couple's disagreement versus agreement			Model 2: Male intention (no versus yes) for couples where the woman wants to have a child			Model 3: Female intention (no versus yes) for couples where the man wants to have a child		
	Coef.	SE	Odds ratio	Coef.	SE	Odds ratio	Coef.	SE	Odds ratio
<i>Type of union</i>									
Cohabitation	0.506*	0.259	1.66*	0.491	0.356	1.63	0.830*	0.390	2.30*
Marriage (ref.)									
<i>Education (her)</i>									
University	0.288*	0.175	1.33*	0.201	0.243	1.22	0.588*	0.278	1.80*
High school (ref.)									
Lower	−0.223	0.208	0.80	−0.277	0.290	0.76	−0.417	0.326	0.66
<i>Education (him)</i>									
University	−0.074	0.169	0.93	−0.287	0.227	0.75	0.041	0.280	1.04
High school (ref.)									
Lower	0.166	0.216	1.18	0.309	0.288	1.36	0.023	0.355	1.02
<i>Mass attendance (her)</i>									
At least once a month	0.037	0.044	1.04	0.358*	0.168	1.43*	−0.948*	0.235	0.39*
Less than one a month (ref.)									
<i>Mass attendance (him)</i>									
At least once a month	−0.063	0.045	0.94	−0.337*	0.179	0.71*	0.785*	0.222	2.19
Less than one a month (ref.)									
<i>Female employment status</i>									
Employed	0.306*	0.178	1.36*	0.015	0.220	1.02	0.623*	0.357	1.87*
Housewife (ref.)									
Other	−0.329	0.262	0.72	−0.064	0.300	0.94	−0.856	0.606	0.42
<i>Male employment status</i>									
Employed (ref.)									
Not employed	0.055	0.475	1.06	−0.207	0.637	0.81	−0.156	0.787	0.86
<i>Division of housework within the couple</i>									
Women satisfied (ref.)									
Women not satisfied	0.370*	0.210	1.45*	0.171	0.304	1.19	0.415	0.332	1.51
<i>Control variables:</i>									
<i>Area of residence</i>									
North (ref.)									
South	0.016	0.273	1.02	−0.187	0.360	0.83	−0.422	0.468	0.66
<i>Age (her)</i>									
<30	0.334	0.248	1.40	0.359	0.310	1.43	−0.529	0.427	0.59

**Table 3** continued

	Model 1: Couple's disagreement versus agreement			Model 2: Male intention (no versus yes) for couples where the woman wants to have a child			Model 3: Female intention (no versus yes) for couples where the man wants to have a child		
	Coef.	SE	Odds ratio	Coef.	SE	Odds ratio	Coef.	SE	Odds ratio
30–34	0.529	0.201	1.70	0.085	0.289	1.09	0.653	0.289	1.92
35–39 (ref.)									
40+	−0.844	0.348	0.43	−0.253	0.456	0.78	−0.371	0.528	0.69
Age (him)									
<30	0.062	0.278	1.06	0.173	0.338	1.19	−0.917	0.566	0.40
30–34	−0.740	0.235	0.48	−1.068	0.322	0.34	−0.741	0.344	0.48
35–39 (ref.)									
40–44	0.070	0.262	1.07	0.018	0.386	1.02	−0.023	0.391	0.98
45+	0.457	0.416	1.58	0.989	0.563	2.69	1.684	0.646	5.39
Constant	−1.954	0.549	0.14	−1.770	0.728	0.17	−2.293	0.910	0.10

\*  $p < 0.10$ Source: *Family and Social Subjects survey*

cohabitation on the probability of women not sharing the partner's intention to have a child (Model 3).

Education has an opposite effect amongst women and men: the risk of disagreement increases with the female educational level while it decreases with the male one (Model 1). Women with high education are more likely to be in conflict with the male partner's reproductive intention (Model 3), whereas the negative effect of men education on partner's disagreement turns out to be less important and statistically not significant (Model 2).

The female working status has a similar effect to that of education. Consistent with our hypothesis, being in employment increases the woman's decisional power within the couple and the risk of a conflict between partners. The effect proves to be particularly strong in Model 3: working women more often tend not to share their partners' intention to have a child, as compared to women who are inactive. On the other hand, the effect of the male occupational status is not significant.

The effect of the covariate "Satisfaction with the gender division of domestic work" (Model 1) is also noteworthy. In particular, women less satisfied with the division of housework are more likely to oppose their partner if he wants a child (effect stronger in Model 3). This result is consistent with recent findings about the impact of men's involvement in domestic duties on reproductive behaviour. Sevilla-Sanz (2005) interpreted the particularly low level of marriage and fertility rates in Italy as a consequence of the fact that women's education and wages have risen, and young men and women have been unable to commit to a non-traditional division of childrearing responsibilities and other household labour.

"Mass attendance" is positively associated with short-term fertility intentions: religious partners are more likely to want to become parents (Table 2) and less

likely to be in disagreement (Model 1). However, if we analyse in detail the disagreement within the couple, we find that the mass attendance of only one of the two partners significantly increases the probability of a couple disagreement. In particular, if the woman wants a child (Model 2), the probability of an opposition of the male partner is negatively linked to his religiosity and positively to hers. Likewise, if the man wants a child (Model 3), the probability of an opposition of the female partner is associated negatively with her religiosity and positively with his religiosity.

Net of the other covariates the effect of the area of residence is not statistically significant.

It is worth noticing that in most cases the explanatory factors have a stronger effect on female disagreement. This result may be interpreted with the prevalence of the female point of view in the couple's decision-making process. As stated in Sect. 4.2, our main hypothesis was that conflict is likely to occur in couples where the female role is less traditional. The level of female empowerment is included in the analysis through the variables of marital status, educational level, and employment status. The effects of these variables are all in the expected direction.

## 5 Summary and Concluding Remarks

The aim of the paper was to examine the determinants of couples' childbearing intentions, by explicitly taking into account the agreement or disagreement of the two members of the couple.

There is almost no literature on this subject in the European context. Due to a lack of adequate information, previous fertility studies placed the main emphasis on the characteristics of women only.

The household-level data from the "Family and Social Subjects" survey, allowed us to adopt a couple's perspective. This approach gives our study an additional and original value in respect to the previous literature. The use of couples as the unit of analysis is quite innovative, because in most of the studies where both partners are considered, they are treated separately and the partner's characteristics are included in models run on female samples and vice versa. In contrast, our models give us a unitary picture of concordant or discordant partners' first child intentions.

Our main hypothesis is that in Italy the couples' intentions to have a first child are more exposed to conflict between partners if the woman works. Working women have a double role: they contribute to the financial situation of the household and they are still the main person responsible for childcare and child activities. This double role enables them to express a fertility intention which contrasts with that of their partner because they may foresee that they will have to bear the dual burden of motherhood and labour force participation, especially in a context characterised by the existence of a low gender equity system and scarce public childcare services.

Our findings support this hypothesis, suggesting that couples where both partners work are more exposed to the risk of a disagreement in childbearing plans. Females' working status favours a shift from the application of a power rule, where the male view is predominant, to a golden mean rule, where there is an equal influence of

both partners on the couple's decisions. However, in the presence of a low gender equity system, this increased gender equality within the couple is translated into women's first child intentions that contrast with those of their partner. Women are more inclined to postpone their motherhood than men are with their fatherhood.

Our results also support the assumption, often stated in the literature, that a higher consistency between desired and actual reproductive behaviour may be achieved if the increasing female labour force participation is counterbalanced by the diffusion of more symmetric gender roles within the couples. Being religious may also be a source of discordance in couples' childbearing intentions: both male and female partners who attend mass at least once a month are more likely to intend to start a family even with the discordant opinion of their partner, while they are less likely to oppose their partner if she/he wants to have a first child.

Apart from the specific findings, our study shows the importance of considering both members of the couple in the analysis of the reproductive decision-making process and to explicitly analyse the discordance intentions within the couple. In our analysis we adopted an explorative approach. There are several possibilities for developing the investigation in greater depth, by using, for example, bargaining models, and by including higher birth order children. A promising direction in the study would be to adopt a multi-process framework where the impact of the partners' disagreement in childbearing intentions on subsequent behaviour is estimated. However, such an approach will be feasible only when the data from the second wave of the survey on "Family and Social Subjects" becomes available.

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