

Female immigration and fertility behaviour in Italy

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Aims

The objective of this study is to analyze the different fertility contexts and typologies of immigrant mothers. The paper wants to emphasize the socio demographic characteristics that differentiate migrant and native-born mothers with a special attention to the parity, the life cycle and the economic status.

Background

The foreign female population in Italy increased considerably in the last years and is now balancing the number of foreign men. This process may be defined as *feminisation* and can be interpreted as a sign of *stabilization* of the presence of foreigners in the country (Gabrielli et al., 2000). The proportion of women is not uniformly distributed over all citizenships. In the African-born population the majority of migrants are men, in 2007 the proportion of male per female was 159.8. This is different for the migrant groups from Eastern Europe and South America for whom the male/female ratio was 90.6 (without considering the new member states of the EU) and 56%², respectively. If we considers the single states, 22 men per 100 women are observed for Ukrainians, 39 for Polish migrants and 64 men per 100 women coming from Ecuador and Peru (Istat, 2007a).

The continuously increasing number of family residence permits is an important information aspect to study the link between migration and fertility in Italy. Although there are also men that come to Italy to follow their wives this is especially true for women for who the family residence permit represent 48.4% of all cases on average. According to the estimations the Italian Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was about 1.35 children per woman in 2006 (Istat, 2006). If the Italian and the foreign women are considered separately, we find different values: respectively 1.24 and 2.41 in 2005 (ISTAT, 2007b). Births with two foreign parents represent about 10% of the total number of births in Italy. This value is important for two reasons: First, these births

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² data refers to the 1st January 2007

could be helpful to offset the low fertility of the native Italian population. Second, this increases the size of the second generation of migrants who represent a stabilization process of the migrant population in Italy. Today the second generation represents 13.5% of the total foreign resident population.

Data & methods

We examine the Birth Sample Survey conducted in 2005 by the ISTAT. The sample is extracted from Population Registers and represents about 10% of all registered births of 2003 in Italy. The mothers were interviewed using the C.A.T.I. technique (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview)³. After an exploratory and descriptive overview, I will perform a multivariate analysis to discriminate the typologies of foreign mothers referring to their socio demographic behaviours. It is aimed to use these multivariate techniques to subdivide the sample into homogeneous groups using the variables and the indicators that, following our hypothesis, represent the characteristics of the foreign mothers in the best way. The multivariate techniques that we are going to use have always a descriptive aim of the phenomena.

Hypothesis & Research question

Considering resident immigrants, the starting point of our hypothesis is that the choice to have a child in the host country is highly affected by two factors. The first factor is the possibility to be integrated into the society, the second factor is the opportunity of a longer stay, long enough to have the possibility to plan their future life in the host country (Golini et al., 2001) (Crisci, 2006).

We assume that the marital status influences the reproductive behavior (Milewski, 2006); (Mussino and Raalte, 2007) Considering education and economic status the hypothesis is that they have different effects in native Italians and foreigners (Francesca Michelin, 2004). While Italians start to change a trend and the new pattern show a relation between the higher educated couples with healthy economic resources and to be parents (Tanturri and Zuanna, 2007, Kertzner et al., 2006); the foreigners have a negative correlation (Mussino and Raalte, 2007). Beside these factors also a bad integration in the society and a strong gender difference could be negatively correlated with the fertility decision (Maffioli, 1996). We also hypothesize that the parity, the propensity to have more children and the mean age at the childbearing describes the

³ More information on www.demo.istat.it

difference between the two sub groups. It is also supposed that the duration of stay (Ng and Nault, 1997), the nationality of the partner, especially if the partner is Italian (Giovannelli and Strozza, 2005), and the region of arrival are factors that distinguish the different immigrant groups.

Results

The results reveal that factors differentiate immigrants and Italians but also show that there are several factors as the duration of stay and the nationality of partner that are linked with a converging trend in the behaviours of the two groups in the choice to have a child and in the way of raising up the offspring.

The main factor that distinguishes Italians and immigrants is age. Within the immigrant population the nationality of the partner is the most discriminating factor of fertility behavior.

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