

# **Will They Turn Their Back On You? The Relations With Parents Among Young People Choosing Cohabitation As The Living Arrangement In Poland And Italy**

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## **Abstract**

This article investigates the role of intergenerational relations for union formation in Poland and Italy, where cohabitation has become increasingly common only recently. Both these societies are characterized by strong attachment to catholic religion and tradition. Limited welfare state support for youth reinforces the role of kinship ties in Polish and Italian culture. Recent research has argued that under such conditions, youth avoids living arrangement choices which clash with parental values. Deterioration of relationships with family might weaken support received by youth. Hence, cohabitation is chosen mainly among youth with secularized and liberal parents.

Using data from Polish and Italian Generation and Gender Survey we would like to show if these are indeed mainly young people from well-educated, liberal families who cohabit. Next, we analyze how living arrangement choices are interrelated with the frequency and satisfaction from contacts with parents, as well as chances for receiving material support from family.

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## **Extended abstract**

### **Introduction and research hypothesis**

Most European countries have seen a retreat from marriage and a diffusion of cohabitation. The rising diversity of union forms is argued to result from a broader socio-demographic change in Europe and a shift in norms and values (Van De Kaa 2001; Surkyn & Lesthaeghe 2004).

The diffusion of cohabitation proceeded with differential pace across Europe. Societies characterized by strong attachment to tradition and Catholic religion were clearly staying behind. In particular, Poland was argued to remain “immune” to spreading cohabitation (Sobotka & Toulemon 2008) and has only recently recorded an upward trend (Matysiak 2009). Also in Italy the nonmarital unions have been a relatively recent phenomenon (Rosina & Fraboni 2004, DiGiulio & Rosina 2007, Schröder 2008). Apart from the strong role of the Catholic Church, both countries share familialistic culture. The evidence on strong kinship ties concerns among others: support by family provided for the youth - continued by parents also after their children marry (Tomassini et al. 2003, Styrac 2009) as well as remarkable residential proximity between parents and children and high frequency of their contacts (Tomassini et al. 2004; Dalla Zuanna et al. 2007; Santarelli, Cottone 2009). The lack of support of welfare system for youth experiencing crucial events of their life reinforces the role of the family in Polish and Italian society (Schröder 2008a; Di Giulio & Rosina 2007; Albertini and Mencarini 2011). Given such cultural and institutional settings, it is plausible to think that in both countries the tendency to choose cohabitation rather than marriage at the start of the first union should emerge mainly among young people with more secularized and liberal parents. In contrast to this narrow group, most young people could be expected to follow the customary route of union formation, i.e. direct marriage. Since most young people in Poland and Italy are raised in religious and tradition-oriented families, they make union formation choices that are acceptable for parents (Rosina & Fraboni 2004).

Making living arrangement choices that clash with the values of parents would mean deterioration of mutual contact with parents and weakening of emotional and perhaps also material support (Nazio and Blossfeld 2003; Di Giulio & Rosina 2004, 2007; Schröder 2008b).

The existing studies on union formation in Italy show that indeed diffusion of cohabitation has been started by young people from better educated families, who are argued to be more open-minded and less attached to tradition (Fraboni & Rosina 2004; DiGiulio & Rosina 2007; Gabrielli & Hoem 2010). However, more direct evidence on the actual mechanism through which parents influence the choices of their children is still missing. Besides, for inference on how cohabitation spreads in traditional and religious societies with familialistic culture, it would be suitable to extend the research on this topic to other countries with similar cultural and institutional arrangements, such as Poland.

In this paper, we revisit and update the previous findings on the impact of parental background on union formation in Italy and we also confirm if the same associations can be observed in Poland. Next, we follow the arguments regarding the importance of preserving good relationships with parents for union formation choices. In order to provide evidence on how the impact of parents on union formation among young people, we compare the proximity of living arrangements, frequency of mutual contacts as well as emotional and material support provided by parents for cohabiting and married young people. The underlying idea is that choosing cohabitation instead of marriage may lead to deterioration of intergenerational relations, and that only young people with less traditional background that gives them more autonomy, select into the cohabiting group.

### **Data and methods**

For the purposes of our analysis, we use data from two large-scale surveys which were carried out within "Generations and Gender Survey". Similar fieldwork methodology and questionnaire design applied both in Polish and Italian surveys gives excellent opportunities for cross-country comparison.

In the first step of our analysis, we use event history techniques in order to investigate the impact of social and parental background on choices of living arrangements among young people. Specifically, we estimate competing risk hazard models, where

cohabitation and marriage are regarded as alternative options in the process of union formation.

Next, we look at the interrelations between of union formation and the intensity and quality of intergenerational relationships. In this second step of our analyses, we get insight into the consequences of choosing cohabitation with respect to marriage as the living arrangement, taking selectivity of these cohabitation choices into account. To this end, we model union formation decisions and the quality of intergenerational relationships jointly, treating them as simultaneous processes.

### **Expected findings**

The expected findings discussed here are based on preliminary estimates on Polish Generation and Gender Survey, we expect to see similar results for Italy.

According to our preliminary findings, young people choosing cohabitation as the first living arrangement come from better educated and less religious families living in towns rather than in villages. This matches the idea that the process of union formation is affected by the family background, and that parental conservative values and attachment to religion prevent decisions on non-traditional living arrangements.

Next, we analyse how living arrangement choices affect intergenerational relations. We take into account that these might be precisely those young people who anticipate weaker sanctions, that select into cohabitators group. Our results suggest that in general choosing cohabitation indeed worsens intergenerational relations as measured by the frequency of and satisfaction from contacts with parents. However, cohabitation has no negative impact on chances for receiving material support from parents. It seems that even if parents don't accept the choice of their adult children, they continue supporting them.

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