

How family networks of working mothers are changing in times of economic recession

Cinzia Castagnaro, Antonella Guarneri, Sabrina Prati

Istat

Aims

Work/family reconciliation is one of the most discussed matters in the national and international debate on welfare. We assisted to a progressive shift from maternalist to work/family reconciliation policies. In the Italian framework, the support offered by family members in childcare activities often fills some welfare shortcomings.

In this study the attention is focused on the Italian case drawing the instrumental networks of working mothers with children aged 0-2, the group of women more in need of a support network. The general idea is to carry out an exploratory study in order to illustrate the different aspects characterizing the everyday life of working mothers in their usual tasks of family care.

In times of economic recession it seems to be very interesting to study how changes the complex mosaic of childcare strategies of working mothers according to different characteristics of mothers and households. To accomplish this task, networks will be displayed focusing to two different year of reference (2011 and 2005), during the widespread economical crisis and in the pre-crisis period.

Data and methods

Individual data were provided by the Istat Sample Survey on Births (2005 and 2011 edition). This survey was carried out for the 1st time in 2002; the second edition was carried out in 2005 and a renewed edition took place in 2011/2012. In our analysis we consider a sample of around 17,000 births enrolled in the Population Registers in 2003 (2005 edition – long form questionnaire) whereas in 2011 survey were interviewed 18 000 mothers of newborns enrolled at the Population Register during 2009-2010.

Main questionnaire sections are: household and delivery; working history before and after the delivery; childcare and household chores; socio-economic context.

Mothers were interviewed through C.A.T.I. (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) technique; a little sub-sample consisting of 1600 foreign mothers in couple with foreigners were interviewed by P.A.P.I. technique (Paper And Pencil Interviewing).

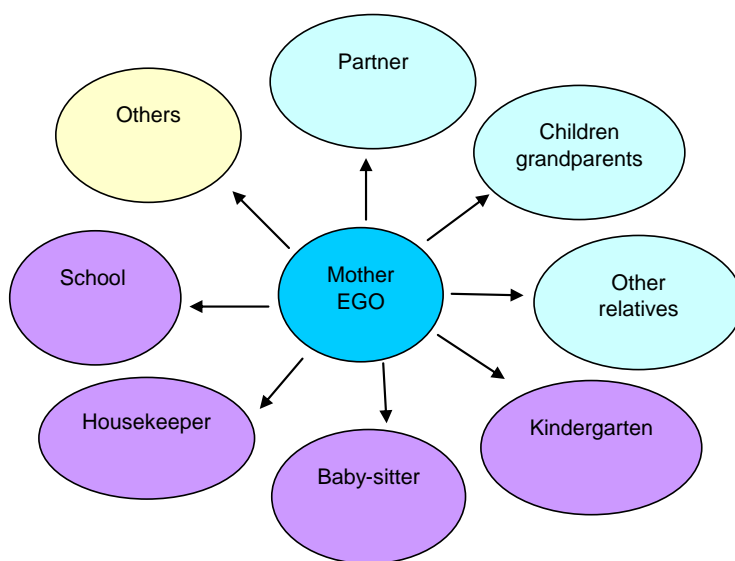
Researchers have often used household survey data to study family structures and family functioning (Widmer E. D., 2006). Social network analysis (SNA) is a technique for visualizing, describing and analyzing a system of relations. Ego-centered networks consist of a single

individual (usually named ego, or focal ego) with one or more relations defined between her/him and a number of individuals – members of ego’s personal network (or local network). The network members are called alters.

Focusing on ego-centered networks of mothers graphs are displayed and the main network measures are calculated (Figure 1).

Among the several approaches in measuring ego-centered social networks with survey, in the role relation approach (RR) response categories are types of relationships (e.g. partner, parents, children, friends, etc.) (Hlebec, V. and Kogovšek, T., 2011).

Figure 1 - The composition of mothers’ networks



In this application for each group of mothers we detected, first of all, the different kinds of instrumental support, given and received (type of relation), then the people involved for each relation (composition of the network) in order to display and try to measure the ‘instrumental networks’ of mothers (size of the network).

Furthermore, the network information gathered through this analysis could be considered as auxiliary variable in regression models aimed to better understand the quality of life of interviewed mothers.

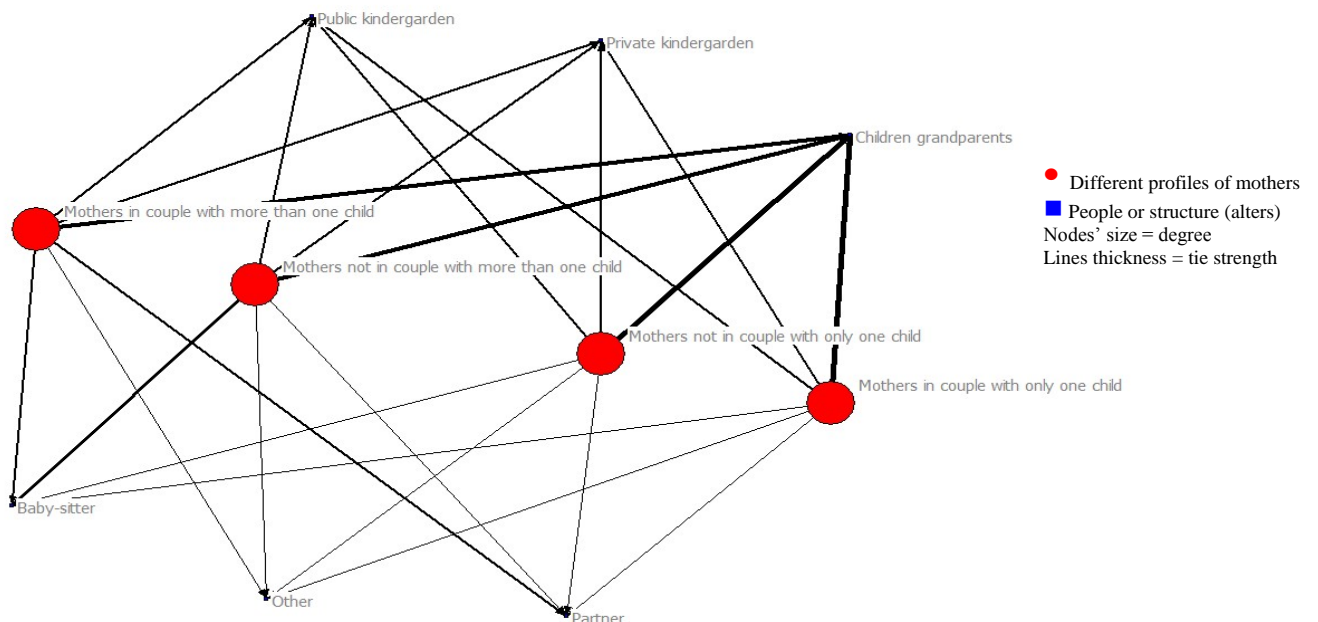
Preliminary results

The networks of working mothers with children aged 0-2 assume different forms according both to the profiles of mothers and to the kinds of support considered.

Four groups of working mothers are considered: the ones with partner living together (shared in living with only one child or living with more than one child) and the ones living not in couple (shared in living with only one child or living with more than one child).

The role of grandparents is particularly relevant if we consider the crucial importance of the personal/familiar relation in the childcare (Figure 2). As a matter of fact, the pre-primary school's option doesn't appear so widespread mainly because both of the lack and of the not homogeneous distribution of these services on the Italian territory.

Figure 2 - Received help network: childcare during mothers' working hours. Year 2005



Grandparents play an important role in financial support and housekeeping activities too. In these two kinds of support network composition and ties' strength differ according to different profiles of mothers.

This framework could be widened considering further profiles of mothers, e.g. mothers that declare to have difficulties in reconciling work and family vs. mothers that have no difficulties.

These main results will be compared with the networks built with the new edition survey data (2011 edition) in order to appreciate the different social and economic context in which the birth took place.

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