

## **Women and Work in Italy: the Risk of Discouragement. With a Southern Italian Case Study.**

*Letizia Carrera\**

### **How to cite**

Carrera L. (2011). Women and Work in Italy: the Risk of Discouragement. With a Southern Italian Case Study . [Italian Sociological Review, 1 (3), 34-44]  
Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.13136/isr.v1i3.22>

[DOI: 10.13136/isr.v1i3.22]

### **1. Author/s information**

\* Department of Psychology and Pedagogical Sciences, University of Bari (Italy)

### **2. Contact authors' email addresses**

\* [l.carrera@psico.uniba.it](mailto:l.carrera@psico.uniba.it)

### **3. Article accepted for publication (*data*)**

October 2011

**Additional information about  
Italian Sociological Review**

**can be found at:**

**[About ISR](#) - [Editorial Board](#) - [Manuscript submission](#)**

## *Women and Work in Italy: the Risk of Discouragement. With a Southern Italian Case Study*

Letizia Carrera

University of Bari (Italy), Department of Psychology and Pedagogical Sciences - Section of Sociology

Corresponding author:

Letizia Carrera

Address: piazza Umberto I, n.1 - 70121 Bari

E- mail address: l.carrera@psico.uniba.it

### **Abstract**

The difficult relationship between women and work in Italy appears disconcerting at national level and becomes really alarming at Southern Italy ones. We have chosen here to consider a particular phenomenon which, in Italy, is especially referred to women: «discouragement». This is the condition of some women who, after having looked for a job for long time and uselessly, at the end, decide to give up looking for it. Going beyond quantitative data, we have made also a empiric survey on one hundred of unemployed women to investigate discouragement process in a Southern Italy region.

Keywords: women, job, discouragement

### **1. Aspects of Discouragement**

The difficult relationship between women and work in Italy can be clearly seen, even if we study only the last fifteen years (table 1)<sup>1</sup>. If we observe this whole period, a situation of absolute and relative weakness (compared with men) is evident in relation to all three of the habitually adopted markers (employment rate, unemployment rate and activity rate).

#### **Job Market in Italy**

(Table 1)		1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Employment rate (15-64 years old)</b>	Women	37.5	38.5	40.5	43.4	45.1	45.3	45.3	46.3	46.6	47.2	46.4	46.1
	Men	66.2	66.0	67.0	68.4	70.0	69.7	69.7	70.5	70.7	70.3	68.6	67.7
<b>Unemployment rate*</b>	Women	15.4	15.3	14.8	12.2	11.3	10.5	10.1	8.8	7.9	8.5	9.3	9.7
	Men	8.6	8.7	8.4	7.1	6.5	6.4	6.2	5.4	4.9	5.5	6.8	7.6
<b>Activity rate (15-64 years old)</b>	Women	44.3	45.6	47.6	49.5	50.9	50.6	50.4	50.8	50.7	51.6	51.2	51.1
	Men	72.6	72.4	73.2	73.7	74.9	74.5	74.4	74.6	74.4	74.4	73.7	73.3

Our processing of Istat data. Constant survey of workforce.

\*Unemployment rates are calculated for the whole of the working population and not only for the age range 15-64 years old.

If the 2010 national figures still appear disconcerting and far from the objectives set by the Lisbon strategy (60%), they become really alarming if we consider that they comprise some quite different geographical areas. Indeed, southern Italy displays values far lower than the national average as regards the three main markers (table 2). These aggregate data hide the significant effects of an internal neutralisation, so they risk concealing the geographical differences concerning individual sub-aggregates.

<sup>1</sup> With the aim of tracing a fairly complete picture of the female work situation, we have chosen to refer to some data provided by Istat (Italian National Statistical Institute) through workforce samples. This information has been gathered on a continuous basis since 2004, although the figures are published every three months.

**Job Market in Southern Italy**

(Table 2)		1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Employment rate (15-64 years old)</b>	Women	26.6	26.7	27.8	29.8	30.9	30.7	30.1	31.1	31.1	31.3	30.9	30.5
	Men	59.8	59.4	60.0	61.6	62.3	61.8	61.9	62.3	62.2	61.1	59.0	57.6
<b>Unemployment rate*</b>	Women	24.9	25.8	27.1	24.3	22.6	20.5	19.6	16.5	14.9	15.7	15.4	15.8
	Men	14.5	15.3	15.6	13.3	12.5	11.9	11.4	9.9	8.9	10.0	11.1	12.0
<b>Activity rate (15-64 years old)</b>	Women	35.5	36.1	38.2	39.5	40.0	38.7	37.5	37.3	36.6	37.2	36.1	36.3
	Men	70.1	70.1	70.2	70.2	71.3	70.3	69.9	69.3	68.4	68.0	66.3	65.6

Our processing of Istat data. Constant survey of workforce.

\*Unemployment rates are calculated for the whole of the working population and not only for the age range 15-64 years old.

As the figures show, female activity rates are far lower than male activity rates and indicate a singular situation in Italy: in 2010, only 5 out of every 10 women stated that they worked, while when it comes to southern Italy this ratio decreases to less than 4 out of every 10 women. In 2010, out of 10 million inactive women recorded by Istat (Italian National Statistical Institute) in Italy, we notice that more than half live in southern Italy. This figure demonstrates the dramatic extent of this phenomenon especially in the southern areas of Italy. The inactive group includes people who are not part of the workforce anymore, that is to say people who are not classified as either employed or seeking employment.

Although we must be aware that this number *hides* all the numerous *illegal* female workers who, whether voluntarily or not<sup>2</sup>, are placed in under the heading “under-the-table work” (Mendolesi, Marchese, 2005), in any case we are dealing with millions of women who state that they are inactive!

In its job market analysis, Istat identifies three age groups and four “motivational types” of inactive people.

The inactive people are divided into “Inactive younger than 15 years old”, “Inactive at the age of 65 or over”, “Inactive between 15 and 64 years old”. The last group is further divided, according to the level of attachment to the job market, into the following categories: a) Inactive people who are not actively job-seeking but are prepared to work, or “potential workforce”<sup>3</sup>; b) Inactive people “who are looking for a job but are not prepared to work”<sup>4</sup>; c) Inactive people “who are not looking for a job but are prepared to work”<sup>5</sup>; d) Inactive people “who are not looking for a job and are not prepared to work”<sup>6</sup>.

If we examine the data referred to inactive women, divided into the four motivational types listed above, we can see that, in 2010, out of 9,689,000 inactive women (15-64 years) recorded by Istat in Italy,

– 818,000 women state *they are looking for a job but not actively*,

<sup>2</sup> As noted in a previous survey, although a lot of women, especially when they work as employees, suffer because of this condition as “illegal” workers and experience it in a rather troublesome way, other women, especially when they have self-employed status, “consider the condition as “illegal” worker as the most suitable and therefore even preferable. Some people base their choice on economic factors and to the possibility of *net* earnings; others, on the contrary, refer to the greater freedom to manage their daily schedules and also to more easily manage their presence in two or even three places of work” (Carrera 2011, 163).

<sup>3</sup> Among inactive people, this is the group with the greatest level of “attachment” to the job market, since it displays some important features shared by the group of people who are looking for a job. Indeed, even these people have stated they are looking for a job and would be prepared to start working within two weeks after the interview; however, on the contrary, they have not been actively job-seeking during the last four weeks (an “active” effort, together with the two previous features, is a necessary element to be classified as job seekers in accordance with E.C. Regulation no. 1897/2000).

<sup>4</sup> The people in this category have a lower level of “attachment” to the job market than the previous one. They are people who have stated they are looking for a job (they have made active and/or passive efforts) but they are not ready to start working within the two weeks following the interview.

<sup>5</sup> These are people who have asserted they are not looking for a job, but they have also stated they would be prepared to start working within the two weeks following the interview, if they were offered a job. This aggregate also includes discouraged people who are not looking for a job because they think it is a useless effort.

<sup>6</sup> Among inactive people, this is certainly the group with the lowest level of “attachment” to the job market. They are people who have stated they are not looking for a job and would not be prepared to start working within two weeks after the interview.

- 893,000 women state *they are not looking for a job but are prepared to work*,
- 181,000 women state *they are looking for a job but not prepared to work in the immediate future*,
- 7,798,000 women state *they are not looking for a job and are not prepared to work*.

On the other hand, as far as southern Italy is concerned, in 2010, Istat recorded that 4,493,000 women (15-64 years old) were inactive, of which,

- 560,000 women state *they are looking for a job but not actively*,
- 575,000 women state *they are not looking for a job but are prepared to work*,
- 84,000 women state *they are looking for a job but not prepared to work in the immediate future*,
- 3,274,000 women state *they are not looking for a job and are not prepared to work*.

Considering this setting, we have chosen here to examine a particular phenomenon that, in Italy, refers above all to women: “discouragement”. This is the condition some women find themselves in after looking for a job at length and in vain, in the end deciding to give up their search, leave the world of the unemployed and the workforce and *end up* as part of the inactive population. Discouraged people display a particular brand of inactivity because they are all *potentially* unemployed and therefore active (Brandolini, Cipollone e Viviano, 2006) persons who have “chosen” to stay or place themselves outside the sphere of workforce membership because factors pertaining to their personal sphere or to their wider context are perceived as particularly difficult or even hostile.

Among this large number of women who – whether voluntarily or less so – are out of the workforce, the “discouraged” ones belong to the third “motivational type”, and to the first one also, albeit only in part. In line with the Istat analysis, discouraged women are in essence to be found in the third category of inactive women because it comprises the women who state they are not looking for a job but, unlike the fourth type (the truly inactive women), they state they would be prepared to start working if they were offered a job. Therefore they show a desire to work that is not backed up by an appropriate active behaviour regarding the search for a job. This behaviour is motivated by a search for work that may be long or short, but always unsuccessful. Discouraged women can also be linked, albeit only in part, to the first type of inactive woman because, in some cases, discouragement does not represent a total abandonment of the search for work, but is a sort of slowing down of this search, which becomes disorganized and long. Discouragement is not a psychological condition that suddenly appears and causes a quick exit from the market; rather it is a state that allows a lot of possible forms of behaviour, a process that, as the final step, could lead to an exit from the market. A recent analysis carried out by Banca d'Italia (Cingano, Torrini, Viviano, 2010) underlines the increasing level of discouragement among women and young people, particularly in the current time of widespread crisis, when the likelihood of finding work is reduced<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the exit from the market to be considered is not only the official one (that can be statistically verified), because there could be a lot of women who are officially no longer employed, but who have been and are currently part of the illegal job market.

In order to highlight how this phenomenon regards especially *women*, we could compare the numbers of *discouraged women* to those of *discouraged men*: 893,000 women compared with 426,000 men in Italy (out of a female “workforce”<sup>8</sup> of 10,227,000 and a male “workforce” of 14,748,000), and 575,000 women against 290,000 men in Southern Italy (out of a female ‘workforce’ of 2,572,000 and a male ‘workforce’ of 4,587,000).

If we want to give some further details about these data in terms of female discouragement, we need to relate them to the main social and demographic variables.

We can note that, in both the areas under examination here, female discouragement appears highest in the 35-44-year-old range and in the adjoining age groups.

---

<sup>7</sup> This phenomenon and its increase, which involves above all women, has also been underlined in recent reports by Censis (2010) and Svimez (2011). In the Censis Report it is suggested that discouraged people must be added to the numbers of unemployed people in order to obtain the “real” unemployment rate.

<sup>8</sup> Workforces (active) are composed of “employed” and “unemployed” persons who are *actively* looking for a job.

The relationship with qualifications can be clearly seen. In Italy, the number of discouraged women with only an elementary school leaving certificate is 134,000 (5.8% of all women with an elementary school certificate), discouraged women with a leaving certificate awarded by a lower secondary school 394,000 (5.9% of all women with a lower secondary school certificate), those with a “short” diploma 41,000 (3.2% of all women with a “short” diploma), women with a high school leaving qualification 255,000 thousand (3.8% of all women with a high school diploma), and, finally, those with a degree or higher are only 69,000 (2.4% of all female graduates). To view the matter from another perspective, if we take all the discouraged Italian women (893,000), 15.0% of them have only an elementary school certificate; 44.1% have a lower secondary school certificate; 4.5% a “short” diploma; 28.5% a high school leaving qualification, and only 7.7% a degree or higher.

In southern Italy the relationship between discouragement and qualifications is more marked. The discouraged women with only an elementary school leaving certificate are 100,000 (8.9%), the women with a leaving certificate awarded by a lower secondary school are 262,000 (10%), those with a “short” diploma are 15,000 (8.1%), the discouraged women with a high school leaving qualification are 162,000 (7.1%), and those with a degree are only 35,000 (4.0%). Also for Southern Italy, observing it from our second perspective, if we take all the discouraged women (575,000), 17.4% of them have only an elementary school certificate, 45.6% have a lower secondary school certificate, 2.6% a “short” diploma, 28.2% a high school leaving qualification, and only 6.1% a degree or higher.

The data show how the state of discouragement, which is a process and is never “instantaneous”, can be affected to a great extent by personal factors, such as age, qualifications and context elements, such as the quality of job markets in different areas and, beyond the Istat data reported here, the quantity and quality of social welfare, in first place social services for children and old people (and for non-self-sufficient people in general).

## **2. The Theoretical Facet of Discouragement**

Discouragement seems to be a complex subject and one that is not easy to interpret. In order to understand it better, it is necessary not only to examine the data but also to review, albeit summarily, all the surveys that, in the course of time, have tackled this phenomenon.

In one of the first surveys presented in Italy about discouraged female workers, Fiorella Padoa Schioppa refers to La Malfa and Vinci’s survey (1970) and to Filona’s ones (1971), adding that “the econometric tool used by Ugo Colombino (1975) shows efficiently how the supply of women between 30 and 49 years old on the job market is contemporaneously sensitive 1) to a normal effect of absorption-expulsion, that is to say that the unemployment rate varies in inverse proportion to the intensity of a specific demand, 2) to a discouragement effect, that is to say that (...) some women (...), when the expectation of finding a job dwindles, stop looking for a job (or they do not start at all), and, in this way, all conditions being equal, they reduce their specific rate,” (Padoa Schioppa 1977, 21 and 22).

In their survey, and specifically in the chapter about female employment, Giovanni Mottura and Enrico Pugliese make an exemplary explanation of the phenomenon of discouragement and, among other things, explain the passage of many women to a role as housewife: “for instance, a lot of immigrant workers’ wives or daughters in some industrial cities, former female factory workers who have been laid off etc., who neither work nor look actively for a job, but only because they are discouraged by the repeated experience of lack of demand” (1975, 263).

In our attempt to provide a brief historical reconstruction of discussions of the discouragement theory<sup>9</sup>, it appears opportune to draw more deeply on Accornero and Carmignani’s contribution,

---

<sup>9</sup> Padoa Schioppa also notes that “the hypothesis of the discouraged female worker... derives from J. Mincer...” (1977, 27). Aris Accornero and Fabrizio Carmignani, about 10 years after Padoa Schioppa, also reference the same author and his essay (*Labour Force Participation and Unemployment, a Review of Recent Evidence*, in R.A. Gordon and M.S. Gordon, *Prosperity and Employment*, 1966), but they also quote A. Tella (*The Relation of Labour Force to Employment*, “Industrial Relations Review”, 1964), and, linking these women to the “discouraged worker’s theory of Keynesian influence”, they attribute to them the observation according to which “the job supply can react, taking account of the

which asserts that this theory, “blamed in Italian debates as a cause of the drop in employment rates”, seems rather surprising “because of the narrow margins that, at the end of the day, it leaves to the labour supply”, such narrow margins that the only option is to quit the market (1986, 74 and 75). The two authors assert that if it is not possible to separate employment and unemployment, then it is even more difficult “to separate unemployment and voluntary inactivity” because, in the latter case, there is no possibility of an ““objective” empirical support for the distinction, therefore it is advisable to trust individual justifications and explanations”, considering that the choice to be part of the non-workforce (that is to say inactive) “could be a relatively free choice, but it could be also a forced renouncement which derives *precisely* from the difficulty of finding a job” (*ibidem*, 112). This explanation of discouragement, used to account for the lowest employment rates recorded “in depressed areas or in difficult situations (...), seems to be plausible on an intuitive level, and has only been indirectly demonstrated on a statistical-deductive level: when demand for jobs is lacking, the job supply comes or will also come to an end” (*ibidem*, 113). This model allows us to explain workforce behaviour in some areas like southern Italy, where the labour market scenario reveals a critical situation.

The theory regarding discouragement, as we can see, is no small matter because, besides the implications of economic theories, it has significant effects on the categories that define the job market, since it relativises the meaning of unemployment and of the figures that quantify it. Considering this argument, the unemployment figures recorded by Istat in different cases lose their effectiveness as the sole gauge of and fount of information regarding the number of unemployed people, because varying numbers of unemployed, who are in direct relationship with the lack of work, are not picked up by official statistical data. Indeed, they declare they are not looking for a job, even though they are *effectively unemployed* people who have abandoned the search for work as a result of discouragement. They escape the gathering of statistical data in such numbers that drops in unemployment are sometimes recorded; as a consequence, a sort of paradoxical relationship between an increase in the difficulty of finding a job and a decrease in the numbers of unemployed is created. Indeed, this paradoxical relationship highlights the hold that context factors have over the phenomenon in question by avoiding oversimplification of the matter or it being limited it to only personal and psychological factors.

As regards women in particular, it is evident how these decisions to definitively abandon the search for work are influenced by cultural variables which refer to the gender socialization processes and context factors mentioned above. It would be a mistake to consider discouragement, especially female discouragement, as only a psychological result, ignoring or at least underestimating the impact that the traditional models taken on board by the same women have on their attitudes and on their behaviour towards the job market. A study conducted on some of the strategies adopted to combat the phenomena of long-term unemployment and discouragement has showed that, while combining the threat of economic penalties with the obligation to take part in job-search training courses on the one hand significantly decreases the unemployment and discouragement rates among the men in the groups analyzed, on the other hand, it does not produce relevant results where women are concerned (Dolton & O’Neill, 2002). That is to say that, for women, the courses designed to increase self-efficacy levels and/or to learn job-searching techniques are not enough to increase their active presence on the job market; this situation shows how the phenomenon analyzed here is rooted in the strongest frameworks of social rules and values.

We cannot fail to consider as difficult and *selective* the conditions that characterize especially the married women with very young children who are looking for a job but have no service networks dedicated to them (Del Boca, Rosina, 2009). In fact, these women look for a job which allows them to blend their roles as wives and especially as mothers (and sometimes as daughters too), but by doing so they limit their *opportunities* on the market significantly and so they become *troublesome resources* for potential employers (Bimbi, 2003). The search for a job, already especially difficult in areas like southern Italy, becomes a hopeless endeavour, especially when

---

economic situation, to a lack of aggregate demand, that is to say to a slowdown of the economic *trend*, because workers are not on the market anymore: people do not look for a job that, at the moment, cannot be found anywhere” (Accornero, Carmignani, 1986, 74, 83).

women are not even supported by suitable professional training (Bozzon, 2008), leaving them destined for repeated failures<sup>10</sup> that discourage them to the point where they more easily decide to give up their search.

### 3. The Results of an Empirical Study

Given the complexity of the subject and the opportunity to go beyond the reality recorded by the Istat figures on the subject of female discouragement, we decided to take a survey of one hundred women who declared a state of unemployment in the last census, employing the tool of a semi-structured interview<sup>11</sup> to do so.

The area considered in the survey is Apulia. It is a southern region of Italy and, even though it presents some unique characteristics, is not very different from the Southern Italian job market as a whole. For this reason many of the analyses of Apulian women's situations may be substantially referred to the situation of all Southern Italian women.

#### Job Market in Apulia

(Table 3)		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Employment rate (15-64 years old)	Women	22.7	21.0	22.3	23.3	23.4	22.6	22.6
	Men	51.6	52.0	52.4	52.7	52.4	50.2	48.8
Unemployment rate*	Women	21.8	20.9	17.7	15.5	15.8	16.2	15.6
	Men	12.1	11.5	10.3	9.0	9.4	10.8	12.1
Activity rate (15-64 years old)	Women	29.0	26.6	27.0	27.5	27.8	26.9	26.7
	Men	58.7	58.8	58.4	57.8	57.9	56.2	55.5

Our processing of Istat data. Constant survey of workforce.

\*Unemployment rates are calculated for the whole of the working population and not only for the age range 15-64 years old.

The interviews aimed to inquire into their status as inactive women by considering the causes that had affected them or the reasons that kept them out of the job market. The criteria adopted were the Istat motivational types, but the chosen tool went somewhat further than simple quantitative statistics.

Out of the one hundred women, 36 stated that they had worked in the past but then left their job, 29 stated that they had never worked and 35 said that they currently worked but not with a legal contract (for "under-the-table" wages), so they are neglected by Istat data, and therefore are *formally* "inactive". Despite this *substantial* condition as workers, we chose not to leave them out of the "sample" because their statements showed a whole different type of discouragement.

The "sample", chosen at random, was made up as follows:

<sup>10</sup> This path becomes more probable in the absence of widespread availability of part-time work, which is linked proportionally to female employment rates (Reyneri, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> The semi-structured, or semi-direct, interview is a particular tool that, even when used on a relatively limited number of people, allows the interviewer to draw "sufficiently solid conclusions, especially as regards a list (whether structured or not) of attitudes, portrayals, behaviours, motivations, processes etc. as well some undertones of people's attitudes and behaviours, are very hard to pick up through yes-no questions" (Persichella, 2004, 13).

Table 3 “Sample” distribution

Age range		Marital status		Qualifications		Working status		Province of Residence (Apulia)	
18-24	11	Unmarried	21	Elementary	23	Has worked in the past	36	Bari	31
25-29	12	Married or common-law wife	63	Lower secondary school	41	Has never worked	29	BAT <sup>12</sup>	15
30-34	19	Separated	8	“Short” diploma	6	Works but illegally	35	Brindisi	11
35-39	19	Widowed	8	High School	21			Foggia	12
40-44	22			Degree	9			Lecce	19
45-49	9							Taranto	12
≥ 50	8								
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

For the real non-working inactive women (65 in total), we analyzed the type of inactivity reported by them using the Istat motivational types given above, in order to focus on the truly “discouraged” women.

There were women who stated they were against women working [*not looking for a job and not prepared to work*], women who were postponing the search for a job until after their children had begun school (some of them nursery school, and others even primary school) [*looking for a job but not prepared to work in the immediate future*], women who were looking for a job but only occasionally and in a “careless” way (“I put word about my job search out among my relatives and some friends, but sure...”; “I sometimes look in the newspaper”) [*looking for a job but not actively*] and, finally, a lot of women who stated that they had given up looking for a job, even though they would have preferred not to stay at home and “be only a housewife” [*not looking for a job but prepared to work*]. This last type of inactive woman, in line with the Istat categories, provides the perfect opportunity to research the phenomenon of “discouraged women”.

It is here that we find the more significant examples of discouragement, revealed by the interviews, that allow us to formulate a sort of typology. These examples confirm in substance that it is misleading to raise the question of whether discouragement expresses a voluntary or, on the contrary, a forced decision that causes an exodus of women not only from the job market but also from the market of the active workforce.

Starting from this common result, we can trace the different types of discouragement. First of all, among unemployed women we find the “classic discouragement” experienced by women discouraged by an often long and always fruitless search for a job; these women are convinced they will not be able to find one, and even though they are ready and willing to work, they no longer look for a job and often *resign* themselves to filling a role as *only* wives and mothers.

- *I’m not looking for a job. I’d like to work but I don’t know which job. Some time ago, seeing that I needed a job, I looked around for a job and I noticed a poster in a shop - a dairy - that was looking for staff. I was dubious about it because I didn’t know if I would be able to do it; it was a new job for me. When I decided to put myself up for it, I was told that I wasn’t suitable because they were looking for more experienced staff [no. 21; 40 years old]*

In this category, there are a lot of women with previous work experience who left their jobs after getting married and especially after the birth of their children. Then, when they tried to go back to the job market, they had to face a lack of opportunities and a lot of rejections, at times because of inadequate professional qualifications and on other occasions because of their being “mothers” (as we will explain better below).

Furthermore, there are some factors that could worsen or accelerate the process of discouragement.

<sup>12</sup> BAT is the acronym of Barletta-Andria-Trani. These cities combined form the sixth and the most recently constituted Apulian province.



a') In some cases the search for a job is terminated because of age, which the woman herself considers "too advanced", even if she is only 40 years old!

- *I'm not interested in a job. I'm old now, I'm 50. [no. 15; 50 years old]*
- *No, I don't intend to look for a job again because it's useless looking for one at my time of life. I found my first job thanks to one of my relatives, but I was younger. Now, at my age, it's hard to find someone to help you find a job. That's how it works around here [no. 28; 41 years old]*
- *I only started high school, then I dropped out almost immediately because my teachers and my parents told me that school was not for me! (...) then for a while I looked for a job because I wanted to work but in the end I realised that it was useless. I tried again to look around and I also applied for different jobs, but then I stopped because I knew that I had no chance [no. 49; 38 years old]*
- *I believe that it's useless me looking for a job now. There are a lot of young people and they are also highly skilled. What would anyone do with me? [no. 69; 40 years old]*

a'') In other cases, some women believe that, without an appropriate qualification, they have no chance of finding a job, therefore in this case they interrupt their search for a job even more quickly.

- *No, I've never worked. What could I do? At the beginning I looked for a job but, with my qualifications (lower secondary school), what could I do? When I was young I wanted to continue my studies but my father thought that it was a useless choice for a daughter, so he forced me to drop out quickly [no. 59; 45 years old];*
- *I've applied for a few jobs, but had no reply. I'd like to work as an auxiliary, but nowadays you need qualifications to be an auxiliary; in the past the situation was different. My aunt keeps her eyes open, but nothing more; my mother asks around but I get annoyed because all these efforts are blown on the wind. Nowadays there are no jobs going so it's useless looking for one [no. 60; 33 years old].*

a''') Lastly, in some cases, the presence of children has a strong impact on women's choices

- *When I got married, my husband asked me to leave my job. I was only twenty and I was working hard for a starvation wage, so I left it. Then my children got bigger and I tried looking for another job, but it was useless because there was nothing. Now I've given up. It wasn't worth looking anymore [no. 4; 29 years old];*
- *I've tried to find a job but I've found nothing. In the end, it's a common situation here in the South (...) Since my children were born, I haven't looked for anything because who could I leave them with? Where could I leave them? If there was a nursery, maybe I could leave one of them there, but where I live there is nothing and I can't afford to pay anyone to babysit. So I will be a full-time mother. There is no work for mothers [no. 30; 33 years old];*
- *When my second child grew up a bit, I tried to look for a job, but a mother can't work all day, so I looked for a part-time job, but to no avail. You can't find a job here, and I can't leave my children! So I've given up looking for work and I'm only a mother [no. 37; 35 years old];*
- *I didn't want to leave my job, but what could I do? I don't have relatives here... where could I leave my child? Since he has got bigger, I've tried to look for a job, but the situation is different, I need a job that would allow me to be at home when my son gets back from school, but I couldn't find anything. Now I've given up [no. 82; 39 years old].*

b) Regarding the women who state they are inactive but are currently busy in unrecorded employment, therefore employed albeit in an *invisible* job, (35 in our "sample"), another type of discouragement emerged, one that is only apparently outside the domain of classic discouragement. It is the type that involves women who, *discouraged* by the useless search for a legal job, have then

*thrown themselves* into the work of illegal work (whether freelance or salaried). This is a particular type of discouragement that concerns not so much the fact of being a female worker but the legal side of that condition that can be verified statistically.

b') Again in this case, there is a sort of subtype made up of women who have got a job for which no earnings are declared, so, in the end, they give up looking for a legal job, blaming the impossibility of "finding something better" at their time of life. Again, this advanced age may correspond to *only* 40 years old.

- *I didn't want to do it like this and he knows it. It didn't appeal to me, but he told me that he was obliged, because competition had increased in our area. He left me no choice. He didn't say it openly but he made me understand... What could I do? At the age of 40, with only a diploma, who'll give you a job? Nobody! Then I've known him for a long time, I feel happy here, so I was obliged to accept* [no. 7; 45 years old];
- *No, I wouldn't like to change my job because I'm happy here... then, at my age - I'm over 50! (...) I've never had a legal job. In the past women didn't work. Who would have given them a legal job?* [no. 16; 51 years old];
- *Perhaps I'd like to change my job, but at my age... there are a lot of young people who are unemployed. Fancy me looking for a job! I'm happy with those ladies. I don't want to change. Not many people know about my job, I keep it to myself. I don't want people knowing about it. (...) Yes, illegal work is not a good thing, but* [no. 17; 53 years old];
- *I have never been able to find a job at a hairdresser's, mainly because you're paid so poorly. You're exploited and you aren't given any contracts. So I decided to work cash in hand, as a freelance, so what I earn is mine and mine alone* [no. 72; 50 years old];
- *Some time ago I found this job by chance, so I don't reckon I'd have much chance of finding another one! Unfortunately at my age it's not easy to get onto the job market, so I'm holding on tight to this job* [no. 76; 53 years old];
- *After the training course that gave me a qualification, I looked for a job in the important boutiques, but I would have had to move and my parents didn't want that. So for years I contented myself with sewing at home and I had plenty of clients. I've always liked my job as a dressmaker...* [no. 77; 46 years old];
- *It would take a contract for me to change my present situation, but by now... I've applied for some jobs but they've all been taken. Anyway, at my age!* [no. 80; 40 years old].

b'') Again, for this particular type of "discouraged women", the absence of suitable qualifications carries a great deal of weight

- *If I could, I'd change my job. But I know that, at my age... there are a lot of girls who have studied but can't find work, just think of me! I hope to quit this job very soon, but I have to wait because my children are still too young. When they grow up, I'll be able to say: "I'm quitting my job, so young people will have the opportunity to work"* [no. 18; 41 years old].

b''') Also for these women, the fact of having children carries particular weight.

- *When my children were born, my employer made me an under-the-table employee and I had to accept this situation because around here it's impossible to find a legal job (...) for a little while, I looked for one, but nothing came of it so I decided to stick with this one* [no. 55; 47 years old];
- *I looked for a job for a long time. I found nothing, then when my daughter was born, the situation became worse. Who would employ me? I really tried, but could find nothing because a mother is considered unreliable. So when I found this woman who wanted to employ me, I accepted, even though it's an under-the-table job* [no.61; 44 years old].

However, past job experiences did not display a particular impact on discouragement. Among both "no work experience" women and "experienced" ones there are some very fast paths towards discouragement (no more than one year before giving up the search for a job) and some much

slower ones (sometimes even more than four years).

## Conclusions

Female discouragement is revealed as a complex phenomenon that is deeply influenced by factors relating both to job supply (age, qualifications, marital status, presence of children, quality of welfare) and to job demand.

Women lose heart more than men because they show a smaller investment in the world of work, which gives them weaker 'stamina' when faced with a search for work that can be relatively short or long, but always fruitless. This is a risk run by women with low qualifications and often low achievements, because they believe that their low investment in education and training is in itself a sign of a life plan that does not include a job as a fundamental and vital element. For a lot of these women it is simpler to fall back on a role as "only mothers and wives".

Especially, but not only, when women are under-qualified on the professional side, they notice that their job opportunities are considerably narrowed, so they are very often obliged to take on illegal jobs. The qualitative survey, the results of which are presented here, shows clearly how some variables, such as qualifications, marital status and children, have an effect on the job offer side, while on the job application side, we encounter a geographical factor that confirms the persistence of the "Southern Question". This problem is represented both by fewer job opportunities on the qualitative and quantitative levels, whether through a lack of facilities for childcare or a different gender culture that still "expects" women to do more – often one hundred per cent – of the household tasks, making their time and their opportunities for out-of-home activities much more limited. The Southern Italian job market presents few opportunities for anyone, both men and women, but it appears particularly "hostile" to women, as employers view them as "precarious" and therefore "expensive" resources (thinking about potential absences and difficulties linked with childcare) above all in a context with a weak welfare policy system.

Therefore it is highly probable that the presence of more opportunities on the job market would decrease discouragement rates for both women and men, but it is essential to also contemplate action on a cultural level, for instance the promotion of change in gender traditional gender models. It is important for work to become more central in women's life plans. Women have to be freed from the "devotion trap" (De Beauvoir, 1967) that, to this day, continues to *immobilise* them in their primary (sometimes sole) function as wives and mothers and affect their educational choices, often by directing them towards educational programmes leading to job opportunities that are considered compatible with their domestic role, but that catapult them towards already saturated and, at times, even more precarious sectors.

It is also important that institutions begin to act differently, for instance by increasing the services for pre-schoolers and non-self-sufficient adults, so that women would have some time free from their families and could be given the right to choose their times and ways to re-enter the job market.

It seems clear, therefore, that the issue of female discouragement is the most visible point of the more complex phenomenon that is the general relationship between women and work. This is why every solution requires a systemic approach that would above all force us to question the normative models that continue to shape Italian society, in view of them undergoing *denaturalization* and a critical rethink.

## References

- Accornero A. e Carmignani F. (1986), *I paradossi della disoccupazione*, il Mulino, Bologna
- Bimbi F. (a cura di), (2003), *Differenze e disuguaglianze. Prospettive per gli studi di genere in Italia*, il Mulino, Bologna
- Bozzon R. (2008), "Modelli di partecipazione delle donne al mercato del lavoro. Un'applicazione delle analisi delle sequenze alle storie lavorative femminile", *Stato e Mercato*, 2, pp. 217-250
- Brandolini A., Cipollone P., Viviano E. (2006), *Does The Ilo Definition Capture All Unemployment?*, in *Journal of the European Economic Association*, MIT Press, vol. 4(1), pages 153-179, 03

- Carrera L. (2009), *Donne e lavoro*, in Persichella E. (a cura di), *Lavoratori e mondi del lavoro in Puglia*, Franco Angeli, Milano
- Carrera L. (2011), *Donne e lavoro. Mondo dei lavori e mondi della vita*, Palomar, Bari
- Cingano F., Torrini R., Viviano E. (2010), *Il mercato del lavoro italiano durante la crisi*, in *Questioni di Economia e Finanza*, n.68, Banca d'Italia Eurosystema, Roma
- Colombino U. (1975), *Squilibri strutturali sul mercato del lavoro*, in Graziani A. (a cura di), *Crisi di ristrutturazione dell'economia italiana; diciotto interventi*, Einaudi, Torino
- Corbetta P. (2003), *Metodologia e tecniche della ricerca sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna
- Del Boca D., Rosina A. (2009), *Famiglie sole. Sopravvivere con un welfare inefficiente*, Il Mulino, Bologna
- Dolton P. & O'Neill D. (2002), *The Long-Run Effects of Unemployment Monitoring and Work-Search Programs: Experimental Evidence from the United Kingdom*, in *Journal of Labor Economics*, University of Chicago Press, vol. 20(2), pages 381-403
- Filosa R. (1971), *L'andamento delle forze di lavoro in Italia: analisi teorica e verifica*, «Contributi alla ricerca economica» del Servizio Studi della Banca d'Italia
- Istat (2010), *Rilevazioni continue delle Forze di lavoro*, Roma
- La Malfa G. e Vinci S. (1970), *Il saggio di partecipazione delle forze di lavoro in Italia*, «L'Industria», ottobre-dicembre
- Mendolesi L., Marchese M. (a cura di), 2005, *Emersione al femminile*, Carocci, Roma
- Mincer J. (1966), *Labour Force Participation and Unemployment, a Review of Recent Evidence*, in R.A. Gordon e M.S. Gordon, *Prosperity and Employment*, Wiley & Sons, New York
- Mottura G., Pugliese E. (1975), *Agricoltura, Mezzogiorno e mercato del lavoro*, il Mulino, Bologna
- P. Leon e M. Marocchi (1973), *Sviluppo economico italiano e forza lavoro*, Marsilio, Padova
- Padoa Schioppa F. (1977), *La forza lavoro femminile*, il Mulino, Bologna
- Persichella E. (a cura di) (2004), *Gente di periferia al voto. Inchiesta qualitativa sui comportamenti elettorali di un campione di baresi*, Palomar, Bari
- 44° Rapporto Censis sulla situazione sociale del Paese (2010), Roma
- Rapporto Svimez 2011 sull'economia del Mezzogiorno (2011), Roma
- Reyneri E. (2005), *Sociologia del mercato del lavoro. Il mercato del lavoro tra famiglia e welfare*, vol.I, Il Mulino, Bologna
- Tella A. (1964), *The Relation of Labour Force to Employment*, «Industrial Relations Review», n. 17