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The last bastion is falling: Survey evidence of the new demographic reality in Italy

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Abstract

The study makes use of the 2016 Household Multipurpose Survey of Family, Social Subjects, and Life Cycle (FSS) to demonstrate that family-related behaviour is now rapidly changing in Italy. The country is often taken as a stronghold of traditionalism. We, instead, highlight recent and substantial changes in cohabitation, dissolution and non-marital fertility in the country. In doing so, we carefully assess the predictions made by the Second Demographic Transition (SDT), and show that trends in Italy are monotonically moving in the direction of the SDT. There are, though, important differences across educational groups and regions. Demographic behaviour is also changing in the South of Italy in much the same way, but not at the same speed as in the rest of the country.

Keywords
Second demographic transition; Marriage; Non-marital cohabitation; Childbearing; Union dissolution.

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1 Introduction

The Second Demographic Transition (SDT) remains a key conceptual framework for explaining the diffusion of new family demographic behaviour in almost all developed countries. Drawing on seminal work by Inglehart (1971), Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa argued (for the first time in a Dutch language article in 1986) that a new pattern was emerging. Cohabitation was replacing marriage, fertility was being postponed, and more children were being born out of wedlock. This, it was suggested, might be the result of the process of individualization permeating the Western world. In other words, through value change, progressive independence of individuals made self-realization, psychological well-being and personal freedom of expression increasingly important. The family ceased to be as central as it had previously been (Van de Kaa 1987). Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa pointed to secularization, age-structure and urbanization as the key drivers for these new patterns of demographic behaviour. Later it was also acknowledged that certain structural changes played a role. Women's empowerment arising from educational expansion and their increased participation in the labour force gradually improved gender equality, which also undoubtedly accelerated the process of individualization and its associated value changes. The SDT is presented as a diffusion process (Casterline, 2001) where new behaviour was first implemented by "fore-runners". It was only then gradually adopted by the general population.

One important SDT prediction is that there will eventually be convergence with the new demographic behaviour spreading across all Western countries. The idea of convergence has prompted much debate about the validity of the SDT: not least because the empirical evidence for convergence has been uneven. In particular, some Western countries appear to be lagging behind in SDT terms. Within a debate about whether the SDT is a useful concept for demography, published in the 2004 Vienna Yearbook for Population Research, Micheli underlined that the SDT is taking place within longstanding territorial cleavages. Convergence, argued Micheli, was a long way off. He reflected, for instance, on how Southern Europe particularly challenges this convergence process:

"*Generally (even in the era of globalisation) groups tend to be rooted in a territorial niche and in a subculture or 'folklore': they act on 'telluric' principles. Their demographic behaviour is thus embedded in the local anthropological structures and practises, as the outcome of a gradual sedimentation along time."* (Micheli 2004: 30)

Within Southern Europe, Italy is often given as argument against SDT trends. The family has remained pivotal and traditional attitudes towards demographic behaviour have prevailed. Being part of the "Mediterranean model", characterized by weak social protection and by strong family ties (e.g., Reher, 1998; Viazzo, 2003; Dalla Zuanna and Micheli, 2004), Italy is frequently classified as "traditional" in terms of value orientations, a result not least of the influence of the Catholic Church (Caltabiano et al., 2006; Vignoli and Salvini, 2014). In light of these characteristics, some have argued that the adoption of "innovative" family behaviours, as observed in so many other countries, may not materialize in Italy, or at least not reach the same levels as seen elsewhere (e.g., Reher, 1998; Nazio and Blossfeld, 2003). The only indicator strongly inconsistent with Italian traditionalism would be its forty-year history of low fertility. Indeed, Italy is for many a conundrum: a highly traditional society, where fertility declined precociously and to unprecedented levels, giving rise to the term *lowest-low fertility* (Kohler et al., 2002), a pattern accompanied by extraordinary childbearing postponement. Today the mean age of childbearing among Italian women stands at 32 years and the Total Fertility Rate is now below 1.3 (1.24 in 2022, ISTAT 2023). The contrast is tricking with the Nordic countries, where new demographic behaviour has been accompanied by "healthy" fertility rates, at least until the recent fertility drop from 2010 onwards (Comolli et al. 2021).

The present study contests the widely held view that Italy is a homogeneous family-oriented country. After showing period family demographic macro trends, this study delves into cohort changes in family-related behaviours, as well as their social and geographical gradient. We use micro-level event history analyses on the most recent survey data for the country to do so.

2 SDT, a debated concept

"*In my view it is really impossible to understand the demographic changes that have occurred in Europe, and in many other industrialised countries as well, since the mid-1960s, without accepting the idea that the many and very varied changes we have observed in a whole series of demographic variables are interrelated and may in their totality be indicative of, and represent, the manifestation of a change in demographic regime.*" (van de Kaa 2004: 4)

These words were used by van de Kaa to describe the very essence of the SDT narrative at the 2003 European Population Conference in Warsaw in a debate around the usefulness for demography of the concept of the SDT (Billari and Liefbroer 2004; van de Kaa 2004; Bernhardt 2004; Coleman 2004; Micheli 2004). The quote is indicative of the foundation of the SDT, which posits that a new freedom in sexual behaviour, the diversity in forms of sexual partnership, and the relaxation of traditional norms and constraints observed in many wealthy countries since the 1960s, are part of a common process. The SDT is facilitated by parallel trends in economic growth, emancipation through education and paid work (especially among women) and the concomitant ease of diffusion in ideas. The SDT is likely to be irreversible and will progressively involve all wealthy societies.

Apart from concluding that the term *revolution,* rather than *transition,* fits the SDT narrative better, opponents have argued that the SDT concept only works for North-Western Europe, since elsewhere there is weaker evidence of the SDT (e.g., Coleman 2004; Micheli 2004). As the SDT stresses the importance of ideational changes in bringing about certain demographic behaviours, it also prescribes a process in which family and fertility behaviour will *converge* to a common "standard". This standard is the one set by societies that are considered to be most advanced in the SDT, i.e., the Scandinavian countries. However, the convergence argument has been questioned by the persistent divide between the "new" family patterns of north-western Europe and the more traditional family behaviors in southern European societies. Still, a new population-wide behavior never appears instantaneously; rather, it initially emerges among certain population sub-groups – the so-called trendsetters, or forerunners – who are usually to be found at the upper end of the socio-economic strata. Their ideas, if "appealing", spread across all strata, much as happened with the first Demographic Transition in Europe (Livi Bacci 1986). This argument also lies at the heart of Goode's (1962, 1970, 1993) studies: initially, only couples from the highest social strata would have the intellectual and economic means to go through with divorce. But as the acceptability of divorce becomes more widespread, and the legal and economic barriers fell away, the socio-economic gradient of divorce weakened, and could even reverse its sign. Goode thus argued that marriage dissolution would, in all likelihood, eventually become more common among those placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Women's economic empowerment – most often expressed by women's education – has been considered an important factor in the emergence of new patterns of family behaviour by advocates of the SDT framework (e.g., Bumpass, 1990; Lesthaeghe, 2010). We might, therefore, expect to find that highly educated individuals are at the forefront in the shift in family formation and dissolution. They are more likely than their less educated counterparts to

hold liberal values, and they are, therefore, more likely to challenge prevailing social norms. The foundation of this view is clear in Lesthaeghe's more recent words in presenting the SDT narrative:

"*We [i.e. Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa] were convinced that below replacement fertility was going to be a lasting feature, and that pre-marital cohabitation was going to expand in Europe. We had both lived through the cultural changes of the 1960s that questioned all forms of authority. And we based our argument on the fact that an era of much more individual discretion and autonomy was in the making, spurred on by a newly expanding educated 'post-materialist' elite (Inglehart, 1977). We were not the only ones who thought along similar lines: in France Philippe Ariès (1980) and Louis Roussel (1983) were equally convinced that a page had been turned.*" (Lesthaeghe 2020: 2)

Nonetheless, a critique advanced against the SDT concerns the *engine* of its diffusion after 1970 (Perelli-Harris, et al., 2010; Sobotka, 2008): the idea that more highly-educated individuals pioneered the diffusion of new family life courses does not always align with empirical evidence. In many societies, women with lower levels of education are more likely to have children while cohabiting. Evidence of this pattern is found not only in the United States (Rindfuss, Morgan, & Offutt, 1996; Upchurch et al., 2002; Ventura, 2009), but also in some European countries (Perelli-Harris, et al., 2010). A negative educational gradient is also reported for the diffusion of cohabitation for a large number of Latin American countries (Esteve, Lesthaeghe, & López-Gay, 2012). These empirical findings have been used to advance the "Pattern of Disadvantage" hypothesis (Perelli-Harris, et al., 2010). According to this thesis, the rise in cohabitation, and childbearing within it, was due to a worsening in living conditions among poorer segments of the population. It was not, as the SDT argues, driven by a "cultural revolution" led by the young, the secular and the educated. Individuals facing poor economic opportunities (who, therefore, felt economic uncertainty more strongly), might opt for cohabitation over marriage because the former union type requires a lower level of commitment. Alternatively, they might decide to postpone marriage until they felt less uncertain about their future income opportunities (see also Oppenheimer, 1994; Kalmijn, 2011).

The present paper follows up on the SDT debate by focusing on Italy, a country that has been a prime example of the so-called "Southern or Mediterranean model", with low level social protection but very strong family ties (e.g., Reher 1998), and classified as "traditional" because of Catholic influence. Moreover, weak state support to the family is also a peculiarity

of Southern countries (Dominguez et al. 2007). The Catholic Church has maintained a strong presence in the socialization of young people, and this is more marked in Italy compared to other European contexts such as, for example, France or even Spain (Caltabiano, Dalla Zuanna, and Rosina, 2006). At the same time, parents tend to discourage non-normative behaviour in their offspring, and even their adult children feel themselves to be under great pressure when making their own choices (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli, 2004; Di Giulio and Rosina, 2007; Vignoli and Salvini, 2014; Guetto et al., 2016). In light of these specificities some scholars suggest that the adoption of cohabitation and marital dissolution among Italians will remain at lower levels than the rest of Europe (e.g., Reher 1998). In line with this assumption, it was anticipated that differences among social groups would persist over time as the diffusion process by social strata was stagnant (e.g., Nazio and Blossfeld 2003).

Nonetheless, already more than forty years ago, De Sandre (1980) demonstrated an increase in marital instability among women of high socio-economic status in the first half of the 1970s. This finding was later confirmed, among others, by De Rose (1992) and Vignoli and Ferro (2009) using micro data. More recently, during a rapid rise in separations, Salvini and Vignoli (2011) found evidence of a reversal in the educational gradient, as the rate of separation was increasing more abruptly among the less educated, while plateauing among the highly educated. As for the rise in cohabitation, educated women initiated its diffusion in Italy, but the educational gradient is becoming neutralized, or even negative, among the younger cohorts who are increasingly more likely to enter cohabitation as a first union (Guetto et al. 2016). In the following we show that, despite being all-too-often pitched as traditional in terms of family dynamics, Italy is currently undergoing a *revolution* (Bernhardt 2004; van de Kaa 2004) in family formation and dissolution patterns.

3 Data and analytical strategy

Conveniently, for better understanding the underlying drivers of the new emerging form of Italian family behaviour, the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) implemented in 2016 a retrospective individual level survey entitled “Families, Social Subjects, and Life Cycle” (FSS). The survey consists of 32,000 individuals aged eighteen or more. Each individual was randomly selected from municipal registry lists, according to a sampling design aimed at constituting a statistically representative sample of the resident population. The overall response rate of the survey was greater than 80%. The 2016 FSS survey contains a wealth of information about

individuals' and families' daily lives, including fertility, partnership, education and employment histories recorded with the precision of the month.

With this survey data we are able to focus in on three outcomes: (i) first union formation, distinguishing between marriage and cohabitation; (ii) non marital childbearing (where union status is modelled at birth); and (iii) marital separation (considering the moment of legal separation). For each one of these outcomes, we estimate a discrete time regression model to estimate the predicted probabilities for experiencing the event – i.e., of entering marriage or cohabitation; of having the first child in marriage or in cohabitation; of dissolving a marital union. Our aim was to document family-related trends over time. A competing risks specification is used in the models referring to union formation and union type childbearing.

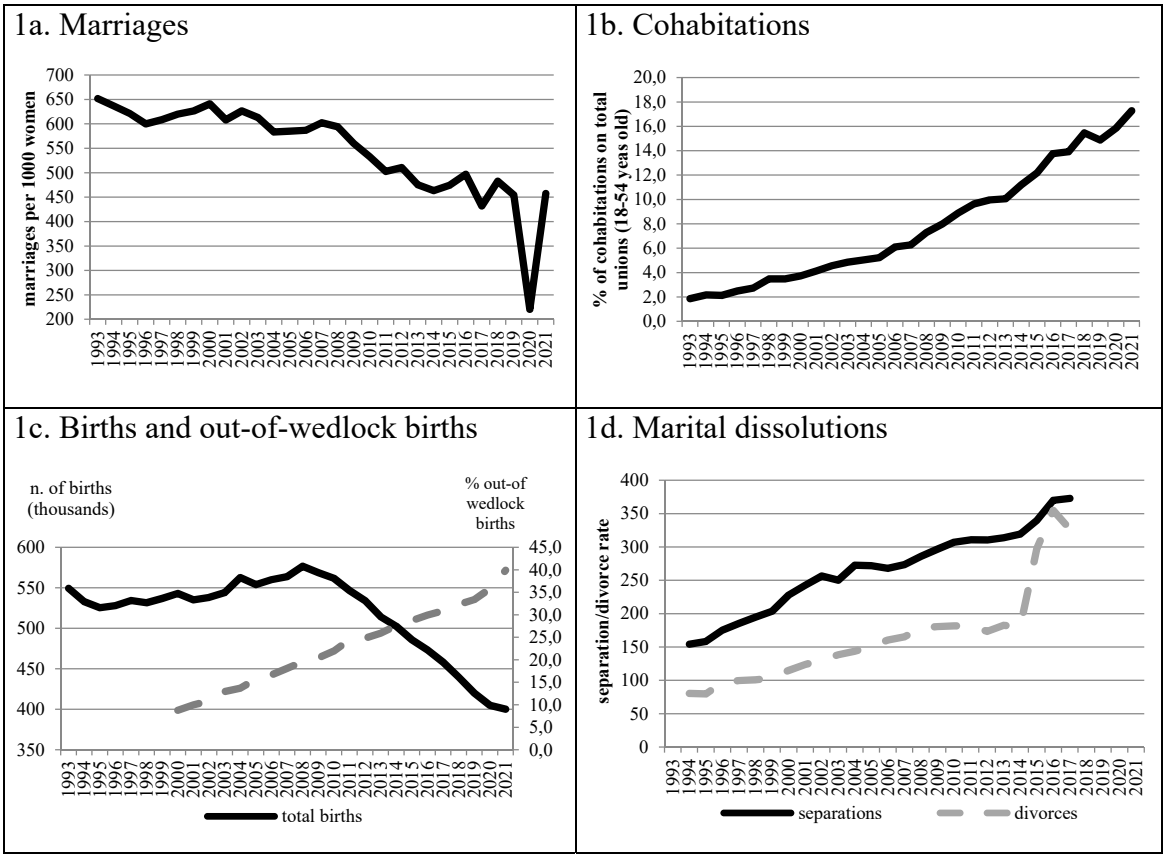
We first show recent trends using aggregated data from ISTAT. Though indicative of trends, they might mask compositional changes. We then deal with this weakness, by presenting predicted probabilities based on the survey responses for: 1) entry into marriage and cohabitation estimated with the help of a competing risk specification; 2) having, respectively, first and second births; and 3) marital separation. These results come from event history models standardized for a set of socio-demographic factors (Hoem 1991, 1993). The method enables us to investigate underlying behaviour as it allows us to account for compositional changes in the population over time. These are changes that may influence family related trends, or in other words, estimate changes in the "force" of these behaviours across cohorts (Andersson 1998). Factors include gender; area of residence (at interview[3], categorized into: North, Centre, and South and Islands); and educational level (time varying categorized into: *lower-secondary*, *upper-secondary*, and *higher education* levels). Given the relevance that social origins play in Italian family life (Guetto et al. 2022), we also include controls for: parental separation (*no/yes)*; parental education differentiating between *lower-secondary* vs. *upper-secondary or higher education*; and mother's occupational status (when the respondent was aged fifteen, categorized into: *employed*, *not employed*). Throughout we include interactions between birth cohorts and the individual's educational level, parental education, and area of residence. Because the social gradient (and its change over time) differs between women and men (e.g. Matysiak et al. 2014), we also segment the analysis by gender.

[3] Italian internal mobility has been mainly confined to short distances in the last decades (De Rose and Strozza 2015). To limit the risk of "anticipatory analysis" (Hoem and Kreyenfeld 2006), we included a covariate describing the macro-region of residence.

4 Key trends in Italy

Figure 1 shows the trends in key family behaviours for the last quarter century. Although marriage continues to be central and popular among Italian couples, it is clearly no longer the only way to form a co-residential union. The decline began slowly and at an irregular pace in the late 1990s, but from 2008 onwards, the marriage rate started an unexpected and fast decline. This was likely intensified by the Great Recession (Figure 1a). From about 600 marriages for every 1000 women registered in 2008, Italy moved to fewer than 500 in 2018. In addition, during the last two decades the proportion of marriages established with a civil ceremony increased from less than 20% to 50% of all marriages.

Figure 1 – Trends in family behaviours: Italy, 1993-2021



Source: Own processing of National Statistical Office data

This is an astounding development, since back in the early 1970s, only 2% were civil marriages, and a clear confirmation of the secular wave, which has so often been argued to drive the SDT. This points to traditional attitudes and norms, in part imposed by the Catholic Church, now weakening. At the same time, non-marital unions are becoming increasingly popular (Figure

1b). Whereas the current level is still modest compared to that of Nordic countries, the trend is remarkable. These changes are closely mirrored by the trend in out of wedlock childbearing, which has tripled since the beginning of the 21st century (Figure 1c). Currently, above one third of children are born in non-marital unions. This increase is even more remarkable considering the steady reduction in the absolute number of new-born children, as reflected on the left-hand axis in Figure 1c. The softening of the institution of marriage is also visible through the rate of dissolutions. Whereas about 80 marriages out of 1000 concluded with a divorce at the beginning of the 1990s, the divorce rate has passed 300 in recent years (Figure 1d). This value is somewhat overestimated due to a recent change in the divorce law that has reduced the time needed to file divorce proceedings after legal separation, from three years to one year. There has been an anticipation, then, in the relevant quota of divorces which would have been recorded in subsequent years. But there is no question that data concerning legal separation rates show a clear increasing trend in marital disruption during the last three decades. These macro trends suggest that Italian family behaviours are changing substantially.

5. Social gradient of the Italian SDT

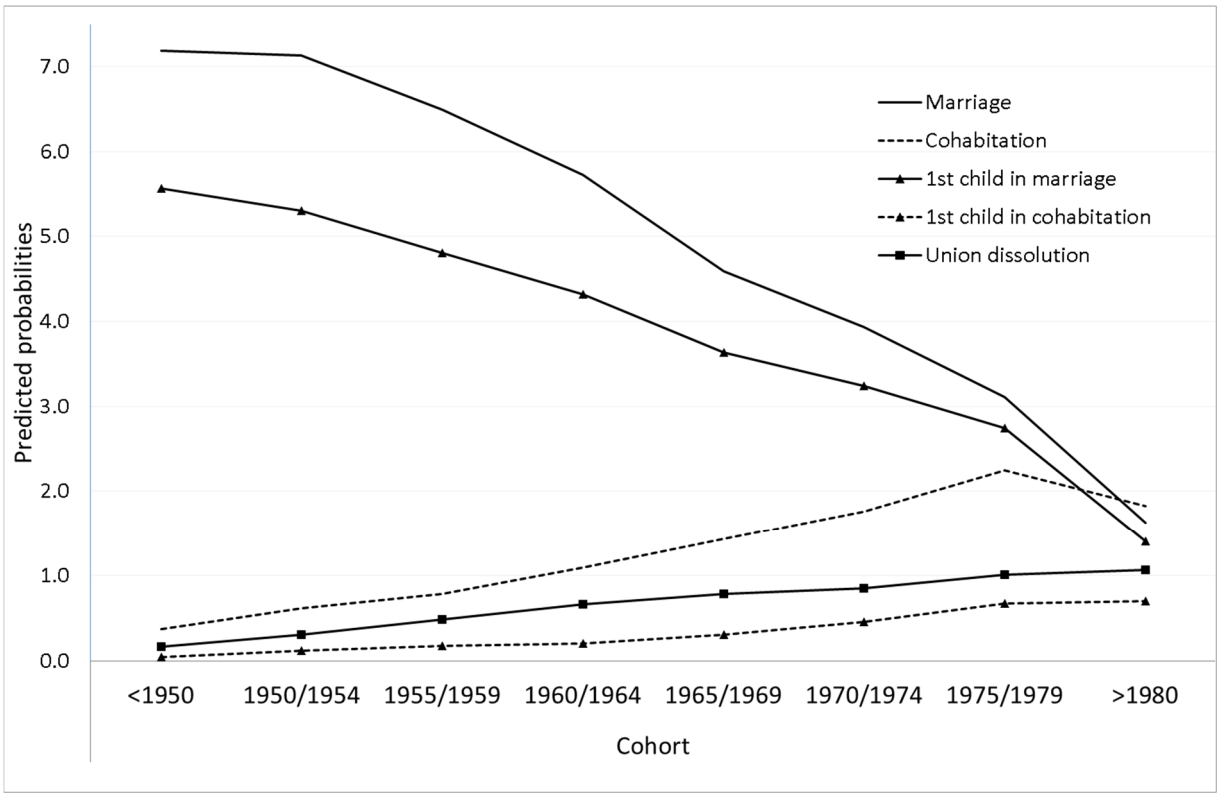
5.1 Cohort differences

The macro trends are reflected by cohort differences (Figure 2). The full set of parameter estimates are presented in Appendix [Tables A1-A3]. Starting with union formation (Figure 2), for the oldest cohort (those born before 1950), the probability for entering a first union through cohabitation was close to zero, but from this cohort onwards, the pattern is dramatic. The probability for marrying rapidly falls for Italians born in the late 1950s and 1960s, and then although less intensely, the decrease continues for the following cohorts. Simultaneously, the trend for cohabitation goes in the opposite direction, with the probability of cohabitation slowly increasing cohort by cohort.

When looking to the first birth event (Figure 2), we see that, for the older cohorts, children tended to be born exclusively within marriage and the probability of having children out of wedlock was virtually zero. But again, we see a tremendous shift across cohorts, and for the youngest ones the first child is more likely to be born outside rather than in wedlock.

The pattern of union dissolution shows a similar trend (again Figure 2). Though we are having a small number of events for the youngest cohort, we see that union dissolution is becoming commonplace among the younger cohorts.

Figure 2 – Estimated predicted probabilities of marriage, cohabitation, first child in marriage and in cohabitation, and union dissolution



Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

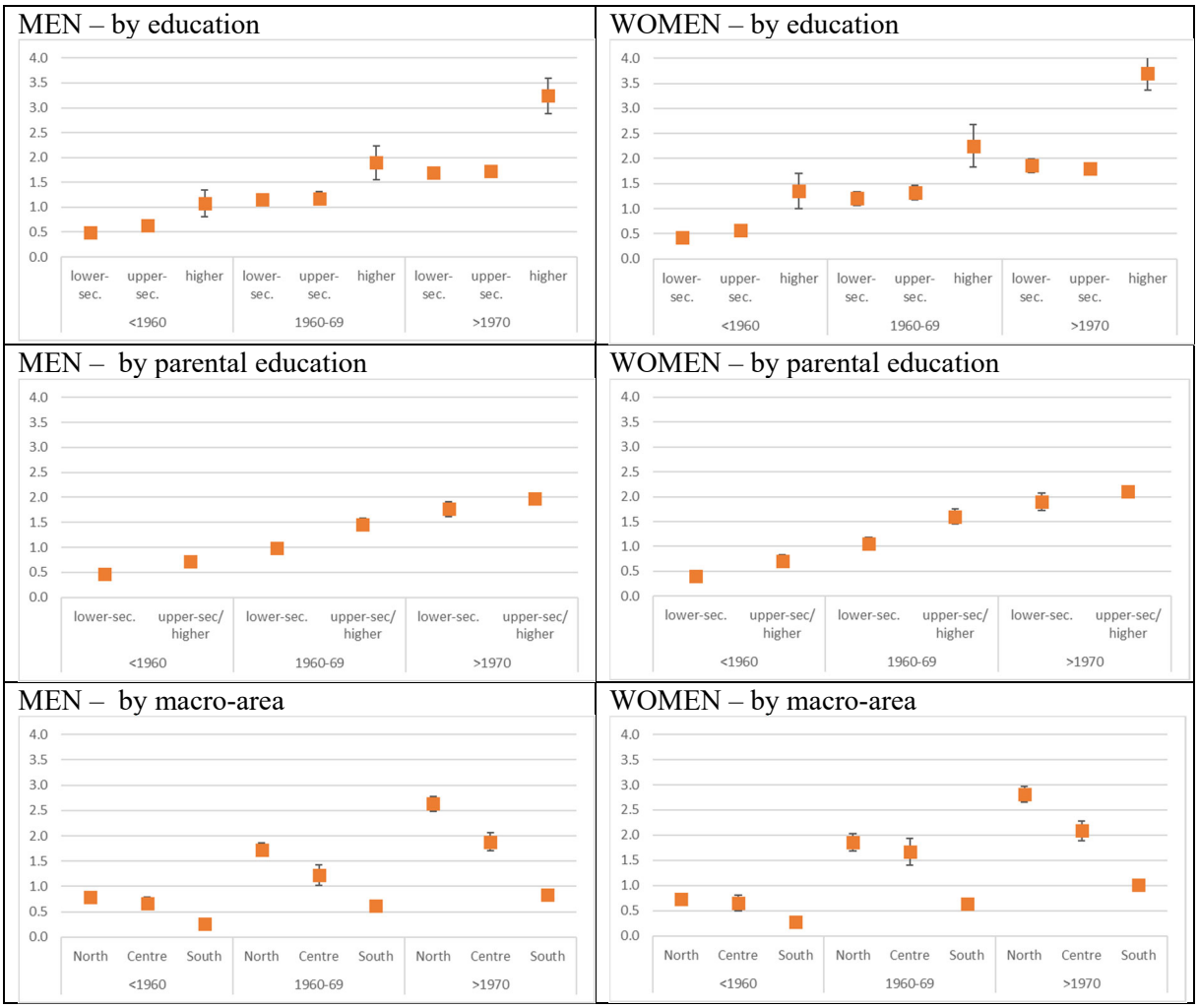
5.2 The role of education and geographical differences

In order to understand the existence of specific forerunners groups, once background characteristics are controlled for, we consider the effects of (respondents' and their parents') education and region of residence. The region of residence is divided into the North, Centre and the South. Regions are important in Italy since there has always been a substantial North – South divide in a range of indicators – not least economically and in terms of social norms. The specific interest here lies in whether the observed macro changes are taking place mainly in the North, or, happening on a broader scale across the country. Models are estimated separately for men and women, and the models for union formation and childbearing account for competing risks.

We first focus on the effect of education, at the individual and parental level, looking at the estimates of union formation by education. From Figure 3 we observe the "innovative" behaviour of non-marital cohabitation, and whereas the probability to cohabit increases across cohorts, also the effects of education changes. For the older cohorts of men, those with higher

education spear to be more likely to cohabit, although the effect of education was minimal. For the two younger cohorts, those with higher education are considerably more likely to enter unions through cohabitation. Among women, we find those with higher education to have considerably higher risk of cohabitation than those with medium and low education. This is especially the case for the youngest cohort, but already present in the oldest ones. For the youngest cohort, it is still the case that, in general, women with higher education have higher risk of cohabitation.

Figure 3 – Cohabitation: Predicted probabilities, among men and women, of cohabiting by cohort, educational level, geographical region, and parental education.



Note: CI for approximate 5% significance level for the comparison of pairs of predicted probabilities.
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

We also see that men and women with low and medium education have a similar likelihood to opt for cohabitation. These results on the effect of education by gender and generation are consistent with the SDT idea that those with higher education are the forerunners. The educational trend across cohorts is somewhat similar in terms of parental education (see again Figure 3). The educational gradient, though, is smaller and it is reduced for the youngest cohort, for both men and women.

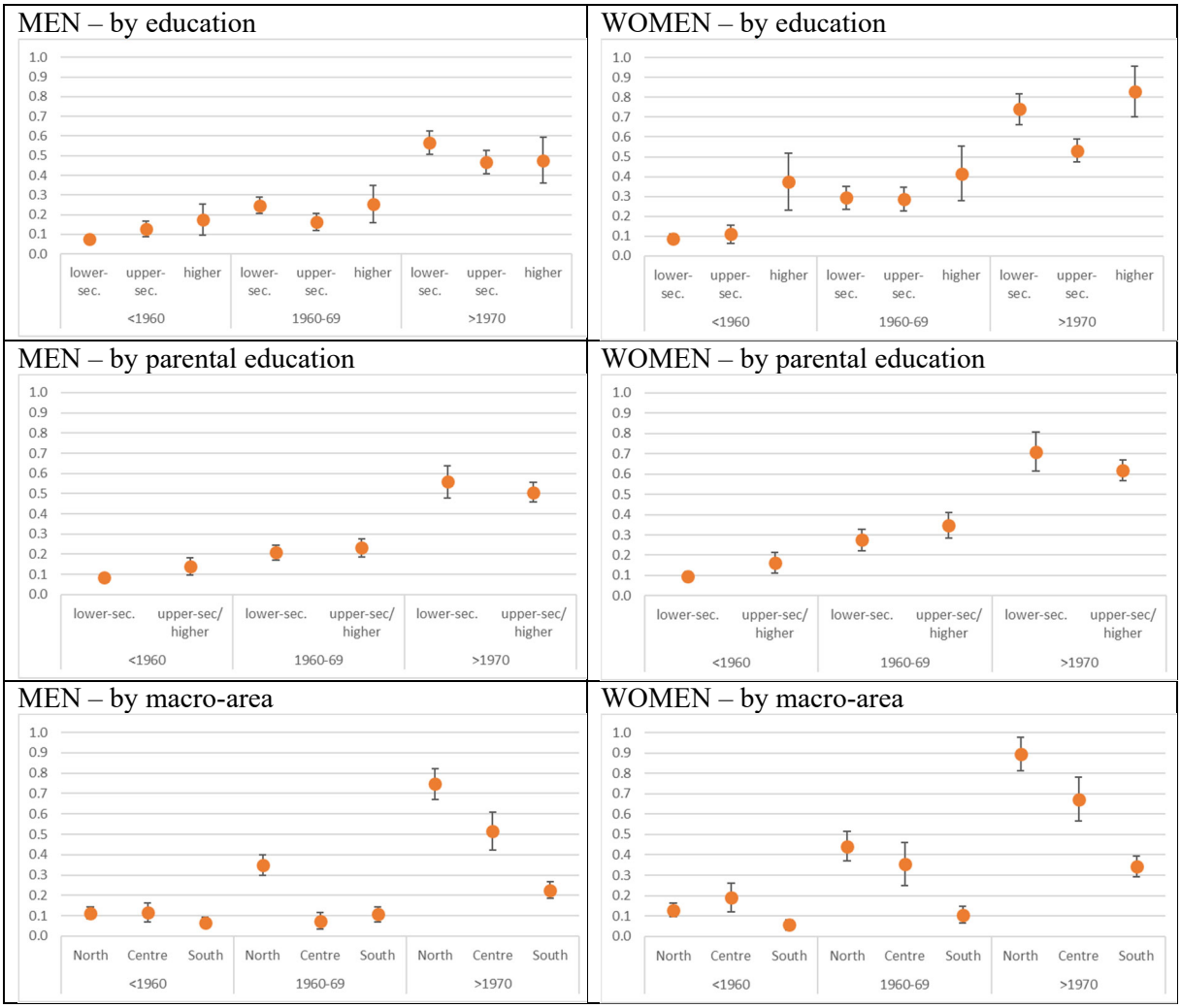
When we look at the regional patterns, the story is even more familiar. In the South, men have a much lower probability of cohabiting compared to those in the Centre and the North, however the declining trend is evident across all the three geographical areas. Whereas the trend in the predicted probability of cohabitation is positive, again everywhere, we see a much sharper increase for those living in the North, regardless of gender.

Figure 4 shows the estimated probability of having the first child in a non-marital union, and again we show estimates by (respondents' and their parents') educational groups and geographic region. For men, the probability of having the first child within a cohabiting union is increasing cohort by cohort, but there is no strong difference across the educational levels. For women, instead, we see a particular peak among the highest educated in the oldest cohort (born before 1960), where the probability of having a child outside the wedlock was considerably higher. For the youngest cohort, there is an indication that the probability is higher for groups with high and low education, giving support to both the SDT and the POD narratives. Educational differences are smaller when considering parental education, for both men and women.

The patterns across regions are very similar to what we saw for union formation: those living in the northern regions have a higher probability of the first child in a cohabiting union, with respect to the other two macro areas. Again, in so far this reflects the fact higher speed in the North of the diffusion of the SDT.

Indeed, similarly and complementary, are the changes across cohorts in the more "traditional" behaviours, such as marriage as the form of first union and birth of first child within marriage (Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix). Beside a general decrease in the likelihood of marrying (without first cohabiting) and having the first child within marriage, education loses its relevance across cohorts, especially for men. However, the probability to marry remains a bit higher in the Southern regions, whereas in the likelihood of childbearing within marriage, there is no discernible difference across Italy.

Figure 4 – First child out-of-wedlock. Predicted probabilities, among men and women, of having the first child in cohabitation by cohort, educational level, geographical region and parental education.

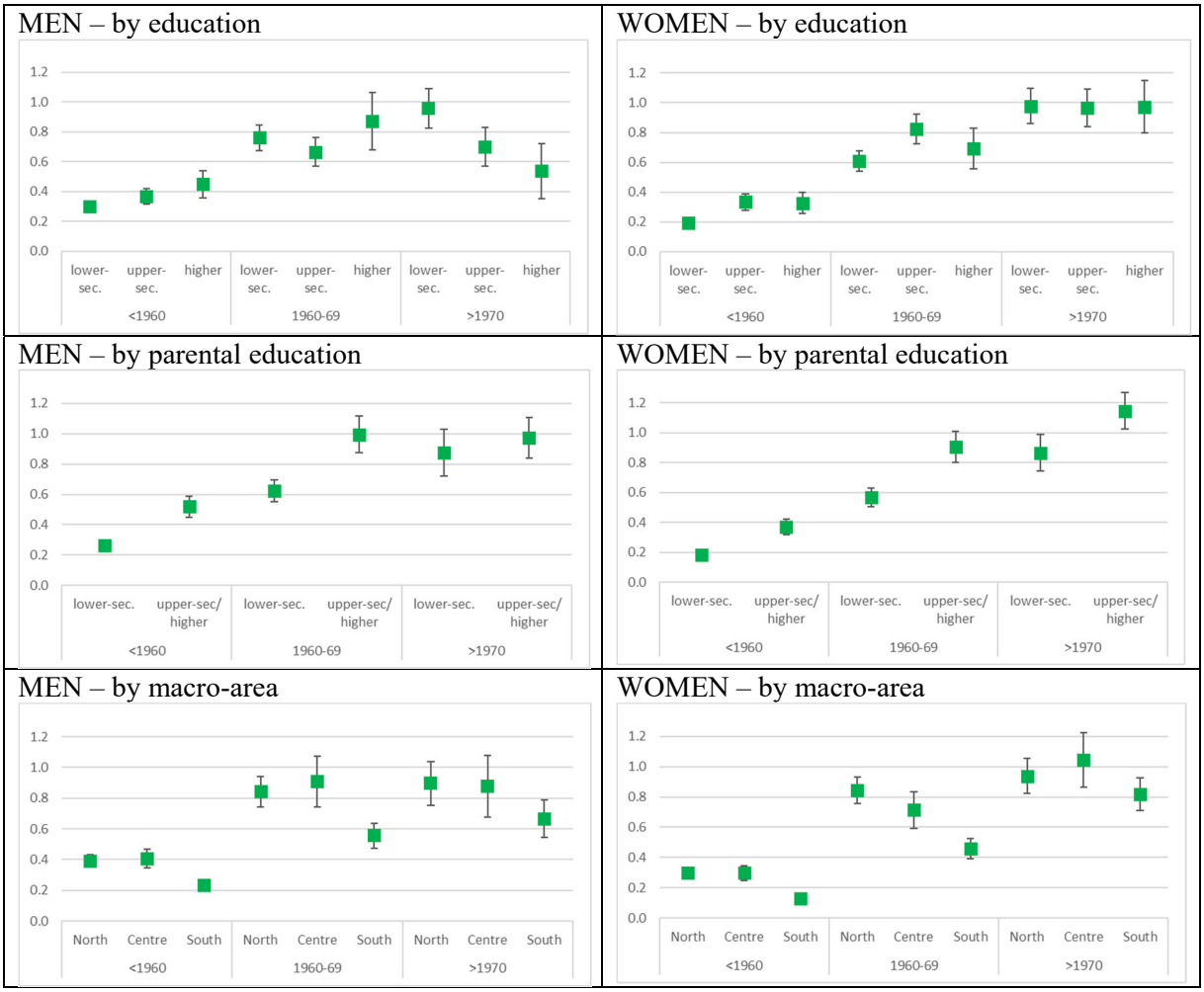


Note: CI for approximate 5% significance level for the comparison of pairs of predicted probabilities.
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

The predicted probabilities of union dissolution are shown in the last Figure (Figure 5), again distinguishing among educational groups and geographical regions. Consistently with the SDT scenario, union dissolution increases across the cohorts for both men and women, and across regions and educational groups. The youngest cohort, born after 1970, is however of particular interest here: i.e., men with higher education have the lowest risk of union dissolution, whereas no differences are found when considering parental education. For women, instead, there is literally no difference across educational groups, though those with highly educated parents continue to have an increased probability of dissolution.

As for the geographical differences, union dissolution is less prevalent in the South, though for the youngest cohort, the difference is much smaller, sign of a stronger relative increase in union dissolution exactly in the South.

Figure 5 – Union dissolution. Predicted probabilities, among men and women, of union dissolution by cohort, educational level, geographical region and parental education.



Note: CI for approximate 5% significance level for the comparison of pairs of predicted probabilities.
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that the Italian demographic landscape is undergoing a *revolution* (Bernhardt 2004; van de Kaa 2004) in family formation and dissolution patterns. Up until recently, the most noteworthy feature of Italian demography was its long running low fertility,

an aspect that has been much covered in the social sciences. The conundrum was how a traditional society with strong family ties, apparently immune to the SDT, could end up with a persistently low fertility. We show that Italy is now following suit in the new family behaviour of many other countries, implying that the stereotypical view of Italy as, in demographic terms, an old fashioned and traditional society, is unlikely to survive. The more recent data suggest that the main SDT indicators, i.e. the prevalence of cohabitation, out-of-wedlock childbearing and divorce, are now changing rapidly. Young Italians are, indeed, on track to catch up with the behaviour of their Nordic counterparts, creating a new demographic reality in Italy (Pirani and Vignoli 2016; Vignoli et al. 2018). Looking across the cohorts, the trends are clearer: marriage is being replaced by cohabitation as first union; non-marital childbearing is on the increase; and union dissolution is increasing even in the South. In addition, our findings showed that the usual-suspect trendsetters (i.e. the highly educated, living in the North, and those of high social class) are indeed those having initiated the new family patterns, providing clear support of a SDT-inspired interpretation of the engine of family change also in Italy. With individual survey data, we have shown here that education plays an important role in this revolution. Higher education not only leads to postponement of key steps in the family formation, but it also brings about value change. More educated Italian men and women resulted, in fact, forerunners in terms of forming unions through cohabitation and also in terms of out-of-wedlock childbearing. The effects of these characteristics are weaker among youngest cohorts, however. The positive educational gradient (i.e., the well-educated being more likely to make these choices than their counterparts) is vanishing. Based on our findings, we affirm that the new family behaviour of marital dissolution and childbearing within cohabitation was initiated by the higher educated individuals, but then diffused across all social groups, included the more economically disadvantaged.

Nevertheless, we should also take into consideration that in the meantime these new trends happened, there has also been a contemporary expansion in tertiary education. The younger cohort has a higher rate of tertiary education, especially among women, compared to the oldest cohort: in 2020 28% of adults aged 30-34 (the key reproductive age interval) have tertiary education against 19% of a dozens of years before (ISTAT, 2021). However, in Italy the current level of tertiary education is the lowest in Europe and the process of increase has been far slower and later than the other European countries: only one out of five people aged 25-64 has a tertiary education against one out of three of the European average (ISTAT, 2021). This fact prompts us to a possible interpretation of the late spread of SDT in Italy, exactly as a consequence of the

Italian lower rate of enrolment in higher education. Further analysis is needed to confirm this intuition.

In light of the regional differences, our analyses show that Italy is potentially at a crossroad. The rate of increase in the new behaviours is no longer stronger in the North and the Centre - at least in terms of union dissolution patterns. However, marriage – as the first form of co-residential union – remains central in Southern Italy. One should also factor in that there is still a North-South divide in many other characteristics, including family services, cultural beliefs, female labour force participation and economic prosperity (Aassve et al 2021). It is yet an open question if the traditional "Southern model" a lá Reher – will survive.

Our overview helps set the agenda for future research, suggesting that new SDT behaviours in Italy might gain ground in the next years, boosting family complexity. Non-traditional family forms, such as cohabitation, out-of-wedlock childbearing, disrupted and blended families, will become prevalent among Italian families, soliciting considerations about the wellbeing of their members, intergenerational relationships, and social support networks. In line with prior research (e.g. Guetto et al. 2016; Matysiak et al. 2014; Pirani and Vignoli 2022), we documented that the new family behaviours were initiated the Italian "social vanguard" for then to progress the other social groups. Based on our findings, notably divorce and non-marital childbearing, are increasingly experienced by the lower social strata of the Italian society. Here there is a question whether the institutional context can cope with these new developments. Although non-traditional behaviours and complex families are not new, even in Italy (Livi Bacci 1981; Breschi et al. 2008), they currently do represent a great challenge to an archetypical familistic institutional arrangement. Detecting and understanding patterns of family change is crucial for the families formed through these processes. This involves examining the roles of education, economic uncertainty, cultural shifts, gender dynamics, and policy changes in influencing family transitions.

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Appendix

Table A1: Models' results for union formation: relative risk ratios and predicted probabilities for the competing events marriage and cohabitation, reference outcome: no union

	marriage				cohabitation			
	RRR	*P>z*	pred. prob.	*P>z*	RRR	*P>z*	pred. prob.	*P>z*
Baseline duration								
<20	5.12	*0.000*	5.16	*0.000*	0.92	*0.468*	1.37	*0.000*
21-25	2.85	*0.000*	2.96	*0.000*	1.34	*0.020*	2.00	*0.000*
26-30	1.00		1.07	*0.000*	1.00		1.53	*0.000*
31-35	0.40	*0.000*	0.43	*0.000*	0.67	*0.047*	1.03	*0.000*
Birth cohort								
<1950	1.27	*0.000*	7.40	*0.000*	0.32	*0.000*	0.36	*0.000*
1950/1954	1.26	*0.000*	7.34	*0.000*	0.56	*0.000*	0.62	*0.000*
1955/1959	1.14	*0.000*	6.67	*0.000*	0.73	*0.001*	0.81	*0.000*
1960/1964	1.00		5.88	*0.000*	1.00		1.11	*0.000*
1965/1969	0.79	*0.000*	4.72	*0.000*	1.30	*0.000*	1.46	*0.000*
1970/1974	0.68	*0.000*	4.05	*0.000*	1.59	*0.000*	1.78	*0.000*
1975/1979	0.53	*0.000*	3.20	*0.000*	2.02	*0.000*	2.28	*0.000*
>1980	0.27	*0.000*	1.68	*0.000*	1.61	*0.000*	1.86	*0.000*
Gender								
Men	1.00		3.92	*0.000*	1.00		1.35	*0.000*
Women	1.55	*0.000*	5.89	*0.000*	1.09	*0.010*	1.45	*0.000*
Macro-area								
North	1.00		4.31	*0.000*	1.00		1.99	*0.000*
Centre	1.13	*0.000*	4.86	*0.000*	0.75	*0.000*	1.50	*0.000*
South-Isles	1.23	*0.000*	5.30	*0.000*	0.34	*0.000*	0.68	*0.000*
Education								
lower-sec.	1.08	*0.000*	4.70	*0.000*	0.98	*0.587*	1.27	*0.000*
upper-sec.	1.00		4.36	*0.000*	1.00		1.30	*0.000*
higher	1.99	*0.000*	8.13	*0.000*	2.00	*0.000*	2.48	*0.000*
Parental separation								
no	1.00		4.82	*0.000*	1.00		1.34	*0.000*
yes	0.80	*0.001*	3.86	*0.000*	1.75	*0.000*	2.32	*0.000*
Parental education								
lower-sec.	1.00		5.35	*0.000*	1.00		1.20	*0.000*
upper-sec/ higher	0.73	*0.000*	3.98	*0.000*	1.24	*0.000*	1.50	*0.000*
Mother's occupation								
employed	1.00		4.76	*0.000*	1.00		1.49	*0.000*
not employed	1.01	*0.740*	4.80	*0.000*	0.89	*0.001*	1.32	*0.000*
constant	0.01	*0.000*			0.02	*0.000*		

Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

Table A2: Models' results for first childbearing: relative risk ratios and predicted probabilities for the competing events having the first child in marriage and in cohabitation, reference outcome: no child

	marriage				cohabitation			
	RRR	*P>z*	pred. prob.	*P>z*	RRR	*P>z*	pred. prob.	*P>z*
Baseline duration								
<20	3.47	*0.000*	3.91	*0.000*	0.49	*0.000*	0.37	*0.000*
21-25	3.52	*0.000*	3.89	*0.000*	1.75	*0.000*	1.14	*0.000*
26-30	1.00		1.13	*0.000*	1.00		0.66	*0.000*
31-35	0.22	*0.000*	0.25	*0.000*	0.39	*0.003*	0.27	*0.000*
Birth cohort								
<1950	1.31	*0.000*	5.53	*0.000*	0.20	*0.000*	0.06	*0.000*
1950/1954	1.24	*0.000*	5.26	*0.000*	0.60	*0.015*	0.16	*0.000*
1955/1959	1.12	*0.002*	4.75	*0.000*	0.89	*0.506*	0.23	*0.000*
1960/1964	1.00		4.24	*0.000*	1.00		0.28	*0.000*
1965/1969	0.83	*0.000*	3.54	*0.000*	1.52	*0.003*	0.39	*0.000*
1970/1974	0.74	*0.000*	3.15	*0.000*	2.27	*0.000*	0.54	*0.000*
1975/1979	0.63	*0.000*	2.63	*0.000*	3.39	*0.000*	0.78	*0.000*
>1980	0.32	*0.000*	1.32	*0.000*	3.45	*0.000*	0.77	*0.000*
Gender								
Men	1.00		3.07	*0.000*	1.00		0.36	*0.000*
Women	1.43	*0.000*	4.30	*0.000*	1.40	*0.000*	0.49	*0.000*
Macro-area								
North	1.00		3.25	*0.000*	1.00		0.59	*0.000*
Centre	1.15	*0.000*	3.74	*0.000*	0.72	*0.000*	0.44	*0.000*
South-Isles	1.22	*0.000*	4.04	*0.000*	0.33	*0.000*	0.20	*0.000*
Education								
lower-sec.	1.13	*0.000*	3.61	*0.000*	1.25	*0.001*	0.45	*0.000*
upper-sec.	1.00		3.23	*0.000*	1.00		0.36	*0.000*
higher	1.76	*0.000*	5.48	*0.000*	1.46	*0.000*	0.53	*0.000*
Parental separation								
no	1.00		3.65	*0.000*	1.00		0.40	*0.000*
yes	0.87	*0.016*	3.06	*0.000*	1.78	*0.000*	0.70	*0.000*
Parental education								
lower-sec.	1.00		4.02	*0.000*	1.00		0.42	*0.000*
upper-sec/ higher	0.77	*0.000*	3.09	*0.000*	0.92	*0.258*	0.41	*0.000*
Mother's occupation								
employed	1.00		3.66	*0.000*	1.00		0.44	*0.000*
not employed	0.99	*0.580*	3.62	*0.000*	0.88	*0.038*	0.40	*0.000*
constant	0.01	*0.000*			0.00	*0.000*		

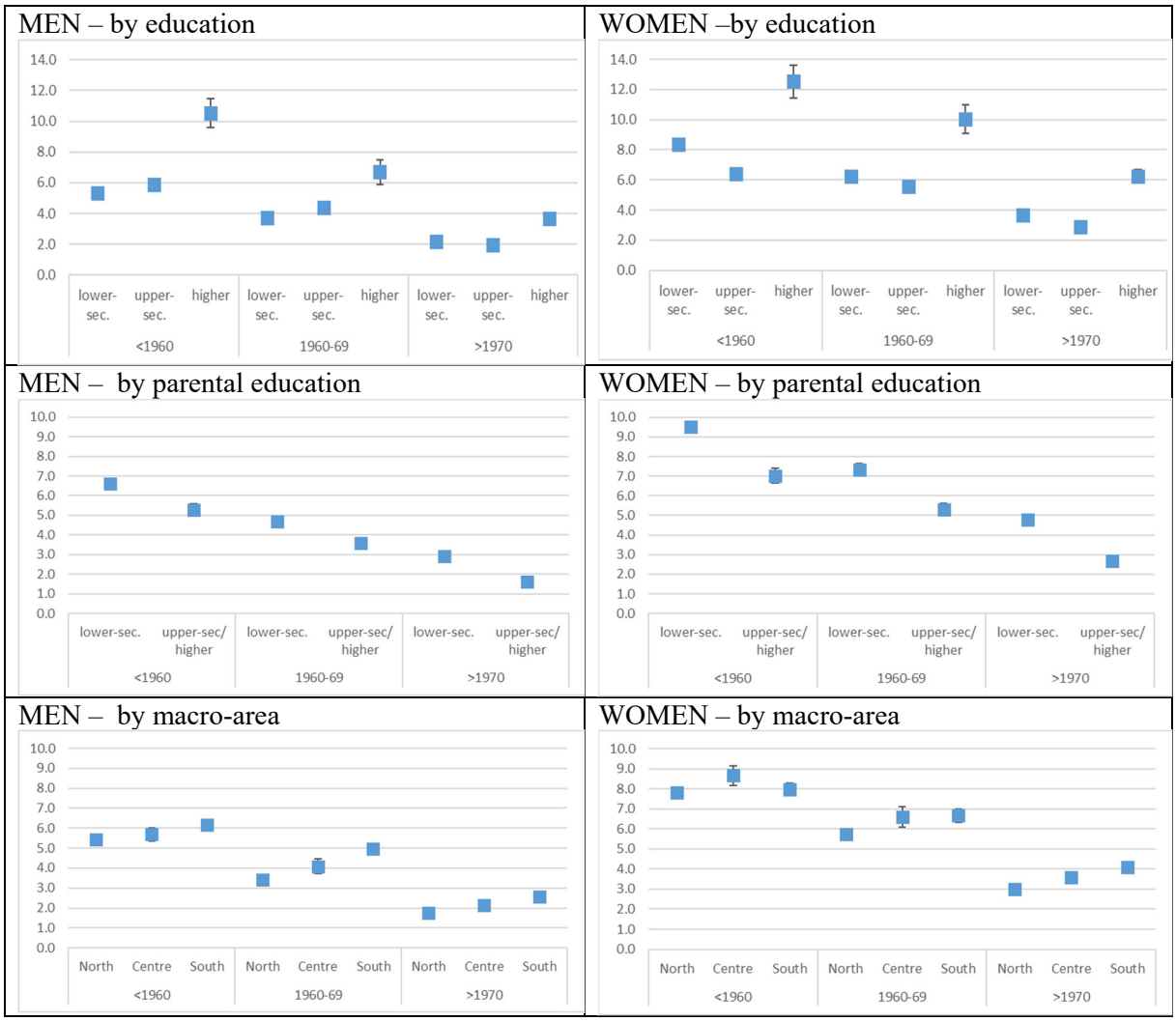
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

Table A3: Models' results for union dissolution: odd ratios and predicted probabilities for the dissolution of the marital union

		OR	*P>z*	pred. prob.	*P>z*
Baseline duration					
	0-1	0.61	*0.000*	0.34	*0.000*
	2-3	0.71	*0.001*	0.40	*0.000*
	4-5	1.06	*0.519*	0.59	*0.000*
	6-7	0.84	*0.081*	0.47	*0.000*
	8-10	0.87	*0.122*	0.49	*0.000*
	11-14	1.00		0.56	*0.000*
	>=15	0.81	*0.003*	0.45	*0.000*
Birth cohort					
	<1950	0.25	*0.000*	0.16	*0.000*
	1950/54	0.47	*0.000*	0.31	*0.000*
	1955/59	0.74	*0.000*	0.49	*0.000*
	1960/1964	1.00		0.66	*0.000*
	1965/1969	1.19	*0.034*	0.78	*0.000*
	1970/1974	1.29	*0.003*	0.85	*0.000*
	1975/1979	1.54	*0.000*	1.01	*0.000*
	>1980	1.62	*0.000*	1.06	*0.000*
Gender					
	Men	1.00		0.51	*0.000*
	Women	0.87	*0.004*	0.45	*0.000*
Macro-area					
	North	1.00		0.55	*0.000*
	Centre	1.01	*0.812*	0.56	*0.000*
	South-Isles	0.61	*0.000*	0.34	*0.000*
Education					
	lower-sec.	0.91	*0.095*	0.45	*0.000*
	upper-sec.	1.00		0.49	*0.000*
	higher	1.03	*0.674*	0.51	*0.000*
Parental separation					
	no	1.00		0.46	*0.000*
	yes	1.95	*0.000*	0.88	*0.000*
Parental education					
	lower-sec.	1.00		0.39	*0.000*
	upper-sec/ higher	1.54	*0.000*	0.60	*0.000*
Mother's occupation					
	employed	1.00		0.51	*0.000*
	not employed	0.89	*0.017*	0.45	*0.000*
constant		0.01	*0.000*		

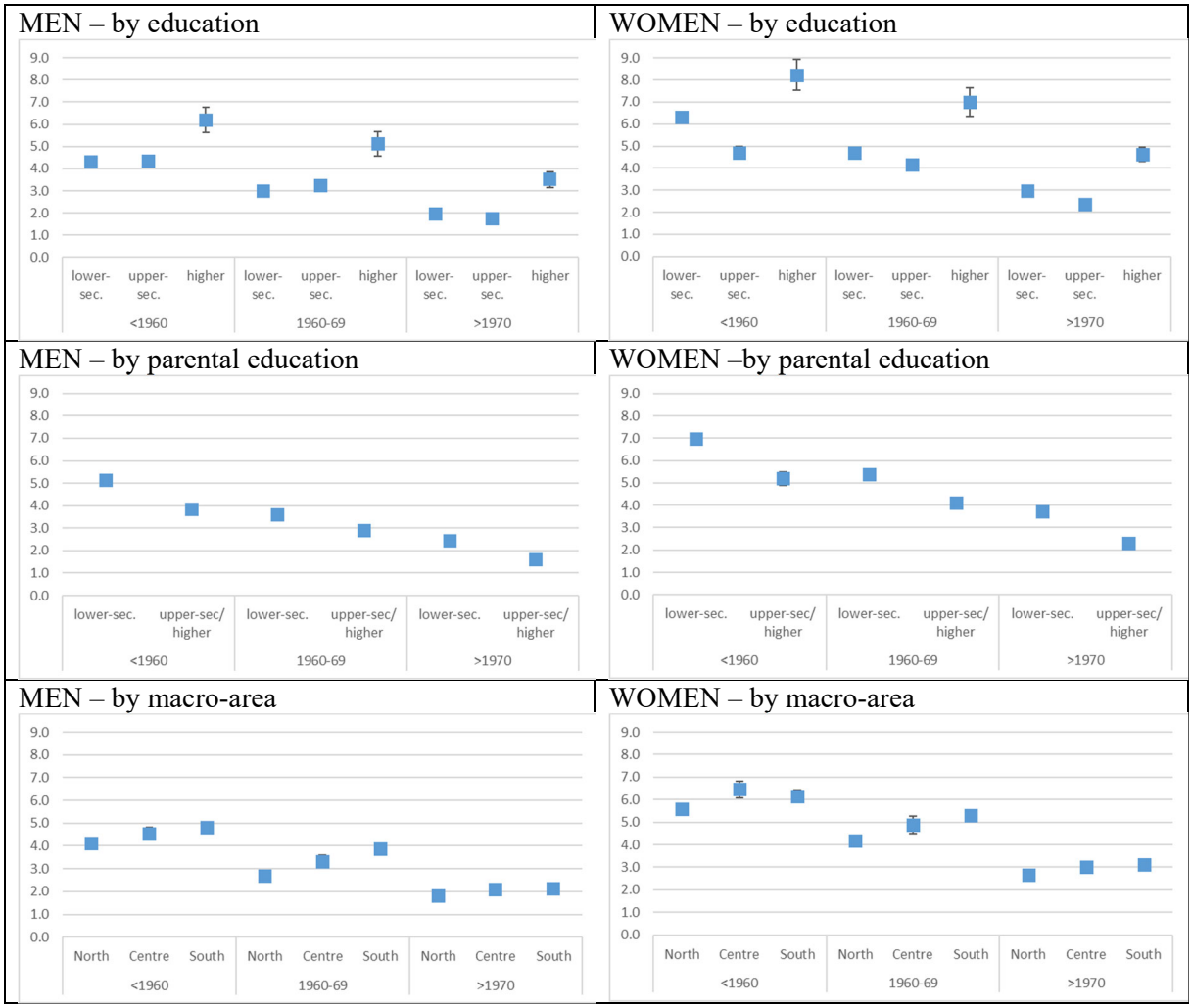
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

Figure A1: Predicted probabilities of marriage, among men and women, by cohort and by educational level, geographical region, and parental education.



Note: CI for approximate 5% significance level for the comparison of pairs of predicted probabilities.
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.

Figure A2: Predicted probabilities, among men and women, of having a first child in a marital union by cohort and by educational level, geographical region and parental education.



Note: CI for approximate 5% significance level for the comparison of pairs of predicted probabilities.
Source: Authors' elaborations on Italian FSS data, 2016.