



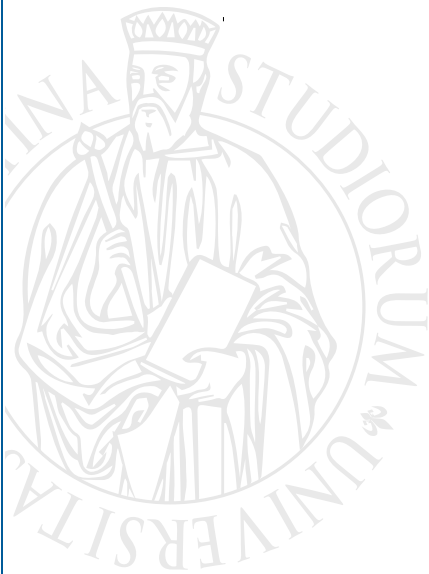
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**Instability of Employment Careers
and Union Dissolution.
A Complex Micro-level Relation**

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Instability of Employment Careers and Union Dissolution A Complex Micro-level Relation

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Abstract

The present study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the relation between employment instability and union dissolution. To address the oversights of previous research, we disentangle the effect of employment instability on union dissolution by: (i) considering not only the effect of joblessness, but also the type of employment contract; (ii) evaluating both status and the accumulation of instability over the life course; and (iii) detecting variation across gender and generations. We focus on Italy, applying event-history techniques to the 2009 and 2016 Italian Multipurpose Survey on Family and Social Subjects, observing cohorts from 1950 to 1980. Our results suggest that the effect of employment instability on union dissolution is gender-specific: joblessness and limited-time employment are facilitators for men's dissolution, while joblessness is an inhibitor for women's dissolution. Nonetheless, these differences weaken across recent cohorts as gender equality gains relevance in the labor market. We also highlight the crucial role of the persistence of instability in unpacking the association between employment instability and union dissolution.

Keywords

Union dissolution; Employment instability; Joblessness; Time-limited employment; Gender

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, capitalism and increasing globalization, and the consequent strong deregulation, privatization, and delocalization of economies—together with rapid advances in technology—have fundamentally reshaped European labor markets (Mills et al., 2006; Mills & Blossfeld, 2013; Vignoli et al., 2020a,b). Exposure to global markets has promoted the diffusion of new forms of temporary work contracts characterized by lower wages, decreased bargaining power, and diminished rights and social protection, thereby transforming labor market entry and exit conditions, and provoking an increasing precariousness of career paths (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Ciganda, 2015; Grotti & Scherer, 2014; Vignoli et al., 2016, 2020c). Furthermore, within the last two decades, the global economy has faced a series of transformations—culminating in one of the most dramatic financial crises in recent memory—which caused a drastic rise in unemployment, the spread of precarious work, and the volatility of household incomes (Bloom, 2014; Mills & Blossfeld, 2013; Storesletten et al., 2004). Such changes generated an unprecedented level of economic uncertainty (Bauman, 2007; Vignoli et al., 2020a). Economic uncertainty has been shown to affect family dynamics (Kreyenfeld, Andersson, and Pailhé 2012); however, the relation between economic uncertainty and union dissolution has been rarely studied. The present paper adds to the growing literature on the nexus between economic uncertainty and family life courses by addressing the relation between the instability of employment careers—considered a major proxy of economic uncertainty (Kreyenfeld et al., 2012)—and union dissolution.

Existing research indicates a theoretical ambivalence concerning the direction of the effects of employment instability on divorce. On one side, the *relational stress hypothesis* (Conger et al., 1990; Liker & Elder, 1983) suggests that perceived economic insecurity increases psychological distress and exacerbates marital discord, thus increasing divorce risk. Conversely, the *cost of divorce* perspective (Cherlin, 1979) argues that unfavorable economic conditions may reduce divorce by rising its relative cost, i.e., legal settlements, household relocation, or increasing the costs of consumer durables (Amato & Beattie, 2010; Cohen, 2014; Fischer & Liefbroer, 2006). The existing empirical evidence is as mixed as the theoretical expectations, also because of a series of limitations.

First, virtually all previous research has only used unemployment as an indicator of economic performance. This is somewhat dismissive of the fact that employment instability is also engendered by time-limited work contracts, characterized by time discontinuity,

insecurity, lack of rights and social protection, and generally low earnings, thereby favoring uncertain futures (Benach et al., 2014; Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Pirani & Salvini, 2015). We thus identify employment instability with joblessness and time-limited employment—both of which embed a strong dimension of uncertainty, since they correspond to a lack of clarity on economic prospects, as well as economic strain from either a total lack of income from work, or temporary (and often scarce) salaries. To the best of our knowledge, no study has yet analyzed the relation between fixed-term work contracts and the risk of union dissolution.

Second, nearly all past studies have considered measures of employment status (being unemployed), while a series of recent papers have added that not only the *status*, but also—and especially—the *persistence* of employment instability affect family dynamics (Busetta et al., 2019; Ciganda, 2015; Özcan et al., 2010; Pailhé & Solaz, 2012).

Third, prior research has generally lacked a gender perspective, despite it being already well-established that employment status may have a different meaning for women and men partnership choices (de Rose & Di Cesare, 2007; Sayer et al., 2011). In societies with a prevalent male-breadwinner family system, when the wife is not employed, her cost of divorce is typically higher since she is likely to be financially dependent on the marriage (Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). Conversely, when the husband is jobless, the stress mechanisms may be predominant due to his poor performance as a provider (Cherlin, 1979; Conger et al., 1990). Importantly, it has been shown that, as the economic role of men and women becomes increasingly equal, these differences gradually disappear (Hansen, 2005; Jalovaara, 2003; Oppenheimer, 1994). As the economic roles and aspirations of men and women begin to converge across generations, there may well be an equal evolution regarding the gender relation between employment conditions and couple stability.

To address these oversights of past research, we hope to clarify the effect of employment instability on union dissolution by: (i) considering not only the effect of joblessness, but also the type of employment contract; (ii) evaluating both the status and accumulation of instability over the life course; and (iii) detecting changes across gender and generations. We use Italy as a meaningful case-study for our empirical analysis. Italy represents an interesting laboratory to study the relation between employment instability and union dissolution for multiple reasons. Marriage is still a dominant institution, and the diffusion of union dissolutions is limited as compared to European standards. Nonetheless, over the last decades, trend data illustrate a strong increase in total divorce and separation rates, mirrored by one of the fastest-growing spread of temporary contractual arrangements in Europe, rising

unemployment, and a slow and problematic convergence of gender roles. We apply event history techniques to long-term data, obtained through joining two of the Italian Multipurpose Survey on Family and Social Subjects of 2009 and 2016, conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). The data is unique in providing high quality retrospective information, including cohorts from 1950 to 1980, with dissolutions occurring throughout over four decades. This is the first study to address union dissolution in Italy that covers such a broad time span—which also encompasses the period of the Great Recession.

We continue by reviewing the literature on employment instability and union dissolution, followed by a description of the Italian context, and a set of research hypotheses. Once done, we describe our data, methodology, and the variables used to test our hypotheses. Thereafter, we present our results, followed by a concluding discussion.

2. Background

2.1. Instability of employment careers and union dissolution

At the individual level, unemployment has been repeatedly linked to union dissolution (Conger et al., 1990; Doiron & Mendolia, 2012; Hansen, 2005; Jalovaara, 2003; Liker & Elder, 1983; Ruggles, 1997; Starkey, 1996). Existing research dates back to few decades ago and, in line with the *relational stress hypothesis*, identified several potential mechanisms which suggested unemployment's disruptive effect on marriage.

One such mechanism outlines how surging financial pressures and loss of income deriving from unemployment may reduce marital quality. A sudden and unexpected reduction in income may in fact generate tension within a couple by disrupting the routines of family life (Conger et al., 1990; Liker & Elder, 1983; Starkey, 1996). It has been shown that marital relations grow more tense and conflicted as couples are forced to adapt to a heavily reduced income (Liker & Elder, 1983).

A second mechanism suggests that unemployment leads to lower levels of subjective well-being, manifested by higher psychological distress, frustration, and depression (Marsh & Alvaro, 1990; Oesch & Lipps, 2013; Whelan, 1994)—factors likely to facilitate marital conflict. Early studies in the United States found that unemployment had an indirect effect on marital quality through husbands' behavior (Atkinson et al., 1986; Conger et al., 1990; Liker & Elder, 1983; Starkey, 1996). Husbands' employment instability negatively affected family interaction by increasing their irritability, explosiveness, and hostility, while simultaneously

decreasing their levels of warmth and support toward their wives. In turn, men's hostility was associated with greater perceptions of marital instability by wives, and with lower levels of satisfaction or happiness for women (Conger et al. 1990).

A third mechanism links unemployment to certain individual psychological traits and characteristics which could also influence marital stability, such as personal inconstancy, mutability, or a lack of reliability or sense of responsibility (Atkinson et al., 1986; Charles & Stephens, 2004; Doiron & Mendolia, 2012). Therefore, joblessness could also be indicative of certain characteristics which affects a person's suitability as a mate. Doiron and Mendolia (2012), distinguishing between different types of job displacements (dismissal, redundancy, and the end of a temporary contract) among men in the UK, found support for this hypothesis. They showed that job losses dependent on the worker's characteristics (dismissals) more strongly impact marriages than redundancies, which instead depend on the employer's characteristics.

As the majority of the presented research dates back to few decades ago, it therefore does not account for time-limited jobs—which at the time played only a minor role in the job market. Time-limited contracts have been promoted to reduce unemployment, simplify the transition between education and work, and were proposed as a mean to help families (generally women) to reconcile work and family duties. In many European countries, however, such contracts have failed to achieve these goals, and have instead provoked increasing segmentation and dualization of labor markets, where time-limited workers are far less likely to find quality employment (Barbieri & Cutuli, 2010; Barbieri & Scherer, 2009). While time-limited jobs share some positive features with permanent employment (or, at the very least, help stave off unemployment), they also share certain unfavorable conditions with unemployment (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Benach et al., 2014; Pirani & Salvini, 2015). Several studies have in fact shown that time-limited contracts have negative consequences on private lives and health conditions. For instance, they have been shown to be associated with reductions in life satisfaction and subjective well-being, and rises in such psychological disorders as mental distress and depression (Benach et al., 2014; Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Gash et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2008; Pirani & Salvini, 2015; Scherer, 2009; Virtanen et al., 2005). Clearly, some of the mechanisms described for unemployment may also apply to time-limited work. As a matter of fact, temporary work has been proven to contribute to increased work-family conflict and relationship strife (Scherer, 2009) which, just as for unemployment, may serve to increase the risk of dissolution.

2.2. Instability of employment careers: status or persistence?

Joblessness and time-limited work contracts may also have long-term negative consequences for employment prospects (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Busetta et al., 2019). From a life-course perspective, exposure (particularly in one's early career) to long spells of joblessness or time-limited work can be significantly detrimental as work experiences often follow from one another and people are increasingly directed into given trajectories, thereby leading to patterns of path dependency (Dannefer, 2003; Giesecke, 2003; Mynarska et al., 2015; Vignoli et al., 2020c). Following this idea, certain recent studies on the relation between employment instability and fertility (e.g. Busetta et al., 2019; Ciganda, 2015; Özcan et al., 2010; Pailhé & Solaz, 2012) suggest that family decisions are likely influenced not only by our own present circumstances, but by the information garnered from previous experiences and future prospects.

To the best of our knowledge, no prior study has addressed the role of continued employment instability on union dissolution. Addressing the role of its persistence allows us to acknowledge that the relationship between employment instability and union dissolution may be non-monotonic. A relatively short spell of joblessness or unstable positions may be insufficient to generate stress in the couple. After all, such periods may even strengthen the bonds between a couple. As long as these periods expand, however, employment instability may exacerbate tensions within a couple and increase the risk of union dissolution.

2.3. A gender lens

The disruptive role of unemployment on marital stability has been generally discussed and tested within the context of men's unemployment. Nevertheless, from the few studies containing information on women, it appears that women's unemployment does not provoke the same familial strain (Liker & Elder 1983)—with the exception of a handful of studies from Scandinavia (Hansen, 2005; Jalovaara, 2003). However, such studies date back to a time with highly different gender and family systems to what we now have.

Under male-breadwinner family systems, where men are the main income providers and women, if employed at all, cover more alternative and “compensatory” economic roles, the financial strain on families is greater when the husband is unemployed (Liker & Elder 1983; Starkey 1996). Nonetheless, jobless women, due to their high skills' specialization in care and domestic work rather than in the labor market, and lacking the economic means to live independently, face a *higher* cost of divorce (Cherlin, 1992; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000; Todesco,

2009). Moreover, women with traditional family views, for whom being outside the labor market is a “choice”, do not experience—by definition—employment instability. When the man is jobless, by contrast, the *stress mechanisms* are typically predominant due to his poor performance as a provider (Cherlin, 1979; Killewald, 2016).

According to the gendered institution perspective, the risk of divorce within a couple is also dependent on the deviance or compliance with the prevalent model, and divorce is more likely when spouses’ employment and earnings violate gender norms. From this perspective, in societies still (relatively) traditional, a husband’s unemployment and a wife’s employment strain marriages by violating the implicit terms of the marital contract (Killewald, 2016; Sayer et al., 2011). The disrupting effect of men’s unemployment and women’s employment on marriages is thus claimed to be tied to traditional gender norms and ought to decrease in more gender equal societies.

This perspective is in line with recent developments in socio-demographic theories linking marital disruption with the incomplete, or stalled, revolution of gender roles (Esping Andersen, 2009; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; Hochschild, 1989; Lappegård et al., 2020). Therefore, as women’s desires and aspirations change, and the global economy increasingly requires a dual-earner family, the economic roles of men and women are equalizing across generations. Consequently, the gender relation between employment instability and union dissolution is likely to evolve. With a dual-earner model and a greater shared income, couples should be able to maintain higher standards of living, thereby reducing economic hardship and relational stress, and increasing relationship stability (Cooke & Gash, 2010; Jalovaara, 2003; Ono, 1998; Oppenheimer, 1988, 1994). Studies on Scandinavian countries in the early 2000s, where gender egalitarianism has a quasi-normative status, reported similar effects of his and her unemployment on separation risk. In Finland, couples in which husbands, or wives, or both, were unemployed, were more likely to divorce (Jalovaara 2003). Similar results were found in Norway, where the effect was the same for men and women, but the magnitude of these effects was less robust than those found for other countries, thus supporting the hypothesis that unemployment effects are less disruptive in more gender symmetric societies (Hansen 2005).

3. Italy, a case study

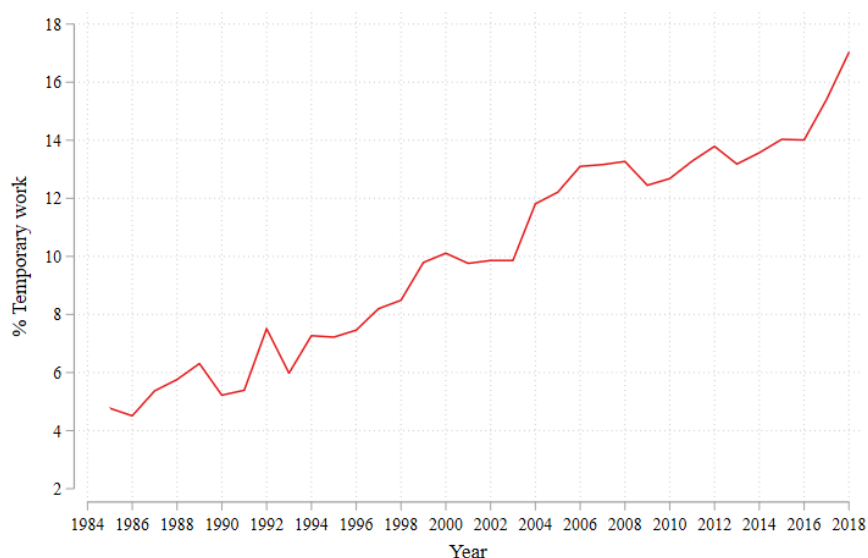
Divorce was introduced in Italy on December 1, 1970 with law no. 898. This is significantly later than most European countries, where laws regulating divorce existed since the first half of the 20th century or earlier (González & Viitanen, 2009). Up until the last two decades, Italian marital stability seemed to be an exception to the wider European landscape. Besides being a latecomer in the introduction of divorce, dissolution rates have always been low compared to most developed countries. Nonetheless, divorce rates have been considerably growing, while marriage rates have been shrinking, to such an extent that in 2016 the number of divorces reached almost 50% of the number of marriages celebrated that year (Istat, 2016). Following the same tendency, non-marital cohabitations—a traditionally marginal phenomenon in Italy—have seen a considerably increase in recent decades, passing from 1.7% of all couples in 1998 to 8.6% in 2016 (Istat, 2020).

Changes in relationship patterns have been mirrored by important shifts in the labor market. The Italian labor market was traditionally heavily regulated with strong employment protection legislation and a rigid system of wage determination. Core reforms towards labor market flexibilization began in the 1980s and has led to a gradual liberalization of fixed-term employment, as well as the progressive introduction of flexible contracts (relating to both working hours and employment duration). The most significant steps in the process of deregulation/segmentation were taken in 1997 with the “Treu Law” (L.196/1997), and the following “Biagi Law” (L.30/2003). These new regulations introduced and revised several forms of non-permanent contracts, i.e., job-on-call, job sharing, part-time, apprenticeship, training, fixed-term, and project-based work—all of which are characterized by lower wages, inferior bargaining power, and decreased rights and social protection (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Pirani & Salvini, 2015; Vignoli et al., 2016). However, alongside this increased flexibilization, legislation for open-ended contracts has long remained substantially unmutated. The Italian reform process was thus defined as marginal or targeted (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Garibaldi & Taddei, 2013), since it applied only to new jobs, and affected only a fraction of the population. This has engendered a substantial labor market dualization: a “rigid” primary labor market, in which a core group of insiders hold stable and secure jobs (predominantly represented by adult men, and a residual “flexible” secondary labor market (overrepresented by women and young adults), where jobs are unstable and unemployment spells can be long-lasting (Barbieri & Scherer, 2009; Boeri et al., 2012; Garibaldi & Taddei, 2013). Following the

Great Recession, two reforms, known as the “Fornero Law” in 2012 and the “Jobs Act” in 2015, attempted to reduce the dual structure of the labor market. Their goal was to provide incentives for companies to adopt more permanent employment contracts, and increase their flexibilization both in hiring and dismissal costs, and procedures. However, this was only marginally achieved (Boeri & Garibaldi, 2019; Catalano & Pezzolla, 2017).

From the early ‘80s, the Italian economy has been characterized by high unemployment and low employment rates as compared with other developed countries (Garibaldi & Taddei, 2013). The liberalization of fixed-term work contracts in the pre-crisis period played a pivotal role in reducing unemployment levels by boosting hiring and job creation (Barbieri & Sestito, 2008). The spread of temporary contracts in Italy has in fact been one of the fastest-growing in Europe—much higher than the OECD average. Figure 1 shows the time trend of the share of temporary work as a percentage of total employment. However, at their termination, most temporary contracts were not transformed to permanent ones. In segmented labor markets (as in Italy), temporary work is often used by firms as a cheaper factor of production, thus taking advantage of the large regulatory gap with respect to permanent contracts (Garibaldi & Taddei, 2013).

Figure 1: Share of temporary work as a % of total employment between 1985–2018



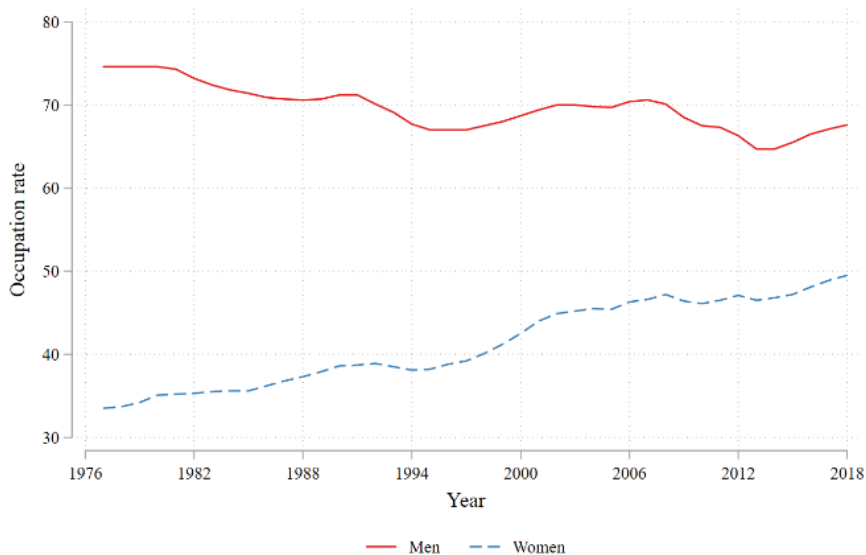
Source: Own elaboration of OECD data.

The Great Recession brought with it a sizable negative shock that strongly undermined Italy’s labor market performance, leading to alarmingly high levels of unemployment (Marino

& Nunziata, 2017). The highest post-crisis peak in unemployment came in 2014, followed by continued, though moderate, recovery (Istat, 2020; Marino & Nunziata, 2017). Indeed, most affected by the crisis were those with fixed-term (and non-renewed) work contracts who were not covered by social protection schemes (Garibaldi and Taddei 2013). The Great Recession has amplified existing inequalities by further contributing to the exacerbated dualization of the labor market.

The Italian labor market continues to contain sizeable gender differences in terms of employment rates. Although the gap between women and men employment rate has been slowly narrowing (women employment has increased by approximately 12% in the last 20 years), the 20% employment gap remains a significant gender difference. Furthermore, as seen in Figure 2, the reduction in the gender gap is also partly due to a constant drop in men's occupation rates. Italian women continue to have one of the lowest labor force participation rates in the OECD, despite the number of women in tertiary education exceeding men (OECD, 2017). The country's average occupation rate of women aged 15–64 is currently 49.5% (Istat 2020). Nonetheless, geographic differences are prominent.

Figure 2: Occupation rate by gender, 1977–2018



Source: Own elaboration of Istat data

The growing, but still limited, participation of women in the labor market is at times attributed to the long tradition of a rigid familistic system (Reher, 1998), traditional expectations concerning familial responsibility and the gender division of labor, and the

“imperfect secularization” of Italian society which has heavily influenced policies and behaviors (Knijn & Saraceno, 2010). Several studies (e.g. Blome, 2016; Naldini & Jurado, 2013) have shown that in Italy, in contrast to most European countries, attitudes and values towards family and gender have remained fairly constant over the past decades. In terms of behavior, Italy has been shown to be one of the most asymmetrical countries in Europe regarding the division of domestic work—although important signs of change, especially among the most educated couples, are emerging (Bertolini & Solera, 2016). Policies aimed at promoting work-family balance and gender equality are still limited, and have been characterized by a certain degree of inertia over the last decades (Naldini & Jurado, 2013; Naldini & Saraceno, 2008, 2011). Moreover, the Great Recession, and the related financial crisis and austerity measures imposed as a response, resulted in severe budget restrictions, as well as an important retrenchment and recalibration of the welfare system, including family policies (León & Pavolini, 2014).

4. Hypotheses

4.1 Joblessness

Since Italy still presents relevant gender differences in allocation of time and responsibilities between paid and unpaid work—and traditional gender attitudes are still widespread—our first hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) is that the individual-level relation between joblessness and union dissolution will likely be the opposite for women and men (in line with the literature). Jobless women should form more stable relationships than permanent employed women since they are economically dependent on their husbands and comply with traditional gender norms. Therefore, non-employed women should face a *high* economic and social *cost* of divorce. On their side, women with permanent job positions (representing a select group of women), are likely to enjoy greater independence than jobless women, and therefore more likely to leave unhappy relationships since their *cost of divorce is lower* (Killewald, 2016; Sayer et al., 2011). Moreover, due to the general scarcity of reconciliation policies and family services, and the persistence of a gender ideology in the division of domestic labor and responsibilities, working women are more likely to experience work-family conflict, often resulting in *high relational stress* (Collins, 2020; Musumeci & Solera, 2013). It follows that jobless women are expected to be less likely to experience union dissolution than permanent employed women (Hypothesis 1a).

We expect to observe the opposite relation for men. Since, in Italy, men are expected to be a family's main provider, jobless men are more likely to exhibit stress and frustration (Kim & Luke, 2020), thereby generating relationship conflict and leading to a higher risk of separation. Moreover, jobless men in a dominant male-breadwinner context do not comply with gender norms and, therefore, could be seen as unsuitable husbands, further increasing *relational stress*. Conversely, men with secure jobs are likely to form more stable relationships as they fit the role of an effective family provider. Therefore, we expect jobless men to more frequently experience union dissolution than permanent employed men (Hypothesis 1b).

4.2 Time-limited jobs

Likewise, we anticipate a different relation between time-limited contracts for women and men (Hypothesis 2). In the Italian context, time-limited forms of employment could represent an unfortunate "solution" to preserve the male-breadwinner family system by allowing women to combine work with domestic and care responsibilities (Kim et al. 2020). Women with time-limited contracts are relatively more able to comply with gender norms in that they could combine work and family responsibilities. Consequently, they should face *lower* levels of relational stress than their permanently employed counterparts. Moreover, since time-limited jobs often confer little-to-no economic independence, and are characterized by certain degrees of uncertainty, women with time-limited work contracts are expected to face a high cost of divorce, since they are not economically independent. It follows that women with fixed-term employment should be less likely to experience union dissolution than permanent employed women (Hypothesis 2a).

Men with time-limited contracts, instead, do not conform to their bread-winner roles and may engender economic hardship and uncertainty for the future of the family. This can lead to high relational stress and exacerbate tensions within couples, resulting in their dissolution. Therefore, time-limited employed men are expected to be more likely to experience union dissolution than permanent employed men (Hypothesis 2b).

4.3 Accumulation of employment instability

As observed in fertility research (Busetta et al., 2019; Özcan et al., 2010; Pailhé & Solaz, 2012), the role of employment instability is likely dependent on its accumulation over a life-course or, in the case of union dissolution, on the accumulation of employment instability over the time

spent in the union (Hypothesis 3). Limited periods of joblessness or time-limited employment may in fact be a contingency, and thus not necessarily influence union dissolution.

As with the previous hypotheses, the effect is likely to differ between genders. For women, the accumulation of jobless or fixed-term employment spells may increase economic dependence on their partners. Moreover, women in relationships who spend significant periods of time jobless, in fixed-term employment, not working, or working a limited time, could be doing so out of a choice to dedicate more time to familial responsibilities. Therefore, for women, we expect to observe a reduction in the risk of dissolution as time spent jobless or with time-limited job increases (Hypothesis 3a).

For men, a short (or relatively short) length of time spent jobless or with unstable positions may be insufficient to generate significant levels of stress within a couple or to be a sign of his unsuitability as a partner. On the contrary, a short spell of employment instability may serve to bring a couple together and strengthen family bonds during a difficult time. However, prolonged employment instability is likely to exacerbate relationship tension and increase the risk of union dissolution. Therefore, according to the amount of time spent in employment instability, the effect may not be monotonic, but instead characterized by a “J-shaped” pattern (Hypothesis 3b).

4.4 Changes across cohorts

We expect gender differences in the relation between employment instability on union dissolution to gradually reduce across cohorts (Hypothesis 4).

As women’s desires and aspirations are experiencing a state of change, and the modern economy requires both partners to work, the economic role of women has not only become more established, but an important source of income for families in recent cohorts. Therefore, as observed in the trendsetters Scandinavian countries, the relation between women’s employment instability and union dissolution in recent cohorts could well have become more similar to that described for men (Hypothesis 4a).

On the other side, as women more actively contribute to a family’s economic status, the uncertainty and economic hardship generated from men’s employment instability should be less significant in recent generations. As such, we expect the disruptive effect of employment instability to reduce in magnitude across cohorts (Hypothesis 4b).

5. Data and methods

Our analysis makes use of micro data from the survey “Families and Social Subjects” carried out by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). The survey provides detailed (monthly) retrospective information on education, employment and career paths, fertility, and partnership histories.

The event under study is the risk of union dissolution, including all first unions, be they cohabitations or marriages. Despite the vast differences between these two types of unions in terms of stability, our choice to include both—and therefore to study union dissolution instead of divorce—was driven by an issue of selectivity, as it has been shown that younger couples (both within and outside of Italy) with unstable jobs generally tend to cohabit rather than marry (Manning, 2020; Vignoli et al., 2016). For non-marital cohabitations, the event of union dissolution corresponds to the reported date of relationship termination and, for marriages, to the date of de-facto separation, i.e., separations not yet accompanied by legal provision. Few cohabitations first turn into marriages, and then end up in union dissolution; for those, the event corresponds to the de facto separation from the marriage. The moment of de facto separation is in fact the moment that marks the dissolution of the marriage and is consistent with the end of the relationships used for non-marital unions.

We combined the 2009 and 2016 surveys in order for the analysis to cover a larger time span. We limited the analysis to working age population (between the ages of 15–60), and excluded those who dissolved their union before their 20s, and whose union lasted less than three months, to differentiate more casual and fleeting relationships from committed non-cohabiting unions. Despite the capacity for individuals above the age of 60 still being active in the labor market, we excluded them from our analysis since they fall into the category of “grey divorces” (Brown & Lin, 2012)—itself a distinct phenomenon. We also cut our sample at 50 and 55 years old, and found that the results were substantially the same. Moreover, we excluded cohorts born before 1950, as divorce in Italy was possible only since 1970, and cohorts born after 1980, as at the time of the interview were still quite young to experience the event of union dissolution. The final sample consists of $N = 14,409$ women and $N = 12,820$ men who entered a first union, including 2,290 non-marital cohabitations, 22,177 direct marriages, and 2,762 cohabitations which in the observed time turned into marriages. Of these, $N = 2,238$ women ($N = 579$ cohabitations and $N = 1,659$ marriages) and $N = 2,016$ men ($N = 775$ cohabitations and $N = 1,241$ marriages) experienced union dissolution.

We employed an event-history model where the baseline risk was specified with a piecewise constant function. With such specifications, we assumed the risks of separation to be constant within each defined time period, yet we allowed for variation across periods. We measured all episodes in months since the beginning of a union.

We ought to reference certain limitations of the data upfront. First, the employment characteristics of ex-partners is not available, thereby excluding the possibility of a couple-level analysis. Moreover, despite the data provides detailed information on past and current employment spells, there is no information on unemployment spells. Therefore, we could only see that the individual was not working, without being able to distinguish between inactivity or unemployment. However, joblessness, over unemployment, has been suggested to be more impactful when studying the consequences of economic constraints on family outcomes (Härkönen, 2011). Many of the social and demographic consequences of economic inactivity are identical to those of unemployment as the key point is whether a person is working or not, not whether they are actively looking for work. For this reason, many studies have expanded their focus to joblessness instead of unemployment (Busetta et al., 2019; Clasen et al., 2006). Following this strand of research, the lack of an indicator of personal unemployment should not compromise our analysis.

To test our hypotheses, we built a number of key explanatory variables measuring different aspects of employment instability (c.f. Pailhé and Solaz, 2012). In order to analyze the relation between current employment conditions and the risk of union dissolution, we built a time-varying variable identifying the respondents' type of contract, which we grouped as *permanent employed* (as reference category), *jobless*, *time-limited employed*, and *self-employed*. Time-limited contractual arrangements include jobs-on-call, job sharing, apprenticeships, training, project-based contracts, seasonal work, and all other types of time-limited employment.

To assess the influence of employment instability accumulation over the course of a relationship, we constructed two additional indicators measuring: the number of months of joblessness; and the number of months working time-limited jobs, over the total number of months since the beginning of the union. In order to more comprehensively understand the patterns of accumulation of employment instability, we coded the two ratios in categories measuring whether the respondent was *never jobless* (reference), *jobless up to 25%*, *between 25% and 50%*, or *more than 50% of the relationship duration*. Similarly, for time-limited work,

whether the respondent was *never in time-limited jobs* (reference), *up to 10%*, *between 10 and 20%*, or *over 20% of the relationship duration*.

The model equation also includes the primary correlates of union dissolutions as identified by the literature: years since union formation; type of union (marriage vs cohabitation); number and age of children; cohort; parental education and separation; and macro-region (Amato, 2010; Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010; Vignoli & Ferro, 2009). Years since union formation, type of union (marriage or cohabitation), and number and age of children are time-varying.

6. Results

Table 1 displays three subsequent models for women and men. The model parameters, produced as maximum-likelihood estimates, are shown in the form of relative risks. All models include the individual-level control variables listed beforehand. Adding to these, model 1 reports the time-varying indicator of the type of work contract; in model 2, employment instability is instead measured through the two cumulative indicators on the percent of relationship time spent in joblessness and fixed-term employment; model 3 includes an interaction term between employment status and cohort. In the latter case, employment status is coded just as working or not working, as temporary jobs were only liberalized since the 1997 “Treu Law”.

Analyzing the results of model 1, we note the confirmation of hypotheses 1–1b. The relation between joblessness and union dissolution is in fact the opposite for women and men (Hypothesis 1); specifically, for women, not having a job reduces the risk of union dissolution by 30% (Hypothesis 1a), while, for men, it increases the risk by more than the double (Hypothesis 1b). Likewise, time-limited employment is associated with a higher risk of union dissolution for men of 34%, while for women the effect is not statistically precise. These findings offer support for hypothesis 2b, and highlight the importance of distinguishing time-limited from permanent employment contracts. Hypothesis 2a, however, is not fully supported, as we do not find a clear effect for women.

Model 2 measures employment instability through the two indicators of accumulation of joblessness and time-limited employment (see also Figure 3). For women, the accumulation of employment instability reduces the risk of union dissolution. Relative to women who continuously work, the risk of union dissolution is 30% lower for women jobless for up to 25%

of the union duration, and 31% lower for women out of the labor force for over half of their union. Thus, women with spells of joblessness experience a lower risk of union dissolution compared to those who continuously work, regardless of the length of time spent out of the labor market. Regarding the accumulation of time-limited jobs, we found a rather different effect. Increasing the time spent in time-limited jobs, gradually raises women's risk of union dissolution, to the extent that women who engage in time limited jobs for more than one fifth of the relationship duration have about 20% higher risk of union dissolution than those who never work time-limited jobs. Despite this result contradicts our hypothesis, it could be explained by the fact that, for women, working in time-limited jobs for a considerable time may actually increase their economic independence relatively to the majority of our women who do not engage in paid work at all. However, results are not statistically precise.

Again, for men we observe a different tendency (Figure 3). As we hypothesized, short periods of joblessness are associated with a lower risk of union dissolution for men, corresponding to a reduction of the risk of 30% for those without a job up to 25% of the relationship. However, men out of work for over half of their relationships see 96% increase in the risk of union dissolution compared to those who never experience periods of joblessness. Thus, our results suggest that a considerable accumulation of joblessness for men is extremely detrimental for relationships. We observe a similar non-monotonic tendency for the accumulation of time-limited employment—though it must be noted that the effects are less defined and not statistically precise. Generally, and in line with Hypothesis 3, the relation between employment instability and union dissolution seems to depend also on its accumulation over the time spent in the relationship. However, Hypothesis 3a is only partly confirmed since the effect of accumulation of time-limited jobs for women does not lead to statistically significant results and furthermore seems to be associated with a higher risk of union dissolution. For men, and in line with what we hypothesized, the effect of accumulation of employment instability appears “J-shaped”.

In model 3 we analyze whether gender differences change across cohorts. For women, there is a sign that the relationship between joblessness and union dissolution is gradually evolving across generations. In the 1955–1959 cohort the risk of dissolution for jobless women is 44% lower relatively to working women in the same cohort, while for jobless women in the two more recent 1960–1964 and 1965–1980 cohorts the risk is, respectively, 42% and 29% lower compared to working women in the same cohort. Therefore, the relation between joblessness and union dissolution is slowly changing for women from one generation to the

next, confirming Hypothesis 4a. Likewise, for men, despite we do not find a clear pattern, we observe that, in the last cohort analyzed, the increase in the risk of dissolution due to joblessness is lower compared to older cohorts, thereby giving support to hypothesis 4b.

Table 1: Relative risk of union dissolution. Piecewise constant exponential model

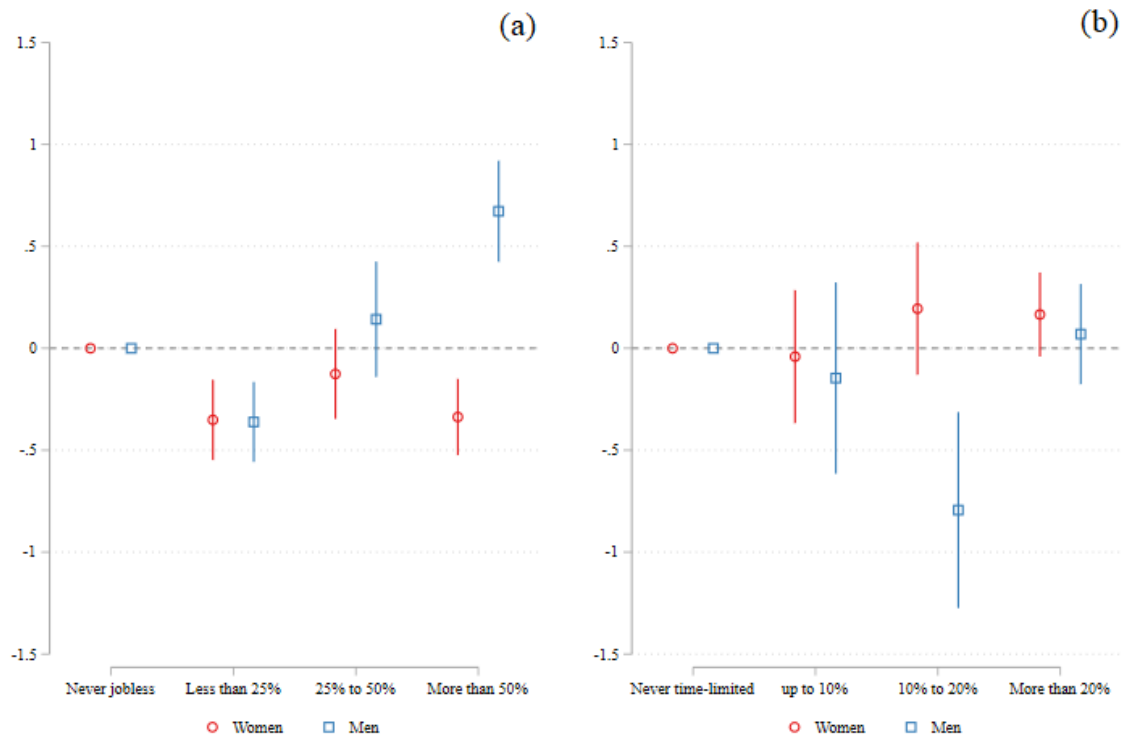
VARIABLES	WOMEN			MEN		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Years since union formation						
<i>1-3</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>4-7</i>	1.69***	1.74***	1.69***	1.63***	1.62***	1.63***
<i>8-14</i>	2.76***	2.93***	2.74***	3.33***	3.24***	3.33***
<i>15-20</i>	8.82***	9.68***	8.76***	8.83***	8.49***	8.81***
<i>20+</i>	39.97***	45.18***	39.62***	40.13***	39.91***	40.59***
NUTS-1 region						
<i>North- east</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>North-west</i>	0.90	0.92	0.90	1.03	1.03	1.03
<i>Center</i>	1.22**	1.21**	1.22**	1.13	1.13	1.14
<i>South</i>	0.74***	0.73***	0.75***	0.83*	0.81*	0.84
<i>Islands</i>	0.86	0.84	0.88	0.97	1.00	0.99
Cohort						
<i>1950-1954</i>	0.62***	0.62***	0.50***	0.41***	0.46***	0.45***
<i>1955-1959</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>1960-1964</i>	1.90***	1.91***	1.87***	2.02***	2.05***	2.39***
<i>1965-1980</i>	6.50***	6.63***	6.09***	4.05***	4.12***	4.47***
Cohabitation (Ref. Marriage)	7.08***	7.22***	7.12***	10.38***	10.36***	10.63***
Children						
<i>Childless</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>1 age 0-6</i>	0.38***	0.37***	0.38***	0.34***	0.34***	0.34***
<i>1 age 7+</i>	0.56***	0.56***	0.56***	0.42***	0.42***	0.43***
<i>2 youngest 0-6</i>	0.26***	0.26***	0.26***	0.22***	0.23***	0.22***
<i>2 youngest 7+</i>	0.31***	0.31***	0.31***	0.24***	0.24***	0.24***
<i>3 or more</i>	0.35***	0.34***	0.35***	0.29***	0.31***	0.30***
Parents do not live together	2.26***	2.25***	2.27***	1.17	1.18	1.15
At least one parent is highly educated	1.59***	1.57***	1.59***	1.52***	1.53***	1.54***

Table 1 continued

Education						
<i>None or elementary</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lower secondary	1.11	1.14	1.11	1.03	0.98	1.01
Upper secondary	1.45**	1.50***	1.46**	1.31*	1.23	1.28
Tertiary	1.82***	1.92***	1.84***	1.59***	1.56**	1.58***
Employment status and type of contract						
<i>Permanent</i>	1			1		
Jobless	0.70***			2.12***		
Time-limited	1.13			1.34**		
Self-employed	0.98			1.27***		
% of relationship time in joblessness						
<i>Never jobless</i>		1			1	
Up to 25% of time		0.70***			0.70***	
25% to 50%		0.88			1.15	
More than 50%		0.71***			1.96***	
% of relationship time in time-limited employment						
<i>Never time-limited</i>		1			1	
Up to 10% of time		0.96			0.86	
10% to 20%		1.21			0.45***	
More than 20%		1.18			1.07	
Cohort * Jobless						
<i>Cohort * Work</i>			1			1
1950-1954 * Jobless			0.98			2.00***
1955-1959 * Jobless			0.56***			3.23***
1960-1964 * Jobless			0.58***			1.00
1965-1980 * Jobless			0.71***			1.89***
Individuals	14409	14409	14409	12820	12820	12820
Failures	2238	2238	2238	2016	2016	2016

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Figure 3: Coefficients plot of union dissolution for women and men according to the accumulation of joblessness (a) and time-limited work (b) over the relationship.



Source: Own computation of 2009 and 2016 Istat survey data “Families and Social Subjects”

6.1 Additional analysis

One final issue requires clarification. In this article, we have relied on the observed order of events (e.g., employment entry and union dissolution). It is worth considering that such a strategy may lead to an upward bias in the effect of women’s employment on the risk of union dissolution if women increase their involvement in the labor market as a direct response to a decline in their relationship satisfaction and fear for disruption (Oppenheimer et al., 1997; Özcan & Breen, 2012; Vignoli et al., 2018). Support for such anticipatory adjustments can be found in the empirical literature for Italy (Vignoli et al., 2018). Thus, as a sensitivity check, we re-estimated a set of models excluding those women who entered the labor market during the three years preceding union disruption. After excluding these cases, results are substantially unmuted, however, we notice that the association between women’s time-limited employment and union dissolution, which in table 1 is positive but non statistically significant, becomes negative, despite the term is non-statistically precise. These slight changes may suggest that

women unsatisfied with their current relationships started working—perhaps even accepting precarious jobs—in view of a possible separation.

Table 2: Relative risk of union dissolution for women, excluding those who started a new job within 3 years before the end of the union. Piecewise constant exponential model

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)
Cohort			
1950-1954	1.59***	1.59***	1.91***
1955-1959	1	1	1
1960-1964	3.08***	3.07***	3.63***
1965-1980	10.13***	10.35***	10.93***
Employment status and type of contract			
<i>Permanent</i>	1		
Jobless	0.78***		
Time-limited	0.97		
Self-employed	1.00		
% of relationship time in joblessness			
<i>Never jobless</i>		1	
Up to 25% of time		0.64***	
25% to 50%		0.82*	
More than 50%		0.64***	
% of relationship time in time-limited employment			
<i>Never time-limited</i>		1	
Up to 10% of time		0.82	
10% to 20%		1.25	
More than 20%		1.11	
Cohort * Jobless			
<i>Cohort * Work</i>			
1950-1954 * Jobless			1.01
1955-1959 * Jobless			0.60***
1960-1964 * Jobless			0.63**
1965-1980 * Jobless			0.85
Women	14233	14233	14233
Failures	2026	2026	2026

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. Model controlled for all variables presented in Table 1.

7. Conclusion and discussion

The present study adds to the growing literature investigating the link between economic uncertainty and family dynamics addressing the relation between employment instability and union dissolution. Employment instability could either reduce the risk of union dissolution by rising its relative costs, or increase the risk by exacerbating stress and conflict within the relationship (Amato & Beattie, 2010; Cohen, 2014; Fischer & Liefbroer, 2006). The present study overcomes several limitations of prior research by providing novel evidence diachronically and through the lens of gender. We studied the Italian context through the most reliable and extensive retrospective data available. These data allowed us to scrutinize the effect of time-constant and time-varying characteristics, and to observe cohorts from 1950 to 1980.

Our results suggest that the effect of employment instability on union dissolution is gender-specific. Joblessness represents a facilitator for men's dissolution and an inhibitor for women's dissolution. Our results highlight the importance of distinguishing time-limited from permanent employment, as the former has been found to substantially increase the risk of union dissolution for men, while no clear effect has been found for women. The gendered effect of employment instability on union dissolution is deeply rooted in relevant gender differences in allocation of time and responsibilities between paid and unpaid work in Italy. Instability of employment careers renders women economically dependent on their husbands, contributing to rise the economic and social cost of a separation. On the other side, men's instability of employment careers might generate relational stress, as the male partner is the main income provider. In addition, in a dominant male-breadwinner context, men's employment instability clashes with prevailing gender norms.

Nonetheless, the relation between employment instability and union dissolution appears much more complex than it might seem at first glance. Without accounting for the persistence of employment instability, the emergent pattern is partial and simplistic. Indeed, our results show that the relation between employment instability and union dissolution is not monotonic. For men, the initial effect of employment instability appears to be a rise in the cost of divorce, substantially reducing the risk of dissolution. Only when employment instability becomes persistent up to a certain level does relational stress kick in and increase the risk of dissolution. In particular, a relevant accumulation of joblessness for men appears to be especially detrimental for relationships. On the whole, a "J-shaped" association emerges

between instability of employment careers and union dissolution. For women, however, the accumulation of joblessness remains associated with a lower dissolution risk relative to women who continuously work, regardless of the length of time spent without a paid job.

Interestingly, we find traces of changes in the relation between employment and union dissolution across generations. For women, although joblessness is associated to a lower risk of dissolution for all generations, such risk gradually increases from the oldest to the youngest cohort, suggesting a possible future reversal. Likewise, we observe a sign of change in the relationship between men's joblessness and union dissolution as well; in the last cohort examined, the increase in the dissolution risk due to joblessness is lower compared to older cohorts.

Our study has its limitations. First, as the Istat survey does not include information on ex-partners, we were unable to explore both sides to the couples in the analysis; thus, we could control only for the respondent's information in predicting dissolution risk. However, it has previously been suggested that information on both partners' contributions to paid and unpaid work are needed to properly assess the effect of women's employment on union dissolution (Mencarini & Vignoli, 2018; Oláh & Gahler, 2014; Sigle-Rushton, 2010). Second, the data does not allow us to distinguish unemployment from inactivity. Despite joblessness having been proven to be a valid indicator of employment instability in family research (Busetta et al., 2019; Härkönen, 2011), we acknowledge that unemployment and inactivity may have different roles in exacerbating stress or influencing the cost of separation.

In sum, our study provides novel insights into the role of employment instability on union dissolution, and categorically rejects the notion of any simple, uniform, and unidirectional relationship. Our findings emphasize the importance of fully considering different dimensions of employment instability including distinguishing between time-limited and permanent employment contracts, considering the role of accumulation of instability in employment careers, and elucidating differences of gender and cohorts. Further research is needed to understand whether our results can be extended to other countries and contexts.

8. References

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