

# The Decision Making Process of Leaving Home: A Longitudinal Analysis of Italian Women

Giulia Ferrari, Alessandro Rosina and Emiliano Sironi

## Abstract

In this paper we investigated the determinants of the realization of intentions of leaving the parental home for Italian young female adults. We used data from the longitudinal panel survey “Family and Social Subjects”, carried out by Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics) in 2003 and 2007. For the analysis we adopted a probit regression model with sample selection.

We found empirical evidence of the importance of the employment status in the choice of leaving the parental home. The realization is also favored by past experiences of autonomy and parental union instability.

## 1 Introduction

Leaving the parental home represents a crucial step in the process of the transition to adulthood [2]. Under a comparative perspective, the timing and the possible determinants of this process show a strong geographical heterogeneity [1, 7]. In particular, in Italy young people leave home at a very high age in comparison to the other Western countries. The peculiarities of the Italian context can be explained with both cultural and structural reasons. On the one hand, the presence of strong intergenerational ties is coherent with a long permanence in the family of origin [3]. On the other hand, the individual autonomy is not encouraged by the lack of opportunities in the labour market together with a public welfare not generous towards the young generations [9].

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [5], the choice of leaving the parental home is preceded by the formation of intentions toward that behaviour, which

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Giulia Ferrari, “Sapienza” Università di Roma; email: [giulia.ferrari@uniroma1.it](mailto:giulia.ferrari@uniroma1.it)

Alessandro Rosina, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore; email: [alessandro.rosina@unicatt.it](mailto:alessandro.rosina@unicatt.it)

Emiliano Sironi, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore; email: [emiliano.sironi@unicatt.it](mailto:emiliano.sironi@unicatt.it)

in turn results from a process that involves several determinants, such as attitudes, beliefs, social norms and economic constraints.

Recent descriptive results show that young people increasingly aim to leave the family of origin and to move [4]. It is interesting to note that according to Istat [8], only 40% of people who declared their willingness to leave the parental home within the next three years were effectively able to realize this intention.

## 2 Data and Methods

We analyse intentions and realizations using data from the panel sample survey “Family and Social Subjects”, belonging to the Multipurpose Survey Program carried out by the Italian National Statistical Institute (Istat) in 2003 and 2007. We used the first wave in order to study the determinants of the intention of leaving home in the following three years; the second wave, with a sample size of about 10,000 individuals, allows us to capture changes in intentions and behaviours.

As we are in the presence of a binary response, we adopted a two-equations modelling strategy, using a binomial probit with sample selection [6, 10]. We focused our study on young women aged between 18 and 34 at the time of the first interview (thus aged 21 to 38 three years later) and living in the parental home. Using a latent variable approach, the model can be specified as follows:

$$\begin{cases} y_{i1}^* = x_{i1}^T \beta_1 + u_{i1} \\ y_{i2}^* = x_{i2}^T \beta_2 + u_{i2} \end{cases} \quad \begin{pmatrix} u_{i1} \\ u_{i2} \end{pmatrix} \sim N \left[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \rho \\ \rho & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right]$$

$y_{i1}^*$  is the dependent variable of the main regression, indicating the propensity of going away between 2003 and 2007 for each individual (the event of home leaving is labelled as  $y_{i1} = 1$ );  $y_{i2}^*$  is the dependent variable of the selection equation, indicating the propensity of an individual to be intentioned ( $y_{i2} = 1$ ) or less ( $y_{i2} = 0$ ) to leave the parental home in the next three years; in the model we address  $y_{i1}^*$  conditionally on  $y_{i2} = (x_{i2}^T \beta_2 + u_{i2} > 0)$ , i.e. when the selection equation generates a value of 1. Here, this means that we study the exit from home conditionally on the positive intention expressed in 2003; the correlation between the error terms underlines the presence of a potential connection between omitted variables that may affect both the likelihood of being intentioned to leave the nest in the first wave and the effective departure from the parental home after three years. Finally, identification conditions of the model require that at least one variable will be included in  $x_{i2}$  but not in  $x_{i1}$ : in this framework, this means that we have to consider at least one variable that is associated to the intentions of leaving home but not directly with that behaviour; TPB identify in attitudes<sup>1</sup> the variable linked only with intentions.

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<sup>1</sup> Attitude indices are obtained with a factor analysis on five items related to the potential consequences of the departure from parental home on sexual and individual independence (*Factor 1*) and economic condition and working opportunities (*Factor 2*).

### 3 Results and Discussion

**Table 1:** Determinants for the intentions of leaving home and their realization ( $n=737$ )

<b>Main equation (Realization of Intentions)</b>		coef.	sign.
Age (ref: 29-33)	<i>Age 21-28</i>	<b>-0.40</b>	**
Age (ref: 29-33)	<i>Age 34-38</i>	-0.19	ns
Educational level (ref: low)	<i>High</i>	0.28	ns
Employment status (ref: unemployed)	<i>Permanent Employment</i>	<b>0.35</b>	**
	<i>Fixed-term Employment</i>	0.22	ns
Past experience away from parental home (ref: No)	<i>Yes</i>	<b>0.49</b>	**
Presence of a partner (ref: without partner)	<i>With partner</i>	<b>0.51</b>	***
Geographical area (ref: Centre-North)	<i>South</i>	-0.16	ns
Number of siblings (ref: 2+)	<i>&lt;2 Siblings</i>	0.07	ns
Religiosity (ref: religious)	<i>Not Religious</i>	0.18	ns
Father's educational level (ref: high)	<i>Low</i>	-0.10	ns
Mother's educational level (ref: high)	<i>Low</i>	<b>-0.31</b>	*
Mother's employment status (ref: retired or not employed)	<i>Employed</i>	-0.07	ns
Parents Marital Status (ref. not divorced)	<i>Divorced</i>	<b>0.57</b>	**
Intercept		<b>-2.98</b>	***
<b>Selection Equation (Intentions)</b>			
Age (ref: 29-33)	<i>Age 21-28</i>	<b>-0.78</b>	***
Age (ref: 29-33)	<i>Age 34-38</i>	<b>-0.30</b>	†
Educational level (ref: low)	<i>High</i>	0.08	ns
Employment status (ref: unemployed)	<i>Permanent Employment</i>	<b>0.56</b>	***
	<i>Fixed-term Employment</i>	<b>0.42</b>	**
Presence of a partner (ref: without partner)	<i>With partner</i>	<b>0.48</b>	***
Geographical area (ref: Centre-North)	<i>South</i>	-0.13	ns
Father's educational level (ref: high)	<i>Low</i>	-0.03	ns
Mother's educational level (ref: high)	<i>Low</i>	-0.02	ns
Mother's employment status (ref: retired or not employed)	<i>Employed</i>	-0.04	ns
Parents Marital Status (ref. not divorced)	<i>Divorced</i>	0,01	ns
Negative attitudes towards individual independence	<i>Factor 1</i>	<b>-0.30</b>	***
Negative attitudes towards economic changes	<i>Factor 2</i>	<b>-0.42</b>	***
Intercept		-0.28	ns
$\rho$		<b>0.57</b>	*

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$ ; †  $p < 0.15$

Our results show that being employed and having a partner in 2003 are significantly correlated with positive intentions of leaving the parental home (selection equation). Accordingly with the TPB, negative attitudes towards home leaving result significantly associated with its relative intention.

The main equation considers only those who were positively intentioned of leaving in 2003. What emerges is that younger cohorts are less likely to realize their intentions, while young women who are permanently employed in the first wave, experience a period of time outside home and have a partner tend to achieve their purpose with a higher probability. In addition, the impact of the mother's level of education and of the

parents' marital disruption is significant in accelerating the process of obtaining an independence from the family of origin.

Finally, the positive correlation between the error terms of the two equations underlines the presence of an association between the omitted variables in the selection and in the main equation and justify the use of a sample selection model instead of a standard probit regression.

Our results highlight the importance of being employed for those who intend to leave and of being permanently employed for those who achieve that purpose, consistently with the assumption that economic constraints do affect this kind of decision. The presence of a partner is another crucial factor in determining both the intention and the behaviour of interest. Accordingly with the TPB, negative attitudes towards home leaving influence directly the formation of intentions. In addition, Italian females result to be more likely to realize their positive intentions if they spent a period of time outside the parental home and this is in line with the hypothesis that a previous autonomous experience can be a motivating factor for a permanent leaving. Parental background also plays a decisive role in increasing the likelihood of an effective departure from home: young women with divorced parents are more likely to leave the nest. As a matter of fact, the parents' experience, taken with the constitution of a stepfamily, could have created an unfavourable home environment, which in turn could have contributed to the females' higher propensity to leave.

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