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The relations between young cohabiting people
and their parents**

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Will they turn back on you? The relations between young cohabiting people and their parents

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Abstract

This article investigates the relation between cohabitation of young people and the frequency of meetings with their parents. These issues have recently attracted increasing attention because, while nonmarital living arrangements are becoming common in most European countries, the consequences of this process are not yet well understood. Our analysis focuses on Poland and Italy, two countries dominated by tradition and strong intergenerational ties. We use the data from the recently released Polish Generation and Gender Survey and the comparable Italian Family and Social Subjects Survey, which provide information on both union formation patterns and the frequency of meetings with parents. Notwithstanding similarities between the two countries, our results show that in Italy cohabitation lowers contacts of adult children with parents, whereas for Polish youth we do not find strong evidence in such sense.

Keywords: adult child-parent contacts, cohabitation, intergenerational relations

JEL: J12, J14, Z13

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I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to get more insight into the consequences of cohabitation for the frequency of meetings with parents. In most European countries, cohabitation is becoming a very common form of living arrangements (Kalmijn, 2007; Kiernan, 2004; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008), which raises the need to include unmarried cohabitation in studies on family life. In the international literature, substantial effort has been made to understand the reasons behind choosing cohabitation rather than marriage (Lye, 1996), however, the impact of the consequences of the rising rates of cohabitation among younger generations on intergenerational relations has been so far hardly investigated.

It is argued in the literature that the frequency of contact between parents and children may be considered as a good measure of the strength of the parent-child relationship (Kalmijn, 2006; Kalmijn & De Vries, 2009; Lye, Klepinger, Hyle, & Nelson, 1995). Contacts serve the purpose of providing companionship and of being aware of each other's needs, as well as for exchange of emotional and material support (Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Silverstein, Parrott, & Bengtson, 1995). Previous studies have also showed a positive correlation between the subjective evaluation of the relationship quality and the frequency of contacts (Kalmijn & Dykstra, 2006). The relevance of this dimension for the intergenerational relationships raises therefore an interesting question whether contacts weaken as a result of choices of non-traditional living arrangements among young people.

Previous studies do not provide unequivocal evidence on this issue. Two of the few empirical studies carried out so far, by Hogerbrugge and Dykstra (2009) and Bucx, Van Wel, Knijn, and Hagendoorn (2008), show that in the Netherlands there is a negative association between cohabitation and contacts with family members. Similar conclusions have been reached by Eggebeen (2005), who shows that in the United States cohabiting couples exchange less support with parents than married couples. The results of Maslauskaitė (2011) suggest a lack of significant difference in Lithuania between cohabiting and married children in the frequency of

meetings with parents. Moreover Daatland (2007) found no difference between cohabiting and married adult children in the quality of their relationships with their parents in Norway. The view of negative consequences of cohabitation is refused also for adult children in Great Britain, and the effect is very limited and unclear in Italy (Nazio & Saraceno, 2012). Based on this brief review of available studies it is evident that more empirical evidence would be helpful for better understanding of the links between partnership choices among young people and the strength of their bonds with parents. These issues seem especially relevant for countries with high attachment to family ties and tradition, where the value of the institution of marriage remains strong, but when considering the centrality of both cohabitation and parental support to the lives of young adults, their general applicability is straightforward.

Previous studies have focused on describing the association between cohabitation and the frequency of contacts with parents. Assessing the causal relationship between union type and the frequency of contacts with parents is challenging because people choosing to cohabit are a very specific, selective group. For example, they have been found to come from better educated, non-religious and less tradition-oriented families (Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010; Nazio & Saraceno, 2012). Some of the characteristics of individuals that choose to cohabit rather than to marry can be directly operationalized, measured and taken into account in the analyses. Following a selection perspective, many previous studies demonstrate that most, if not the total, variation in contacts with parents is attributable to differences in social and demographic characteristics of cohabitators (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009; Nazio & Saraceno, 2012). However, many behavioural, cultural and attitudinal characteristics may be very difficult to capture in the data and handled in the standard regression design. Therefore, studies that compare the relations between people who decide to cohabit and their parents focus on portraying associations rather than on drawing causal inference.

In this paper we aim at distinguishing the impact of selectivity of cohabitation from the genuine impact of union type. Unlike in previous studies, we estimate simultaneous equations

models, which examine jointly the selection into a specific union type and the consequences of this choice in terms of the frequency of contacts with their parents.

We use data from large, nationally representative surveys carried out in Italy and Poland, two countries still dominated by tradition and strong intergenerational ties, and presenting similar patterns in partnership formation (Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010; Hoem, Gabrielli, Jasilioniene, Kostova, & Matysiak, 2010). Given the institutional and cultural context of these countries, we may expect strong differences between cohabiting and married adult children in the quality of their relationships with their parents. Hence, our study complements research carried out mostly in Western Europe or United States, where individualisation and changes in attitudes regarding the organisation of family and private life have been more advanced (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Van de Kaa, 2001). Moreover, we complement and extend the existing literature on the impact of cohabitation on frequency of contacts with parents in terms of the comparative design. The only comparative study in this strand of research, by Nazio and Saraceno (2012), provides evidence on countries that are quite different in terms of the range of cohabitation, patterns of frequency of contacts with parents and in terms of a whole range of cultural and institutional factors that moderate the impact of union formation on intergenerational relations. Our study compares instead countries that are quite similar in all these respects.

II. THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

There is a long-standing debate about the impact of adult children's life styles and status attainment on the quality of family relations (Pillemer & Sutor, 2002). Many societies impose certain norms regarding the status a person should achieve at specific early life course stages. For example, young people are usually expected to complete their education, find a stable job, leave the parental home and establish an independent life; and, ultimately, to become a potential source of support for their parents. These norms may also concern getting married and forming their own family (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010) and young adults who remain unmarried may be

regarded as avoiding responsibility and commitments, which in turn may undermine relationships with parents.

The norms that condition adulthood and maturity may overlap with social attitudes towards living arrangements. In case of socially unacceptable behaviours by their children – and cohabitation can be view one of these – parents could see the failures of their children as their own defeats, trying to discourage them by reducing the intensity of their relationship (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004). Partnership choices that clash with social attitudes and norms of reference of parents may lead to deterioration in family relations (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Schröder, 2010).

These norms can also be related to, and reinforced by, religious influences, such as the belief that living in a non-marital relationship is a sin. In societies where, from a moral point of view, marriage is considered the only “proper” route to family formation, and cohabitation is not regarded as an acceptable living arrangement, adult children who cohabit might be seen as failing to respect the rules their parents tried to teach them (Maslauskaitė, 2011), again inducing a worsening of their relationships.

Alternative mechanisms, acting at individual level, may lead to lower intensity of relations with parents among cohabiting couples. For example, given a typically shorter duration and lower stability of cohabiting unions, parents may be reluctant to spend their time on meetings with a couple until the adult children’s union is transformed into a marital relationship. The uncertainty regarding future benefits from family-related decisions has been shown to affect investments in family relationships (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009). Hence, cohabiting adults may be much less likely than their married counterparts to maintain strong bonds with their parents (Eggebeen, 2005).

A negative association between cohabitation of adult children and relations with their parents might be observed empirically even if parents accept the type of their children’s partnership and are not sceptical about the future stability of this union. As emphasized by Hogerbrugge and Dykstra (2009) and also shown by Nazio and Saraceno (2012), people who

choose cohabitation rather than marriage may have a number of characteristics that are in turn negatively correlated with frequent meetings with parents and the probability of receiving support from kin. For example, having experienced parental divorce has been shown to raise the probability of cohabitation and in the same time to affect negatively relations with parents (De Graaf & Fokkema, 2007; Kalmijn, 2012; Tomassini et al., 2004). Moreover, cohabiting couples tend to live more often in urban rather than in rural areas, usually far away from their parental home and to have non-traditional values regarding family relationships (Kalmijn, 2006), all characteristics which diminish the frequency of contacts and exchanges of support with parents (Kalmijn, 2006; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Selectivity characteristics towards cohabitation thus act as mediating variables in shaping parents-children relation (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009). The individual characteristics intervening in the relation between partnership type and relationships with the family of origin are innumerable, and often they are very difficult to measure directly, such as individualistic and liberal attitudes.

Summing up, it can be assessed only empirically whether cohabitation as such has a positive or negative effect on relations with parents and whether this influence is genuine or attributable to individual characteristics.

III. CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

We previously saw that the norms on getting married after becoming an adult and preventing unmarried cohabitation may potentially shape the relations of cohabiting adults with their parents (Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). These norms apply specifically to the countries where marriage is very strongly valued. Moreover, in societies oriented at traditional and family values, the moral legitimacy of cohabitation may be questionable.

Clearly, Poland and Italy are examples of such countries. As demonstrated by Vanassche, Swicegood, and Matthijs (2012), Poland belongs to the group of countries with relatively high disapproval for alternative family types such as cohabitation and remarkable attachment to the

institution of marriage. Also in Italy, the role of marriage is prominent and this choice is more popular than cohabitation; moreover, for the majority of case, cohabitation represents only an “intermediate” passage toward a future marriage (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Schröder, 2010). While many European countries have seen cohabitation becoming a viable and commonly acceptable alternative to formal unions (Kalmijn, 2007; Kiernan, 2004), we can only observe the onset of this process in the two countries under investigation. According to the data from the European Values Survey 2008, the proportion of people who find a situation that a couple lives together without marriage acceptable amounts to about 61% in Poland and almost 56% in Italy. This indicates that currently cohabitation in Poland and Italy is not completely condemned by the vast majority of the society. Nevertheless, there is a large proportion of people who do not approve it. The share of people accepting informal partnerships is somewhat larger than in some countries from Central and Eastern Europe, but definitely smaller than in Western Europe or in Scandinavian countries, where more than 80% of the population agrees the fact that people live together without getting married. The limited social acceptance of cohabitation is confirmed also by the fact that Poland and Italy remain two of the few countries where the institution of marriage is still highly valued. Indeed, again the data from European Values Survey 2008 show that only about 17-19% of Polish and Italian people perceives marriage as an outdated institution, whereas in many other countries – especially in Western Europe – this share exceeds 25%.

The high value of marriage may be largely ascribed to the impact of the Roman Catholic religion. Catholic religion considers living in non-marital relationship as a sin, and social attitudes towards family formation patterns are largely interlinked with this Catholic dogma. According to data from International Social Survey Programme 2008, Poland and Italy are two of the few countries where over 90% of the population were raised in the Catholic religion, compared with an average of 49% in the other European countries. Hence, religiosity may be one of the explanations for the limited social acceptance for informal unions in Poland and Italy.

Moreover, as Mynarska and Bernardi (2007) note, cohabitation has been perceived in Poland as a living arrangement common in the lower social strata and among people with adverse partnership experiences. This negative image might constitute another factor that slows down the diffusion of a social acceptance for cohabitation and strengthens the value of marriage.

While in general the social acceptance for cohabitation is lower in Poland and Italy than in other European countries, it has been gradually increasing. Younger generations tend to have more positive attitudes towards such living arrangements (Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010; Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007), and they practice this form of partnership increasingly often leading to a growing tolerance of older generations, and in general of society, towards consensual unions. The results presented by Mynarska and Matysiak (2010) show that while in the first half of nineties, informal unions amounted to about 12% of all unions formed, by the years 2004-2006, this percentage had tripled in Poland. In Italy, even if one continues to register a constant prevalence of direct marriage on cohabitations, it is undeniable an increase in the number of cohabitations and of pre-marital cohabitations in recent years: the former passed from 3.5% of all unions formed by the cohort of women born in 1961-65 to 20% for women born 15 years later, the latter from 7% to 17% (Salvini & De Rose, 2011). It is worthwhile to note that marked territorial differences still persist in this domain, with southern Italian regions registering marginal, even if increasing, values both for diffusion and social acceptance of cohabitation (Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010). Hence, even though younger generations are still more likely to form their first partnership by marriage rather than by cohabitation, the tendency towards deinstitutionalisation of union formation is evident. Still, it remains an open question if choosing this form of relationship is neutral with respect to the quality of relations with the older generation.

This research question seems relevant because in both in Poland and in Italy parental support is of crucial importance for young people. Both countries share familialistic culture. Parents commonly invest in their adult children's education, and help them in finding the first

job. A non-negligible proportion of parents in these two countries supports their children financially even after young people have left parental home, set up a family (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004; Rózanska-Putek, Jappens, Willaert, & Van Bavel, 2009; Tomassini, Wolf, & Rosina, 2003) and need help with childcare (Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008). In Italy the evidence on strong kinship ties is shown also by the remarkable residential proximity between parents and (married) children and high frequency of their contacts (Santarelli & Cottone, 2009; Tomassini et al., 2004; Dalla Zuanna, Michielin & Bordignon, 2007).

In many other European countries, the welfare state serves most of these functions. However, in these two countries the institutional arrangements are shaped in such a way that young people need to rely on their parents at every step that they make in the course of transition to adulthood and often also afterwards. The lack of social and care provision policy for youth experiencing crucial events of their life thus reinforces the role of the family in Polish and Italian society (Albertini & Mencarini, 2012; Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Schröder, 2010).

IV. DATA AND METHODS

DATA AND SAMPLE

Our analyses draw on data from the Polish GGS carried out in 2010 and the Italian survey on Family and Social Subjects (FSS) carried out in 2009 (ISTAT, 2009). Both surveys were conducted by means of face-to-face interviews in a nationally representative sample of 19,987 men and women for Poland and 43,850 men and women for Italy. The Polish questionnaire was based on the guidelines formulated by the international committee that set up the whole Generation and Gender Programme (Vikat et al., 2008). GGS provides very detailed information on union formation processes and in the same time it is a valuable source of data on intergenerational relations. The Italian FSS survey addresses similar topics, and even if questionnaire is not identical, it is comparable to GGS to a large extent.

For the purpose of this study we used two subsamples made up of male and female cohorts born in 1970-1992, that equals to 7,102 for Poland and 12,507 for Italy. We restrict our attention to those individuals, who have formed their first union by the time of the survey dividing young people into two groups: those who married directly and those who decided to cohabit (individuals who have not formed their union represent 33.4% of the Polish cohort and 59% of Italian one). We excluded people whose parents are not alive and young people who live together with parents in the same household because we have no information on meetings with parents, moreover, as Lye (1996) notes, such co-residence may have very different meanings depending on the ages of the parent and child and on who is head of household. Individuals who established a partnerships union for whom at least one parent is dead or who are living with parents represent respectively 37.9% the 5.2% in Poland; and the 22.6 and 6.7% Italy; missing or inconsistent data amounts to 8% of the remaining sample in Poland and 2% in Italy. Due to these restrictions, final subsamples amount to 2,260 young people for Poland and 3,644 young people for Italy.

We examine the intensity of intergenerational relations between young people and their parents in relation with the union type they chose. In this sense, the first key dependent variable in our analyses is the frequency of meetings with parents. Meetings with parents can be seen as an indirect measure of parental support for the younger generation (Kalmijn & Dykstra, 2006). Frequency of meetings proxies many forms of relation that are too difficult to capture directly in standard surveys (e.g. it is quite difficult to quantify emotional support). Still, this measure is an imperfect proxy of the quality of the relationships between family members, for at least two reasons. First of all, young people can feel obliged to meet their parents frequently even if the quality of their relationships with parents is rather poor. This means that we can observe frequent meetings with parents even if these meetings do not provide any emotional support for young people. Second, direct meetings are not the only form of maintaining contact – the recently developed technologies provide means of contacting which may be important especially for young people who live far away from their parents. Hence, we can observe sporadic meetings

with parents even if young people in fact do receive a lot of emotional support from parents (e.g. due to regular telephone calls, traditional or electronic mail, etc.).

Bearing these all concerns in mind, we use information on the frequency of meetings with parents, distinguishing between meeting with mother and with father. In Polish GGS meetings are measured with a question that codes the number of visits per chosen unit of time (with the following possible options: weekly, monthly and annual). We first translate the unit of frequency of meetings into weekly measure (we assume 4 weeks in a month and 52 weeks in a year) and then multiply it by the indicated number of visits. Next, this frequency is grouped in the following intervals: (1) once a quarter or less (2) once a month or less (3) weekly or more often (but less often than daily) (4) every day. In the Italian survey, the frequency of meeting with parents is measured through a categorical variable with the following categories: everyday, sometimes a week, once a week, sometimes per month, sometimes per year, never.

The second key variable of our analysis is the first partnership of young people, i.e. marriage vs. cohabitation. Previous studies analysed the quality of relationships between young people and their parents by comparing the adult children who were cohabiting or married at the time of data collection. We take a different approach because we believe that the contemporaneous strength of bonds with parents is not determined by the present marital status of adult children alone. Instead, we consider the role of the first union formation choice. Hence, rather than focusing on the contemporaneous marital status of the adult children, which may be actually affected by the current quality and frequency of relations with parents, we consider the impact of the first partnership, and distinguish between adult children who cohabited and those who married directly in their first union.¹

¹ We run models also using the current union status and estimation confirmed the results obtained using the type first partnership. These results are not shown but they are available under request.

MODEL SPECIFICATION

Our objective is to examine the relation of cohabitation of young people and the frequency of contacts with their parents. Our analysis is guided by our theoretical framework, which emphasizes the role of selectivity of the group of people that choose non-traditional living arrangements. First, we look at the association between cohabitation and frequency of contacts with parents by means of multivariate analysis, i.e. standard ordered probit models. In this specification, we control for a range of observed individual-level socio-demographic characteristics as well as parental background, which may make cohabiting and married people different with respect to the frequency of contacts with parents. This approach means to treat cohabitation as a variable which is random conditional on the observed characteristics, like in previous studies on this topic.

In the second step of our analyses we use an econometric technique which takes into account not only all the observed characteristics of young people used in the first step, but also unobserved factors driving potential selectivity of cohabiters. Thus, we extend the standard ordered probit framework to the version that corrects for selection effects estimating simultaneous equations models with endogenous regressors. This approach is akin to a control function approach (Heckman & Navarro-Lozano, 2004), however, in its classical version the outcomes are continuous whereas in our approach we take into account that our outcome variables are ordered. Another way to obtain the estimates causal effects is the use of panel data; however, the approach adopted in this study has been indicated as an alternative option for causal inference, based on cross-sectional data (Moffitt, 2005). It has been recently started to be implemented in population studies (Vignoli, Rinesi, & Mussino, 2013), including the field of research on intergenerational relations (Kalmijn & Saraceno, 2008). The general idea of this approach is to estimate jointly two equations, a selection equation for the choice of union type U (1), and an outcome equation for the consequences of this choice in terms of intergenerational relationships R (2). We estimate the following bivariate ordered probit model:

$$U_i = \alpha + \delta X_i + \lambda Z_i + v_i \quad (1)$$

$$R_i = \alpha + \beta X_i + \gamma U_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where R_i is individual i 's outcome ordered variable, i.e. the frequency of contacts with parents, U_i is a dummy variable equal to 1 if individual experienced cohabitation as first union and to 0 in case of marriage, X_i a set of exogenous control variables, and Z_i an exogenous control variable that affects the probability of experiencing the event cohabitation but does not directly affect R_i ; v_i and ε_i are error terms.

The simultaneous estimation of the two equations allows for correlation in error terms in these equations (ρ). The parameter ρ represents the dependence between the two equations and captures the correlation between the unobserved variables in each process. This means that when $\rho=0$, that is under the null hypothesis, the choice of union type and the quality of relationships with parents are two independent processes. On the contrary, if the null hypothesis is rejected, e.g. through a standard LR test, it implies that U_i is related to either ε_i or, β_i , so the results from standard (ordinal) probit models would be biased (Moffitt, 2005). In other words, intergenerational relationships and entry into cohabitation are interrelated and one should consider the impact of both observed and unobserved characteristics of cohabiting individuals whenever comparing them with married individuals regarding relations with parents.

Specifically, if people who choose cohabitation have characteristics that affect negatively their relations with parents, for example if they are more nonconformist, individualistic and liberal, then the parameter ρ will take a negative value. Cohabitation might also involve self-selection of people who – knowing about their parents' attitudes – anticipate that their relations with parents will not worsen if they choose informal union arrangements. Such impact of unobserved individual traits would lead to positive value of parameter ρ .

In order to identify the parameters of bivariate ordered probit models, the selection equation includes variable(s) that, conditional to other observed variables, is not related to ε_i and do not directly affect the level of relationships with parents modelled in the outcome equation. The indirect impact, through the choice of living arrangements, is assumed to be at work, though. The variable Z_i in equation (1) is called instrument variable (IV).

A practical difficulty arises in coming up with suitable instruments. The most common type is represented by variables that are environmental or ecological in nature, measuring some aspects of the area in which an individual resides (Moffitt, 2005). This approach rests on the assumption that the individual has little control over characteristics of the area where he or she lives and thus these characteristics are likely to be exogenous to any given individual's outcome, i.e. the contacts with parents. At the same time, the assumption is that these area characteristics should affect the individual choices of the union type U . A second type of instrument is variables related to population-segments, that is, variables that are assumed to affect individuals in different demographic groups differently. In this case, geographic areas are replaced with groups that are defined by demographic characteristic (e.g., gender, age, marital status, etc.). In our estimation, the instrumental variables assumed to affect selection into the group of cohabiters and to have no direct impact on contacts with parents refer to the level of religiosity, but they are computed in a slightly different way for the two countries, a choice justified by the need to select the most appropriate instrument. For Poland we use an indicator of religiosity (as measured by frequency of attending religious services) in cohorts that are up to five year older than the cohort of individuals. As for Italy, we use the level of religiosity (again measured by frequency of attending religious services) in the period of first union formation, distinguishing by region.²

² Using data from surveys “Aspects of daily-life” carried out continuatively since 1993 by the Italian Institute of Statistics (Istat), we computed for the different cohorts of first union (1990-1994; 1995-1999; 200-2004; 2005-2009) the mean level of people declaring to attend religious services at least once a month, differentiating by macro-region of residence (North, Centre, South and Islands).

The (lack of) correlation of the instrumental variables with the selection variable(s) can be tested recurring to LR tests (Monfardini & Radice, 2008; Vignoli, Rinesi and Mussino, 2013). We have performed a series of LR tests to compare the relative fit of the nested standard ordinal probit models, with and without the variable used as instruments. The tests showed that adding the IV when estimating a standard ordinal probit model for the contacts with parents does not significantly improve the general model fit. Vice versa, the improvement is remarkable when comparing the nested models for the equation for the entry into cohabitation, and the validity is also confirmed evaluating the chi-squared test statistic over the number of restrictions (Vignoli, Rinesi and Mussino, 2013).³

V. RESULTS

SELECTION INTO THE COHABITING GROUP

We present the results on selection into the group of cohabiting in the first union in Table 1. Our results demonstrate that choosing cohabitation rather than marriage become more widespread for younger people, which is consistent with previous results (Gabrielli & Hoem, 2010; Matysiak, 2009). Both in Italy and in Poland socio-economic status matters: young people who are in education have higher propensity for non-marital living arrangements. In the same time, in Poland involvement in paid work seems to discourage cohabitation, whereas in Italy having a job actually raises the probability of cohabitation. Our results also show that people from better educated families are more likely to cohabit in the first union. The selection from better educated families that are usually seen as more liberal and open-minded, has been postulated in the literature on diffusion of cohabitation (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007). According to our results, cohabitation seems also more likely to occur in case of partnerships established among young people whose parents had divorced – this effect is not significant in Poland, though. The place of residence matters: living far away from parents is associated with higher probability of cohabitation.

³ Results from these tests are available from authors upon request.

There seems to be a territorial gradient in diffusion of cohabitation: in Poland the cohabitation is more common among inhabitants of metropolitan areas and less widespread among inhabitants of villages; in Italy the variable referring to the residence of young people is no longer significant.

The variables measuring the impact of environmental factors such as religiosity of older peers (for Poland) and religiosity at area level at the time of union formation (for Italy) turn out to be significantly related to individual choices regarding first partnership. For Italy, it is arguable that this contextual variable accounts for the differences in the area of residence.

Table 1 – Results from probit model on selection into cohabitation among young people

	Poland		Italy	
	coef.	s.e.	coef.	s.e.
Individual characteristics				
age	-0.01	0.03	-0.05***	0.01
women	-0.26***	0.06	-0.20***	0.04
education attainment (ref.: lower secondary)				
tertiary	0.00	0.11	-0.14	0.11
upper secondary	0.01	0.08	-0.26***	0.09
primary	0.20	0.17	-0.24**	0.10
in education	0.22**	0.10	0.67***	0.12
employment	-0.13**	0.06	0.29***	0.06
commuting time to parental home	0.06***	0.01	0.04***	0.01
place of residence (ref. small towns)				
metropolitan	0.22***	0.07	0.06	0.10
village	-0.29***	0.07	0.08	0.06
Parental characteristics				
parental education (ref. primary)				
tertiary	0.30**	0.12	0.18	0.11
upper secondary	0.24**	0.10	0.25***	0.09
lower secondary	0.08	0.10	0.40***	0.12
parental divorce before age 15	0.21	0.17	0.29**	0.10
instrumental variables: religiosity	-0.06*	0.03	-0.07***	0.02

Note: Polish GGS (2010) and Italian FSS (2009) data, authors' calculations. * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

THE EFFECTS OF COHABITATION ON MEETING WITH PARENTS

In the first step of our analysis we estimate standard ordered probit models. We control for the whole range of characteristics of young people and their parents that play potentially important role for the frequency of meetings with parents (Table 2). It is interesting to note that, in both countries, contacts with parents tend to be more frequent for young women with respect to men, and clearly they decrease as the distance from parental home increases. As literature

suggested, contacts with father are reduced in case of parental divorce, whether small or no effect is found in the case of contacts with the mother. Moreover, in Italy, the frequency is lower for people living in metropolitan areas.

A negative association between contacts with parents and living in cohabitation were present also in the null models, i.e. in standard probit models estimated using the type of first partnership as the sole covariate.⁴ Controlling for the observed characteristics entails a decrease in the estimated coefficients, thus proving partly accounting for the selection effect. Still, even after controlling for these factors, the outcomes from standard ordered probit models suggest that choosing a non-tradition type of union is associated with a decrease in frequency of the contacts between young people and parents.

In the second step we estimate models accounting for selection effects. Our results (i.e. the significance of ρ) indicate that both in Poland and in Italy the observed association of cohabitation on meetings with parents may be affected by unobserved characteristics that jointly affect the choice of the type of partnership in the first union and the frequency of meetings with parents. Interestingly, the mechanisms of selection seem to operate in a different way in our countries. In Poland, it seems that people with lower propensity for frequent contacts with parents tend to cohabit more often. Hence, these may be young people who are likely to have relatively less traditional views and more individualistic approach to taking life choices that select into the group of youth that chooses non-marital living arrangements. In Italy, it seems that individuals who have high propensity for frequent meetings with parents are more likely to cohabit in the first union. Thus, it seems that a prevailing pattern may be related to individual expectations regarding the reaction of parents towards partnership choices: young people, who may expect that living under one roof with an unmarried partner will not affect the quality of their relations with parents, are more likely to choose to cohabit.

⁴ The coefficients for Italy were -0.28 and -0.33 respectively for the contacts with mother and with father. For Poland the coefficients amounted to -.36 and -.42, respectively. All the results were significant at 0.001 level.

Table 2 Frequency of contacts with mother and father, models' results

	Poland (N=2260)								Italy (N=3644)							
	contacts with mother				contacts with father				contacts with mother				contacts with father			
	standard probit		selection model		standard probit		selection model		standard probit		selection model		standard probit		selection model	
	b	se	b	se												
Cohabitation (ref. marriage)	-.23***	.05	.82***	.19	-.26***	.05	.08	.69	-.16***	.03	-.74***	.15	-.18***	.04	-.89***	.30
Individual characteristics																
age	-.01***	.01	.01*	.01	-.01*	.01	-.00	.02	.00	.01	-.01	.01	.00	.01	-.01	.01
women	.16***	.05	.24***	.05	.15***	.05	.18**	.08	.27***	.05	.21***	.05	.15***	.05	.09*	.05
education attainment (ref. lower secondary)																
tertiary	-.21**	.09	-.19**	.09	-.25***	.09	-.25***	.09	.06	.11	.03	.10	.03	.10	.00	.10
secondary	-.10	.07	-.09	.07	-.14**	.07	-.14*	.07	.11	.11	.05	.10	.11*	.06	.03	.08
primary	-.20	.15	-.25*	.15	-.18	.15	-.19	.16	.17*	.10	.10	.10	.12*	.07	.03	.08
in education	-.15*	.08	-.21**	.08	-.20**	.08	-.22**	.09	.00	.12	.14	.13	.04	.12	.21	.14
employment	-.01	.06	.04	.05	-.00	.05	.01	.06	.17***	.06	.24***	.07	.10*	.05	.19***	.07
commuting time to parental home (in hours)	-.53***	.02	-.50***	.03	-.49***	.02	-.49***	.02	-.62***	.02	-.59***	.02	-.58***	.02	-.54***	.04
place of residence (ref. small towns)																
metropolitan	.02	.06	-.07	.06	.02	.06	-.01	.08	-.22***	.06	-.20***	.05	-.17***	.04	-.15***	.04
village	-.09	.06	.03	.06	-.07	.06	-.04	.09	.01	.04	.01	.04	.00	.04	.03	.04
Parental characteristics																
parental education (ref. primary)																
tertiary	.06	.10	-.05	.10	.03	.10	-.00	.12	-.26**	.13	-.19	.12	-.16	.10	-.05	.12
upper secondary	.11	.09	.02	.09	.12	.09	.09	.10	.14***	.06	.20***	.05	-.01	.06	.04	.06
lower secondary	.10	.08	.07	.08	.10	.08	.09	.08	.10	.08	.19*	.08	.10	.07	.15*	.08
parental divorce	.02	.15	-.08	.15	-.96***	.16	-.98***	.16	-.19*	.11	-.13	.10	-.99***	.09	-.88***	.10
correlation across error terms ρ			-.73***	.17			-.20	.43			.36***	.22			.44***	.19
Log likelihood	-2083.79		-3449.47		-2145.96		-351.21		-4253.67		-6291.66		-4432.39		-6470.99	

Note: Polish GGS data, 2010, Italian FFS data, 2009. * p<.05, ** p<.01, and *** p<.001. Estimates for the values of cut-points not displayed.

As for Poland, if we take selectivity of cohabitation into account, it appears that the type of union as such does not have a negative effect on the frequency of contacts with mothers. Selection mechanism is weaker when it comes to the meetings with fathers. Still, the overall impression is that having chosen a type of partnership which is not in line with tradition and which is not commonly accepted in the Polish society does not necessarily translate into lower frequency of meetings with parents. In Italy, after taking unobserved characteristics of the cohabiters into account, the probability of meeting parents frequently is significantly reduced both in case of contacts with mother and with father.

Note that the effects of other correlates of intergenerational contacts are similar in both standard ordered probit models and bivariate models.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we investigated the consequences of choosing cohabitation for the frequency of contacts with parents in two European countries: Poland and Italy. Recent studies emphasize that cohabitation may lead to reduction of emotional and material support received from family, especially in countries with low social acceptance for informal unions and high value of marriage, (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Schröder, 2010). Nevertheless, youngest generations tend to choose cohabitation increasingly often as a form of their partnerships (Barbagli, Castiglioni, & Dalla Zuanna, 2003; Matysiak, 2009; Mynarska & Bernardi, 2007; Salvini & De Rose, 2011). The question is how the diffusion of cohabitation may affect the relations with the older generation, and specifically, the contact between young adult women and their parents. Given the relatively limited social acceptance for informal unions in Poland and Italy – at least in comparison to other countries – we expected that cohabitation may be negatively associated with the frequency of meetings of young people and their parents.

In order to address this question, we used the data from two recent surveys: the Polish Generation and Gender Survey and the comparable Italian Family and Social Subjects Survey. To

correctly evaluate the association between intergenerational relations and cohabitation we estimated ordered probit models corrected for selection. The choice of our research design was guided by the insight that cohabiting people may have observed and unobserved characteristics that make them different with respect to people who chose to marry directly, and these characteristics may be associated with a certain kind of relationships with parents (Hogerbrugge & Dykstra, 2009; Nazio & Saraceno, 2012).

According to our findings, in Italy, the probability of meeting parents frequently is significantly reduced in case of cohabitation, once accounted for selectivity. Cohabitation is starting to become a more and more accepted and widespread behaviour, but there are still some groups for whom it is not acceptable. For the former group, which selects into cohabitation, the effect is weaker, and if we don't take selectivity of cohabiting individuals into account, the negative effect of cohabitation will be underestimated. In Poland the negative association between cohabitation and quality of relations with parents is not a causal effect of union type, but rather it results from selection of people who have low propensity to meet with parents into the group of cohabiters. After controlling for these factors, it turns out there are a positive significant relation between cohabitation and the frequency of meetings with mother, while the pattern of meetings with fathers is less clear.

Our findings for Italy support the hypotheses advanced in the most recent literature on the negative impact of cohabitation on the quality of intergenerational relations (Di Giulio & Rosina, 2007; Schröder, 2010). The results obtained for Poland suggest in turn that the detrimental effects of non-traditional union formation choices may not necessarily manifest in terms of decreased frequency of meetings of young people and their parents, even in a context similar to Italian.

We argue that this divergence may be (among others) related to the differential selection into the group of cohabitants. As we show in this paper, despite many similarities between Poland and Italy, the key factors driving the diffusion of cohabitation are not exactly identical.

Arguably, in both countries younger people from better educated families are overrepresented among cohabiting couples. However, our results reveal that in Italy, cohabitation is a choice of young people with better access to resources that are available to them due to better social background and higher socioeconomic status. Hence, this young people do not necessarily need support (or approval) from parents, and are not incentivized to stay in contacts with them. We can also see that individuals, who may expect that their opportunities to meet parents will not worsen due to cohabit, make these decisions about non-traditional living arrangements more often. In Poland in turn, cohabitation is more often an experience of young people whose situation perhaps does not necessarily imply strong economic disadvantage, but in Polish context means a need for parental support. Hence, young people may need to contact their parents frequently even if their relations with parents do deteriorate. Also, given that young people tend to cohabit if they live away from parents and are inhabitants of large cities, certain arguments on the sources of open conflict between young people and their parents may not hold. For example, if parents cannot directly observe the socially unacceptable behaviour by their children and do not need to face the reactions of their social environment, then their adult children's living arrangements are not necessarily perceived as parental failures. This might decrease at least to some extent the possible discomfort related to child living arrangement choices. We should stress however, that such a situation does not imply high quality of mutual relations between adult children and their parents: the clash of values might persist, but does not necessarily translate into open conflict and reduced direct contacts.

Our findings suggest an increased need for further research on how partnership choices and residential choices interact with the quality and intensity of relations of adult children and their parents. So far, very little research has been done on this issue. Ideally, a promising path for future studies would be to examine the interplay between life time residential mobility, living arrangements and the quality of adult child-parent relations based on longitudinal data. The currently available European surveys providing longitudinal data lack information on the quality of contacts between family members. For this reason, most studies carried out so far on

the topic close to ours, as well as our own study, are based on cross-sectional research design. Fortunately, increased efforts of international scientific community have recently contributed to collecting the data that could be in future used as basis for longitudinal analysis (Vikat et al., 2008), which should improve the opportunities for drawing causal inferences on the dynamic interplay of family formation processes and relations between generations.

ANNEX

Table A1. Descriptive statistics by type of first union

	Poland		Italy	
	N = 2,260		N = 3,644	
	marriage	cohabitation	marriage	cohabitation
	56.6	43.4	67.7	32.3
Individual characteristics				
Gender ^a				
male	37.2	46.5	38.5	46.5
female	62.8	53.5	61.5	53.5
Age (mean, in years)	33.4	30.6	33.9	32.3
Education attainment at the time of first union				
tertiary	14.6	16.9	11.17	13.2
secondary	42.2	35.8	39.74	36.09
lower secondary	22.4	13.6	7.26	10.53
primary	3.05	2.8	38.31	32.07
in education	17.7	30.7	3.53	8.11
Labour market status at the time of first union ^b	66.3	59.6	71.7	81.0
Commuting time to parental home (mean, in hours)	0.73	1.27	2.23	2.51
Place of residence				
metropolitan	22.7	37.7	17.3	18.5
small town	37.4	40.3	45.6	38.4
village	39.9	22.0	37.1	43.1
Parental characteristics				
Parental education				
tertiary	12.7	16.6	2.8	5.1
secondary	34.8	43.0	10.8	17.5
lower secondary	36.7	28.2	4.4	9.0
primary	15.7	7.1	82.0	68.4
Parental divorce till age 15 ^c	1.6	3.5	2.8	5.4

Note: Polish GGS (2010) and Italian FSS (2009) data, authors' calculations. Means and proportions are presented.

^a 0 = male, 1 = female. ^b 0 = not employed, 1 = employed. ^c 0 = no, 1 = yes.

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