



Young workers and flexibility  
of the labour market:  
what family strategies?

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## 1. Introduction

*“I wish to get married once my working status is a little more stable”* (F29, University graduate, single)<sup>1</sup>

They are called atypical workers: they belong to the wide number of consultants and collaborators working for small and large companies. Their number is on the rise: since 1992, in Italy there has been a 45% increase in their number.

Though such new fragmented and heterogeneous labour market started gaining ground fifteen years ago, it is nowadays that atypical jobs have concretely become a reality in Italy. Extensive literature on the matter has developed over the years, examining the details of new employment contracts and their differences with “traditional” labour agreements, and assessing their economic impact.

The potential employment of new High School/University graduates with a fixed term contract would appear to reduce youth unemployment, other than offering companies a labour force suited to their changing needs; yet, as held by Bianco (2003), “...*the substantial employment rise is only apparent, it is a kind of optical illusion. In other words, although the number of employees has risen, as shown by data, the number of worked hours has not*”. Quite undoubtedly, the new employment contracts can bring about increased precariousness and insecurity. This new kind of market concerns precisely youngsters, so it has strong consequences for their life. Namely, in the Italian the strong family ties is prevailing and, for young people, parents constitute the defensive bulwark against the general uncertainties of the future and the fluctuating labour market (Billari and Ongaro, 1999; Billari and Rosina, 2003; Micheli, 1999).

Since the widespread use of atypical contracts is a recent phenomenon, research into the way in which “flexible” jobs become part of one’s life, especially affecting one’s decision to get married and

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<sup>1</sup> The sentences reported at the beginning of each paragraph are drawn from the focus groups held within the framework of a survey on atypical work in Tuscany, to be discussed below; participants’ gender, age, academic qualification and civil status are reported in brackets.

have children, is not yet consolidated. Nonetheless, we may refer to a number of sources in literature in order to conceptualise the issue.

The delay in attaining high academic qualifications – at a relatively “mature” age when compared with other European countries – and in achieving professional expectations, is certainly one of the reasons behind young people’s delay in leaving home, i.e. the so-called “delay syndrome” which affects their transition into adulthood, their getting married and having children (Livi Bacci, 2004). Moreover, there are substantial (not only economic) constraints due to the uncertainties of the future, especially in terms of working status. As pointed out by Mills and Blossfeld (2005), globalization of modern societies may affect the life courses especially among young people. The internationalisation of markets, the intensification of competition, the diffusion of knowledge and of information technologies, and the rising importance of markets, together lead to a high level of uncertainty in society. For young people insecurity may delay choices of adulthood, namely, partnership and parenthood.

This paper shall examine up to what extent working conditions affect workers’ uncertainty about the future which, in turn, may determine their “taking refuge” within their family (De Rita, 2004).

Our paper is divided in six sections, included this introduction. We shall firstly provide a short description of the development of the labour market; then, we shall describe the potential relationship between labour flexibility and family decisions, from a generational and gender viewpoint; in the fourth paragraph we shall focus on eventual behavioural differences between atypical and typical workers in Italy; we will then outline the distinctive traits of atypical young workers in terms of economic and existential vulnerability, by relying on a survey on fixed-term workers in Tuscany (Salvini and Ferro, 2005). Some remarks conclude our paper.

## **2. From a “stable” job to an atypical job: the definition and extent of the problem**

*“I work for my Ltd as a co.co.co. [coordinated and continuing collaborator]; this form of employment has been chosen because it is more favourable to the company” (M34, graduate, cohabiting)*

Over the past few years, there has been a shift from standard employment contracts to new forms of employment, both in Italy and in many other European countries (Giesecke and Groß, 2004; Petrongolo, 2004; Rettaroli, 2005). Said shift has deep consequences on family choices. We shall now focus on the features of non-standard employment. A preliminary definition may be the one given by Reyneri (2002): *“the expression “atypical jobs” refers to a kind of work which, although not self-autonomous, is substantially different from subordinate employment, as developed over the century-long industrialization process”*. Hence, as noted by Magatti and Fullin (2002), it is the contractual form governing the job and the way it is performed that are atypical, and not the job in itself. In such a light, atypical employment may take different shapes (Bianco, 2003). Hence, definitions are difficult to make in this context, and all the more is their quantification: ISTAT, for instance, gives a restricted definition of atypical jobs,

narrowing them down to part-time<sup>2</sup> and fixed-term jobs. Among these, it includes fixed-term jobs themselves and casual jobs, for which estimates are available on the number of “missions”, rather than of concerned workers.

Although we are aware that our definition is arbitrary, our paper (just like most literature on the issue) shall define as “atypical” all forms of employments which do not fall within the two large categories of self-employment and permanent employment. Failing a more suitable definition, we shall conceptualise the atypical work in terms of “*what it is not*”: the atypical worker “*does not*” have an indefinite contract, “*does not*” have the same guarantees as standard employees in the event of illness, “*does not*” have the same pension coverage, and “*does not*” have the same guarantees in the event of maternity.

It is clear that the territorial spread and distribution of said contractual forms are not easily determinable. Reference must thus be made to different sources, both administrative and *ad hoc* surveys. Given the nature of said sources, it is quite difficult to determine the number of atypical workers at any given time.

It is unquestionable that the labour market has witnessed a substantial increase in “atypical” jobs over the last years – though to a lower extent than what often claimed; said jobs are different from indefinite full-time standard jobs and have distinctive flexible traits. The administrative source, for several reasons, generally overestimates the number of temporary workers; however, it does not include all the flexible forms of employment. Hence, the above estimates may not be too far from the real extent of atypical jobs (Regione Toscana, 2004<sup>a</sup>).

Atypical jobs are on the rise all over Italy, though with strong territorial differences. In certain regions, said increase is higher than the national average: for instance, Tuscany (discussed below), is particularly concerned by the phenomenon (Regione Toscana, 2004<sup>a</sup>). As matters currently stand, atypical jobs do not represent an efficient way to enter the labour market, and are not rapidly turned into stable jobs allowing workers to plan their future. According to OCDE data, in 2001 half the number of workers became permanently “entrapped” in atypical jobs, while 20% left the labour market and ended up being unemployed (Bianco, 2003). A survey carried out in some Tuscan areas confirms said data: after 3-4 years’ temporary employment, a significant number of atypical workers still does not have a stable job (Giovani, 2005; IRPET, 2005).

### **3. Gender and generations facing atypical jobs**

*“My parents, at my age, were certainly worse off, I have many more things... though they had different prospects... they might not have had a bank account or a house, but they had the prospect of a stable job, which I don’t” (M28, graduate, single)*

*“I would like to have a boyfriend too ... nowadays I wouldn’t use (a magic wand) for a job” (F30, graduate, single)*

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<sup>2</sup> Permanent part-time employment has not been included among atypical jobs, since the consequences of such non-precarious form of employment on life choices are not comparable with those of fixed-term employment.

*“I would like to be) More certain about... my job and thus feel more confident in managing my private life” (F37, graduate, single)*

*“I live the present, also because these collaborations do not allow for future plans” (F29, graduate, cohabiting)*

Focusing on age and gender, atypical workers have interesting peculiarities. The number of young atypical workers is substantial, though possibly lower than expected – nearly 20% of atypical workers are under 30 years of age (Regione Toscana, 2004<sup>a</sup>). In terms of incidence, the percentage of adult atypical workers is the most substantial, especially within the 30-39-year range (31%). The number of atypical workers in their forties is also significant (21.3%). Hence, atypical jobs are not merely a way of entering the labour market; rather, they also concern people who, wishing to re-enter the market, have no choice but to accept less guaranteed contracts. The phenomenon seems to be spreading to wider groups of workers, either expelled from production processes or dismissed as a result of delocalization. In particular, said workers, who began working many years ago under a standard system of rights, now end up experiencing a highly precarious situation at the most vulnerable time in their life (Andreana, 2004). The issue cannot be underestimated, since it leads to an increase in the number of people living in hardship who, albeit not poor, are at risk of poverty.

When considering gender issues, women represent 40% of atypical workers; the rate notably increases among youngsters, whereas the number of men is more prevalent among middle-aged and more mature workers. Indeed, most people entering the labour market are women: female employment has increased especially thanks to young generations who, alongside the traditional horizontal and vertical segregation, usually take on atypical jobs (not always for a short period of time). It may be wondered whether this entails a further element of specificity in the workers’ participation in the labour market and if said gender-related specificity may, in turn, enhance the difficult conciliation between family and career.

The current labour market is thus highly heterogeneous. Unlike the past, whose job features were rigid for all working generations, with a minority of women suiting themselves to working standards conceived for men, fluctuating young generations nowadays prevail, adopting a *job-to-job* strategy; in this context, moreover, women are sometimes prevalent. Thus, young men experience a difficult transition into adulthood, exacerbated by the uncertainties of the future, and young women face the problem of their “double role”, which is more troubled than their mothers’: these are precisely the new processes we need to ponder on when considering the relationship between family decisions and working flexibility.

In this respect we need to distinguish between flexibility and flexibilization. *“We may distinguish «flexibility as a culturally defined model», within which there is a residual room for individual choices, from «flexibility as a socially prescribed model», which people must comply with lest their exclusion from the labour market; put into ideal types, the «flexible» against the «flexibilized» worker” (Zucca, 2004).*

And it is also for this reason that in Italy, nowadays, female employment continues to have a strong impact on lowest low fertility (Kholer et al., 2002; Caltabiano et al., 2007 ). In Italy, in fact, women's careers have a depressive role on the decision to have children, unlike what has been going on for some time in the rest of Europe (Rampichini and Salvini, 2001; Gottard, Salvini and Santini, 2003). The relationship seems to be due also to the difficulties encountered by women trying to be both mothers and workers, not being supported by public structures (only by their families, when possible), and having to face strong gender inequalities within the family and within the labour market.

So the key word today is flexibility. Apparently, this was the dream of past generations, which had to experience women's "double role" of mother and worker with difficulty and contradictoriness. But at what stage does flexibility turn into precariousness? When desire to carry out a work, and to reconcile it with family commitments, borders on the threshold of utmost uncertainty about the future? And above all, how strong does a worker's professional engagement need to be, often in times of commitment and working hours, to earn a living and hope for his/her fixed-term contract to be renewed? Hence, working flexibili(ty)zation is not matched by highly flexible working time, to be balanced with family time. The wish to have a family (this is more often a wish than a concrete reality) becomes difficult to pursue in a context of uncertainty and deep professional engagement. Such a widespread unstable process is still not matched by flexible means for credit grants and houses on rent, or by a network of social "shock absorbers" making contractual flexibility more sustainable.

Although atypical work increases employment rates and broadens access to said market, its typical features (temporariness and less guarantees) have the negative effect of exacerbating professional precariousness, even in the presence of new legislative reforms. and it leads to wonder whether this positively affects the life of individuals or not.

Hence, one of the main problems when examining atypical jobs is their double nature, compulsion and free choice. While the lack of flexibility in terms of working hours was, for past generations, a reason for compressing fertility – due to the impossibility of suitably rearing children<sup>3</sup> – young people now have other prospects. The theoretical advantages of flexibility are still the possibility of managing one's working time, both in terms of working hours and of alternating between working and non-working periods. Yet, seldom can the worker really decide whether to be a "precarious" or "stable" worker. Atypical jobs have become an alternative and possibly provisional option, due to the lack of more stable contracts; when they do not represent a "momentary shift" to a stable job or the chance to gain experiences, they run the risk of becoming a worker's "trap". In other words, they may lead to persistent precariousness and marginalization, with potential negative effects on the formation and training of human capital.

Recent studies (Catania *et al.*, 2004) have shown that albeit youngsters are very active and willing to work, they invest their energies and human capital in the present, evidencing a "suspension in present times" which, although effective, does not include future plans. Their strong connection with parental home, the financial and emotional support they receive from their parents, and the personal autonomy

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<sup>3</sup> A deep analysis of the relationship between childbearing and women's employment is available in the work by Rampichini and Salvini (2001).

they enjoy within said context, prompt them to take refuge within such a *niche*: this may be good for the time being, though is less effective for the future, both for one's personal growth and for the development of society.

Debates on the relationship between work and family have so far concentrated on the impact of women's extra domestic activity on low fertility in Italy. Recent research (Bernardi and Nazio 2005) stressed the importance of economic and job precariousness on transition to adulthood both for men and women. Now we need to carry on this debate by including current changes of the labour market, and consider men's and women's professional choices and pressures, as well as strictly economic elements and professional aspirations, which may have a strong impact on a person's decision to have a family of his/her own.

#### **4. Young people and work in Italy**

*"[An advantage of working on a fixed-term contract] is the kind of work, which is not monotonous... yet, changing employees ... is also stressful" (F32, graduate, married)*

*"I have two options... I either ask for a pay rise at the University and stop offering external consultancies ... or I continue to be paid a meagre salary... and have a more stable job (M33, graduate, cohabiting)*

The IDEA survey (Inizio Dell'Età Adulta – [Beginning of Adulthood])<sup>4</sup> allows us to ascertain whether transition into adulthood is marked by significant differences according to one's working conditions. We shall focus on workers' contracts<sup>5</sup> in order to assess whether flexible workers attain personal autonomy later than other workers, as held by the abovementioned literature. We have thus studied how young people behave with respect to their late economic and residential autonomy, as well as to their emotional and reproductive life, performing their job with no guarantees in terms of continuity and stability.

In carrying out our analysis, we need to bear in mind that atypical workers are very heterogeneous. As recently pointed out (Zucca, 2004; Catania and Zucca, 2004), professional flexibility may be perceived and experienced either as a (prolonged) and imposed precarious condition, or as a time for personal enrichment (especially at the beginning of one's career), for strengthening human resources and for individual creative freedom. The different vulnerability associated with such situations is induced by professional uncertainty (supported by one's family, where possible) and is mainly linked – on an individual level – to one's age, gender and academic qualifications. On a collective level, the characteristics of the labour market play a key role. Hence, the local context – with its economic and cultural features – has a strong impact on family strategies.

The doubleness between flexibility and the wish to have different working experiences hinges also on the law regulating atypical jobs. The above literature makes a distinction between "transitional" employment, i.e. jobs performed as a transitional shift towards a stable job, with a strong training component, and temporary jobs, which lead to continuing precarious conditions. In short, the IDEA

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<sup>4</sup> For information on the survey, see Mencarini et al. 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Given the aim of our study, we focused on youngsters who were employed at the time of the survey, excluding students.

survey allows us both to consider the above individual factors and to include our analysis within different local contexts mirroring, in turn, the characteristics of the Italian labour market.

On the basis of given structural data, we may now quantify the phenomenon. Table 1 shows the number of workers subdivided by type of contract, gender, age range and geographical region. In Italy, 76.5% of male workers between 23 and 27 years are on a stable contract, and so are 92% of older workers, while women amount to 64% and 80% respectively. Atypical jobs, on a parallel level, are performed primarily by women: 36% and 20% of women, in the two cohorts of workers respectively, have an unstable job, against 23.5% and 8.2% of men. In general, standard jobs are more widespread in the North and in the Centre, whereas atypical jobs are more common in the South and Islands.

**Table 1 – Employees subdivided by contract, residence, gender and corresponding cohort (weighted data: percentage by line)**

Geographical region		Age range			
		23-27		33-37	
		Current contract		Current contract	
		typical	atypical	typical	atypical
Men	North-Centre	79.1	20.9	94.4	5.6
	South-Islands	71.4	28.6	86.0	14.0
	Italy	76.5	23.5	91.8	8.2
Women	North-Centre	66.4	33.6	81.7	18.3
	South-Islands	57.3	42.7	74.8	25.2
	Italy	64.0	36.0	80.0	20.0

Source: our elaboration of IDEA data

The proportion of typical and autonomous workers increases among the oldest cohort of workers, while the number of atypical workers is lower, presumably because of the “cohort effect”: since youngsters are currently entering the market at a time of widespread use of new contracts, the chance of having a stable job is reduced. As it can be seen (Table 2), in fact, little more than half of 23-27 year old workers was on a typical contract for both their first and current job, while 19% of them had an atypical job in both cases. Approximately 15% of both men and women had a first atypical job and now have a typical job, thus improving their occupational stability, while 4% experienced the opposite change. Among 23-27 year old women, there is a higher number of workers who began their career with an atypical contract and, when interviewed, still had an unstable job (31.9%), while 49.3% of them had a stable job in both cases.

**Table 2 – Transitions (percentage) between first and current job, by gender and corresponding cohort (weighted data)**

Current job		Age range					
		23-27			33-37		
		First contract		total	First contract		Total
typical	atypical	typical	atypical				
Men	Typical contract	59.6	16.9	76.5	70.6	21.2	91.8
	Atypical contract	4.5	19.0	23.5	1.7	6.5	8.2
	Total	64.1	35.9	100.0	72.3	27.7	100.0
Women	Typical contract	49.3	14.7	64.0	65.2	14.8	80.0
	Atypical contract	4.2	31.9	36.0	3.6	16.4	20.0
	Total	53.5	46.5	100.0	68.8	31.2	100.0

Source: our elaboration of IDEA data



As regards the other cohort, 70.6% and 65.2% of workers (depending on their gender) had a standard job in both cases, and only 21.2% and 14.8% of workers now have a stable job, despite starting their career on an atypical contract.

Atypical jobs are thus a consistent phenomenon; it is thus worth considering whether there are any differences in young people's "steps" towards adulthood according to the kind of contract.

Let us consider the 33-37 year old cohort, whose number of "transited" workers allows us to evaluate the differences, in terms of contracts, with workers who have not taken any decisive "steps". In terms of median age<sup>6</sup>, while one's contract does not seem particularly discriminating on the decision to leave home (since it is affected by the number of workers leaving home at a young age to attend University), workers on an unstable contract tend to delay the moment when they first get married (Table 3). Employees on an indefinite contract take this step earlier than employees whose working status is not yet certain.

**Table 3 – Median age at leaving parental home and getting marriage, by gender and contract at the time of the event (adjusted data: percentages).**

Cohort 33-37	CURRENT JOB	Median age	
		Leaving home	Getting married
Men	Typical contract	28.4	30.5
	Atypical contract	26.9	31.6
Women	Typical contract	27.3	29.7
	Atypical contract	27.2	32.2

Source: our elaboration of IDEA data

In order to better understand the relationship between marriage and working status, we estimated a Cox model for our data, keeping the two cohorts separate (Blossfeld and Rohwer, 1995)<sup>7</sup>. We were thus able to ascertain said relationship as well as other connections with different variables, such as gender, geographical distribution and, indirectly, cohort. In this respect, we kept self-autonomous workers separate from standard and atypical workers in order to appreciate the connection between precarious working status and marriage, net of other factors. As known, in fact, the category of self-autonomous workers includes miscellaneous workers, ranging from professionals to coordinated and continuing collaborators with VAT, and thus is particularly difficult to interpret.

As regards (Table 4) the younger cohort of workers, their training curriculum has a crucial impact on their delay in getting married and having children; the *gender* variable appears to be significant – women are more likely to get married – and so does the *contract* variable: atypical workers' propensity to get married is 50% lower than that of stable workers. Self-employed workers are more likely to get married.

<sup>6</sup> The median age is calculated on the basis of survival tables for every event.

<sup>7</sup> Our preliminary analysis of the effects of variables on one's decision to get married uses a main effects model, in particular a traditional Cox proportional hazards model. Further studies may concern both the interaction between different events and their duration, and the use of parametric models for the dependence of hazard on duration itself.

The data concerning the second cohort are different. *Gender* has a less crucial, though still significant, role: women’s likelihood of getting married is 23% higher than men’s; the impact of one’s contract and of one’s academic qualifications, albeit relevant, are both slightly lower.

Region of residence does not seem to be a discriminating factor; yet, by subdividing Northern from Southern young workers, it appears that atypical jobs have a strongly delaying effect in the Centre-North, thus showing the importance of the context of the labour market.

We have thus shown the relationship between working conditions and family choices/non choices, as well as the impact of working flexibility on the type and time of transition into adulthood. In the following section we focus our analysis on the young atypical workers living in Tuscany.

**Table 4 – Getting married: estimates of parameters of Cox models for the two cohorts.**

Variable		Age range 23-27		Age range 33-37	
		Estimate of parameter	Hazard ratio	Estimate of parameter	Hazard ratio
Gender	female	0.68**	1.98	0.21*	1.23
	male (baseline)	-	-	-	-
Geographical region	South and islands	0.02	1.02	0.14	1.15
	North and centre (baseline)	-	-	-	-
Academic qualification	normal	-0.64**	0.53	-0.24*	0.79
	high	-1.93**	0.15	-0.57***	0.57
	low (baseline)	-	-	-	-
Contract	atypical	-0.78*	0.46	-0.25*	0.78
	self-employed	0.49	1.63	-0.26*	0.77
	typical (baseline)	-	-	-	-

Source: our elaboration of IDEA data Significant levels: \*\*\* <0.0001; \*\* <0.001; \* <0.01

## 5. The typical Tuscany of atypical workers

*“My family is fundamental; I wouldn’t have had my job without them” (M33, graduate, cohabiting)*

*“My wish to have children is particularly compromised by this kind of job ... I invest so much mental, emotional etc energy in my job that I don’t have enough energy... to make this choice” (F37, graduate, single)*

In Tuscany, fixed-term contracts have become widespread over the last few years (1997-2003), more quickly than in other central-northern regions, reaching national average levels (the variation for said period amounts to 119% in Tuscany and 122% in Italy). Quite interestingly, the phenomenon involves a wide range of people and, as seen above, is especially significant among workers under the age of 49 years. Such a notable increase in atypical jobs is not matched by an equally widespread use of said contracts in different economic fields: in Tuscany, fixed-term contracts are commonplace in highly qualified fields, e.g. research. Nonetheless, contractual and working conditions vary substantially among atypical work. This might be the reason why atypical workers do not share the same levels of (dis)satisfaction. Workers who have more human capital are keen on discovering the labour market, on understanding their own interests through different working experiences and, by relying on their curriculum and their own initiative, are perfectly happy to plunge into the multiform and often uncertain

world of atypical contracts. Non-graduates, instead, settled themselves for new contractual patterns, encountering different kinds of problems.

Although, young atypical workers do not represent the entire group of young people, they are the ones who, probably, need to plan their life strategies on the basis of their working (and economic) status. Since “working flexibility” is an increasing reality especially among young people, it is interesting to assess what long-term demographic and social consequences the new working paradigm may have.

#### *5.1 Focusing on young Tuscan people: an ad hoc survey*

Bearing in mind that youngsters’ delayed transition into adulthood is not exclusively due to cultural changes and psychological/emotional reasons, we examined the impact of objective elements, such as the delay in graduating, the lack of effective policies favouring youth employment, and the widespread use of fixed-term employment contracts. Our survey on 10 Tuscan provinces was carried out in 2004, and concerned a sample of atypical workers (25-39 years), both men and women. Our ensuing structural and contextual picture was similar to that depicted by other studies, both on a local and national level (such as the above IDEA survey).

Women amount to 62% of atypical workers in Tuscany; young workers (both men and women) are prevalent: 44.5% in the 25-29 year old range, against 31.9% in the 30-35 year old range and 23.6% in the 35-39 year old range. Most of this people have jobs requiring notable training (there is a striking prevalence of people with, at least, a High School diploma: 44.6% are High-School graduates and 41.4% are University graduates), as well as organizational, decision-making and executive skills. Since the number of University graduates among 25-34 year old residents in central Italy is still lower than 16% (ISTAT, 2003), the new contracts are presumably more common in fields requiring highly specialized personnel. The youngsters we interviewed were mainly unmarried (men 81.2%, women 60%).

The most common contracts are fixed-term contracts and coordinated and “continuous collaboration contracts” (or “collaborations by project”). The first are especially widespread among 35-39 year old people (65.3%); said apparent asymmetry with respect to younger cohorts is due to two reasons, as mentioned above when discussing the IDEA data. Firstly, this generations entered the labour market when other temporary-term contracts were still being developed; secondly, a fixed term contract is, among the many temporary contracts, the one offering most guarantees, such as illness/maternity leave, paid vacancies, pension coverage and employees’ indemnity fund. Hence, being more costly to employers, they are offered only to experienced workers.

Quite interestingly, the current flexibility of the labour market is perceived by workers as precariousness or, at the most, transitoriness, rather than as the chance to “self-manage” one’s working hours: 68.2% of young people are full-time workers and often work also at weekends or in the evening. Moreover, 34.8% of atypical workers, whose working hours cannot formally be determined *a priori* by their employers, have nonetheless fixed working hours. Hence, atypical workers work is too often the result of specific economic choices on the part of employers, who not only demand fixed working hours, but also continuous presence at the office (87.5% of young people work at their employer’s office). Quite obviously, not even the flexibility of the workplace is put in practice.

Nonetheless, fixed term contract is the chance for many youngsters to enter the labour market and discover working environments which are often hard to enter due to lengthy competitions, as well as to gain experience and acquire professional skills. It is for this reason that 78% of young people are generally satisfied with their job; the greatest level of satisfaction is connected with the kind of job they perform, followed by the chance to gain experience and by the suitability of the job to their academic qualifications. On an administrative level, however, the kind of contract and retribution are disappointing, in that they bring about difficulties in the management of one's working hours, as well as of one's economic and financial resources.

Quite interestingly, satisfied workers decrease as the period of time between one's first and current job increases (Table 5): at first, the atypical nature of one's contract is easily accepted if the job suits one's expectations; however, over time young people grow increasingly dissatisfied with such contracts; a "flexible" job seems to be a voluntary choice only for some workers (35-39 year old people who have been working for more than 10 years are equally divided into satisfied and dissatisfied workers).

**Table 5 – Are you satisfied with your contract? By age range and number of years since first job (after school/university).**

Age		Years between first job and interview					
		0-1	1-3	3-5	5-10	10-15	>15
25-29	not satisfied	46.8	57.9	60.6	62.3	61.9	-
	satisfied	53.2	42.1	39.4	37.7	38.1	-
30-34	not satisfied	41.3	54.2	61.9	61.8	65.0	71.7
	satisfied	58.7	45.8	38.1	38.2	35.0	28.3
35-39	not satisfied	100.0	25.1	66.2	75.9	54.1	51.0
	satisfied	-	74.9	33.9	24.1	45.9	49.0

Source: Our elaboration of the survey on Tuscan atypical workers.

In most cases, said individuals are rewarded also by the kind of job they have; these are people who have invested many years in training and are now engaged in a highly qualified job requiring organizational and decision-making skills.

### 5.2 The curious, the adapted and the resourceful

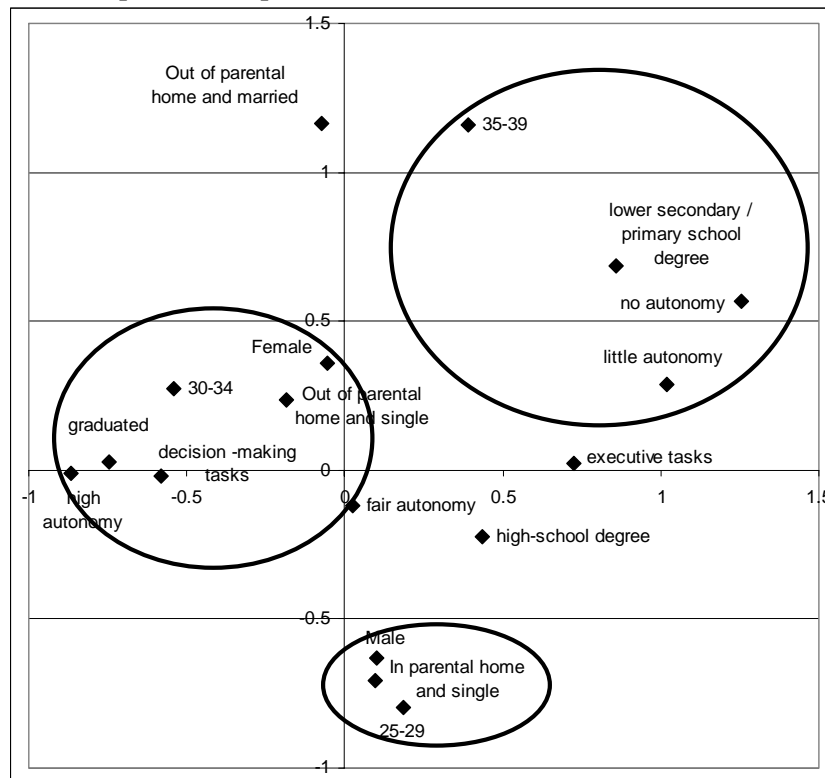
Our preliminary analysis shows us that although atypical workers have diversified physiognomies, there are a number of profiles which may be rigorously determined by a multiple correspondences analysis. This allows us to make out, even visually, a number of discriminating elements within the heterogeneous group of young Tuscan atypical workers. The link between the modes of a set of variables is thus represented on a Cartesian plan, and their distance is a measure of their association (Anderson *et al.*, 1995; Bolasco, 1997; Regione Toscana, 2004<sup>b</sup>).

The variables we have chosen are: *academic qualification*, *family status*, *autonomy* and *kind of skills* required. One's *academic qualification* is an indicator of human capital. One's *family status* ("living with parents, unmarried", "living autonomously, unmarried", "living autonomously, married/cohabiting") has been chosen for two reasons: firstly, the crucial role of one's family as a "social shock-absorber" has been evidenced by many studies, and thus it seems that the chance of relying on one's parents material assistance is a watershed in young people's lives; secondly, because it represents an indicator of a step,

whether or not taken, towards adulthood. Our analysis includes one's *autonomy* and *kind of skills* at work, as *proxy* of the characteristics of one's job; lastly, one's *age range* and *gender*: the former because it is the discriminating variable for one's "transition into adulthood", and the latter because, as ascertained above, young women differ from men not only in terms of professional aspirations but also in terms of family aims and strategies.

The graph of Figure 1 shows three categories of individuals: 25-29 year old men who, in most cases, are High School graduates and are relatively autonomous at work; the number of people in this group who still lives at home is substantial. The second group includes more mature workers, i.e. 35-39 year old people who, in most cases, live autonomously and have a stable relationship, low academic qualifications and essentially manual jobs. The third group is made up of 30-34 year old people: they have a high cultural level, and are thus likely to have jobs requiring organizational, decision-making and executive skills; this is the group where women's presence is most prevalent.

**Figure 1 – Result of the multiple correspondences analysis: representation of variables on a Cartesian plan made up of the first two dimensions.**



Source: Our elaboration of the survey data on Tuscan atypical workers.

Hence, the above multiple correspondences confirm that the variables included in the model have a discriminating effect. We thus deepened our research, through a more articulated method which could mirror the various traits of the phenomenon, i.e. examining whether these groups have different approaches towards professional (in)stability and personal-life choices, as well as the relationship between the aspects considered so far.

We thus grouped individuals through a *cluster analysis* (Fabbris, 1997), with the aim of creating groups on the basis of one's human, economic and family resources, presuming these to differentiate "flexible" individuals from "flexibilized" ones.

The grouping system evidences 3 clusters among the individuals we considered, whose percentages are the following: the first group is made up of 36.6% of individuals, the second of 31.6% and the third of 31.8%. Their characteristics, with grouping and structure variables, are reported in Table 6.

**Table 6 – Results of our cluster analysis: averages of variables in the groups**

Variable	Modality	group 1	group 2	group 3	sample
<b>Grouping variables</b>					
Autonomy	Not at all	3.4	6.1	1.3	<b>3.6</b>
	Little	15.3	<b>23.1</b>	9.5	<b>15.9</b>
	Relative	<b>62.8</b>	50.7	50.3	<b>55.0</b>
	High	18.5	20.1	<b>38.9</b>	<b>25.5</b>
Required skills	Decision-making	52.2	27.5	<b>88.4</b>	<b>55.9</b>
	Manual	<b>47.8</b>	<b>72.5</b>	11.6	<b>44.1</b>
Academic qualification	Primary school/lower secondary school	12.6	<b>20.7</b>	8.6	<b>13.9</b>
	High School graduate	<b>63.8</b>	41.4	26.4	<b>44.8</b>
	University graduate	23.6	37.9	<b>65.0</b>	<b>41.3</b>
Living/not living with parents	With parents – single	<b>75.3</b>	36.4	48.1	<b>54.3</b>
	Living autonomously - single	8.6	20.6	<b>23.0</b>	<b>17.0</b>
	Living autonomously - not single	16.1	<b>43.0</b>	28.9	<b>28.7</b>
<b>Structure variables</b>					
Gender	Female	56.3	<b>64.3</b>	<b>65.5</b>	<b>61.8</b>
	Male	<b>43.7</b>	35.7	34.5	<b>38.2</b>
Age	25-29	54.3	35.1	42.6	<b>44.5</b>
	30-34	23.5	34.5	39	<b>31.9</b>
	35-39	22.2	30.4	18.4	<b>23.6</b>
Children	No	83.6	67.1	76.4	<b>76.1</b>
	Yes	16.4	32.9	23.6	<b>23.9</b>
<b>Current job</b>					
Kind of employment	Coordinated and continuous collaboration	26.2	26.2	<b>34.1</b>	<b>28.7</b>
	No contract	<b>12.1</b>	6.7	5.2	<b>8.2</b>
	Fixed-term	55.5	<b>59.3</b>	47.2	<b>54.1</b>
	Stage/occasional collaboration	6.1	7.8	13.5	<b>9.0</b>
Working hours	Established	<b>58.0</b>	<b>59.0</b>	52.2	<b>56.5</b>
	Agreed	30.0	30.4	<b>32.3</b>	<b>30.9</b>
	Chosen	12.0	10.6	<b>15.5</b>	<b>12.7</b>
Are you satisfied with your job?	Very much	81.8	75.5	<b>86.4</b>	<b>81.3</b>
	I don't know	0.3	0.3	0.0	<b>0.2</b>
	Little	17.9	<b>24.2</b>	13.6	<b>18.5</b>
Are you satisfied with your contract?	Very much	<b>43.5</b>	41.4	39.0	<b>41.4</b>
	I don't know	1.2	1.0	0,6	<b>1.0</b>
	Little	55.3	57.6	<b>60.4</b>	<b>57.7</b>

NOTE: any percentages differing from the overall average are evidenced in bold

Source: Our elaboration of the survey on Tuscan atypical workers.

#### Group 1: the curious

The first group mainly includes young people living with their parents, most of whom are High School graduates and are relatively autonomous at work. It is the "youngest" group, and it may be for this reason that the percentage of workers who are satisfied with their job and contract is higher (though not

significantly) than the sample average. We have called them “curious” as a result of the joint analysis of grouping and structure variables: their living with their parents is not so much attributable to their economic and working status, but rather to their age. In the early years of their career, they are curious to discover new environments and are keen on putting themselves to the test. This is mirrored by their decision to continue training in order to increase their human capital and curriculum. Hence, the curious feel at ease in a flexible market which offers no guarantees for the future and does not demand conclusive choices which, for the time being, would be felt as premature. Instability is not perceived as an obstacle to the wish (still not strongly expressed) to become adults.

#### Group 2: the adapted

The second cluster is made up of young people who strive to suit themselves to a changing labour market. Their training is modest, and they perform manual activities highly controlled by others. They often have a fixed term contract, hence enjoy some contractual protection similar to stable jobs, though are nonetheless dissatisfied with their working status. In most cases, they are the “least young” workers who, despite their working status, have already made important life choices, such as leaving home and getting married.

#### Group 3: the resourceful

This is the group encompassing the most dynamic workers who, by reason either of their age or of their finding the right balance between investing in the present and having aspirations for the future, experience working instability with equanimity, and are satisfied with their high professional level and with their job, if not their retribution.

It is within this group that one’s family may become a “necessary stagnation factor”, especially for workers not living on their own (Catania *et al.*, 2004): although the delay in leaving home and being economically dependent from one’s parents is, in many cases, the result of rational choices (rather than of having a traditional stay-at-home mum, Saraceno, 2002), such choices may eventually become a double-threaded link between generations.

## **6. Summary remarks**

To summarize, with a slightly extreme picture, the new employment contracts and their impact on family strategies, we can say that there is a working context which requires the individual to suit himself to constant changes, which requires a strong family to economically support children for many more years than in the past; which runs the risk of intruding upon the individual’s vital time in the name of efficiency or, at least, of self-achievement: Indeed, given such a context, to strike a balance is not easy: the family’s role as a central core of society is deeply changing (Saraceno, 2003); the individual, who is at the heart of the system, wishes to achieve professional success, though this clashes with his/her wish (at times veiled) to get married and have children; although the average life expectancy is rising, this is not matched by the possibility to be self-sufficient and active in one’s last years of life; what is more, traditional gender inequalities within the family are still deep-rooted.

How is it then possible to combine the need for a job guaranteeing professional achievement, as well as time and energy for personal life, with the permanent contractual guarantees (illness and maternity

leave, paid vacancies, safety on the workplace, indemnity, pension) strived for and obtained by post-war generations, which are now faltering?

As seen above, the atypical features of the labour market lie not only in flexible contractual relationships, but also in the many forms they take the shape of; it would thus be too reductive to make generalizations and speak broadly of atypical workers. Fixed-term contracts have different consequences on people's life choices, depending on their age, professional aspirations, human capital, kind of contract and working environment.

Individuals viewing their job as a constitutive element of their own identity clearly invest time and resources in their professional growth, rather than in looking for a stable job; at the same time, given the uncertain status of their career and their sometimes precarious economic conditions, they often choose to live with their parents, whom they inevitably resort to for economic needs – and do so even when they eventually leave home. What will happen, then, if fixed-term contracts become the rule and the group of adults with a stable job and a guaranteed pension, now acting as young people's *social shock absorbers*, disappears? Individuals, instead, who view their job as merely instrumental, either out of choice (having no particular professional aspirations) or for contingent reasons (e.g. women choosing to resume work after a long time of absence from the labour market for family reasons), are less keen on accepting an unstable job, which requires them to be able to suit themselves to sudden changes, to sacrifice their family to their job and which offers, in return, no guarantees for the future and very few for the present.

The current trend in the labour market and its consequences on life cycles – which we have pondered on in the light of different studies – is unlikely to reverse. In other words, flexibility nowadays seems inevitable. Besides its undoubted benefits – evidenced above – its costs for the individual cannot be ignored; indeed, all political parties nowadays seem keen on promoting “sustainable flexibility”, pursuing economic development compatible with a social reality characterized by a difficult generational balance. In fact, though demographic factors are important in this process, labour policies must take into account the relationship with family choices, with a view to conciliate home and working lives.

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