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FERTILITY INTENTIONS OF WOMEN INVOLVED IN MIXED, NATIVE AND MIGRANT COUPLES IN ITALY.

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Short abstract

Despite the rising interest on migrants' fertility intentions (FIs), none of these studies investigated the role played by the combination of the nationalities within the couple. This article fills this gap, testing whether and how women's fertility intentions differ according to the type of couple (native, mixed and migrant) while disentangling the influence of the selection and socialization or adaptation hypotheses. Data drawn from two ISTAT surveys were harmonized and merged for multivariate analyses. Results shown that positive and certain FIs decrease after controlling for compositional differences: foreign women partnered to Italian men seem to be selected if compared to foreign women partnered to foreign men. Simultaneously, the FIs gap between foreign women partnered to Italian men and Italian women partnered to Italian men also decreased, supporting adaptation. Findings identified gradients in the explanatory power of the adaptation hypothesis across groups of migrant women according to their area of nationality.

Keywords: Fertility intentions; type of couple; migrants; selection; adaptation; Italy.

Extended abstract

Introduction

A large bulk of studies analyzed natives' fertility intentions (FIs, hereinafter) and literature on migrants' FIs grown significantly in recent years (Kraus and Castro-Martín, 2018; Puur et al., 2018; Carlsson, 2018; Alderotti et al., 2022). However, to the best of our knowledge, none of the former investigated the role that the combination of partners' nationalities may play in individual's intentions to have a(another) child. Filling this gap is particularly relevant for research on migration and fertility because fertility behaviors and outcomes tend to vary greatly according to the type of couple (Coleman, 1994; Fu, 2008) and certain FIs are good predictors of future reproductive behaviors (Schoen et al., 1999; Fahlén and Oláh, 2018). Additionally, FIs reflect childbearing norms of social and cultural groups, being remarkably helpful to analyze adaptation and integration processes of migrants while shifting from the norms of their country of origin to those of the country of settlement (Puur et al., 2018).

Italy becomes a particularly interesting case of study because, first, there has been a systematic increase in marriages and births among foreign couples and Italian-foreign couples over time; second, previous research identified differences in characteristics and behaviors between mixed and endogamous couples (Maffioli et al., 2012; Gabrielli and Paterno, 2015; Guetto and Azzolini, 2015; Vitali and Fraboni, 2020), and, third, these differences gain relevance if we consider the contribution of foreigners to fertility levels (Mussino and Strozza, 2012).

This paper is aimed at contributing to the existing literature studying the Italian case while testing the influence of the combination of nationalities of the members of the couple on short-term FIs. Our analyses

unravel and quantify the influence of the selection, socialization and adaptation hypotheses in positive and certain FIs of women in mixed (foreign woman-Italian man) and endogamous couples (Italian woman-Italian man, foreign woman-foreign man). Finally, as differences also emerge when dealing with different origins (Impicciatore et al., 2020; Mussino et al., 2021), we also disaggregate information in wider groups of nationalities to search for differences.

Brief theoretical background and research hypotheses

According to the selection approach, the composition of migrants in terms of observable (i.e.: sociodemographic and economic characteristics) and non-observable characteristics (i.e.: cultural) may be responsible for fertility differentials between migrants and non-migrants (Milewski, 2010; Wolf and Mulder, 2019; Lindström et al., 2022). Thus, if there is a selection of migrants (RH1 Selection) and considering that individuals engaged in mixed couples tend to have different characteristics than individuals who engage in endogamous relationships (Casacchia et al., 2003), we expect that taking into account individual and couple characteristics would change differences on FIs between foreign women partnered to Italian men and foreign women partnered to foreign men.

Once controlling for differences between foreign women partnered to Italian men or to foreign men, we can further test for the rest of our research hypotheses.

According to the socialization approach, migrant behaviors do not converge to those of natives because they tend to resemble those of the stayers if reproductive decisions of stayers differ from those of natives (Andersson, 2004; Kulu and Milewski, 2007). Instead, for adaptation, the reproductive decisions of migrants while living in the host country are more likely to resemble those of natives rather than those of stayers (Kulu, 2005; Kulu and González-Ferrer, 2014).

Thus (RH2 Socialization or Adaptation), FIs of foreign women partnered to Italian men will resemble those of foreign women partnered to foreign men if socialization holds; or, instead, will resemble those of Italian women partnered to Italian men, finding support for adaptation. Finally, as migrants' fertility is shaped by different norms or migratory projects (Impicciatore et al., 2020; Alderotti and Trappolini, 2021; Carella et al., 2021; García-Pereiro and Paterno, 2022), we also hypothesize changes on the explanatory levels of Socialization vs Adaptation to FIs across different migrant origins of women partnered to Italian men.
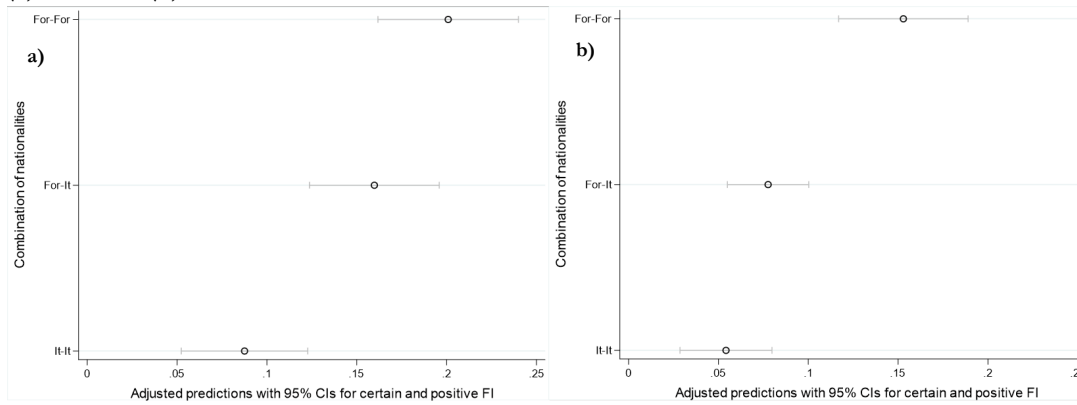
Data and methods

Given some important limitations, data are drawn from two different surveys conducted by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). The last available survey on Families, Social Subjects and Life Cycle (FSS 2016) did not sample sufficient respondents with foreign citizenship, thus, it needs to be completed with data of the survey on Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens (SCIF 2011/12), which did not include nationals. As surveys complement each other, data were carefully harmonized in one unique dataset in which most part of national couples (Italian woman-Italian man) were drawn from the FSS (97.8%) and most mixed (Foreign woman-Italian man) (90%) and non-national (Foreign woman-Foreign man) (92.5%) couples came from SCIF. To accurately disentangle the role of the combination of nationalities, our analyses look at partnered women, with or without children, aged 18-45 for a total sample of 5,901.

The dependent variable of multivariate analyses identifies respondents' certain intentions to have a child (certainly yes vs probably yes, probably not and certainly not". We estimate binary logistic regressions considering independent variables already identified by the literature as important individual determinants of FIs (respondents' health status, place of birth, parity and NUTS3 residence, marriage or cohabitation) as well as couple-related characteristics (couples' combination of age, educational level and employment status). Our main variable of interest combines the nationality of the woman with the one of her partner distinguishing among foreign woman partnered to Italian man (mixed couple), Italian woman partnered to Italian man (endogamous native couple) and foreign woman partnered to foreign man (endogamous foreign couple).

Main results in brief

We can observe a clear ranking in woman's positive FIs when considering her nationality and that of her partner. In particular (Figure 1(a)), FIs of foreign women partnered to Italian men (16%) seem to be much closer to those of foreign women partnered to foreign men (20.1%) rather than to those of Italian women partnered to Italian men (8.8%). However, the inclusion of covariates in model estimations has a clear reductive effect on fertility intentions for the three observed groups (Figure 1(b)) also changing the previously registered closeness between pairs of categories. In fact, FIs of foreign women partnered to Italian men (7.8%) got significantly reduced and are now only slightly higher to those of Italian women partnered to Italian men (5.4%) and much distant to those of foreign women partnered to foreign men (15.3%). As positive and certain FIs decrease after controlling for compositional differences in the characteristics of the respondent and the couple, foreign women partnered to Italian men seem to be selected if compared to foreign women partnered to foreign men. A finding that is supporting our first hypothesis (RH1 Selection).

Figure 1. Adjusted Predictions of certain and positive FIs by couples' combination of nationalities (95%CI) without (a) and with (b) control variables hold at mean values.
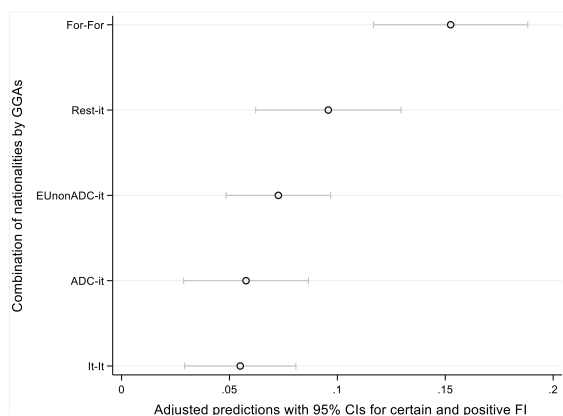

Notes: b) models control for survey, respondents' health status, place of birth, parity and NUTS3 residence, marriage or cohabitation and couples' combination of age, educational level and employment status.
Source: own elaboration on merged and harmonized data.

As shown in Figure 1(b), foreign women partnered to Italian men have a likelihood of positive and certain FIs that resemble more accurately those of Italian women partnered to Italian men (7.8% vs 5.4%), and which values are much lower than those declared by foreign women partnered to foreign men (7.8% vs 15.3%). This result is supporting adaptation in our second hypothesis (RH2 Socialization or Adaptation).

Subsequently, we examine whether and how the explanatory power of the adaptation approach to FIs differs across different migrant origins of women partnered to Italian men.

Adjusted predictions displayed on Figure 2, further confirm our second hypothesis, pushing us to question the explanatory power of the adaptation hypothesis when analyzing certain and positive FIs of foreign women from Asia, Africa and Latin America partnered to Italian men (9.6%). In fact, their intentions are almost exactly halfway through those of Italian women partnered to Italian men (5.5%) and those of foreign women partnered to foreign men (15.2%). The contrary holds for foreign women from ADC partnered to Italian men (5.8%), whose FIs resemble those of Italian women partnered to Italian men. A similar situation is observed among women from European countries (non-ADC) (7.7%), whose FIs are also closer to those of Italian women partnered to Italian men but to a lesser extent.

Figure 2. Adjusted Predictions of certain and positive FIs by couples' combination of nationalities disaggregated in Great Geographical Areas (GGAs) (95%CI).

Notes: models control for survey, respondents' health status, place of birth, parity and NUTS3 residence, marriage or cohabitation and couples' combination of age, educational level and employment status. GGAs are: Advanced Developed Countries (ADC, including European Union, Canada, USA and Australia), European countries -not ADC (New EU countries and Middle Eastern Europe), and the remaining nationalities (Rest: Africa, Asia and Latin America). *Source:* own elaboration on merged and harmonized data.

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