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**Innovative Behavior in Italy: Parents' Influence  
in the Choice of Type of First Union**

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**1. Introduction**

Since the beginning of the 1970s cohabitation started to spread among the youngest generations in Western and Northern European countries as a new form of entering the first union, alternative to marriage. This did not happen in Italy and in the Mediterranean countries, but scholars perceived it as a simple and small delaying in the adoption of the innovative behaviors, just in the same way it happened for the start of the fertility decline.

Despite this prediction, in the present time Italy has still one of the lowest percentage of women cohabiting in Europe, although there is a slight increase in the youngest generations. Macro level socio-economic factors, welfare systems, religion and gender norms are usually taken into account to explain the differences between the countries, whilst education, position in the job market and religiosity are thought to be some of the important factors in the decision of starting a cohabiting union at the individual micro level.

Our hypothesis is that the diffusion of cohabitations in Italy is influenced by one of the deepest cultural specificities of the Italian family, the so called strong ties between parents and children (Reher, 1998, Micheli, 2000, Barbagli et al. 2003), consisting in a high level of economic

and emotional support that is given by parents to children well beyond the growing up phase, that is making very problematic for the children to take choices that are openly clashing with the value of the parents.

To investigate in the direction of our hypothesis we will analyze the process of leaving parental home to start an informal union in Italy, with the focus on the behavior of women. Regression models and event history analysis techniques (for current status data) will be used, trying to model the relationship between cultural values of the parents and adoption of innovations among the young daughters.

In the following sections there will be a short summary of the theoretical background and a more extensive presentation of the research question (section 2), a description of methods and data used (section 3), a discussion of results (section 4), and finally concluding remarks (section 5).

## **2. Theoretical Background**

As many authors have already pointed out, the level of diffusion of cohabitation between young adults is much differentiated in European countries. However, given that the choice of type of union of young men is usually driven by other factors than that of women (Oppenheimer, 2003), in this paper we will concentrate only on women.

When we compare the experience of women in their late 20s in some European countries, according to national representative Fertility and Family Survey (FFS) data the first partnership was a consensual union for only 2.4% of Italian women reaching age 29 and born in 1946-50, and 7.6% for those aged 29 and born in 1961-65, whereas in France 53.4% of the 29 years old women born in 1959-63 choose the consensual union as the form of first partnership, in Sweden 83% of the 28 years old women born in 1964, in the Netherlands 89.9% (when aged 28, born in 1958-63), in Germany around 40% (when aged 25-29, born in 1962/63-67)<sup>1</sup>. This situation is the result of different institutional and cultural assets in the countries, including welfare system organization, gender norms, and various degrees of flexibility in the internalization of the new modern values in the society.

The main framework in which that innovative behavior has been integrated is the Second Demographic Transition (Van de Kaa, 1987, Lesthaeghe, 1992) that links the spreading of

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<sup>1</sup> Standard country tables for FFS data: [http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ffs/f\\_h\\_151b.htm](http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ffs/f_h_151b.htm)

cohabitation as a modern way to enter a union with the increase in post-materialist values and in female economic autonomy. According to several authors the spreading of modern cohabitation started at the beginning of the 1970s and it was characterized by free choice among the people in the middle and upper class living in the Northern and some of the Western countries (Wiersma 1983, Lesthaeghe, 1992). In the course of the time the meaning of cohabitation is obviously changing, (Manting, 1996), and some typical steps in the developing of the phenomena has been underlined, above all according to the social acceptability, the increasing acceptance in cohabitating couples of arrival of children, and the increasing difficulty to tell them apart with married couples (Prinz, 1995). As postulated by the SDT theory, the successive spreading of cohabitation to other countries was considered inevitable, and only a question of time, because it was expected that “all countries go through the same sequence” (Van de Kaa, 1987).

However, the numbers cited at the beginning of the paragraph seem to tell a different story. Is it a simple delay due to the low level of secularization and modernization (as stated by the SDT theory) or is it true that such behavior is not consistent with the Italian socio-cultural context?

Our hypothesis (see also Rosina, Fraboni 2004) is based on the belief that the lack of a diffusion of cohabitation in Italy is mainly due to the strong ties between parents and children, anthropologically rooted in the Italian society (Reher, 1998; Micheli, 2000; Dalla Zuanna, 2000).

This strong relationship common to other countries of the Mediterranean area, such as Spain, expresses itself, among other things, through: support by the parental family to the young adult, not only up to the age of consent, but also until he/she has reached a satisfying employment position (Sgritta, 2002; Rosina et al., 2003; Moreno Minguez, 2003); substantial help while he/she is getting married, in particular (but not only) for the purchase of a house (Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda, 2002; Barbagli et al., 2003); marked residential proximity between parents and married children; and continuous help by the parents to their children even after they are married (Barbagli, 1996; Tomassini et al., 2003). Several historical studies have shown how all these aspects that can clearly be seen in today's Italian society, have profound roots in the past (Reher, 1998; Derosas, 2002; Viazzo, 2003).

In today's Italian society all these aspects are reinforced by a substantial lack of a welfare system capable of supporting the youth in the crucial events of their life, which is at the same time cause and effect of the crucial role of the family in Italian society (Saraceno, 1994; De Sandre, 1997).

According to our hypothesis, the marked material and affective investment which is at the basis of the strong family ties feeds and reinforces the intense emotional involvement of the parents in the life of their children. So much so that parents tend to see their children almost as their own extension, to the point that they consider the failures of their children as their own defeats (Dalla Zuanna, 2000). This leads them to adopt a particularly protective attitude towards their children, with which they tend to guide their children's choices with a view of avoiding behaviors that they do not approve of.

The prolonged permanence in the parental family, the residential proximity, and the continuous and intense relationship even after the exit from the parental family do not favor, in the Mediterranean countries, the development of that "tolerant indifference" among generations which enables the European youth in the weak family ties area to freely make choices, even though these are not shared by their parents (Beck, 1997). Strong proximity requires some sort of complicity. Italian parents cannot pretend to ignore the behavior of their children living in the same residential context and with which they have a continuous material and immaterial interchange. In the case of social unacceptable behavior by their children, parents are forced to take a stance. Keeping an intense relationship virtually means approval. As a consequence, parents tend to discourage their children from behavior they do not approve of with affective and material means at their disposal. On the other hand, the strategic importance of the parent's support makes it particularly disadvantageous for young Italians to make choices which parents do not approve of, and that could render their help less generous.

Consequently, the choice to cohabit can be carried out without painful breaking-offs (which otherwise would confine it to a minority behavior) only if it does not clash irremediably with the values of the parents (and of their context of reference). That is, if the parents are culturally open minded to the possibility that their children can make non traditional choices.

If this is true we expect young people to have had a generally favorable opinion of cohabitation for a while now, and low diffusion of informal unions to be connected with a limited opening-up of the society. As to the behavior, forerunners may belong to less traditional contexts (above all in the North) and to family with greater cultural resources (parents with higher education). In particular, the father's education is important, as people with a higher education tend to be more open minded toward the possibility of their children making non-traditional choices. They have better cultural and material resources, enabling them to be less subjected to the conditioning of social norms. Forerunners usually belong to the population with

high cultural status. This is also true for leaving the parental home for reasons of independence and for non-traditional family formation (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1999). With regards to the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy, not only the educational level of the youth, but, net of that, also that of the parents would be significant. In fact, according to our hypothesis, the diffusion of cohabitation among the young generations must be preceded by a process of acceptability of this behavior among the generations of the parents. This process is evident above all at the beginning of the diffusion, when only selected people with special characteristics adopt the new behavior, and is becoming less and less evident the more the new behavior and its social acceptability is spread (hystorical change hypothesis, Manting, 1996).

The idea of an effect of the parental characteristics on the union formation behavior of the children is not a new one, but in the past it was used above all as a proxy to measure the level of economic resources in a family and to explain the impact of these in entering a marriage. In this case the highest the education level of the father the highest is the probability of marrying. Only rarely it was used as a proxy for cultural values affecting cohabitation. For example in the Netherlands the residence in the parental home was used as the basis for an analysis on first union, with the motivation that parents have more means of influencing the behavior of children living in the parental home: since parents presumably favor family life, they are likely to influence their children to form a union, especially a marital one (Liefbroer, 1991, in Manting, 1996).

The importance of including familiar cultural background in Italy can be seen in another example. In a very interesting recent paper Nazio and Blossfeld (2003) analyze the diffusion of cohabitations in Italy and Germany at the micro level. They state that the spread of consensual unions between Italian young women is more influenced by the behavior of peers (people belonging to the same generation) than by the experience of the previous generations, and that first informal unions are confined to a small highly selective groups of women, the diffusion to broader groups being somehow blocked.

That is in contrast with what is found in other studies (Rosina 2004, Rosina, Billari, 2003), where it is stated that the diffusion of cohabitations, some decades later than in other countries, is starting also in Italy (Rosina, 2002). In addition the Italian cultural specificity seems to be more coherent with hypothesis that assign a more important role to inter-generational mechanisms than intra-generation mechanisms for the adoption of an innovative behavior. Some preliminary evidence supporting this hypothesis is found when the Nazio-Blossfeld model is slightly modified, introducing the education level of the father and restricting the analysis to the people

living in the Center-North of Italy, where the innovative type of cohabitations are more spread, in contrast to the South where mainly the traditional type can be found (Di Giulio and Rosina, 2003).

So, it is very important to stress once more that our hypothesis is taking into account not only the individual level, but also the environment where in Italy the values can develop into behaviors, namely the family. According to us ignoring this mechanism could lead to wrong interpretation of the Italian behavior.

### **3. Data and methods**

Cohabitation is still a rare phenomenon in Italy, although there are some signs of diffusion. For this reason we need data collected on a huge sample. Data for our analysis are stemming from the Multipurpose Survey “Famiglie e Soggetti Sociali”, carried out by the Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT) in Italy in 1998 and containing information about more than 50.000 individuals, representative for the Italian population at sub-national level<sup>2</sup>. In this survey information about structural variables, life cycle events, education and job experience of each member of a family are collected. Moreover for the individuals 18-69 years old, also some information about the parents was asked.

Unfortunately the Multipurpose survey is not done for studying explicitly the formation of a family from an event history analysis point of view, so no direct explicit question was asked to respondent about the timing or type of first union<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, questions about some special aspects of unions were asked only to women. All questions in the questionnaire regarding unions are briefly reported in appendix A.

Anyway, the information provided were detailed enough to estimate the date and type of first union, cohabitation or marriage, opportunely combining the information collected in the questionnaire by means of an extensive examination of the data<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The survey is based on direct interviews of individuals –irrespective of age- belonging to the families included in the sample; in particular 59.050 individuals were interviewed, belonging to 20.153 families. The sample is a two-stages one, with stratification of the first stage units (municipalities), representative at the repartition level (North-West, North-East, Centre, South, Islands).

<sup>3</sup> This lack of information is probably the reason that such a rich source of data has been largely ignored until now for the studying of the process of formation of a family from a modern point of view, namely taking into consideration not only marriage.

<sup>4</sup> For example if a woman declared that she had only one marriage, with no premarital cohabitation with the husband, and without any other experience of cohabitation in the life, then she probably started her union history with a direct marriage on the date of marriage specified. Obviously, this was one of the simplest possibilities. Very

Of the 19.908 women 18-69 years old, 4.368 (21.9%) have experienced no union at the time of the interview; for 14.457 (72.6%) the first union was a marriage, for 1.043 (5.2%) it was a cohabitation, and for 40 (0.2%) no information could be found. As far as the date at the beginning of the union is concerned, the information provided was very accurate when the first union was starting as a marriage, but it was not possible to estimate it for about 10% (100) of the women whose first union is cohabitation.

Cohabitation is a slightly increasing experience among Italian women starting a union, above all if resident in the Center and North Italy, where the new behavior is more spread, fig. tab 1. Although in the youngest generation (18-24 years old at the interview) the high values shown are the result of the selection process in truncation in the life histories (about 90% of women reported to be never in a union at the interview), we can imagine that the trend in the diffusion of cohabitation is in rapid increase in the less traditional North and Center. Data are consistent with similar estimates based on the Fertility and Family Survey data (Kiernan, 1999).

On the basis of this data set we want to test if the modern attitude of the father, that could lead to an easier acceptance of the modern behavior of the daughter, can explain the choice of type of first union of the daughter, net of her characteristics.

**Table 1 Percentage of cohabitations out of all first unions by repartition of residence and total Italy, and percentage with at least one union, Italy Women, 1998**

Year of birth	1929-43	1944-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-68	1969-73	1974-78
Age at interview	55-59	45-54	40-44	35-39	30-34	25-29	18-24
South Italy and Islands	1.8	2.8	3.7	4.2	5.6	8.8	20.5
Center and North Italy	2.6	4.2	6.7	8.6	14.7	19.8	34.2
Total Italy	2.3	3.7	5.5	6.8	10.9	15.0	27.3
% with at least one union	94.4	95.2	94.6	92.2	83.7	51.6	9.4
Number of respondents in the sample	4,430	3,696	2,234	2,447	2,423	2,056	2,582

Source: our elaboration on Multipurpose Survey, Italy 1998.

In order to do so, we analyze the experience of first cohabitating union of a woman, controlling for the generation they belong to, for her level of education, for the level of education of her father, and for the repartition of residence.

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complex patterns of recording a personal history have to be taken into account to find out an acceptable estimate of both date and type of first union.

As far as covariates are concerned, repartition of residence is coded at the time of interview, and is divided in two modalities: Centre and North Italy, and South Italy and Islands. In the South the traditional behavior regarding cohabitating behavior is more usually found, in the North and Centre the modern one.

As education level of the daughter and of her father are our basic variables, we were especially careful in finding a suitable classification. Daughters and fathers are belonging to distant generations, which experienced different average levels of education. For example having achieved an education level that is comparable to the level 2, first stage in the ISCED education code system has a very different meaning for female born around 1960s and for their fathers, born on average about 30 years before. For the former it is a compulsory level, for the latter it can be considered a high level that not everyone could have been able to get<sup>5</sup>.

Another aspect to be considered is that some of the women in our sample are still university students. If we coded their educational level according to the highest level achieved we would ignore the experience of the university life, that is usually very important for the development of modern values.

Keeping in mind these choices, we divided educational level of the fathers in low (up to “scuola elementare” that corresponds to “less than level 2, stage 1” in ISCED classification), medium (“scuola media inferiore” that correspond to “level 2, stage 1” in ISCED) and high (at least “scuola media superiore”, at least ISCED “level 2, stage 2”). For the daughters, we choose a different classification, reflecting the different meaning that the levels of education achieved in the years, and we defined low educated all the daughters whose highest level of education is not more than the compulsory one<sup>6</sup> (“scuola media inferiore”, ISCED level 2, stage 1), medium educated all the daughters whose highest education is the “scuola media superiore” (ISCED level 2, stage 2) with no enrolment in the university level, highly educated all the daughters who achieved the “laurea” degree (ISCED level 3), or who are currently enrolled in the university.

In our sample the percentage of women holding a high level of education is ranging from 8.1% in the generations born 1944-53 to 21.5% for the generations born 1969-73; their fathers

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<sup>5</sup> In 1963 a reform of education was approved in Italy, according to which education until the level “scuola media inferiore” (level 2, stage 1 in ISCED classification) or for at least 8 years is compulsory. Moreover a law made the completion of “scuola media inferiore” mandatory for the majority of the jobs.

<sup>6</sup> The totality of women included in the analysis belong to the cohorts that could benefit of the education reform of 1963 (see previous note).



(that are on average 30 years younger) holds a high degree in 8% of cases for the oldest generations, in 21% for the youngest generations of daughters.

When we concentrate on data about the Centre and North Italy, we find that both education of the daughter and of the father is generally positively influencing the share of cohabiting people in the first union, tab 2.

We want to answer then to the question if this is a simple structural effect, or if the education level of the father shows an effect also after controlling for the education level of the daughter.

Moreover we can expect that the “father” hypothesis has greater importance on the intensity of the phenomenon, namely the choice of type of first union, than on the calendar of the event, namely the time to experience the first cohabiting union. This is possible if we think that a “forbidden” behavior cannot be simply delayed (at the individual level), and it is probably never experienced. In general the delay is probably caused by scarce resources, or by something that could become better in a relatively short time. In our case, the women who would like to cohabit but are not supported by the family, could choose then to marry directly, although a little bit later than they would like to start a union, but would not experience cohabitation.

**Table 2 Percentage of cohabitations out of all first unions by education level of the women and of her father, Italy Women, 1998**

Year of birth	1929-43	1944-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-68	1969-73	1974-78
Age at interview	55-59	45-54	40-44	35-39	30-34	25-29	18-24
<i>Education level</i>							
Low	2.4	2.8	5.7	6.2	11.9	15.7	26.8
Medium	1.3	6.3	5.1	7.2	8.1	12.1	25.8
High	2.8	7.0	5.7	8.7	15.4	22.7	41.7
<i>Average year of birth of father</i>							
	1910	1919	1926	1931	1936	1941	1946
<i>Education level of father</i>							
Not indicated	3.1	3.2	8.8	14.7	11.1	34.5	46.2
Low	2.2	3.2	4.9	5.3	10.0	12.8	25.2
Medium	2.0	4.9	7.4	7.9	11.2	16.6	22.6
High	4.1	8.0	6.8	12.6	14.8	18.4	37.9

Source: our elaboration on Multipurpose Survey, Italy 1998.

So, two models will be developed, the first one will be a logistic model for the choice of cohabitation instead of marriage in the first union and the second one will be an event history

analysis model on the timing of first union when this is a cohabitation, following the logic of competing risks. As far as the logistic model is concerned, let us recall that for some of the women it was not possible to decide if the first union was cohabitation or marriage. As it is somewhat likely that they are cohabitation instead of marriage, because marriage is an unforgettable record on an institutional act, we would like to find a way to include them in the analysis. Therefore we decided to adopt a Bayesian approach for the model fitting, using the Gibbs sampling (implemented in Winbugs). This approach allows us to estimate the missing values in the response variable, according to the values of the covariates (Gilks et al 1995)

We decided to apply the model only to people born 1944-68, both to minimize the number of people that have no experience of first union at the time of the interview, and to avoid selection problems due to deaths in the older generations.

For a greater number of women it was not possible to estimate the date of the beginning of the union. But even when it is possible to estimate a date, one has to think that often the process of entering in a cohabiting union has not a precise starting date (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel, 1990, Manting, 1996, Manning and Smock, 2003), not being a result of an official act. Sometimes the process itself is inherently nuanced, and for the respondent herself it is difficult to decide a date for its beginning.

To take into account both problems we decided to apply the methodology of event history analysis for current status data. Current status are an extreme form of incomplete data that refers to the situation where the observations are either right- or left-censored. Early examples arose in the analysis of the age at weaning (Diamond et al 1986; Diamond and McDonald 1991). There is now an extensive literature both on application (in various fields such as sociology, epidemiology, econometrics) and on methodological issues and extensions (Jewell, M.J. van der Laan 2002).

Observations are right censored when the event has not happened at the time of the interview, and left censored if we know that it happened but we do not know (or we are not sure) when. The only known information is if the event happened at the moment of the interview, and the age at the interview. The main difference with usual event history analysis is that the function that is modeled is not the risk function, that expresses the risk of experiencing the event at a certain time, given that it was not experienced before, but a transformed quantity, the distribution function, that express the probability to have already experienced the event at the time of interview (Diamond et al., 1993).

In this kind of analysis the events are grouped in time intervals mutually exclusive and exhaustive, with limits:

$$0=a_0 < a_1 < \dots < a_N.$$

The dependent variable is:

$$?_j = \Pr(0=X < a_j), \text{ where } j = 1, 2, \dots, N-1$$

The complementary log-log transformation of  $?_j$  permits us to obtain a proportional risk model:

$$\log(-\log(1- ?_j)) = c_j + \beta_Z Z$$

where:

- $c_j$  corresponds to the logarithm of the cumulate (up to the age class  $j$ ) of the baseline function.
- $Z$  is the generic explicative covariate,  $\beta_Z$  is the parameter that express its effect.

Once the model is specified in such a way, it is reconducted to a simple regression on binary data and can be estimated with the most common statistical softwares (Diamond et al. 1993).

Given that the model is a competing risk one, we studied only the risk to enter into a cohabitation, treating all other events, marriage included, as censoring ones: we used only the information if a women had experienced a first union as a cohabitation or not, at the time of survey.

The hypothesis on which this model is based is that the risk of experiencing the event at a given age is not changing over the time, namely that the process is stable over time. To respect this hypothesis, we limit our analysis to the cohort with relatively low risk to cohabit. Therefore we will concentrate our attention on the so-called “forerunners” of the cohabitation, people that are experiencing the phenomenon when the general behavior in the society is still very traditional, so we will include women aged 25 to 50 at the time of interview, that were born in 1948-73.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 *Choice of cohabitation in the first union*

Results of the logistic regression on the choice between cohabitation and marriage in the first union are showed in table 3. The estimates can be read as usual, namely that the effect of each variable is intended net of the effect of the other variables included in the model. We

adopted a Bayesian approach. We can consider “significant” an estimate when the “credible interval” (interval between the 2.5<sup>th</sup> and the 97.5<sup>th</sup> percentile of the posterior distribution) does not contain the 0. We used as (non-informative) priors for the regression coefficients:  $N(0, 10000)$ .

Keeping this in mind, we can say that starting a union without being married is becoming increasingly common in the younger cohorts, and that the experience of a first cohabitation is more usual in the North and Centre of Italy than in the traditional South and Islands, net of the effects of other variables. Both these results confirm the descriptive findings we introduced in the previous paragraph.

**Table 3 The choice of type of first union: results of the logistic regression on cohabitation vs. marriage, Women, Italy 1998. Posterior distributions summaries of the coefficients**

	Mean	s.e.
<i>Year of birth</i>		
1964-68 (ref.)		
1959-63	-0.515	0.113 *
1954-58	-0.739	0.121 *
1944-53	-1.156	0.118 *
<i>Repartition of residence</i>		
South (ref.)		
Center and North	0.738	0.096 *
<i>Education level</i>		
Low (ref.)		
Medium	-0.071	0.103
High	0.157	0.150
<i>Father's education level</i>		
Don't know	0.478	0.218 *
Low (ref.)		
Medium	0.255	0.124 *
High	0.564	0.133 *

*Source: our elaboration on Italian Multipurpose Survey, 1998.*

\*: The credible interval does not contain the 0.

Before commenting the variables about education, our key variables, we will recall that the aim of a statistical regression is to highlight the effect of a variable net of the effect of all the others variables. In our model a low education level has a positive effect on the risk of having a first cohabitation, this is not surprising because we know that cohabiting unions were somewhat

traditionally common in the past among the lowest socio-economic groups in the population, when people could not afford to marry, for whatever reason.

Also a high level of education has a positive effect on the risk of cohabitation with respect to the lowest educated ones, and this is going in the direction of our hypothesis: better educated and open-minded women could have some gain in not marrying directly. Anyway, this variable, once the father's education level is included, is no more significant (0 is inside the credible interval), that is strongly going in the direction of our hypothesis.

The effect of the education level of the father is completely as expected: better educated fathers have probably a more open cultural attitude with respect to cohabitation than low educated fathers, and could let the daughters choose more freely. A positive effect is found also when the education level of the father is not known: this is usually happening when the woman never met him or did not have with him a strong relationship (about 3.3% of our sample). In this case we can interpret this as a lack of control over the behavior of the daughter, going in the expected direction.

In sum, the education level of the father seems more relevant to the choice of cohabitation than the one of the woman herself, and when we interpret this indicator as a cultural one we can agree that fundamental for the spreading of cohabitation in Italy (where desired from the woman) is the familiar cultural background.

#### *4.2 Timing to first cohabitation*

Results for the competing risk event history analysis on the time to first cohabitation based on current status data are presented in table 4.

As far as the significance is concerned the model can be read in a usual way. In interpreting data about year of birth one has to keep in mind that this variable indicates how each group of generations is contributing to the estimation of a trait of the distribution function, and from this point of view it can also be interpreted as age effect.

The age group where it is more likely having started a union as cohabitation is 30-34 (women born in 1964-68), while the oldest age group is the one where this happens less frequently.

As in the previous model, to be resident in the South of Italy is lowering the risk of first cohabitation.

We will concentrate now on the results for the two most important variables for our analysis, the education level of the woman and of her father. As it is happening also in the logistic model the time to the experiencing a first cohabitation is longer for the medium level educated woman, as compared to the highest educated, and shorter for the low level educated women, as compared to the best educated ones. This kind of effect was found also in the previous model, and in both cases this variable was not significant. In fact significance is disappearing because we included in the model the variable about the education level of the father, with the usual meaning.

**Table 4 Time to first cohabitation: results of the competing risk event history analysis on current status data on cohabitation vs. marriage, Women, Italy 1998.**

	$\beta$ -estimate	s.e.
<i>Intercept</i>	-2.681	0.142 ***
<i>Year of birth (age at interview)</i>		
1969-73 (25-29)	0.569	0.109 ***
1964-68 (30-34)	0.741	0.098 ***
1959-63 (35-39)	0.225	0.208
1948-58 (40-44) (ref.)		
<i>Repartition of residence</i>		
South	-0.685	0.093 ***
Center and North (ref.)		
<i>Education level</i>		
Low	0.219	0.136
Medium	-0.038	0.137
High (ref.)		
<i>Father's education level</i>		
Don't know	0.263	0.223
Low	-0.392	0.124 ***
Medium	-0.262	0.141 *
High (ref.)		

*Source: our elaboration on Italian Multipurpose Survey, 1998.*

\*:  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ .

The medium level education of the father is discouraging the daughter to enter in a first cohabiting union, as compared to the highest one, and even more the low education (both from a magnitude and a significance point of view), this effect is controlled for the education level of the daughter. Low educated fathers, namely those who are less educated than the average level, once

again seem not to have the cultural means to understand and accept the innovative behavior of the daughter. The starting with a cohabiting union is not permitted even if the daughter is highly educated, and living in a cultural setting that was modernized by the cultural revolution of the end of the 1960s.

This result was not completely expected, although going in the direction of our basic hypothesis, because we thought that we could have accepted a result where the father's role is weaker in the timing to first cohabitation. In fact what is important is to accept this or not, that means that if it is not accepted it will never happen. However, in this second model the effects of the independent variables on the tempo and quantum of the phenomenon are mixed, and it is not possible to tell them completely apart.

In sum the results are consistent with our basic hypothesis, and they show that the open-mindedness of the fathers seems to have a crucial role on the daughter's decision about cohabitation.

This results encourage us in carrying on furthers analysis in this direction.

## **5. Conclusions**

The aim of this paper was to shed some light on the lack of diffusion of modern cohabitating unions in Italy. Whilst in the Northern and Western countries of Europe to start unions with cohabitation is considered almost fully acceptable from the society, to the extent that somewhere the direct marriage is considered a minority behavior, in Italy, as in other Mediterranean countries, something was blocking this process.

Some scholars perceived it as a simple delay, others as the effect at the individual level of the low secularization degree of the Italian society, and of the great influence of the Catholic Church.

According to us the cause of such a situation must be searched in one of the strongest peculiarities of the Italian society, the extent of the so called strong ties between the members of the family. Following this approach, in the weak area the generation that is open to a new behavior is the same that can freely adopt it, while in the strong ties area before the new behavior is adopted by young people, it is necessary that their parents accept it. This is especially true if we keep in mind that the extent of the need of economic help of the parents and the lack of protecting welfare system can make a rupture with the parents' values very penalizing.

That mechanism is even stronger if the parents have a kind of aversion towards non-traditional behavior and suffers from the context influence. In particular we consider important the role of the father: the higher the educational level of the father (once the educational level of the daughter is controlled), the more likely is that he is more open-minded towards innovative behavior of the daughter.

To check this hypothesis we applied multivariate statistical techniques on a huge representative sample of women born from the second half of the 1940s to the youngest cohorts born at the end of the 1960s and the very beginning of the 1970s, interviewed by ISTAT. The aim is to explain the behavior regarding the choice of cohabitation, controlling for the education level of the woman and the one of her father.

Results presented in the paper are directly going in the direction expected. Consistently with our hypothesis important for the adoption of cohabitation seems not only the attitude of the woman interviewed, but above all the cultural open-mindedness of her father towards innovative behavior.

A new survey from ISTAT, the 2003 Multipurpose Survey, carried on in the last months and build in a way that it is easier to follow life course events, will help us in testing our hypothesis with more recent and rich data.



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## Appendix A

From Multipurpose Survey Questionnaire, Italy, 1998

*(To everyone, except never married women)*

**11.4 Please give the exact date of starting and ending of each one of your marriages.**

	Month	Year
1 <sup>st</sup> or the only marriage	_____	_____
De facto separation	_____	_____
Legal separation	_____	_____
Divorce	_____	_____
Widowhood	_____	_____
2 <sup>nd</sup> or the only marriage	_____	_____
De facto separation	_____	_____
Legal separation	_____	_____
Divorce	_____	_____
Widowhood	_____	_____
Last marriage	_____	_____
De facto separation	_____	_____
Legal separation	_____	_____
Divorce	_____	_____
Widowhood	_____	_____

*(To everyone, except never married women that live in a couple)*

**12.1 Before the present or last marriage, did you live together with your husband?**

No.....

Yes.....

*(If yes)*

**12.2 How long?**

N° years ..... N° months .....

*(To never married, separated, divorced or widowed women who live in a couple)*

**13.1 When did the present cohabiting union start?**

Month ..... Year .....

*(To everyone aged 18 and more)*

**5.1 What year did you stop living with your parents?**

*(if you stopped and then came back, please refer to first time)*

Year .....

Never

**5.2 For what reason did it happen?**

- Cohabitation (free union).....
- Marriage.....
- Job reason.....
- Autonomy/independence wish.....
- Death of parents.....
- Other.....

**5.3 Did you ever experience cohabitation not directly followed by marriage?**

- No.....
- Yes.....

**5.4 (If yes) How long did it last?**

N° years ..... N° months..... N° days.....