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ABSTRACT[1]

International literature on individual behavior has shown the importance of the network of relationships binding individuals to the people who are close to them in everyday life. Family and other role relations are important sources of emotional and instrumental support, as well as social companionship. For the Italian scenario, the 2003 Generations and Gender Survey offers some challenges for constructing ego-centered support networks based on reasonable assumptions of the frequency of contacts and residential proximity of respondents with kin, friends and neighbors. Focusing on young Italian adults aged 18-34 years who are single or have a partner, we define two kinds of support networks - the potential support ego network and the effective family network - with the aim of analyzing the effects of network characteristics (size and composition) on the probability

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of receiving help. Our findings show that couples received more support more often than singles. Although singles' potential support networks were more characterized by no family ties than the ones of partners, the availability of a "comprehensive" network or a network not "encapsulated" only in the family increased the probability of receiving help in both groups. Moreover, gender differences provide evidence of distinct behavior between partners in activating their network for (family) support.

KEYWORDS: Support, Potential support ego network, Effective family network, young Italian adults

1. Introduction

International research has convincingly shown how it is important to include in the analysis of micro-processes not only the macro but also the meso level. The meso level refers to the network of relations binding an individual to the people who are close to him/her in his/her everyday life (for a review, see Rivellini 2006). In recent years, the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) has recognized the importance of ties among individuals. "A central topic for the GGS is relationships within families and between generations and how these relationships determine demographic behavior [...]. This significance rests on the fact that personal relationships matter for the two general dimensions of individuals' decision-making and behavior: for the subjective perceptions of the values of different courses of action and for the resources that are available to pursue desired goals" (Vikat et al. 2007 2007, p. 413).

Until now, researchers have mainly studied the impact of social interactions on fertility choices (Kohler et al. 2001; Bernardi 2003; Bühler and Fratczak 2007), but more recently the network perspective of dynamically changing family relations has been considered even in the discussion of family pattern changes, such as the process of union formation, the transition to parenthood, or the partnership dynamic (see, e.g., Castrén 2008; Ketokivi 2012).

Family (and other) relations represent important sources for support, information, and other resources, and their effects are evident in various fields: individual health, education trajectories, (recovery from) deviant behaviors, successful (Settersten Jr. et al. 2008) but also postponed transition to adulthood (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004).

In a wider perspective, social support is defined as helpful functions performed for an individual by significant others such as family members, friends, co-workers, relatives, and neighbors (Thoits 1985). In the psychological literature, social support is usually defined as the existence or availability of people on whom to rely, who care about, value, and love.

Regardless of how social support is conceptualized, it seems to be characterized by two basic elements: (a) the perception that there is a sufficient number of available others to whom one can turn in times of need and (b) a degree of satisfaction with the available support (Sarason et al. 1983; Vaux et al. 1986; Ayman and Antani 2008). These elements recall quite clearly the broad concept of "social space" (Pattison and Robins 2004) that can take shape in a household, among relatives, friends, workmates, or schoolmates. The social space can generate strong or weak ties/contacts interacting with individual choices, and can appear in different types of social support: "emotional," "instrumental" or "material," and "companionship."

In this paper, we focus on the social support networks of young Italian adults involved in the transition to adulthood. The international literature usually refers to "young adults" as people who are 25-34 years old, but a few exceptions can be found. For instance, in the GGS questionnaire, the "proper" age to leave home is supposed to be between 18 and 20 years (Rosina 2012). Here, we adopt a wider definition, looking at individuals aged between 18 and 34 years, who live apart from the parental home, either alone or as the head of a family.

The scientific literature has recognized this age group as the one who mainly witnessed

the largest change in demographic behaviors because of the negative effects of globalization and the transformation of the welfare system (Barbieri 2011).

In the last few years, young Italian generations have faced great difficulty finding employment, becoming financially independent, and developing their own professional careers because of the economic recession. This situation has contributed to a feeling of instability and uncertainty in the future with the tendency to further postpone binding choices that would require taking responsibilities (Blossfeld et al. 2005). As a result, Italian youths may need some help to manage their lives.

The aim of this contribution is to analyze the social support young Italian adults (singles or partner in a couple, married or not, with or without children) received considering their "potential support ego-centered" network and "effective support family" network. Moreover, we intend to evaluate the effects of network characteristics on the probability of receiving help. More specifically, we address the following research questions: *(i)* Do young Italian adults need help managing their lives? What kind of help, if any, they receive and who provides support?; *(ii)* Are there any differences in individual characteristics among young adults who receive support?; *(iii)* Is the "potential support ego-centered network" related to the probability of receiving help?

The basis of our study is the 2003 "Famiglia e Soggetti Sociali" (FSS) survey conducted by the Italian National Statistical Institute (ISTAT). FSS, as part of the Multipurpose Survey Program on Italian households, is the Italian Generations and Gender Survey and offers challenges in deriving ego-network information on Italian population.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, drawing from recent literature, we show how the relational dimension is considered in studying the transition to adulthood and/or in the way young adults face vulnerability. In Section 3, we recall the main approaches for measuring an ego-centered social support network, and then we describe the FSS data and the procedure we used to construct the potential and effective ego-centered networks of young Italian adults. In Section 4, we present the characteristics of the potential and effective social support networks and the kind of help received by young adults. In Section 5, we propose a logit model to evaluate the effect of the potential social support ego-centered network on the probability of receiving help, controlling for socio-demographics characteristics of singles and partners in a couple. Finally, in Section 6, we conclude with a discussion and final remarks.

2. Summary review of recent literature

As recognized in the recent literature, the relational dimension in the transition to adulthood involves different interacting environments: 1) family (immediate and extended), 2) friends, 3) social and professional experience.

The family context can encourage or hinder self-government, through tangible resources and education. Leaving home is positively influenced (especially for women) by individuals' fathers' education, income, home-ownership or more generally human capital and varies across different countries, depending on their social security and student grant systems. Because of the high unemployment rates and low youth wages in Mediterranean countries, living at the parental home is a form of instrumental support and intergenerational transfer as a means for avoiding economic hardship. The situation is different in

Scandinavian countries. Due to generous welfare benefits and high wages (Aassve et al. 2007), experiencing poverty during early adulthood does not have serious scarring effects on adult life.

The supporting role of parental family can be much stronger in young adults living the first phases of the family life cycle. This is particularly relevant in the case of residential proximity to parents and relatives (Holdsworth and Solda 2002; Santarelli and Cottone 2009). Several authors suggest that proximity and parental support (especially the engagement of grandparents in childcare) are due to strong intergenerational ties, together with a country-specific welfare arrangement that does not encourage individual autonomy and family responsibilities (see, e.g., Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004; Bordone et al. 2012). This approach, called "familistic," considers proximity and parental support as proxies of ties' intensity: family and kinship are seen as immediate providers of well-being for members.

Living with employed parents and delaying emancipation and childbearing is a form of instrumental and intergenerational support. Furthermore, the salaries of young workers who remain at the parental home are a form of intergenerational transfer that reduces the risk of family poverty and young vulnerability (Ayllón 2009; Cobb-Clark 2008). These behaviors are similar in European and extra-European contexts. In the USA recently, parental financial and residential support (called the "helicopter parenting" phenomenon) has provided critical scaffolds and safety nets as youth navigate the increasingly prolonged transition to adulthood (Mortimer 2012).

Family networks can also facilitate leaving home to buy a property (Holdsworth and Solda 2002), but a comfortable parental home can be seen as "feathered nest" from which leaving is less attractive (Mulder et al. 2002).

The family dimension also represents a context in which young people receive an educational style addressed to "socialization for work," i.e., a social experience based on behaviors, values, and skills grasped during childhood and adolescence (Cohen-Scali 2003).

However, especially for singles, friends are an important source of emotional, social, and material support. In some cases, they substitute the traditional family (Agneessens et al. 2006; Bellotti 2009) or can be a proxy family particularly for young people, offering invaluable advice, support, and companionship. For emerging adults, friends can fill the growing gap between the time they live in the families they grew up in and the time they spend in the family they establish of their own (McNamara Barry and Madsen 2009).

Finally, professional experience can play another important role in constructing personal identity. Interaction with the work environment can create qualities or weaknesses that have consequences on familiar or personal choices. In addition, professional success can lead to success in family behavior (spillover hypothesis, Tölke and Diewal 2003).

In a wider view, creating and maintaining healthy relationships with others would also seem to hinge on a capacity for inter-group relationships. Being able to interact and build relationships with people who are different seem increasingly necessary skills to acquire in early adulthood, especially in a diverse and global environment. These skills would facilitate individual outcomes in many domains (e.g., work, education, family, relationships with peers and friends) and diffuse to create more harmonious and stable group relationships in society and in one's successive life course (Settersten Jr. et al.

2008).

Furthermore, social relationships influence well-being by providing social support. Social networks are likely to promote positive cognitions and emotions, provide multiple sources of information that could influence health-relevant behaviors, and help to avoid potentially stressful or high-risk situations (Zhu et al. 2013).

3. Data and network construction

Social support networks can be measured in many different ways (for a complete review, see Kogovšek and Hlebec 2008; Marsden 2011), but in recent years, two main general approaches have been adopted in many cross-national comparative surveys.

The "name generator" approach (McCallister and Fischer 1978; Burt 1983) asks the respondent (ego) to elicit the names of the persons (alters) in his/her social network (direct contacts in ego-centered network). Additional information on the alters' characteristics as well as on the content and properties of ties between the ego and alters (e.g., frequency of contact, duration of acquaintance, intensity) are also collected with "name interpreter" questions. In principle, there is no limitation on the number of people who may be named, although in many applications it is constrained to an upper limit (e.g., eight in McCallister and Fischer 1978). The name generator format provides "the most complete, broadly ranging and substantively rich data about one's social network" (Hlebec et al. 2012, p. 1432), allowing relatively accurate estimates of network characteristics. However, this format usually imposes a very high burden on the respondent's time and effort when applied either in self-administered mode or in face-to-face or CATI interviews. The name generator is adopted in the GGS, with a five name limitation.

In the "role relation" approach, network members are represented only as role relations (e.g., partner, parents, children, friends, etc.), and typically an upper limit on network size is placed presumably for reasons of practicality. In the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), only one choice (the most important person) out of eight is admitted, while in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), indications about the two most important persons are obtained.

Administered with the help of a show-card listing possible role relations, this approach is cheaper, simpler, and less burdensome for respondents than the name generator. However, it supplies less accurate network information, thus limiting the estimates of network characteristics (Hlebec et al. 2012).

The ego-centered network design can be easily embedded as part of a representative survey of a large population providing representative samples of the social environments surrounding people (Marsden 2011).[2]

The basis for our study on the social support[3] network of young Italian adults is data drawn from the FSS survey, conducted by the Italian National Statistical Agency (ISTAT). FSS is a thematic survey[4] of the Multipurpose Survey Program (MSP) and has

[2]Conversely, the complete network design gathers data for all ties linking a set of elements, typically a well-defined group (such as a class, an organization, etc.).

[3]Hereafter, we referred to "social support" only as "support," omitting the term "social."

[4]The FSS target population is given by households living in Italy. In 2003, a probabilistic two-stage sampling with stratification of primary sampling units (municipalities) was selected with a sample size

been delivered every five years since 1998. Using three questionnaires,[5] the survey covers several topics on living arrangement and socio-demographic behaviors (life cycle, relations inside family, transition to adulthood, social mobility, fertility intentions, work histories, economic and social support, etc.) of the Italian population.

The 2003 FSS survey represents the Italian counterpart of the wave 1 survey of GGS although the FSS relies on a somewhat different format to collect relational information. Nonetheless, the FSS offers some challenges in deriving network information referred to the general population. More specifically, as described below, from FSS data, two distinct types of network can be defined: 1) the "potential support ego-centered" network (PSE network) at the respondent level, and 2) the "effective support family" network (ESF network) at the family level.

Due to the change in data collection format, it is no longer possible to reconstruct the second type of network (ESF) for the 2009 FSS edition. Consequently, to compare potential and effective support networks, we referred to the 2003 data.

a. Potential support ego-centered (PSE) network

We defined the PSE network as the set of non-cohabiting people (along with their role relations) who can be a possible source of support to the respondent. Although following only in a few items a conventional role relation approach to gather network data, the FSS blue questionnaire collected information that can be used to infer the respondent's PSE network.

In particular, three sections asked for the presence ("do you have?") of siblings, children/grandchildren (only for respondents 25 years old or older), parents, and grandparents; as well as the frequency of face-to-face contacts ("how many times do you meet?"), respondents entertain with them and, lastly, the residential proximity ("where do they live?") of siblings, parents, and children/grandchildren.[6]

An additional section collected information on the presence ("are there any ..."?) and, eventually, type and number of other relatives the respondent "is close to" or "to whom he/she can count on"; the presence ("do you have"?) and the number ("how many?") of friends and neighbors the respondent "can count on if necessary." For neighbors, only the answers "no or yes, one or more" were recorded.

To derive the PSE network of our target groups (young people living as singles or partners of a couple with no other members outside the nuclear family), we combined the described items for siblings, parents, grandparents, and others (relatives, friends, neighbors), disregarding children and grandchildren because of the young age (18-34 years) of our respondents.

More specifically, we assumed that frequent contacts ("at least once in a week"), and close residential proximity of siblings and parents (even in a different municipality but

of about 20,000 households and about 50,000 individuals.

[5]The questionnaires are distinguished by color: the blue, filled out first, collects information on individual (aged 18 years and older) and household characteristics (among which there are items related to the respondent and his/her household social and support ties); the green, filled out second, concerns the work career; the orange, filled out last, gathers data on education, partnership, and fertility intentions. The green and the orange questionnaires are filled out only by individuals older than 16.

[6]Information on siblings and children/grandchildren was limited to a maximum of three.

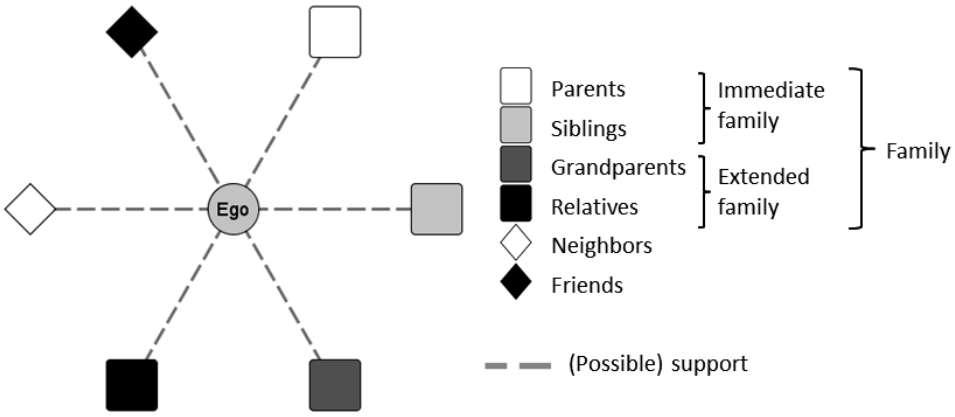


FIG. 1. An example of PSE network from FSS: alters are listed by their role relations with ego (visualization carried out by software VISONE, Brandes and Wagner 2004).

not farther than 16 km) allow a credible ground for the emergence of support ties. Requirements for parents' contacts and place of residence were fulfilled by 84% and 63% of singles and by nearly 79% and 81% of the couple's partners, respectively. The corresponding values for siblings were 72% and 59% for singles and 67% and 69% for couples.

Although information on grandparents was limited to a broad categorization of frequency of contacts,[7] they were also included as alters in our network definition, offering a total of six alter categories based on specific role relations from which the respondent can expect some kind of support (Figure 1).

b. Effective support family (ESF) network

The type of support received from the household was recorded in a specific section of the FSS blue questionnaire. A small set of items investigated the type of support[8] (if any) received by the household or by a specific member within the last four weeks preceding the interview. The information on help providers was then collected via a role relation question. Roles were very detailed for (not co-habiting) relatives. Fifteen out of a total of 19 roles were devoted to providers among relatives, two categories regarded friends and neighbors and the last two referred to people working in health services. No upper limit was set. The answers to these items were provided by the head of the household (HoH)- usually identified as the female partner in the case of couples- who informed about the household as a whole.

Starting from these data, we defined the "effective support household" network as the set of non-cohabiting people (along with their role relations) who provided help to the

[7]Only contacts at least once a month are recorded. This behavior was fulfilled by 94% of singles and 98% of couples.

[8]Multiple responses on a list of 11 detailed modalities of support: 1) economic aid; 2) medical care; 3) adult assistance; 4) child assistance; 5) housekeeping; 6) social companionship; 7) administrative procedures; 8) help doing work outside home; 9) help doing homework; 10) free consumption goods (i.e., meals and clothes); 11) other. When a household received more than one type of assistance, the code of the most important help was registered.

household or to a single member during a fixed time interval.

The comparison between the PSE network and the effective support household network is not limited by the different egos (individual vs household) defining the two networks, since we considered HoHs aged between 18 and 34 years living as singles (in this case, egos coincide) or as partner with no additional members out of the nuclear family (in this case, the PSE network of the couple could be derived from male and female networks). In addition, because of the focus on nuclear families, this network was named the "effective support family" network (ESF network) as reported in the beginning of Section 3. However, in the case of couples, respondents' recall problems and misrecording about members in need of support could affect network results. At the same time, a respondent's perception of his/her evaluation of help shared by the partner (e.g., housekeeping and child assistance) could provide missing data.

Characteristics of the PSE and ESF networks as well as their interrelations for singles and partners in a couple will be discussed in the following sections. We analyze the partners' networks separately to compare the responses on social relationships given by male and female partners.

4. Analysis and results

a. Living arrangements and socio-economic characteristics of singles and couples

Among the 49,541 sampled individuals, 22% (10,847) were young adults aged 18-34 years. Sixty-three percent were included in the survey as child of the HoH, 17% as a HoH and 16% as a partner of the HoH. Nearly 30% of the HoHs lived alone, and 61% were in a union (with or without children). In 88% of these unions, both partners were aged 18-34 years (Table 1).

In the following, we focus only on two groups[9]: young adults living alone or living together as a couple with both partners aged 18-34 years. We refer to the first set as "singles" (N = 565) and to the second as "couples" (N = 1009).

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the two groups. Singles were mainly men (57%), aged 25-34 years (88%), and low-medium educated (83%). Their main sources of income derived from full-time jobs (78%) as self-employed or salaried employees (85%).

In most couples, both partners were age 25-34 years (88%), lived in the South of Italy (40%), and had a medium/low education (59%). The mean union duration of couples was approximately 4 (4.15) years, and the mean number of children was nearly 1 (0.88). A different geographic pattern characterized the couple's main source of income. Specifically, the "male breadwinner" model was more common in the south (40%) while the "dual earner" model, with both partners working full-time, was more widespread in the north (40%).

[9] Analyses are based on unweighted data.

TABLE 1. Living arrangements of the FSS 2003 sampled individuals (panel a) and of the HoHs (panel b).

Panel a	n	%
Head of household (HoH)	1,890	17.4
Partner of HoH	1,760	16.2
Child (of HoH or from previous marriage)	6,836	63
Other (Brother/sister of HoH/partner of HoH)	92	0.9
Grandchild	150	1.4
Other arrangements (other relatives, friends, etc.)	119	1.1
Total	10,847	100

Panel b	n	%
Single	565	29.9
Couples	1,145	60.6
Other	180	9.5
Total	1,890	100

b. PSE and ESF networks

We focus now on the PSE and ESF networks. Let us start by presenting the results for the PSE networks.

Frequent measures in ego-network analysis are network composition -i.e., the proportion of a specific type of role relations (e.g., whether the ego network is primarily kin or friend oriented)- and network size -i.e., the total number of alters connected to the ego.

First, we examine network composition by the number of role relations, and disregard the specific type. As shown in Figure 1, role relations can range from 0 (no alter was found) to six (all role relations of alters were found). Table 3 reveals some differences in terms of gender and living arrangements. In particular, partners in a couple relied on their networks on a higher number of alters/role relations than singles. Indeed, although for singles the distribution was concentrated around three and four roles, the corresponding distribution for partners was more skewed toward five and six roles. Regarding gender, a higher proportion of women relied on all the six alter typologies in both groups (11.4% vs. 5.6% for singles; 9.5% vs. 8.6% for partners).

Then, we analyzed the PSE network composition of singles and partners regarding specific alter roles. The percentage distribution in Table 4 shows that the PSE network of partners was more encapsulated inside the family, while the PSE network of singles was more oriented to friends and neighbors. This difference also emerges when the mean and median number of people who could potentially provide support is considered. Although, on average, there were about eight and seven alters for singles and partners, respectively, the mean numbers of parents, siblings, and relatives was slightly higher for partners, while the mean number of friends was higher for singles.

TABLE 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of singles and couples (aged 18-34 years).

	Singles	%	*Couples*	%
Gender	Male	56.6		
	Female	43.4		
Age	18-24	12.4	Both 18-24	1.9
	25-34	87.6	Both 25-34	87.8
			M. 18-24, F. 25-34	0.6
			M. 25-34, F. 18-24	9.7
Area of residence	Northwest	25.3	Northwest	22.4
	Northeast	29.2	North-east	22.4
	Center	20.0	Center	15.0
	South	25.5	South	40.2
Education	High	17.2	Both with high education	3.3
	Medium	54.3	Both with medium education	28.9
	Low	28.5	Both with low education	30.2
			Other	37.6
Source of income	Self-employed	67.1	M. employed, F. unemployed	40.4
	Employed	18.4	M. employed, F. employed ft.	40.4
	Maintenance/Allowance	12.6	M. employed, F. employed pt.	13.3
	Other	1.9	Other	5.9
Employment	Full-time	77.7		
	Part-time	9.0		
	Missing	13.3		
Union duration (in years)			<4	49.4
			4-5	20.9
			6-7	13.6
			>7	5.7
			Missing	0.4
Number of co-resident children			0	37.9
			1	38.7
			2 or more	22.9
			Missing	0.5
N		565		1009

M. = male partner, F. = female partner.
ft. = full-time, pt. = part-time

The combination of the six alters types (role relations) totaled 64 types of PSE networks. To simplify the descriptions, we collapsed the six roles into three categories, whose definition was mainly based on the distinction among kin (see Figure 1): *i) Immediate family* (parents and siblings); *ii) Extended family* (grandparents and other relatives); *iii) No family* (friends and neighbors). The three categories can be interpreted as distinct "social spaces" to which an individual can refer. Their combination identified eight types

TABLE 3. PSE network distribution of the number of alters. Singles and couple partners (%).

	Singles	*Couples (Males)*	*Couples (Females)*
0	3.5	2.3	3.4
1	6.6	5.8	6.1
2	16.1	15.2	14.8
3	26.4	22.1	21.9
4	23.7	25.9	24.4
5	15.6	20.1	19.9
6	8.1	8.6	9.5

TABLE 4. PSE network size by alters composition. Singles and couple partners.

	Singles			*Couples (Males)*			*Couples (Females)*			
	%	Mean	Median	%	Mean	Median	%	Mean	Median	
Parents	55.9	1.0	1	75.8	1.4	2	71.5	1.3	2	*
Siblings	45.0	0.7	0	62.1	1.0	1	60.3	1.0	1	*
Grandparents	50.6	0.7	1	43.5	0.7	0	49.8	0.8	0	
Relatives	55.0	2.6	1	57.2	2.7	1	58.4	2.8	1	
Friends	79.8	2.7	2	41.6	2.0	2	58.6	1.9	2	*
Neighbors	53.1		1	48.3		1	47.3		1	
Total		8.4	7		8.4	7		8.4	7	

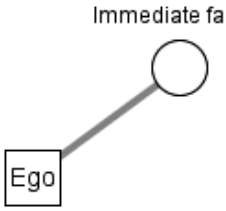
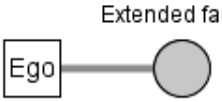
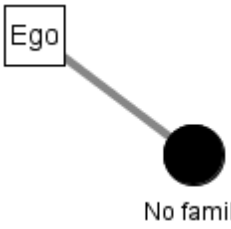
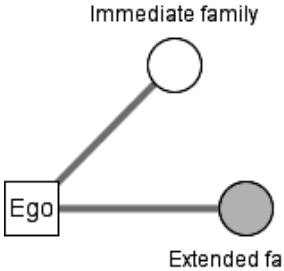
Test on mean differences: * = p-value < 0.001.

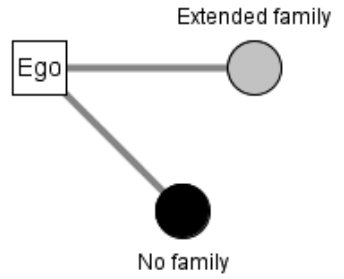
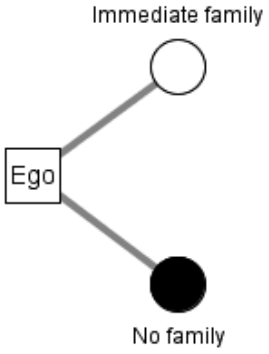
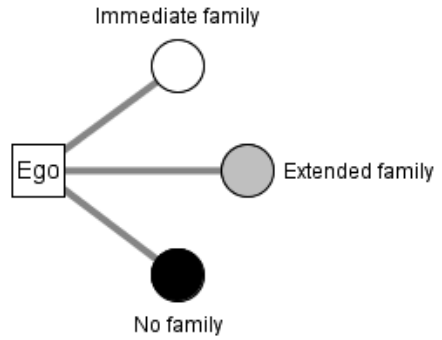
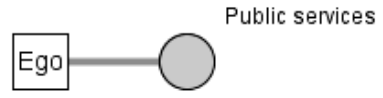
of PSE networks that are visualized in Table 5.

Almost half of the surveyed partners had ties in all three distinct social environments, with a network mean size around 11, while only 40% of singles had such a wide PSE network. Again, the availability of kinship ties was higher for partners than for singles, albeit with a slight difference between male and female partners. Although PSE networks that included the extended family (but not the immediate family) were more common among female partners, PSE networks that included the immediate family (but not the extended family) were more widespread among male partners.

Finally, Table 5 shows that No family ties characterized the PSE network of singles more than the PSE network of partners. Among the latter, we observed a slightly higher percentage for female partners.

TABLE 5. Percentage distribution of PSE and ESF networks by aggregated alter types (mean size of the PSE network between parentheses).

	PSE network			ESF network	
	Singles	*Couples (Males)*	*Couples (Females)*	*Singles*	*Couples*
	3.5 (0)	2.3 (0)	3.4 (0)		
	3.9 (2.7)	8.2 (3.0)	6.5 (2.9)	71.6	47.7
	2.6 (3.1)	2.0 (2.8)	2.6 (2.2)	6.0	42.9
	8.1 (3.5)	3.5 (3.1)	3.8 (3.5)	15.5	5.0
	5.7 (5.5)	10.6 (6.8)	12.4 (6.5)		1.0

	PSE network			*ESF network*	
	Singles	*Couples (Males)*	*Couples (Females)*	*Singles*	*Couples*
	22.8 (9.5)	12.0 (8.1)	13.4 (8.9)	0.9	1.3
	9.6 (6.3)	11.4 (5.4)	8.3 (5.7)	4.3	0.3
	43.8 (11.1)	50.0 (11.4)	49.7 (11.1)	1.7	
					1.7

c. Received support and ESF network

Couples received support more often than singles. Among the main six types of received help,[10] 79% of singles had not received any help in the previous four weeks; 14% received only one type of support, and 7% two types or more. The same percentages for

[10]Based on the observed frequency distribution, the original 11 modalities (see footnote 7) were aggregated in six main categories: 1) economic aid; 2) child assistance; 3) housekeeping; 4) social companionship; 5) administrative procedures; 6) free consumption goods and other help.

TABLE 6. Received support among singles and couples (%).

	Singles	*Couples*
Economic aid	41.4	18.1
Child assistance		55.7
Housekeeping/Work at home	33.6	12.8
Social companionship	4.3	2.3
Administrative procedures	4.3	2.3
Food, clothes, other	16.4	8.7
N	116	298

couples were 70%, 19%, and 11%, respectively.

A deeper insight into the most important help received within the previous four weeks revealed a difference in needs between the two groups (Table 6). Although singles were mainly supported in economic aid (41%), housekeeping (34%), consumption goods, and other (16%), couples especially received child assistance (56%), economic aid (18%), and housekeeping (13%).

On average, couples received the most important help nearly nine times in the last 4 weeks and singles five times. Of course, some of this assistance (in particular child assistance and housekeeping) were not occasional because of their character.

Distinct profiles of help receivers were connected to diverse types of support, thus suggesting an association between the socio-demographic characteristics of singles and couples and the type of support they received. Here, only the most relevant received help is considered.

Among singles, economic aid and consumption goods were mainly provided to women, medium educated, working part-time as self-employed or with an income derived from maintenance and allowance. The profiles for these two types of support differed only in the area of residence (south vs. north, respectively, for economic aid and consumption goods). Housekeeping was provided mainly to low educated men, living in the central regions, worked full-time, with income from salary.

Among couples, large families (with three children), living in the south and the central regions, with low-educated partners and income from allowance or maintenance, received economic aid. Child assistance was mainly provided to couples living in the north and central regions, with both partners high-educated and working (her full-time or part-time). Couples with no children, living in the north, with both partners high-educated and working full-time were primarily the receivers of housekeeping help. Among couples, only 1.6% availed themselves of a baby-sitter and 2.8% of a domestic worker. The latter percentage increased to 3.9% for singles.

The characteristics of providers of support to singles and couples can be identified by looking at the ESF networks shown in Table 5. We present both PSE and ESF networks in the same figure to easily compare the networks.

As recalled in Section 3.b, the 2003 FSS questionnaire collected information on support

providers according their role relations with the HoH (e.g., the most important help provided by brothers or sisters), but not their size (e.g., how many brothers or sisters provided the most relevant assistance). Consequently, we referred only to the provider's (alter's) role in the ESF network. Furthermore, since items on received support concerned the entire family, the effective support network of male and female partners coincides. Therefore, hereafter we consider only the distinction between singles and couples.

Coming back to Table 5, we found that, in terms of role relations the ESF networks were narrower than the PSE ones. In particular, most of the support was provided by only one alter category, mainly belonging to the immediate family for singles (71.6% of singles shared this ESF network type), and to the immediate and extended family for couples (42.9% of couples felt in this ESF network type). Only a negligible percentage of couples (less than 2%) was supported by public services. These findings show that the source of the most important received help was the (immediate/non-immediate) family, providing evidence of a "familistic approach" (Dalla Zuanna and Micheli 2004) to young singles and couples' support.

The role of the providers by types of help is reported in Table 7. Although parents were the main source of help, relatives supported young couples mainly in child assistance and social companionship. The set of providers for singles was less narrow regarding to kinship. Although parents were still the main source of help, friends played an important role in providing support, especially social companionship. This result is in line with previous findings for PSE networks of singles and partners of the couples.

TABLE 7. Singles and couples who relied on a specific providers by type of help (%).

	Economic aid	Child assistance	Housekeeping	Social companionship	Administrative procedures	Consumption good and others	Total
Singles							
Parents	89.6		69.2	60.0	60.0	52.6	74.1
Siblings	8.3		12.8	40.0	40.0		11.2
Relatives	2.1		5.1	40.0		26.3	8.6
Friends	8.3		25.6	80.0	20.0	26.3	20.7
Neighbors			7.7	20.0			3.4
Couples							
Parents	85.2	18.1	60.5	42.9	57.1	53.9	47.7
Siblings	9.3	1.8	18.4	14.3	14.3		5.7
Relatives	5.6	73.5	7.9	28.6		19.2	45.3
Friends	1.9	5.4				3.9	3.7
Neighbors		2.4	2.6	28.6	14.3	11.5	3.7
Others	1.9	0.6	2.6			7.7	1.7

5. Probability of receiving support and PSE network type

The previous section showed that young singles and couples differ in the overall level and types of support (Wellman and Wortley 1990), and in the set of alters who belong to their ESF networks. We now examine the relation between the received support and the type of PSE networks.

Different types of alters and, therefore, different resulting networks, might not have the same importance to the ego or might provide different resources to him/her. Moreover, receiving support may depend on the personal characteristics of the ego (Moore 1990; Pugliesi and Shook 1998) and the availability of alters with specific roles (Agneessens et al. 2006). The average percentage of singles who received support (21%) increased from 5% for singles relying on an *Empty* PSE network (i.e., a PSE network with no alters) to 26% for those with a *Comprehensive* PSE network (i.e., a PSE network composed by all the three types of alters' categories). Among the 30% of couples who on average received support, a similar range characterized the female partners (8.8% *Empty* PSE network, 34.5% *Comprehensive* PSE network), whereas a larger range was observed for the male partners (2% *Empty* PSE network, 56% *Comprehensive* PSE network).

Several logistic regression models were fitted to the data with the aim of explaining the dependence of the probability of receiving help on the availability of a specific PSE network, controlling for the socio-demographic characteristics of singles or partners. In particular, the effect of the PSE network was included in the models with two distinct covariates: the PSE network size, i.e. the potential number of alters (no matter their roles) on whom the ego could count, and the PSE network type using the same categorization shown in Table 5. Although the former covariate evaluated whether the quantitative dimension of the network matters, the latter captured the qualitative dimension of the network, that is, the availability of a certain type of alter in the PSE network (e.g., parents and/or siblings in the "immediate family" network).

Table 8 shows the model estimates for singles. Model 1 analyzed the impact of PSE network size on the probability of receiving support, controlling for structural characteristics of the individuals. Young singles living in northeast and center regions of Italy had a higher probability of receiving help than those living in the northwest (odds ratio [OR] =2.99 and OR=1.97, respectively) as well as singles whose source of income was provided by allowance or maintenance compared to those with income from salary (OR=3.33). In contrast, people with a medium or low degree had a lower probability of receiving help compared to highly educated individuals (OR=0.55 and OR=0.36, respectively). Considering individual features, network size did not significantly affect the probability of receiving help in this group.

Model 2 included the PSE network type as a network-related covariate. Although the effect of the individual characteristics of young singles was the same as in Model 1, sharing a specific PSE network composition affected the probability of receiving help. In particular, *Extended family*, *Immediate family*, and *No family*, or *Empty* PSE network types were unfavorable network compositions that significantly decreased the probability of receiving help, if compared to a *Comprehensive* PSE network (OR=0.16, OR=0.31 and OR=0.16, respectively). Although these network types pertained to a small minority

of singles (see Table 5), the significant effects provided evidence of the importance of entertaining ties with all the entire set of possible alters to cover the various types of support individuals can need.

Finally, Model 3 included network size and network types. As in Model 2, we observe the same effects of personal characteristics as well as network types, and as in Model 1, network size did not affect the probability of receiving help. Since the number of possible alters was more influenced by the number of friends and neighbors, while the number of persons belonging to kinship of ego was limited by nature (number of parents and grandparents) and by the information provided by the survey (in the case of siblings and neighbors), these findings emphasized the importance of PSE network composition, rather than network size.

The corresponding estimates for couples are reported in Table 9. The probability of receiving help increased in the case of a "dual earner" couple (OR=1.44 and OR=2.72 for women working full-time or part-time, respectively) and when both partners were highly or medium educated (OR=1.91, compared with both low educated partners). The presence of one or more children also affected positively the probability of receiving help (OR=4.22 and OR=4.53 for one child and two or more children, respectively). Compared to couples living in the northwest of Italy, those living in the central regions had a higher probability of receiving help (OR=1.74). Age was significant only for men: the higher their age, lower the probability they received help (OR=0.92). Only the number of alters in the female network had a significant effect, providing evidence of a distinct behavior between partners in activating their network for (family) support.

Model 2 included the network-type variables for both partners and, again, revealed gender differences. Only few female network types significantly affected the probability of receiving help, while male network characteristics did not alter it.

In more detail, when female partners counted only on their kin (in the form of *Immediate* and/or *Extended family* type) they were more likely not to receive help (OR=0.39 and OR=0.48 for *Immediate family* and *Immediate and Extended family*, respectively) as well as if female partners could rely on an *Empty* PSE network (OR=0.15). When controlling for network types and individual covariates, both partners' network size was not significant. Similar to singles, network composition was more important than size for modeling the probability of receiving help.

TABLE 8. Estimates of the logistic regression model. Singles.

	Model 1			**Model 2**			**Model 3**		
	Est.	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*
(Intercept)	-0.27	1.03	0.77	-0.49	1.09	0.62	-0.47	1.09	0.63
Gender (ref. Female)									
Male	0.25	0.22	1.28	0.29	0.23	1.34	0.29	0.23	1.34
Age	-0.05	0.03	0.95	-0.03	0.03	0.97	-0.03	0.03	0.97
Residence area (ref. Northwest)									
Northeast	1.10***	0.33	2.99	1.09***	0.33	2.99	1.11***	0.34	3.04
Central	0.68*	0.36	1.97	0.69*	0.36	2	0.71*	0.37	2.03
South	0.28	0.36	1.32	0.27	0.36	1.32	0.29	0.36	1.33
Source of Income (ref. From salary)									
Self-employed	0.24	0.29	1.27	0.27	0.29	1.31	0.27	0.29	1.31
Other	1.20***	0.3	3.33	1.41***	0.31	4.1	1.41***	0.31	4.09
Education (ref. High)									
Medium	-0.60*	0.29	0.55	-0.59**	0.3	0.56	-0.59**	0.3	0.56
Low	-1.02***	0.34	0.36	-0.93***	0.35	0.39	-0.94***	0.35	0.39

Signif.: $*$ <0.1, $**$ <0.05, $***$ <0.01

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*
Potential number of alters	-0.01	0.02	0.99				0	0.02	1
Networks (ref. Comprehensive)									
Immediate family				-0.63	0.67	0.53	-0.63	0.67	0.53
Extended family				-1.83*	1.07	0.16	-1.83*	1.07	0.16
No family				-0.68	0.47	0.51	-0.68	0.47	0.51
Immediate and Extended family				-0.59	0.54	0.55	-0.59	0.54	0.56
Extended and No family				-0.44	0.28	0.64	-0.44	0.28	0.65
Immediate and No family				-1.18**	0.46	0.31	-1.17**	0.46	0.31
Empty				-1.84*	1.05	0.16	-1.84*	1.05	0.16

Signif.: $*$ <0.1, $**$ <0.05, $***$ <0.01

TABLE 9. Estimates of the logistic regression model. Couples.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*
(Intercept)	-1.05	0.97	0.35	-0.34	0.99	0.71	-0.61	1.01	0.54
Age									
Male	-0.08**	0.03	0.92	-0.08**	0.04	0.92	-0.08**	0.04	0.92
Female	0.03	0.03	1.03	0.02	0.03	1.02	0.02	0.03	1.02
Residence area (ref. Northwest)									
Northeast	0.21	0.23	1.23	0.23	0.23	1.26	0.23	0.23	1.25
Central	0.55**	0.24	1.74	0.56**	0.25	1.76	0.58**	0.25	1.78
South	-0.01	0.22	0.99	0.04	0.22	1.04	0.03	0.22	1.03
Income (ref. He works, she unemployed)									
He works, she works full-time	0.36*	0.19	1.44	0.35*	0.20	1.42	0.35*	0.20	1.42
He works, she works part-time	1.00***	0.23	2.72	1.03***	0.24	2.81	1.05***	0.24	2.85
Other	0.45	0.33	1.57	0.50	0.34	1.64	0.49	0.34	1.63
Education (ref. Both low)									
Both high/Medium	0.65***	0.2	1.91	0.63***	0.2	1.88	0.61***	0.2	1.85
Other	0.07	0.21	1.08	0.02	0.22	1.02	0.03	0.22	1.03
Union duration									
	-0.04	0.03	0.96	-0.04	0.03	0.96	-0.04	0.03	0.96
Number of children (ref. 0)									
1	1.44***	0.19	4.22	1.41***	0.2	4.1	1.43***	0.2	4.18
More than 2	1.51***	0.27	4.53	1.51***	0.28	4.52	1.50***	0.28	4.5

Signif.: $*<0.1$, $**<0.05$, $***<0.01$

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Est.	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*	*Est.*	*s.e.*	*OR*
Potential number of alters (he)	0.00	0.01	1.00				0.01	0.02	1.01
Potential number of alters (she)	0.03*	0.01	1.03				0.02	0.01	1.02
Male PSE Networks (ref. Comprehensive)									
Immediate family				0.27	0.35	1.31	0.34	0.37	1.4
Extended family				-0.56	0.62	0.57	-0.49	0.63	0.61
No family				0.32	0.42	1.38	0.37	0.44	1.45
Immediate and Extended family				0.05	0.31	1.05	0.08	0.32	1.08
Extended and No family				0.04	0.24	1.04	0.06	0.25	1.07
Immediate and No family				-0.18	0.26	0.83	-0.11	0.27	0.89
Empty				0.50	0.56	1.65	0.59	0.58	1.81
Female PSE Networks (ref. Comprehensive)									
Immediate family				-0.94**	0.4	0.39	-0.82**	0.42	0.44
Extended family				0.35	0.49	1.41	0.49	0.5	1.63
No family				-0.34	0.42	0.71	-0.22	0.43	0.81
Immediate and Extended family				-0.73**	0.3	0.48	-0.66**	0.3	0.52
Extended and No family				-0.31	0.24	0.73	-0.29	0.24	0.75
Immediate and No family				-0.25	0.28	0.78	-0.16	0.29	0.85
Empty				1.88***	0.66	0.15	-1.72**	0.67	0.18

Signif.:$*$ <0.1, $**$ <0.05, $***$ <0.01

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we analyzed the support received by young Italian adults living apart from their parental home as singles or partners in a couple. In the wake of the recent literature, suggesting the importance of social relationships in analyzing of demographic behaviors, we constructed two types of support networks (the PSE network and the ESF network), and we studied the effect of the PSE network on the probability of receiving help.

We defined the PSE network as the set of people who can potentially support an ego (an individual living as single or as partner) according to their proximity and the frequency of contacts with him/her, and the ESF network as the set of people who provided the most important help to the ego's household in a fixed time period. In network-oriented studies, these two definitions imply a "central role" of ego (singles and partners for the PSE network and singles and couples in the ESF network) and require looking at the network from his/her perspective.

The analyzed data were collected with a survey that was not fully network-oriented and the questions did not always follow the standard approaches for collecting network data. Indeed, while the information on potential support ties between ego and relatives, friends and neighbors were collected explicitly asking the respondent to specify the set of alter roles to whom he/she is close or can rely on by necessity, the existence of potential support ties between the ego and his/her immediate family required making assumptions on the proximity and frequency of contacts, thus implying the definition of thresholds for living distances and the frequency of contacts. Consequently, the size and the composition of the PSE network might have been overrated or underrated according to the choice of these thresholds. Nevertheless, based on the existing literature (Holdsworth and Solda 2002; Santarelli and Cottone 2009), we believe that the assumptions of living within a short distance and talking at least once a week are good proxies of support availability.

In addition, the size and the composition of the ESF network might have been underrated since help providers were collected only regarding the most important help. Nevertheless, the questionnaire design may have only negligibly affected our results, since most of the singles (67%) and couples (65%) received only one type of help within the previous four weeks.

Another limitation of the FSS data is related to the measurement of support. Measuring social support involves many dimensions, and the size or the composition of alters is not sufficient to capture all these aspects. For instance, some studies (Barrera 1981; Rook 1984) pointed out that the absence of unsupportive ties is more crucial than the presence of supportive ones in studying social support or different alters can provide only a certain type of help (Agneessens et al. 2006). Moreover, receiving support is strictly related to the general meaning society attributes to this behavior that can change for singles and couples, eventually committed with children and work. Although our findings offered suggestions in these directions, we do not have enough information to deepen these elements.

Albeit there are some drawbacks and some biases in size and composition, we have shown that it is possible to reconstruct (support) networks from data collected via survey that are not specifically network-oriented. Looking at the results, we observed that the

PSE networks of singles and couples mainly differ in terms of composition rather than size. Although the PSE networks of couples were more encapsulated in the family (immediate for the male partner and extended for the female partner), the PSE networks of singles were less narrow, and included more often neighbors and friends more frequently. This finding is in line with other results in the literature (e.g., Bellotti 2009), and provides evidence of the existence of an Italian "familistic approach" for coping with difficulties, at least for couples in the first stage of their formation.

The analysis on the ESF network emphasized the central role of the family in supporting young Italian adults even if there may have been other kind of alters as potential sources of support. In analogy with the PSE network, the ESF network of singles mainly included immediate family and friends, while that of couples was mainly family oriented. This finding can be explained considering the kind of help received. Indeed, although the immediate family mainly provided economic aid and housekeeping, the extended family is more helpful for childcare. In particular, the extended family (especially an ego's uncles) was an alternative when the respondent's parents were not available to take care of their grandchildren.

Finally, we analyzed the effect of potential support ties on the probability of receiving help with logistic regression models that controlled for an individual's or couple's attributes. Model results of the individual's/couple's covariates traced a profile of the receiver of support. Singles living in north Italy, with a high degree and employed have a higher probability of receiving help as well as couples where both partners are employed.

Two network variables were also included in the model: the size and the composition of the PSE network. In general, we observed that although the number of alters as potential sources of help was not significant, the network composition had a significant effect. This is particularly emphasized by the fact that the PSE network size for female partners turned out not to be significant when controlling for the PSE network composition.

The analysis of the PSE network composition for partners offers a deeper insight into the "social" resources that a couple can exploit when needing support. More specifically, we found that only the PSE network of the female partner had an effect on the probability of receiving help. This may suggest that female partners "activated" their own network (rather than that of the partner) to cope with the problems of the daily life and to reconcile family and work. Furthermore, we observed that when the female partner has an Empty PSE network or can rely on her entire family or only on her Extended family, the probability of receiving help is lower regarding female partners with a Comprehensive network. A similar result was also found for singles. Therefore, the availability of a Comprehensive network or a network not "encapsulated" only in the family increases the probability of receiving help.

Our results emphasized the idea that individuals varied not only in the overall level and the specific types of support available to them but also in the types of alters who provided these different types of support (Burt 1983; Campbell et al. 1986; Wellman and Wortley 1990).

However, receiving support can be conceived as an indicator of a good relational propensity or "sociality" as well as a lack of autonomy. For young singles, for example, the availability of a wide role relation network could postpone the undertaking of duties and responsibilities of the adulthood status. In this sense, their transition to adulthood

is still in fieri and not yet completed. Instead, for couples, a comprehensive network can represent an opportunity to access resources in early stage of union formation, that welfare system, especially in Italy, is not able to provide, e.g., for working mother.

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