

**The future of the welfare state: paths of social  
policy innovation between constraints and  
opportunities**

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**Women between family and paid work:  
the changing effect of education in Italy and Britain**

Cristina Solera\*

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\*Department of Social Science  
Torino University  
Via S.Ottavio 50  
10124 Torino  
++39-011-6702665  
cristina.solera@unito.it



# **Women between family and paid work: the changing effect of education in Italy and Britain**

Cristina Solera

Department of Social Science  
Torino University  
Via S.Ottavio 50  
10124 Torino

++39-011-6702665  
cristina.solera@unito.it



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

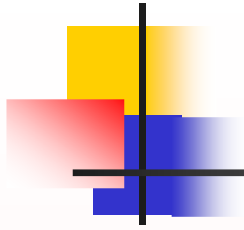
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**Has the trade-off between  
employment and family responsibilities changed  
across cohorts?**

**Has the gap between  
low and high-educated women changed?**

Empirical questions:

- ✓ What share of highly and poorly educated women in each cohort has a continuous or discontinuous work history, or do not start working at all?
- ✓ Having entered paid work, who tends to exit it, and when?  
Having exited paid work, who tends to re-enter it, and when?
- ✓ Are the factors affecting exits and re-entries of low educated women the same as those affecting the high-educated?



# DATA AND APPROACH

✓ **Comparative** between 2 countries

1.	Italy	ILFI	↘	<i>Up to 2005</i>
2.	Great Britain	BHPS	↗	

✓ **Longitudinal** over a larger span of women's life course

*End school- 40 years*

1. First Exit from employment to housework
2. First Re-entry into employment

✓ **Historical** across 4 birth cohorts

1. 1935-1944
2. 1945-1954
3. 1955-1964
4. 1965-1974



# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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It combines insights of mainstream labour supply theory with those from institutional-cultural theory, provided that unrealistic assumptions about perfect competition, information and instrumental rationality are dropped.



A “soft” rational choice model means

- **considering education not only as a monetary investment** but also **as a value in itself**, as a central dimension of own-identity and own-conception of welfare (a la Boudon, both instrumental and cognitive rationality).
- **the effect of motherhood and of education is culturally and institutionally shaped**: crucial are reconciliation policies and labour market opportunities and regulations, but also gender role norms, breadwinner ideologies, moral rationalities.



## HUMAN-CAPITAL THEORY

Investments in education are instrumental to maximization of expected lifetime utility because they are means to gain access to good jobs and good sectors of the labour market. Because such investments are time-consuming, interrupting employment for childrearing is costly for well-educated women. Investments in education are linked to expectations on domestic and caring time, depreciation of human capital and restoration effects and the probability of returning to work (Becker 1975, 1996).



**PREDICTIONS:** the greater a woman's investment in education, the lower will be her probability of leaving the labour market, and the higher her probability of returning. The outcome of this education effect depends on the partner's educational and occupational resources (New Home Economics). The same prediction applies to the type of time commitment made to the labour market: women working full-time are less likely to interrupt their employment and, if they do, they are more likely to resume it rapidly. **Education has an indirect effect through labour market experience and position. It might have a direct effect to the extent which career progression and future earnings are based on education.**

**MAIN CRITICISM:** the prediction concerning **the effect of education on women's labour supply is "additive": this effect is context-less and class-less**, so that no conceptualisation and measurement is made of interaction between the woman's own education (and partner's resources), on the one hand, and the institutional and cultural context and the individual and family position in the stratification system, on the other.



## BEYOND WAGES AND INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALITY

Education also entails non-economic advantages. The value of paid work is not only an instrumental means to acquire income for “consumption” - as standard economic rational choice theory assumes. Investing in education and in the labour market may depend on - and, along the way, be reinforced by - the interiorisation of a cultural model that considers working as a central dimension of a person’s identity and conception of welfare. As recently reiterated by the literature on women’s empowerment in developing countries (Robinson-Pant, 2004; Kabeer, 1999), education can transmit selected norms and values such as gender equality, autonomy and emancipation, thereby increasing not only resources but also agency and achievements. As underlined by Solera and Negri (2008), investment in education can reflect, *à la* Weber and Boudon, both instrumental and cognitive rationality.



**PREDICTIONS: Education has a direct effect:** what economists call “taste for work” and take to be a prior factor influencing labour-market choices is likely to be produced or reinforced by the process itself of acquiring education, and **it may favour labour-market attachment beyond strictly monetary returns.**

**MAIN CRITICISM:** how to empirically capture this cognitive-value dimension?



## PREFERENCE THEORY (Hakim)

Hakim challenges what she considers to be the dominant feminist view on women's employment patterns. Career breaks or part-time work, she argues, are not choices forced on women against their will because of their domestic responsibilities and the insufficient provision of child-care services. Rather, women's disadvantaged position in the labour market reflects the outcome of their varying work orientations. Hakim argues in line with modernization and individuation accounts that women, as well as men, are agents in their own lives, so that "self-classification as a primary earner or secondary earner is determined by chosen identities, rather than imposed by external circumstance or particular jobs" (Hakim, 2000: 275).

**PREDICTIONS:** Different investments in education reflect different sex-role preferences and work orientations. Education has both a direct or indirect effect on women's labour market behaviour (in and out; or full-time or part-time): this is chosen, as correspond to women's own preferences, which are heterogeneous.

**MAIN CRITICISMS:** Preferences do not determine outcomes completely: choices are constrained, so that **attitudes and behaviour may not correspond** // Preferences are not stable over the life course // **Preferences are socially structured:** for example policies supporting mothers' employment (and family care by fathers) affect the extent to which women (and men) can combine paid work with family responsibilities. They also affect gender role attitudes and preferences// **Class is a crucial constraint, especially in liberal welfare regime:** women in high-qualified occupations have more resources with which to indulge their preferences; they also hold different attitudes; however class differences, in both attitudes and behaviours, are more marked where "de-familialization" and "de-commodification" are less advanced // **Hakim's theory falls short of recognising and explaining differences across countries**



## INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL THEORIES

The extents to which the acceptance of maternal employment is based on education or class, the labour market is segmented, and interruptions around childbearing are polarised, vary across countries.

Firstly, the “classical” monetary returns to education are influenced by policies and norms affecting wages, family incomes, or time to care (Del Boca and Wetzels, 1997). Harkness and Waldfogel (2003) and Gustafsson et al (2003) show that **the variation in the pay gap between mothers and non-mothers is largest in the UK and smallest in Sweden**, and that it is not primarily due to differential selection into employment or to **differences in the wage structure**. **Policies are important**.

Secondly, **non-monetary returns depend on the welfare regime and gender arrangements too** (Lück, 2006). In particular, research has shown that the differentiating effect of education in attitudes is stronger in contexts where a general cultural shift in favour of non-traditional gender roles has not (fully) come about and **where de-familialization and de-commodification is weak, making some options more costly and less viable for some types of women than others but also defining them as less or more morally appropriate** (Sjöberg, 2004).

**The effect of class is institutionally and culturally embedded as well**. Some authors have shown that that differences between middle-class or working-class women in mothering respond more to **moral rationalities** than to instrumental rationalities. These moral rationalities are created at a micro relational level through the development of careers as identities, and of moral and social views on what is proper behaviour negotiated with partners and within social networks (Irwin, 2003; Duncan, 2005). Others scholars emphasise that in a “liberal” context like Britain class has not only symbolic but also **material implications** which affect women’s ability to overcome constraints (above all, a lack of childcare support) and to act upon preferences (McRae, 2003; Crompton, 2006).

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- **So in order to account for changes over time in female lifetime employment patterns one has to amalgamate insights from these different theoretical accounts, building a unified conceptual framework.**

A “good” framework comprises both micro- and macro-factors and both agency and structure. Crucial is the concept of constrained choices: women’s choices in the labour market reflect their preferences and their human capital, but they are embedded in a set of social, economic and cultural arrangements. As feminists point out (Saraceno, 1993; Sjoberg, 2004; Pfau-Effinger, 2004) these arrangements not only design the opportunities and constraints of women’s action, but they also define normality models, influencing women’s preferences, identities, and moral rationalities.

- The extent to which and the way in which marriage and motherhood have become more compatible with women’s paid work, and such compatibility is more or less polarised by education (and or class), **will depend on which of all the relevant micro and macro factors underlined in the literature have changed over time, and how they have done so.**

**What has happened in Italy and Britain?** Let’s quickly describe the British and Italian normative and socio-institutional contexts, how they changed from the 1950s to the beginning of the 2000s.



# DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

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## BRITAIN

- ✓ From Beveridge to liberal welfare regime. Then New Labour National Child Care Strategy, but still “liberal”
- ✓ Early and intensive tertiarisation
- ✓ Early and intensive family change  
Decline in fertility, then stability
- ✓ Stronger and general attitudinal change

## ITALY

- Corporatist-familialist welfare regime. Little change. Then “partial and selective” deregulation
- Late and partial tertiarisation
- More family stability  
Continuing fertility decline
- Smaller and compositional attitudinal change



# HYPOTHESES

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## **In Italy**

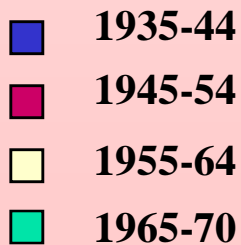
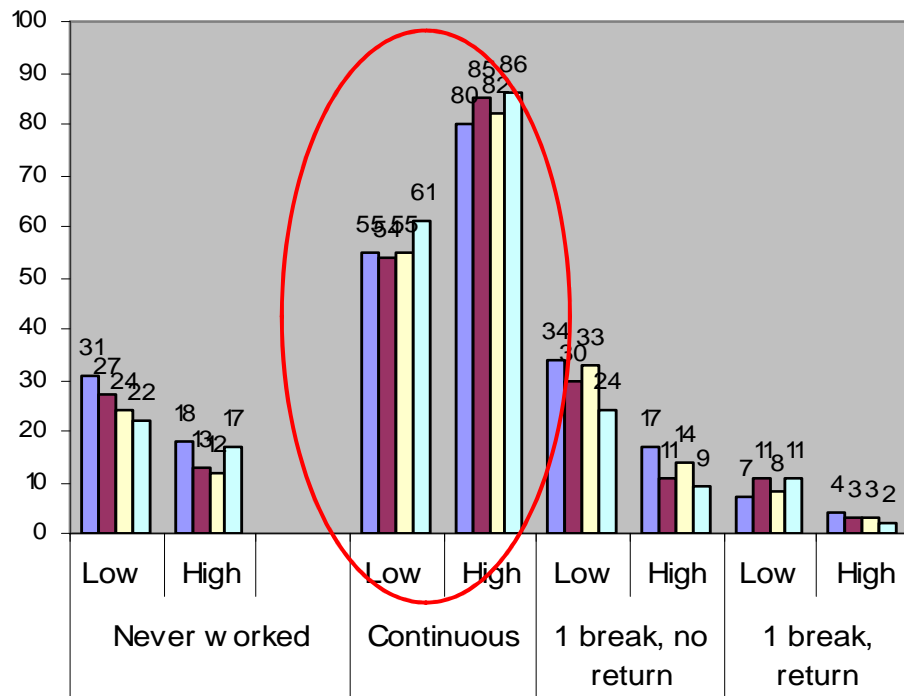
- the divide between poorly and highly educated women is mainly in the first entry into paid work, less in exits and re-entries later.
- Participation responds more to education than to motherhood
- Little change across cohorts
- Education is more important than class (*familialistic welfare regime effect? Legitimacy effect?*)

## **In Britain**

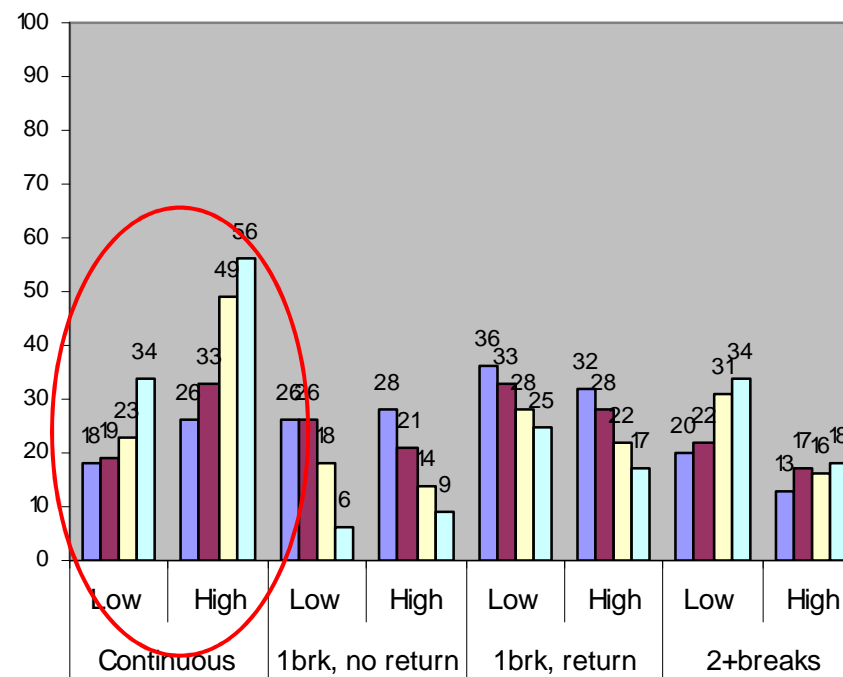
- In old cohorts the divide was in whether and when re-entering paid work, In young cohorts in whether and when exiting it in the first place
- Participation responds more to motherhood than to education,
- Bigger changes across cohorts
- Class is more important than education (*liberal welfare regime effect?*)

# TYPES OF WORK HISTORY UP TO AGE 35

## Italy

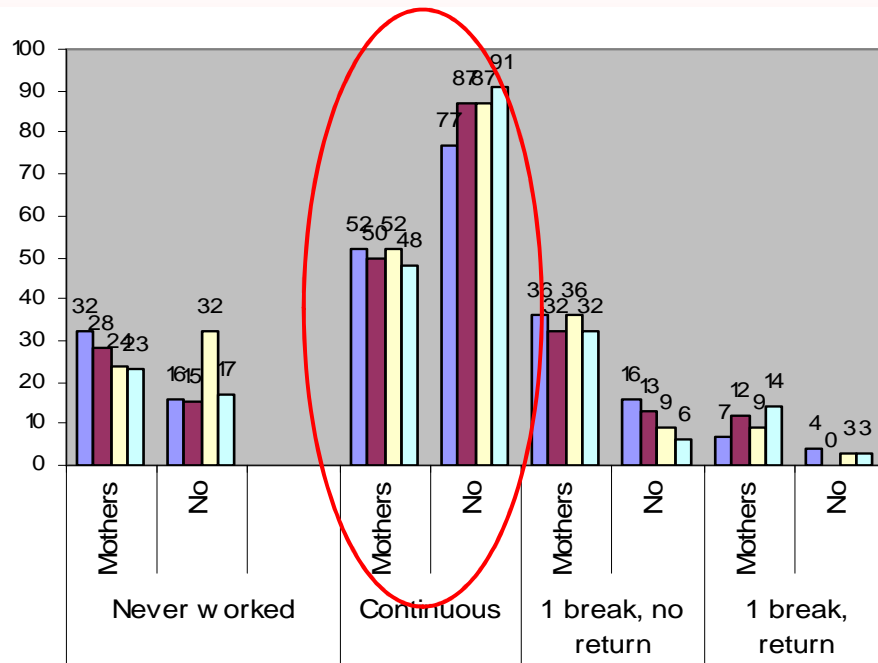


## Britain

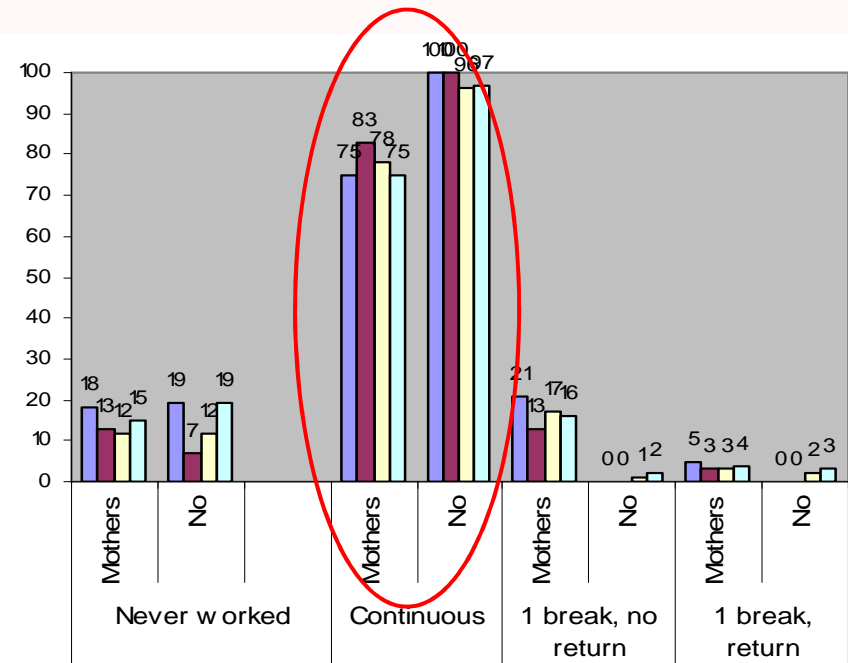


# BY MOTHERHOOD - ITALY

## Low-educated



## High-educated

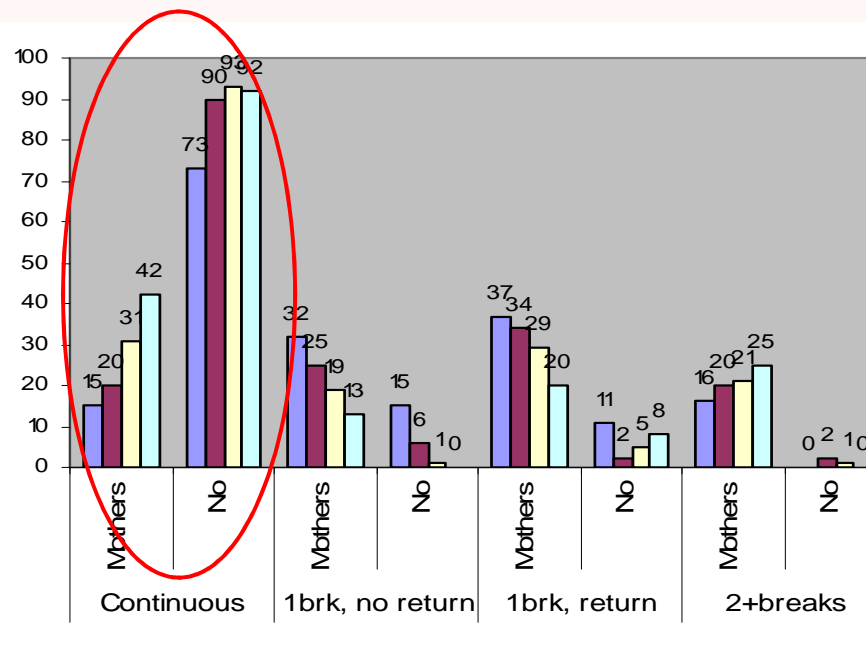
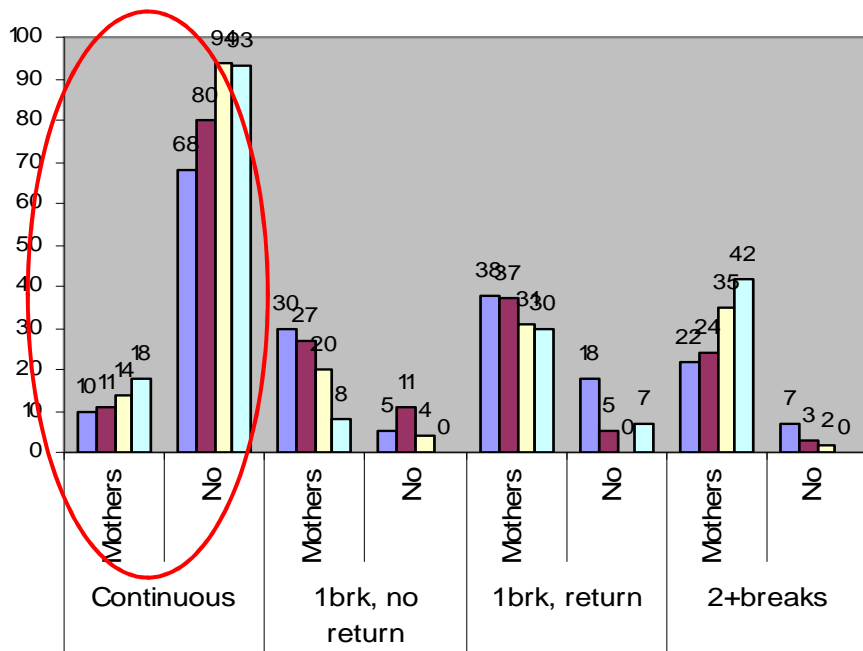


- 1935-44
- 1945-54
- 1955-64
- 1965-70

# BY MOTHERHOOD - BRITAIN

## Low-educated

## High-educated



- 1935-44
- 1945-54
- 1955-64
- 1965-70



## ITALY

- Compared to Britain, in Italy a much higher share of women never starts working, also among the highly educated.
- Once starting to work, nearly all highly educated women have continuous careers, while one out of two of the low-educated. The others low-educated interrupt and never come back. In line with previous studies, it seems that in Italy women's labour supply responds much more to education than to motherhood. The effect of motherhood is stronger for the low-educated but still one out of two of them has continuous careers .
- Relatively little change across cohorts. In the oldest cohort for both highly-educated and poorly-educated mothers the gap with respect to non-mothers is 25 absolute points. Then polarisation has slightly increased: for the low-educated the impact of motherhood increases while it decreases for the most educated (a part for the last cohort when highly educated mothers seem to experience more interruptions, probably as effect of the "partial and selective" labour market deregulation).



## BRITAIN

- Discontinuous careers are typical also among high-educated, although the gap increases over time: in younger cohorts one out of two high-educated have continuous careers, while among the low-educated one out of three. Another 33% has one break, return or two or more breaks.
- Participation seems to respond much more to motherhood than to education, although the impact of motherhood is stronger among the low-educated, at least from the second cohort onwards .
- But polarisation has increased: while nearly 90% of mothers in the oldest cohort interrupted paid work regardless of their level of education, in the last cohort 80% of low-educated mothers had discontinuous careers, against 58% of the most educated.

# FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S FIRST EXIT - BRITAIN

(Discrete time duration models)

	1st 1935-44	2nd 1945-54	3rd 1955-64	4th 1965-74
<i>Duration in employment</i>	-0.000	<b>-0.002***</b>	<b>-0.005***</b>	<b>-0.007***</b>
<i>Education: up to lower-secondary</i>				
- upper-secondary or tertiary	-0.11	-0.13	-0.13	-0.34**
<i>Baseline social class: Service</i>				
- routine non manual workers	0.16	<b>0.46***</b>	<b>0.65***</b>	<b>0.65***</b>
- petty bourgeoisie	-1.30**	-0.60	-0.48	<b>1.18***</b>
- skilled manual workers	0.30*	<b>0.48***</b>	<b>0.76***</b>	<b>1.02***</b>
- unskilled manual workers	0.21	<b>0.57***</b>	<b>0.92***</b>	<b>1.01***</b>
<i>Baseline marital status: not in couple</i>				
- married/cohabiting	0.84***	0.79***	0.71***	<b>0.32</b>
<i>Baseline child status: no children</i>				
- pregnant	3.77***	<b>4.28***</b>	<b>4.40***</b>	<b>4.65***</b>
- youngest child aged 0-3	2.82***	3.06***	3.30***	<b>4.00***</b>
- youngest child aged 3+	0.42	<b>1.94***</b>	<b>2.57***</b>	<b>1.56**</b>
<i>Number of children</i>	-1.45***	-1.42***	<b>-0.57***</b>	<b>-0.29**</b>
NUMBER OF MONTHS-PERSONS	64116	95789	100707	52457
NUMBER OF WOMEN	538	765	761	450
NUMBER OF TRANSITIONS	433	595	491	205

Source: BHPS, up 2005 (table 2, p.25)

Other covariates in the model: job Full-time/part-time + Region (England, Wales, Scotland) + Mother's work experience

# FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S FIRST EXIT – ITALY

(Discrete time duration models)

	1st 1935-44	2nd 1945-54	3rd 1955-64	4th 1965-74
<i>Duration in employment</i>	0.001	-0.000	<b>-0.02*</b>	<b>-0.002</b>
<i>Education: up to lower-secondary</i>	-0.34*	-0.60***	-0.66***	<b>-0.92***</b>
- upper-secondary or tertiary				
<i>Baseline social class: Service</i>				
- routine non manual workers	1.02***	1.27***	1.19***	1.14***
- petty bourgeoisie	0.30	<b>1.23***</b>	<b>1.01***</b>	0.70*
- skilled manual workers	0.91**	1.36***	0.89**	0.63*
- unskilled manual workers	1.01***	1.50***	1.08***	1.02***
<i>Baseline marital status: not in couple</i>				
- married/cohabiting	-1.15*	<b>-0.26</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.85***</b>
<i>Baseline child status: no children</i>				
- pregnant	2.57***	2.15***	<b>1.67***</b>	<b>1.65***</b>
- youngest child aged 0-3	1.71***	<b>0.84**</b>	<b>0.86***</b>	<b>0.62*</b>
- youngest child aged 3+	0.24	0.10	0.13	-0.07
<i>Number of children</i>	-0.25**	-0.26*	-0.07	-0.03
NUMBER OF MONTHS-PERSONS	90973	130896	128091	88694
NUMBER OF WOMEN	541	733	783	830
NUMBER OF TRANSITIONS	224	261	238	156

Source: ILFI, up 2005 (table 1, p.23)

Other covariates in the model: job Full-time/part-time + Region (North, Centre, South) + Mother's work experience



## BRITAIN

### CLASS SEEMS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EDUCATION:

- Only if one omits class from the model does education become significant. Evidently, in **a liberal regime, with a residualist social policy and high wage dispersion, education itself does not guarantee employment continuity**. Rather, British women need to have spent a long time in the labour market and to have reached relatively good positions if they are to enjoy some maternity protection and/or sufficient incomes to purchase care. (Ward et al 1996; Dex et al 1998; Davies and Joshi 2001)

- **Only in the last cohort do highly-educated women exhibit a stronger attachment to paid work regardless of their occupational class.** This can be read as an “homogamy effect”. In a liberal welfare regime like that of Britain, the chances of work/family combination depend strongly on the overall resources to which women have access, and therefore also on the partner. The increasing polarisation in employment transitions between poorly- and highly-educated women partly reflects the general increase, in the 1980s and 1990s, of polarisation between double full-time households and one-earner-and-a-half households, and between high-status and low-status double full-time households. However, in the late 1990s and early 2000s New Labour reforms mainly benefited low- and middle-income families. It is therefore likely that the stronger attachment to paid work shown by young highly-educated women in Britain is also an “attitude effect”. It reflects a change in orientations and preferences. Evidently, for either instrumental or cognitive-identity reasons, these women are less ready to give up their investments in education and in the labour market, and they try to remain attached to paid work even when the income, the conditions, and presumably the satisfaction, of their jobs are not as good as expected.



## ITALY

EDUCATION SEEMS MORE IMPORTANT THAN CLASS: **effect of education remains after controlling for class**

-informal childcare is widespread and intense (Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Saraceno 2008)

-Given the insider-outsider structure of the LM women know that if they exit they risk permanent exclusion. For well-educated women running this risk is more costly

-Legitimacy effect : in a context where traditional norms are still quite strong and attitudinal change has essentially been compositional (cohort not significant once controlling for education and labour market experience; Künzler 2002; Scott 1999; Treas and Widmer 2000) and demand for labour low, only highly educated women are legitimated to work (Solera and Bettio 2007)

EFFECT OF CHILDREN (BOTH AGE AND NUMBER) IS LOWER IN ITALY THAN IN BRITAIN: **women in Italy enjoy much better protection during pregnancy and after childbirth** (if they are in the formal economy), and **they can more frequently rely on the help of the "extended family"** to solve their childcare needs.

IN BOTH COUNTRIES POLARIZATION EDUCATION-BASED IS HIGHEST IN THE LAST COHORT: in the late 1990s and early 2000s **education became particularly important in order to deal with the Italian route to flexibilisation**. Women with higher educational profiles are better equipped not to be entrapped in secondary atypical labour markets. They normally occupy more fulfilling and qualified jobs also when they have atypical contracts. Moreover, in a familistic welfare regime like Italy's, they can rely on greater individual and family capital (economic and social) with which to survive and with which to find new job opportunities when the atypical contract expires (Bertolini and Rizza, 2005).

# SEPARATE MODELS BY EDUCATION- FIRST TRANSITION OUT

	ITALY		GREAT BRIT.	
	Low	High	Low	High
<i>Birth cohort: 1935-1944</i>				
- 1945-1954	<b>-0.05</b>	<b>-0.56**</b>	-0.14*	-0.32**
- 1955-1964	-0.06	-0.30*	<b>-0.43***</b>	<b>-0.69***</b>
- 1965-1974	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>-0.45**</b>	<b>-0.61***</b>	<b>-1.07***</b>
<i>Duration in employment</i>				
	<b>0.000</b>	<b>-0.003**</b>	-0.01***	-0.01***
<i>Social class: high</i>				
- routine non manual, low	<b>0.62***</b>	<b>0.96***</b>	0.22***	0.45***
- manual workers	<b>0.45***</b>	<b>0.83***</b>	0.24***	0.43***
<i>Region: North (England)</i>				
- Centre (Wales)	0.09	-0.13	0.13*	-0.08
- South (Scotland)	0.27***	0.04	-0.09	0.12
<i>Marital status: not couple</i>				
- married/cohabiting	<b>-0.25*</b>	<b>0.26</b>	0.73***	0.52***
<i>Child status: no children</i>				
- pregnant o aged 0-3	1.71***	1.67***	<b>4.07***</b>	<b>4.37***</b>
- youngest child aged 3+	0.47**	0.81**	2.51***	2.24***
<i>Number of children</i>	<b>-0.52***</b>	<b>-0.49***</b>	<b>-1.61***</b>	<b>-1.35***</b>
N. MONTHS-PERSONS	241305	209584	196272	123014
N. WOMEN	1510	1463	1633	929
N. TRANSITIONS	668	210	1151	490

# SEPARATE MODELS BY EDUCATION- FIRST TRANSITION BACK

	ITALY		GREAT BRIT.	
	Low	High	Low	High
<i>Birth cohort: 1935-1944</i>				
- 1945-1954	0.24*	0.58	0.11	0.15
- 1955-1964	0.26*	0.77*	0.43***	0.48***
- 1965-1974	0.83***	1.36***	0.93***	0.85***
<i>Duration in housework</i>	-0.01***	-0.01*	<b>-0.003***</b>	<b>-0.007***</b>
<i>Previous Lm experience</i>	-0.003***	-0.002	<b>0.002**</b>	<b>-0.001</b>
<i>Social class: high</i>				
- routine non manual, low	<b>-0.58***</b>	<b>0.57*</b>	-0.12*	0.07
- manual workers	<b>-0.55***</b>	<b>0.32</b>	-0.21***	-0.19*
<i>Region: North (England)</i>				
- Centre (Wales)	-0.05	-0.25	<b>-0.21*</b>	<b>0.05</b>
- South (Scotland)	-0.96***	-1.55***	-0.06	0.11
<i>Marital status: not couple</i>				
- married/cohabiting	-0.83***	-0.69*	0.33***	0.19
<i>Child status: no children</i>				
- pregnant o aged 0-3	-0.13	-0.85*	<b>-0.64***</b>	<b>-1.12***</b>
- youngest child aged 3+	<b>0.54*</b>	<b>-0.37</b>	0.12	-0.07
<i>Number of children</i>	0.17**	0.14	0.07*	0.16***
N. MONTHS-PERSONS	87283	23187	103242	32972
N. WOMEN	708	234	1271	543
N. TRANSITIONS	234	68	1028	417



## ITALY

### TRANSITION OUT

- The risk of interrupting has reduced only for the highly educated
- When they interrupt, they tend to do it later , not around marriage as in the case of low-educated women
- the interruptions of highly-educated women seem less geographically differentiated and more driven by cost-opportunity considerations: class and Lm experience weight more for the highly-educated

### TRANSITION BACK

- Both highly and poorly educated women have increased their re-entries
- Re-entries for the low-educated depend more on previous class and age of children



## BRITAIN

### TRANSITION OUT

- The risk of interrupting has reduced both for the low and high-educated, but especially for the highly educated.
- Also the timing of interruptions seems to differ slightly: number of children has a stronger effect for the low-educated, while having a young child is stronger for the highly-educated. This suggests that highly-educated women tend to exit later, more around childbirth than around marriage, and that they respond less to income or care needs due to having more children.

### TRANSITION BACK

- Both highly and poorly educated women have increased their re-entries.
- But re-entries for the low-educated depend more on labour market experience and age of children.



# CONCLUSIONS: SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

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**My findings show that both in Italy and Britain women from younger cohorts are more attached to the labour market, but:**

• In Britain discontinuous careers were and still are typical also among high-educated women: participation responds much more to motherhood and to class than to education, although the impact of motherhood is stronger among the low-educated, especially in younger cohorts. Indeed in Britain polarisation between highly and poorly educated women has increased and it has moved to an earlier stage of their life course: from whether and when re-entering paid work after marriage and childbirths to whether and when interrupting it in the first place.

• In Italy a high share of women never start working, also among the highly educated, especially in the South. Once starting to work, nearly all highly educated Italian women have continuous careers, while one out of two of the low-educated. Compared to Britain, changes across cohorts have been small. Indeed in Italy women's employment has grown but "compositionally": *ceteris paribus*, the influence of education, marriage and children has remained fairly constant across cohorts. Women still appear polarised in a "opt-in opt-out" participation pattern: if low-educated, they often remain lifelong housewives, never entering paid work or interrupting it without never re-entering; if highly-educated, they remain lifelong workers, although discontinuous careers and polarisation have generally increased in the last decade. Moreover in Italy participation responds much more to education than to motherhood: the effect of motherhood is stronger for the low-educated but still one out of two of them has continuous careers.



## **I argue that these findings reasonably reflect the interplay between different structural, institutional and normative factors.**

- In Britain, as the marriage bar declined, gender role attitudes got less traditional, service economy expanded and maternity leaves were introduced, mother's employment became more accepted. However, without a parallel improvement of work-family reconciliation policies and of the terms and conditions of the labour market as in the 1980s and 1990s, women's ability to act upon preferences and overcome constraints has become strongly dependent on the type of job women have, on their labour market experience, and on their family income. Indeed, in Britain, where a highly de-regulated labour market has allowed for a wide spread of earnings and where a residualist welfare state has pushed to rely on the private but where the intergenerational-kinship help is weaker than in Italy, class results more important than education. Highly educated women who have not entered the primary labour market or good jobs also tend to withdraw from employment.
- In Italy, the demand for labour has turned in favour of women only in the early 1970s never reaching the level of Britain, whereas gender role attitudes have remained quite traditional, reconciliation policies quite scarce and re-entries opportunities quite difficult. Against this background of increasing preferences for non-domestic roles but of relatively constant constraints, in order to assure themselves entry and permanence in the labour market Italian women have chosen to invest more in education, while delaying marriage and reducing fertility. Moreover, in Italy, education seems to have an independent, not-class mediated, effect. As everywhere, education facilitates the access to good jobs and to the career ladder but, in a context where women can rely on generous maternity and parental leaves and on generous informal childcare services, women, both the highly and the poorly educated, are less influenced by age and number of children. Moreover, given the high "rigidity" of the Italian labour market and the "partial and selective" type of deregulation introduced after 1997, Italian women know that if they exit they risk permanent exclusion. This risk is more costly for highly-educated women which, class an type of job being equal, try to remain attached to paid work as much as they can. Also, in "traditional" Italy, education seems to pay off with higher legitimacy to work.



# CONCLUSIONS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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## THE ISSUE OF AGENCY, CONSTRAINTS AND INEQUALITIES

**Women's decisions are the outcomes of women's own agency, given the opportunity and constraints with which they are faced. Everywhere women have increased their desire to build their life not only around the domestic sphere**

- Women in both countries seem to have used improved access to education to change their options and their negotiating power with regard to family and work decisions.
- Although in both countries child care is still mostly a family affair, more mothers are in the labour market than one would expect. Women who want children and also want, or need, to stay in the labour market use all the means at their disposal to do so.
- Both highly and poorly educated women have increased their re-entries



# CONCLUSIONS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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## THE ISSUE OF AGENCY, CONSTRAINTS AND INEQUALITIES

**Contrary to individuation-type of arguments *a la* Beck or *a la* Hakim, both in Italy and Britain women's employment paths still differ by "classic" stratification factors such as education and class. Although polarisation has assumed new forms.**

The data used here, as most longitudinal retrospective-type of data, cannot be used to disentangle the weight of preferences and constraints. However, through a micro-macro lifecycle model that looks at changes across time (cohorts) and space (countries) and at the interplay between the symbolic, the material and the institutional, one can conclude **that the context does matter.**

- The higher fluidity and flexibility of UK women in entering and exiting the labour market appears a response to the opportunities of a labour market that offers little security but many second chances, however marginalized. In contrast, the stronger labour-market attachment of the, fewer, Italian women who enter the labour market seems a response to a rigid labour market, where, having exited, it is difficult to re-enter, even in a marginal position.
- Although in both countries all four cohorts of women have had to deal with a scarcity of childcare services for the under-threes, in Italy this scarcity has been and still is partly compensated to a larger extent by the care provided by grandmothers.
- Convergence is taking place between the younger cohorts of the two countries: owing to increasing de-regulation of the labour market, also Italian women are becoming more flexible in their labour-market participation.
- Policy also matters, although probably less than one would expect. The more generous maternity and parental leave granted to regular dependent workers in Italy compared to the UK probably absorbs (or substitutes) part of the fluidity that UK working women have to manage on their own.



# CONCLUSIONS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

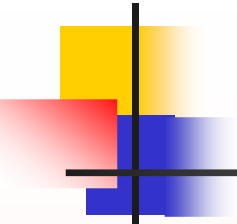
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## THE IMPORTANCE OF WELFARE REGIMES

**In both countries family policies fail to provide adequate support to the combination of work and family.**

**This has negative effects both at the individual and at the societal level**

- In Italy, where such lack is combined with a strong labour-market regulation or a “partial and selective” deregulation producing an “insider-outsider” divide, with uncertain employment opportunities, with relatively traditional gender role norms and with a “strong family” the outcome is the well-known low fertility-low participation equilibrium. And one of the highest gap between high and low-educated women in employment rates
- In Britain, where inadequate family policy reforms have gone together with a strong wage de-regulation and with weak training policies, at least under the late 1990s, the outcome is, at the aggregate level, a low-skill, cheap-labour equilibrium, while, at the individual level, the risk of poverty and of fragmented careers.  
Class-based polarization across cohorts in chances to have continuous careers is high.



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Most of the analyses and theoretical and empirical discussions shown in this power-point paper are drawn from:

**Solera, C. (2009). *Women in and out of paid work: Changes across generations in Italy and Britain.* Bristol: The Policy Press.**