

*Family and media: a research on
newsworthiness of family issues **

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Summary. The family has always been considered as the basic expression of man's social nature. Although in the course of time the concept of traditional nuclear family has changed, it still represents, especially to the young, the primary source of influence for the formation of their personality. The current research focuses on the introduction of news about family and family life in the most important newspapers. Some elements of the project supported by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers about the perceived consensus in the media and the item content analysis have been reported in order to identify the most common features that "describe" family issues. It has come to light that the concept of family in the relation between individual and social value, is not a very debated topic on newspapers, except if it concerns murders or family slaughters.. This result can also be proved by the insufficient number of headlines appeared on the front page of the most important national newspapers having the following objective "Supporting family, giving young people a future".

Key words: : family, parents, wives, fathers, children, couples, young people

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Introduction

Every type of society has got its prevailing typical standards to describe family. The pre-modern family is different from the modern and consequently this latter from the post-modern one. The latest family policies concern the institutional expectations that the Government apply to family. Donati calls this first level of family policies “family polity” and he observes that “ If you take into consideration Italy, its family polity represents an institutional order which safeguards the acknowledgement and the handling of a set of duties and rights that belong to that social structure which is originated by the union of marriage between a man and a woman (Donati, 2003, p. 70). You can read in the article 29 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic : “Matrimony is based on the moral and legal equality of the spouses within the limits established by law to guarantee the unity of the family”; in the article 30 : “It is the duty and right of parents to support, instruct and educate their children, even those born outside of matrimony (...)” and the article 31 concerns the assistance in the formation of the family , through economic measures and other provisions, and the fulfillment of its duties with particular regard for large families. The Republic protects maternity, infancy and youth , promoting the institutions necessary for such purposes”.The second level of family policy concerns family politics, or political discourses about family. We cite family politics examples when we talk about the way social groups and organizations pursue their interests and their identity, when we debate about which type of family structures should be acknowledged and incentivized or about which rights/duties should belong to parenthood.The third level focuses on an agreement that produces a legislative measure of specific interventions (family policy). In this sense you can distinguish two kinds of social policies: family oriented or family friendly. (Donati, 2003, p. 71).

Family policy should concern family structure changes as the result of a certain way of making family policy. You can recognize three different levels:

- a configuration of an institutional arrangement (polity);
- as a political idea and strategy (politics);
- as the combination of a statement of intent in common decisions that imply a precise practical intervention. (policies).

The increasing plurality of family forms makes more difficult the standard sociological definition of family: a growing number of people is living in different family structures if compared to married couples, with or without children. However in the past there was a larger diversity of

families than today and you must consider that the current policy identifies the family by means of single elements and stereotyped images without taking into account that today the family is the result of individual freedom; the question is: how can you recognize the new pluralism of families from the natural consequence of the dissolution of the previous historical patterns?

Government Intervention in family matters gives shape to the so-called Welfare State, which should attend to all the needs of a family. In times of crisis the attention to family-friendly policies moves to the background and the promotion of family support doesn't imply Government intervention but it is rather left to the same families within the local community.

The contemporary family is the result of a slow and gradual evolution, tied to the changing roles of women: as a matter of fact nowadays women are no more totally family-oriented, by devoting themselves to households and to the upbringing of children. Although these traditional tasks are always present in the life of a woman it is possible to find in addition different extradomestic roles. A very important step towards the improvement of the status of women has been achieved in 1974 with the new Family Rights Act, through which the woman became aware of her social status. Improvement in standard of living and the "Zeitgeist" due to the postmodern condition make both men and women more independent; because of different lifestyle choices the traditional family structure had had to adapt to very substantial transformations. While in the past, children were considered as necessary in order to achieve a perfect union between men and women, today they have lost the sense of being a vital part that guarantees the survival of the "bloodline"; on the contrary they represent an obstacle to maintain individuality in a relationship: with no doubt childfree couples can travel a lot enriching their cultural background, they can spend much time with their friends and they can devote to their hobbies. The couple seems to be more satisfied with its life, because in this way there are changing roles, without any gender stereotypes: as a matter of fact each is able to play perfectly the role of the other. As a consequence of this process, children can decide for their future, by opting for different values than those of their parents, confronting with them in a critical way.

The family according to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers

According to this, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers has promoted a project about the perception of public consensus in 9 main national newspapers: il Corriere della Sera, la Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Sole 24 Ore, Il Giornale, Il Messaggero, Libero, Il Mattino e QN-Quotidiano Nazionale (Il Giorno, Il Resto del Carlino, La Nazione). The current research has the aim of monitoring the opinions expressed by the most popular Italian news agencies compared to seven Government missions.

Relaunching the economy

Supporting family, giving young people a future;

Guarantee more security and more justice;

Social care and modern services Modern services to citizen ((Healthcare, Education, University, Research, Culture and Environment);

The Southern Question ;

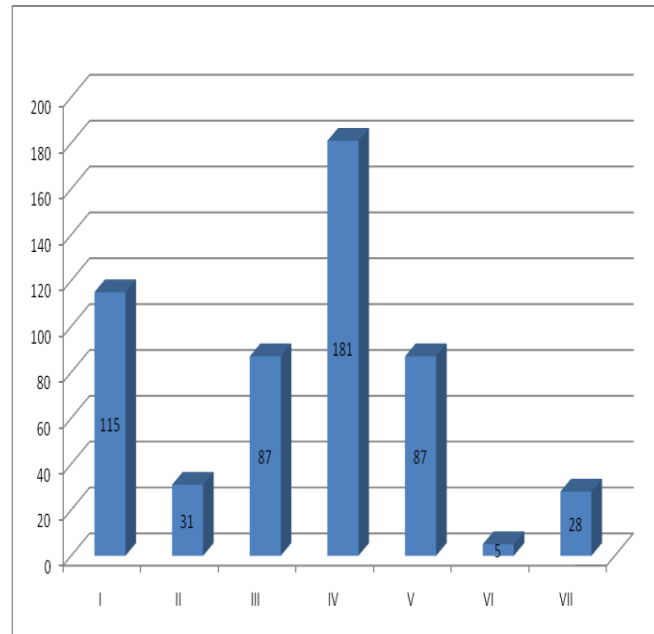
The debate about federalism debate ;

Extraordinary Public Financial Planning;

This observational study refers to the month of November 2010 (1-30 November 2010), a precise period of time in which it has been held an intense debate about family tax benefits. Throughout all this time there were have been identified 534 items published on the front page by the 9 monitored newspapers according to the purpose of this research; nevertheless only 31 items relate to the second Government mission , to which we paid particular attention in the course of our research .

The 1 bar graph displays the frequency of the items concerning the issues which refer about the Planning Government 's Mission. In bar N. 1 you can see that social issues such as family and young people are not so much taken into account. There are only 31 items on the front page which refer to the second Mission , reaching the highest point of interest on 9 th November 2010 with a total number of 8 articles.

Graph N 1: Number of items referring to the Government Missions



Source: Presidency of the Council of Ministers

In Bar 1 you can see that the II Mission , the one referring to family is in the fourth position. While the first pages of the newspapers, we are referring to, reserve a relevant place to the fourth Government Mission “ Social care and modern services for citizens” (Healthcare, Education, University, Research, Culture and Environment) with a total number of 181 items, the second Mission must be pleased with a 5, 81% of items, taking into account that this last mission referred to four different strategic aims: how to pay less taxes, a home for everyone (public housing), improvement of social services and giving young people a future.

News concerning family issues follow the process of selection that involves all the information conforming to the “Cooperative Principle of Communication” in the breaking news moment : as a matter of fact news must be based on common knowledge and must follow prearranged features in order to include elements we already know (McQuail, 1988) . To arouse the reader’s interest the news media must report in a particular way about all that is not implied with everyday life, for example news about politicians, minority groups and outsiders .Such guidelines can be

found especially on the newspapers' front pages: here you can find the highlights of the day, most of all news about politics and business or crime news. According to the principle of newsworthiness "social events enhance the interest of the public presence only if they fulfill some requirements with which the events are arranged[...]" (Tessarolo, 1997; Lupi, 1997) There are selection criteria whereby all that "doesn't arouse" the reader's interest get lost; on the contrary all that is considered newsworthy is decontextualized and then recontextualized in the most popular news format so that it can be read, explained and taken into consideration.

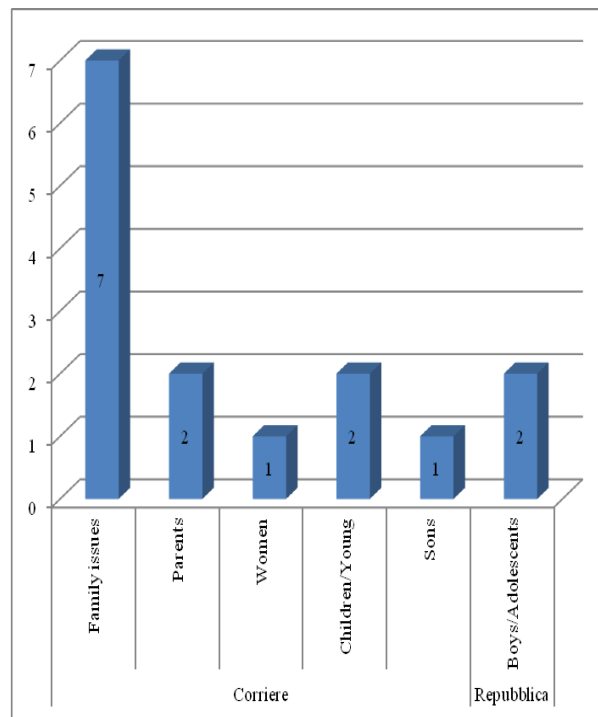
Research objectives

The purpose we want to reach in the following research is to submit each item to the content analysis, by identifying the most debated issues in the news media. Moreover if you take into account the *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*'s front pages, it has been possible to compare both newspapers, by showing that the *Corriere* is more engaged with family issues than *La Repubblica*. This represents a kind of qualitative analysis and considers the corpus of the gathered data, having similar features through the count of their presence in the headlines. If you take into account the data of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the content has been examined, by taking as a unit of analysis the headlines of the articles that were about family issues and that have been published on *La Repubblica* and on the *Corriere* for three months, from September to November 2010. In the content analysis you can recognize: the units of sampling, that is to say the news articles, and the units of classification relating to the parts to analyze in the of the units of sampling, to which the different topics refer in the process of classification (?) (Krippendorf, 1983; Rositi 1971; De Lillo, 1971). Our research success depends on the features through which grounds the idea of organizing the text elements according to the units of analysis, that is to say notions having different meanings and that allow to identify the elements of the text in a double chart. Its features must follow the rules for a good classification, that is to say relevance to the objectives, exclusivity, completeness and distinctiveness. But the concept of objectivity is always influenced by the preferences of journalists in selecting the events. It is clear that media neutrality, including newspapers, is quite impossible to achieve because journalists in a certain measure are always connected to politics and therefore influenced by different ideologies (Tessarolo, 1997). In order to

notice the following features we availed of the agreement among three judges. The first research has been conducted by analyzing 17 items published on the newspaper La Repubblica in the autumn of 2010. They weren't considered as "articles", but in-depth analyses about important social issues that consequently arouse the reader's interest. As a matter of fact they can be found in a special section of the newspaper once called "third page". Its peculiarity lies just in this collocation that shows how the topics which are debated have a value of "political engagement" and of proximity to the social reality (Ippoliti, 2006; Dardano, 1973). Although the original meaning of "third page" is now disappeared, its cultural value moved to other parts of the newspaper as a proof of the reader's desire to be well informed. The most frequent topics identified in 17 news items published on La Repubblica with reference to the first three months have been : young people-teenagers (N=2 presences); children-only children-brothers and sisters(N=3 presences); families-couples (N=5 presences); family problems (N=7 presences) and in the end, the topic parents with only a presence. On the contrary in the same time Il Corriere della Sera published 68 articles having the following topics, which reveal more presences: family (N=7 presences); children (N=5 presences); family problems/issues (N=16 presences); parents (N=5 presences); children-young people(N=4 presences); family arrangements (N=4 presences); mothers (N=4 presences); family tax benefits (N=8 presences). The graph 2 displays how little La Repubblica referred to family topics in the month of September: there are only two items in the whole month. On the contrary Il Corriere della Sera quotes not only topics whose members belong to family unit, but gives also prominence to the issue concerning family problems with the publication of 7 articles/items in the month of September . Taking into account their headlines you can perceive that on 7th September the newspapers, La Repubblica and Il Corriere published an article about teenagers: as a matter of fact both the article published on La Repubblica (To bed without laptop and mobile. So the young punish themselves nowadays) and the article published the same day on Il Corriere (Young and lonely: the role of parents)focuses on the relationship between parent and child. Moreover the article in La Repubblica explains how parents' punishments have gone through changes by adapting to their children's different preferences., while the article of Il Corriere explains how difficult is the role of parents nowadays. As a matter of fact, today children are more free than before and most of the time they are even able to prevail over their parents' choices. The equilibrium between parents and children has been modified: these latter are more and more desirous of breaking the rules and of taking distance

from their family; they want to be independent although they are very young; consequently the parents try to limit their desire of independence by imposing restrictions that as a matter of fact represent useless attempts to impose their will. It is obvious, therefore, that peace and harmony in a relationship between parent and child is difficult to reach even in a very common family background.

Graph N. 2: Items' analysis in the month of September 2010

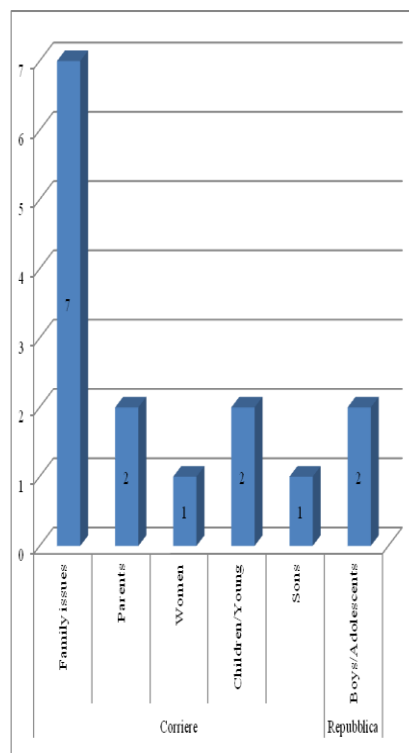


The bar graph N 3, on the contrary, displays that in the month of October the newspaper La Repubblica is more interested in family issues, while Il Corriere spends much time with other issues strictly connected with the family nucleus, because according to the central purpose of journalism they represent highly popular topics and consequently they are supposed to be read by a wide audience. Through the items' analysis in

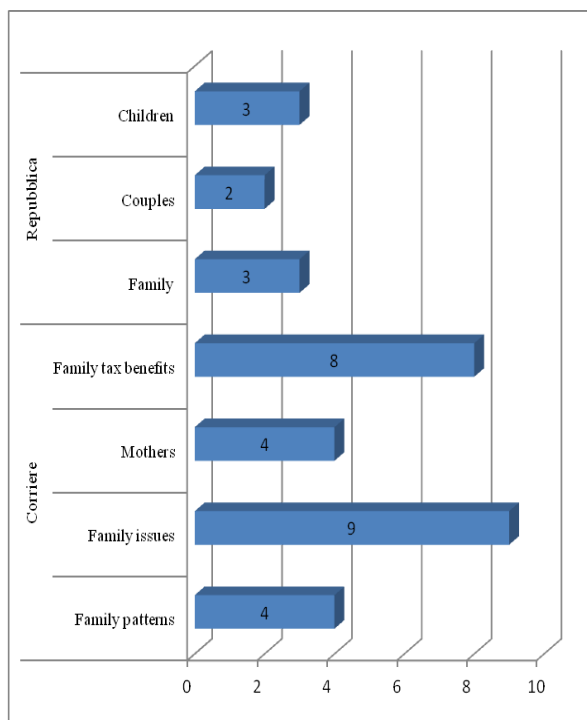
both newspapers in the months of September and October you can observe that the most common topic refers to family problems, sign of a deep change and instability in the family unit, especially because of the weak tie which is characteristic of modern couples. For instance, in the article published on La Repubblica on 7th October (“Test tube, We come back to the Council. Prohibition on in vitro fertilization in unstable equilibrium”) and on the Corriere (“In vitro fertilization law back to the Council”) delivers with great prominence the IVF question, by considering this a very right for all those couples, that are not able to procreate because of their infertility. As a matter of fact, the different debates that have come in succession for a new council about IVF -in vitro fertilization- in Italy, have placed at the centre of interest the law N 40 in the main newspapers’ headlines, especially for the diagnosis of embryo’s pre-implantation and for its employment for HIV and hepatitis C (infected) patients. The measures issued by the political class about this theme have always stricken the interest of newspapers’ journalists, because this issue concerns a particular sphere in the personal interests of the readers. As a matter of fact, the Government wants to support through the promulgation of such decrees the birthrate rising in a country where the number of old people exceed that of young people. This indicates the interest of both newspapers towards this issue, pointing out the fact that infertility prevention and treatment are considered as the most efficient therapy in order to improve the lifestyle of those couples who want to procreate. In the same way in the bar graph N 4 you always notice that the Corriere deals with issues concerning tax benefits, family problems and family structures. In the matter of this you can observe that in the article published on La Repubblica on 9th November 2010 with the title “Sustaining couples who want to procreate, quarrel at once, then Sacconi turns around” and then on the Corriere “Only supporting couples with children. Then Sacconi redresses” is about the National Family Conference promoted by the Welfare Secretary Sacconi who supports the traditional family, rejecting the law N.40 about In vitro fertilization because in his opinion this contributes to the loss of the constitutional principle of family. The Government relaunches the “natural” family, increasing financial assistance for couples who want to procreate. Despite this effort by the heads of government, the natural family is leaving enough space for common law couples, producing a reverse of the familiar nucleus and emphasizing the fact that the modern society doesn’t ground its roots on matrimony, a fading form of relationship, but on common law marriage among partners who don’t accept absolute bounds. After the analysis of this article you can find a strong interest of journalists in the crisis which is striking the current

couple because of infertility problems which affect the one or the other partner. In contrast with the newspaper La Repubblica, the Corriere is more involved in family tax benefits with the publication of eight items published in the month of November. Just in this period the Government held an heated debate about family tax benefits, which focused the interest of the Corriere towards this topic. From this, you can gather that these represent burning social issues and for this reason the Italian Government promoted the project on the “mission” having as objective the assistance of the familiar nucleus giving to its young members a reliable future where the family can transform into a replacement for the Welfare State.

Graph N 3: Items’ analysis in October 2010



Graph N. 4 : Items' analysis in November 2010



Results

The content analysis in the various pages of La Repubblica and in Il Corriere show how all aspects of the issue about family have been examined in details, by focusing the attention of the reader towards the most common problems which have characterized family life. Great importance has been given to the relation between parent and child, especially to the punishments and the prohibitions that parents inflict to their children in order to re-arrange in the family structure a cohabitation based on common specific rules. By respecting some important family rules, children will be more prepared to face the principles which regulate/ the coexistence with other persons out of the family nucleus: starting from the family ,the first living cell of the society, we succeed in understanding

the problematical social interactions among the citizens of a State. Numerous are also those articles that throw light on the governmental arrangements and its respective changes produced by them in the private sphere of the family members: it stands to reason that the way in which it is ruled by the organs in charge arouses interest, because it concerns the way of being of all those belong to a family nucleus. From the analysis of the items taken into consideration you can gather that the newspaper La Repubblica exhorts the role that the family plays in our society: you can consider again the family as a safe haven in an era in which the “escape” from the family is considered a challenge full of dangers and hindrances, especially for young people who have no experience. Italy hangs on the family, safe haven that guarantees especially to the youngest a personal help and an economic support. It is a burning issue of today because of the fact that young people nowadays remain in their family more time than before, both for a free choice or because the difficult effort to find a job doesn't make them independent; on the contrary they are obliged to stay with their parents. Despite the news stories inform us how in some borderline cases even the family nucleus can be a dangerous place, the family as a constitutional institution resists to the passing trends, even if with some difference with the past structure from/ which it takes distance, for example for the importance given today to the problems and to the women's demands and especially for the young who want to live in a more responsible way and are more prepared to solve the typical disagreements that can arise in the generational gap.

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