Is daddy coming to dinner? Working schedules and father's time with children

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The steep increase in the female labor force participation from the 60s has given origins to a process of gender roles redefinition both in the household and in parenting tasks management. Fathers' role is evolving all over Europe, to different extents depending on the institutional context: fathers are no more expected to be financial providers only, but are supposed to be actively engaged in parenting activities too. Even if mothers are still responsible for the majority of childcare (Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Sayer and Gornick 2011) and gender differences in the quantity of time, as well as in the type of tasks performed, persist (Bianchi et al. 2012; England 2011), it is undeniable that fathers spend more time in caring children in most developed countries in recent decades (Bianchi et al. 2000; Craig, Mullan, and Blaxland 2010).

Two specificities of time allocation can be mentioned. First, the daily allocation of time among different activities, if mainly driven by personal wants, needs, and constraints, is also hardly shaped by the societal rhythms culturally constructed (working schedules, TV programs, habits). Basic similarities in people's daily schedules are generally observed that goes beyond the individual determinants. Fathers' allocate their time by following a 'crowd effect'; they tend to perform parenting activities by following quite homogeneous time allocation patterns. Second, activities have different "social meanings" according to their timing in the day. It is well-known that workers working at atypical schedules have lower emotional well-being because they are less able to share leisure activities with other people (Young and Lim 2014). In the same idea, caring for children might not have the same "social cost" according to its timing in the day. For instance, taking care of a sick child, that involves to take care of him during usual working time slots is more costly for parents than taking care of children before work (in the morning) or after work (in the evening). A father's participation at uncommon moments might represent a higher social cost for fathers, both from a working point of view and also because the gender norm might be even more transgressed.

This study proposes an original analysis of the timing of fathering in Italy, that goes beyond most of the existing studies that describe fathers' time use in terms of average duration in total and childrearing activities. We specifically focus on determinants of standard/nonstandard engagement of fathers. When fathers are taking of care of the children? Who are the fathers who take care of children when most others fathers do not? How can we explain this fathers' involvement toward children at uncommon moments? We specifically focus on the role of the father's and mother's working schedules because they might constitute a major determinant of why some fathers do not "follow the crowd".

The hypothesis that guides this research is that the expression of father's role and the father identity are strongly influenced by the workplace rules, but also by some cultural elements, like the social representation and the social expectations on men as fathers. We expect that fathers tend to spend fathering activities at about the same time, and to show standardized behaviors, with sequences of daily parenting activities taking place in a uniform and nearly universal manner. Fathers with non-standard work schedule are expected to spend more time with children, in more 'uncommon moments' of the day might, possibly mitigated by cultural factors that could prevent some fathers to participate because of social stigma consequences.

The Italian context

We focus our analysis on Italy, a very traditional country where the male breadwinner model is still well rooted, where the opportunity costs of being mother are still very high, because of a rigid labor market structure, few public policies for family support and scarce childcare provisions for children under age 3, rarely guarantying women the chance to fairly balance their private and public life spheres. As a consequence, mothers often drops out of employment or reduces working hours to care for children, thus being the main care provider in their families. On the other hand, the relation with job is still a pivotal trait shaping men's identity.

Data and methods

We use Italian data coming from the Time Use Survey carried out within the Multipurpose Surveys Project conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2008-2009. By using a specific type of questionnaire, the daily activity diary, the time use surveys allow for quantifying the duration of different individual activities during a 24-hour time period, and for identifying the timing of the activities' allocation scheme during the day. Indeed, the diary data are based on a grid of 10 minute-intervals of time, with a description of the main activity carried out by the respondent, the second (or concurrent) activity, their location and the presence of other persons. Aside from the diary, all the data sets contain rich sets of information on the background and socio-economic situation of individuals and their households.

The analyses in this work are carried out on a sub-sample of men 2,481 who self-identified as a biological, adoptive, step or foster parent or guardian of one co-resident child aged 0-14 years. When more children are present we select only fathers having all the children in this age range. The sampled fathers are married or cohabiting, living with a female partner, either working or not. Households with adults other than the marital or de facto couples are excluded from the analytical sample, as well as complex families. This is done in order to avoid the confounding effect of other adults who are able to provide childcare or domestic tasks, but who also might require additional care.

We first describe the timing of fathering activities, defined as doing an activity in presence of children. Then we estimate OLS regression models to understand the individual determinants of fathering behaviors. We are interested in the role of working schedule characteristics (daily worked hours and non-standard working schedules) on fathers' time with children, controlling for children characteristics (age, number), the partner/couple features (couple status, couple education, partner working schedule), as well as the availability of external domestic help, and the geographical area of residence, play on our variables of interest. We systematically take into account both the characteristics of the mother and the father to describe the father's involvement. We run separate analyses, for week day and week end.

Two indicators of fathers' time with children are used: the total amount of time fathers spend with children and the *Standard Paternal Involvement Index*, defined as follow.

We start from the hypothesis that spending time with children is more (less) costly, from a 'social' point of view, when it is outside (within) the usual time periods time other fathers. In the time use diaries, the 24 hours period is split in 144 time slots called i, each lasting ten minutes. Our idea is to warp time, by identifying a new 'social duration' for each time slot, through the identification of a weighting scheme, giving the chance to take into account each father's timing of parenting activities, in the light of the 'global' parenting attitudes of all the other fathers under analysis. Weights are identified in the following way: for each time slot we compute the share of fathers spending time with their children:

$$f_i = \frac{n_i}{N} \qquad i=1 \text{ to } 144$$

where n_i is the number of fathers spending time with children, in the *i*-th time slot, and N is the total number of fathers in the considered sample.

Then we compute the mean 'involvement level' $\bar{f} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{144} f_i}{144}$; and use it for computing the final weighting scheme:

$$w_i = 1 + (\bar{f} - f_i) \; ; \text{ so that } \begin{cases} w_i = 1 & \text{if } f_i = \bar{f} \\ w_i > 1 & \text{if } f_i < \bar{f} \\ 0 < w_i < 1 & \text{if } f_i > \bar{f} \end{cases} \quad \text{and } \sum_{i=1}^{144} w_i = 144;$$

Then, if the time slot is scarcely a time slot where fathers are performing activities with children, the weight will be higher than 1 and the social cost of father spending time with children is quite high. On the contrary, if the time slot is a very usual slot of fathering (for instance dinner time), the weight will be less than 1 because the social cost to be with children at that time is reduced. We thus apply the weighting system to the different slots of fathering at the individual level to compute new durations of fathering time. Finally, for each father, the 'social duration' of the time spent with children during the whole day will be computed as follows:

$$D_j = \sum_{i=1}^{144}(w_i * I * 10) \; j=1 \text{ to } N; \quad I = \begin{cases} 1 \text{ if the } j\text{th father is with children in the } i\text{th time slot} \\ 0 \text{ if the } j\text{th father is not with children in the } i\text{th time slot} \end{cases}$$

The 'social warping' new duration will be higher than the real one if the father is doing all his activities with children during slots that are not socially shared by other fathers, and lower otherwise.

As we are not interested in duration, but in the way fathers allocate time with children, we use the normalized difference between the original duration and the weighted amount of time Italian fathers spend with their children, obtained as $(D_j^{original} - D_j^{social})/ D_j^{original})$. It can be considered as a *Standard Paternal Involvement Index*: a negative value is observed among father spending more time with children in 'unsocial time slots', that is, when a low proportion of fathers is doing the same. A positive value is observed when fathers perform childrearing activities in more 'crowded' time slots.

Results

By following a chronological approach, focusing on the timing of fathering activities, defined as doing an activity in presence of children (Fig. 1), it emerges that in the week days Italian fathers spend time with their children during the evening hours, mainly, and that the activities performed are not specifically 'childcare' activities, like having dinner and performing leisure activities. In general, meal time seems to be the moment in which fathers are available for children, even if the percentages of those using this time for active fathering (childcare) are quite low. During the week-end, fathers experience fewer work-related constraints, and are generally more available, during the whole day, by starting from the late morning. Once again, most of the fathers are with their children during lunch and dinner time. Two kinds of main structures can thus be identified, shaping the fathers time allocation with children: the workplace-related rules, mainly defining the availability of fathers during the week day, as well as some cultural norms, expecting fathers to spend time during the main family socializing moments.

Fig.1 Chronograms of activities Italian fathers carry out with their children. Week day and week end.
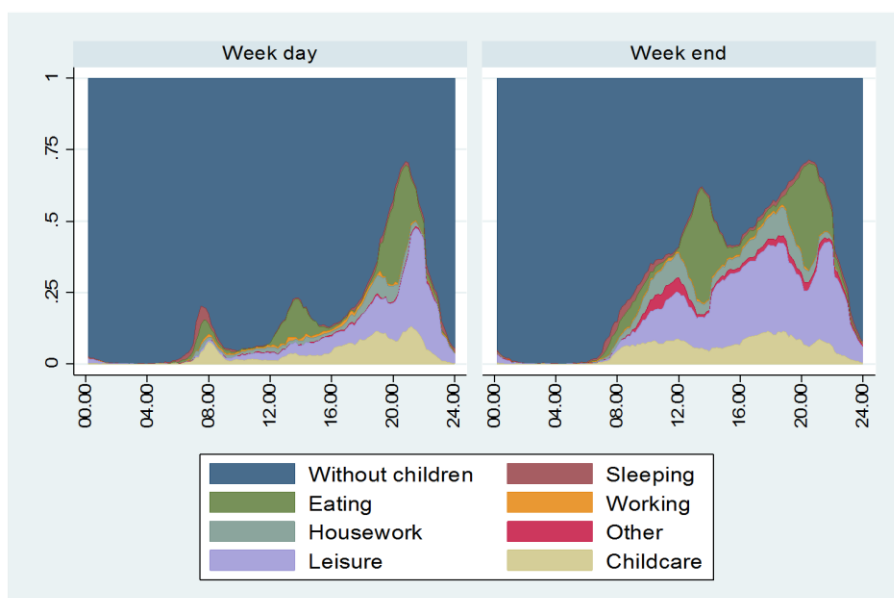
Results of multivariate analysis (Table 1) confirm that in Italy the fathers' work related features strongly influence both the duration and the schedule of allocation of their time with children, above all during the work days. Father who don't work, or work less than 6 hours/day are more likely to spend time with children in 'unsocial time slots', as they are more available, during the whole day; while those having a hard working schedule are less available, and generally spend time with their children in social time slots (above all during dinner moments). Atypical time schedules make fathers spend their time in uncommon time slots: fathers

working in the evening spend with their children less time than fathers who do not work in the evening, and they do it in more unsocial time slot (evening/dinner time slots are those in which most of fathers spend time with their children, so, if fathers are not available in this moment of the day, they are more likely to stay with their children when the other fathers are not doing the same, that is, in the 'less crowded' time slots).

The partner working schedule has an effect too. Fathers whose partner works in the evening spend more time with their children, and they allocate it in more unsocial moment of the day. Having a partner working by following atypical time schedules make fathers being more engaged, and making the effort to alleviate the female burden of work-family life balancing, by contributing in childrearing activities even during less common moments.

The number of children, even if not influencing fathers' engagement in terms of duration, has an effect on their time with children allocation scheme, thus requiring fathers who have more than two children to behave differently from the 'average' father: they are more likely to have less common sequences of time allocation in childrearing activities.

During the week-end, when fathers are generally more available, the work-related variables confirm their importance in generating differences and similarities in fathering behaviors. When fathers are less constrained by work, other elements beyond the working ones, come into play. Specifically, an effect of education emerges, even if modest, showing that socio-cultural aspects contribute in determining the fathers time with children allocation scheme when they can more easily decide how to organize their daily life, with low educated couples and those where he is more educated than she (that are probably the most traditional ones), showing greater homologation tendencies.

Table 1: OLS regression results.

			Week day		Week end	
	Variables	**Categories**	**Time with children**	**Social engagement rate**	**Time with children**	**Social engagement rate**
		Intercept	255.269***	0.272***	340.237***	2.072***
Father's characteristics	Daily working hours	Not working	245.004***	-0.130***	202.877***	-0.289***
		< 6 h/d	132.275***	-0.093***	87.299***	-0.168*
		>10 h/d	-52.036***	0.077***	-119.330***	0.240**
	Working in the evening (Ref. Not)		-40.272**	-0.106***	-30.592	-0.730***
	Working in the night (Ref. Not)		58.331*	-0.056**	1.090	-0.002
	Age (Ref. 35-45)	<35	-1.431	0.001	-12.483	-0.001
		>45	4.797	-0.006	-22.811	0.003
Children characteristics	Number of children (Ref. 2)	1	1.395	-0.003	7.222	0.034
		>2	6.966	-0.049**	-34.951[+]	0.128[+]
	Age of the yougest child (Ref. 3-5)	<3	16.874	-0.003	28.537*	-0.111*
		6-14	-29.256*	-0.001	-27.892*	0.031
Partner's characteristics	Partner age (Ref. 35-45)	<35	-3.620	-0.004	7.176	-0.005
		>45	-24.448	0.009	-16.055	-0.033
	Partner working hours	Not working	3.215	-0.009	29.290	0.118
		< 6 h/w	-8.205	-0.014	35.304	0.077
		>10 h/w	-9.974	0.014	56.029	-0.134
	Partner working in the evening (Ref. Not)		43.511*	-0.029*	-24.437	-0.201
	Partner working in the night (Ref. Not)		-16.271	0.012	3.138	0.160
Couple characteristics	Couple education level (Ref. Both medium educated)	Both low education	-4.333	0.015	-29.540*	0.085[+]
		Both high education	-17.620	0.016	7.517	0.029
		He less educated than she	-0.813	0.008	-5.318	0.054
		He more educated than she	18.672	-0.004	-9.277	0.093[+]
	Cohabiting (Ref. Not)		-28.998	0.026[+]	-22.169	-0.031
	Domestic help (Ref. Not)		12.436	-0.011	-0.249	-0.007
	Residence (Ref. North)	South	-9.693	-0.009	-28.300**	0.049

*p<0.0001; **p<0.001; *p<0.05; [+]p<0.1