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# **Italian Society and Gender Role Stereotypes. How Stereotypical Beliefs Concerning Males and Females are Still Present in Italian People at the Beginning of the Third Millennium**

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## **Abstract**

There are many forms of discrimination in our society. Why is more attention being paid to discrimination against women with awareness-raising debates, public demonstrations, and more? Women's discrimination against men is discrimination, too! To cope with this growing phenomenon, it is necessary to understand the roots from which it originates and is fed. Gender role stereotypes may be responsible for this (Ostuni, 2017). In this work, thanks to a survey carried out by ISTAT in 2019 (referred to 2018) on the male and female Italian population aged between 18 and 74 years old, it will be explained if and how our society is "trapped" in stereotypical beliefs. The results obtained show that Italy is divided into two parts and that in the north-central regions stereotypes are less rooted than in the southern ones. The phenomenon is less widespread, for both sexes, both as they grow in age and when they have a higher educational degree. In this context, as far as family society, and the economy is concerned, the role of women is subordinate to men, especially in the South. As stereotypes are responsible for different forms

of discrimination against women, a possible way to establish fair gender equality can be obtained by eliminating them and bringing down the prevailing patriarchal culture.

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**Keywords:** Italy, society, discrimination, gender role stereotypes

## **Introduction**

An essential link could exist between the discrimination against women and the cultural context in which this behavior originates. It is difficult to admit, but this form of male discrimination perpetrated against women could be determined by a deeply patriarchal culture that is still dominant in our society due to the hierarchy between the status of men and women, that is female subordination and male dominance.

This can be seen through stereotypes, namely "social constructions" that do not reflect reality and that we, unfortunately, accept daily. They have become part of our consciousness, last over time, are mainly transmitted from generation to generation, and produce inequalities in contemporary societies (access to the labor market, different wage levels, etc.).

Perhaps, the persistence of some dynamics in the relations between the genders originated from having ignored the many cultural and social transformations carried out by women.

Masculine and feminine are perceived as opposites and presented as complementary. In fact, the two sides coexist in each individual, regardless of gender. Keeping them in balance is the essential condition for establishing healthy and functional relationships with each other (Ostuni, 2017).

In this paper an attempt will be made to find out whether Italian society is sex-typed, that is if the reality we live in is the result of immutable models that lead to a tightening of the same reality. It will be done through the analysis of the activities that the gender role stereotype attributes to one gender or another, namely, those that the common thought considers "for males" or "for females" and that, once created, are resistant to change.

## **Methodology and data**

In this paper only stereotypes regarding traditional gender roles will be analyzed, thus differing further and subsequent analyses about them.

In November 2019, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and within a collaboration agreement with the Department for Equal Opportunities at the Presidency of the Council, Istat has published data concerning its survey about gender role stereotypes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Istat: "Gender role stereotypes and the social image of sexual violence". The sample of the survey "Gender role stereotypes and the social image of sexual violence" is defined as a sub-

The survey, which concerned individuals aged 18 to 74 years, for the first time, in addition to the detection of stereotypes on traditional gender roles, took into account opinions on the acceptability of violence, its spread and its causes, and stereotypes of sexual violence.

The questions asked to the respondents concerned the family, work, and society roles and there was a total of five, namely:

- 1) *Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?*
- 2) *Is it above all men who must provide for the economic needs of the family?*
- 3) *Is it the man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?*
- 4) *Are men less suited to housework?*
- 5) *For men, rather than women, is it very important to succeed at work?*

The possibilities of answers were "*complete agreement*", "*quite in agreement*", "*little agreement*", "*complete disagreement*", "*does not respond*". In this regard, to avoid adding up three modes of responses (complete agreement, quite in agreement, and little agreement) that certainly denote a favorable opinion of the stereotype but not a convinced one, we preferred to focus attention on the answer "*complete disagreement*" which highlights the strong opposition to the implementation of the gender role in question. Finally, the answer "*does not respond*" was not taken into account because of the very low percentage found.

For each question, attention will be paid to the difference between the sexes. As for age and educational qualification the whole country has been considered, while, at the regional level, through the relationship of masculinity, an attempt will be made to divide regions according to the greater or lesser extent of the stereotype perceived by men as compared with women.

Subsequently, always according to the indicator "*complete disagreement*", the cluster analysis technique will be applied with the aim of creating groups of regions, homogeneous within them and heterogeneous between them. All that will be done to identify, first separately, for men and for women, in which regions the stereotype is more diffused. Afterward, the cited technique of the cluster analysis will be applied, with the same objective, to both sexes together.

To understand if our society is gender-typed, as mentioned above, the data produced by Istat in 2019, which relate to 2018, and the result from the

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sample of the people's sample answering the Labor Force Survey in the period June - November 2018.

survey "Gender role stereotypes and the social image of sexual violence"<sup>2</sup>, were used. The methodology used is as follows:

- 1) taking men as a reference, the ratio of masculinity has been calculated to assess the greater or lesser extent of disagreement on the basis of the question under consideration, as compared to women:

$$R_m = \frac{P_m}{P_w} \cdot 100$$

where  $P_m$  represents the population of men, while  $P_w$  represents the population of women. This indicator assumes values above 100 when there is a greater disagreement between men and women and vice versa.

- 2) the cluster analysis technique has been applied to search for groups of regions homogeneous within them and heterogeneous between them according to the chosen indicator.<sup>3</sup>

## **The results obtained**

### ***Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?***

In 2022 and in any evolved society, talking about male privileges over female ones in the world of work, even under conditions of labor shortage, should no longer be a stereotype.

The classic reason that has always disadvantaged women in the world of work is parenting. As women have always had the task of taking care of their children in case of illness or emergency, they have often asked for work permits, reduction of working hours, or the passage from full to part-time. All that has led women to an important gap, compared to men, in terms of availability of time, energy and constancy and has often obliged them to take a step back in the sphere of work.

This has always happened in Italian society because of the rooted stereotype according to which women must have the duty and the task of raising children. All that at the expense of their career.

In order to promote equality and equal opportunities, the male-female dichotomy ought to disappear within the working world, where women should no longer be discriminated against for their own role as a parent. Moreover, the parenting "privilege" should involve both sexes to the same extent and women should be given more career opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> Istat: <http://dati-violenzadonne.istat.it/>

<sup>3</sup> The method used to measure the distances between cases (regions) is that of the quadratic Euclidean distance. For the formation of clusters, the hierarchical criterion with agglomerative grouping was adopted, with Ward's algorithm (1963). For the related methodological insights see e.g., Delvecchio (2010), Lis and Sambin (1977).

For both sexes, as many as 70% of respondents disagreed with this privilege. This means that about 30% believe that the male sex should be privileged in the world of work.

It is remarkable, however, that the phenomenon begins to lose conviction, because the percentages of disagreement over this hypothetical stereotype decrease with age for both sexes (Table 1).

In fact, it is in the youth age groups (18-29 years) that the highest percentages of disagreement are found (77.3% for boys and 76.4% for girls), while it still remains rooted in the most adult generations, within which the percentages decrease (62.8% for men and 65.2% for women).

By analogy with what has been seen on the phenomenon trend by age groups, there is also feedback when the educational level of the respondents is taken into account. In fact, the stereotype is more widespread among the less educated (41.3% for men and 53.4% for women with or without a primary school degree). The low diffusion of the stereotype reaches very high percentages (84%) among the very young, for both sexes (Table 2).

**Table 1 – Age groups**

Age groups	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
18-29	77.3	76.4
30-44	70.7	71.6
45-59	71.7	70.7
60-74	62.8	65.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>70.4</i>	<i>70.5</i>

Source: Istat

**Table 2 – Educational level**

Educational degree	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
Elementary/no degree	41.3	53.4
Junior High School	65.8	61.8
High School diploma	73.8	76.2
University degree or diploma	84.3	84.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>70.4</i>	<i>70.5</i>

Source: Istat

Widening the issue to Italian regions and placing the masculinity ratio in descending order, in a group of eight regions the masculinity ratio is greater than 100. This means that men are less convinced than women of the stereotype (Table 3).

A remaining group of regions (eleven) have a masculinity ratio of less than 100. This ratio, on the other hand, denotes that the stereotype is more widespread among men and less rooted in women.

The balance between men and women is reached only in the Piemonte region where, like the national value, there is a masculinity ratio of 99.9%. Two opposite trends show that 77% of men in the Marche region are more inclined to have women in the labor market, while 43.8% of men in the Basilicata region are in favor of the precedence of male versus female work.

**Table 3 – Stereotype spread among men and women**

Regions	Men	Women	Masculinity Ratio	Stereotype spread	
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement			
Marche	77.0	69.5	110.8	Spread among women	
Campania	59.6	54.5	109.4		
Lazio	74.2	68.8	107.8		
Molise	61.3	56.9	107.7		
Abruzzo	64.6	60.5	106.8		
Calabria	61.1	57.7	105.9		
Liguria	75.6	72.7	104.0		
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	77.1	74.6	103.4		
Piemonte	76.1	76.2	99.9		Situation of balance
<b>Italy</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>70.5</b>	<b>99.9</b>		
Veneto	77.2	78.3	98.6	Spread among men	
Sicilia	61.3	62.4	98.2		
Umbria	69.7	71.0	98.2		
Lombardia	77.9	79.7	97.7		
Trentino-Alto Adige	70.7	72.6	97.4		
Valle d'Aosta	72.3	75.6	95.6		
Puglia	55.7	58.7	94.9		
Toscana	75.4	79.6	94.7		
Sardegna	73.0	77.6	94.1		
Emilia-Romagna	70.5	77.7	90.7		
Basilicata	56.2	62.1	90.5		

Source: Personal data processing based on Istat data

### Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?

This question, inserted in the Istat survey, emphasizes the role of man seen as an irreplaceable source of income, that is, he who must provide for the economic needs of the family, namely, earning and covering all the fundamental needs of the family.

As far as past history is concerned, the roles of men and women were usually well defined. In the family the widespread prerogative of men was to provide for economic needs and to impart discipline to the members of the

family, while the only task of women was to ensure the well-being of their hearth and home.

In the nuclear family, on the other hand, the roles of men and women, because of work, should be equal. The rights and obligations within the couple should be equally divided, thus creating an economic and social equality of the sexes.

Unfortunately, by analyzing the answers of the Istat sample surveyed, this hypothetical stereotype reaches quite high percentages all over Italy: 50.9% of men and 57.1% of women disagree. This result shows that 49.1% of men and 42.9% of women support the central role of family men in providing for economic needs.

Considering the phenomenon by age, the percentage of new generations (age group 18-29) stands at 57% for both sexes, while a high percentage of women in the age group 45-59 (61.6%) can be inferred from a careful reading of the data. It is evident that this stereotype is less widespread in the female age group 45-59 than in the age group 18-29 (Table 4).

On the other hand, analyzing the educational degree held by the respondents in relation to the stereotype submitted, a progressive percentage increase can be noted for both sexes from the lowest educational level to the highest. The stereotype is very ingrained in the respondents with a low level of education (elementary/no degree). In fact, for men it does not reach 25%, while for women it settles on about 37%. On the contrary, the stereotype is much less widespread among those who have a higher educational level: for people having a University or High School degree it reaches about 67% for men and 72.4% for women (Table 5).

**Table 4 – Age groups**

Age groups	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
18-29	57.5	57.2
30-44	48.5	56.4
45-59	53.5	61.6
60-74	45.2	51.6
Total	50.9	57.1

Source: Istat

**Table 5 – Educational degree**

Educational degree	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
Elementary/no degree	24.8	36.7
Junior High School	43.0	49.7
High School diploma	55.7	62.3
University degree or diploma	67.3	72.4
Total	50.9	57.1

Source: Istat

By ordering the masculinity ratio in descending order, it is evident that only in the Marche region the ratio is greater than 100. This means that only in this region men disagree with the proposed stereotype, while in the remaining regions the spread of the stereotype is more rooted among men. Women therefore reject, albeit with very low percentages in many regions, the role of man as the main actor for the economic livelihood of the family. In this regard, we note that 11 regions have a masculinity ratio lower than the Italian average (89.1%) (Table 6).

**Table 6 – Stereotype spread among men and women**

Regions	Men		Masculinity ratio	Stereotype spread
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement		
Marche	58.3	53.4	109.2	Spread Among women
Campania	41.7	41.8	99.8	
Lazio	56.9	58.4	97.4	
Lombardia	59.5	63.3	94.0	
Valle d'Aosta	56.6	60.7	93.2	
Trentino-Alto Adige	55.2	59.5	92.8	
Veneto	58.0	62.6	92.7	
Sardegna	59.8	66.1	90.5	
Basilicata	46.0	51.5	89.3	
<b>Italy</b>	<b>50.9</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>89.1</b>	
Piemonte	55.6	62.9	88.4	Spread among men
Sicilia	40.7	46.5	87.5	
Toscana	57.1	66.9	85.4	
Emilia-Romagna	50.5	60.1	84.0	
Calabria	41.1	51.0	80.6	
Umbria	49.3	63.8	77.3	
Puglia	38.2	50.6	75.5	
Molise	38.4	51.2	75.0	
Abruzzo	30.5	40.9	74.6	
Liguria	47.8	64.7	73.9	
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	46.9	64.5	72.7	

Source: Personal data processing based on Istat data

### Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?

This stereotype, in a sense, is linked to the previous one, with the only difference that the previous stereotype focused on the possible or desired

economic inequality within the couple, while in this stereotype the man assumes the role of a true leadership recognized by all members of the family, that is, the one who must coordinate the actions, solve any problems and will be responsible for the decision-making consequences within the family.

Essentially, the relationship of the spouses is influenced by the one holding power in the couple on economic management, sexuality, relations with the world outside the family, etc.

In past times, in Italian society, there was a widespread belief that men had to hold the decision-making part in the family, but today the opposition to this stereotype reaches quite high percentages. In the country as a whole, men express their opposition with 75.4% and women with a remarkable 82.9%. Looking at the age groups, the highest percentage for both men (78.6%) and women (85.6%) is reached in the age group (45-59 years) but women, in all age groups, have higher percentages than men, which is therefore the sign of a clear opposition to the stereotype by the female sex (Table 7).

**Table 7 – Age groups**

Age groups	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
18-29	74.2	81.5
30-44	73.4	83.4
45-59	78.6	85.6
60-74	74.0	79.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>75.4</i>	<i>82.9</i>

Source: Istat

**Table 8 – Educational level**

Educational degree	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
Elementary/no degree	53.7	68.6
Junior High School	73.8	78.5
High School diploma	76.6	86.9
University degree or diploma	85.2	91.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>75.4</i>	<i>82.9</i>

Source: Istat

A similar trend can be found in the educational degree of the respondents. The disagreement percentages for both sexes raise as their level of education increases. Significantly, women's opposition to this stereotype is always greater than men's one. Therefore, it is not superfluous to point out that the disagreement with the stereotype registered in women with the highest level of education (University degree or diploma) reaches almost 92% even if the 85.2% registered among men is not negligible (Table 8).

As already pointed out in the analysis of the age groups and educational degree of the interviewees, the lesser diffusion of the stereotype among women is also found in the masculinity ratio, placed in descending order and constructed for all regions (Table 9).

This ratio is below 100 in all regions, which justifies the increased spread of stereotypes among the male population. The Italian value of the masculinity ratio is 91%, higher than 12 regions.

**Table 9 – Stereotype spread among men and women**

Regions	Men	Women	Masculinity ratio	Stereotype spread
	Complete disagreement	Complete Disagreement		
Abruzzo	71.7	73.3	97.8	
Sicilia	71.9	74.2	96.9	
Campania	64.7	67.7	95.6	
Lombardia	81.7	87.2	93.7	
Valle d'Aosta	80.3	85.9	93.5	
Trentino-Alto Adige	77.0	82.6	93.2	
Veneto	84.2	90.5	93.0	
Toscana	79.5	86.5	91.9	
<b>Italy</b>	<b>75.4</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>91.0</b>	
Lazio	76.4	84.1	90.8	
Marche	74.8	82.8	90.3	<i>Spread among men</i>
Emilia-Romagna	76.2	85.0	89.6	
Molise	67.9	77.0	88.2	
Umbria	74.7	84.8	88.1	
Sardegna	82.7	94.0	88.0	
Piemonte	77.0	88.6	86.9	
Calabria	69.1	80.7	85.6	
Basilicata	64.9	76.2	85.2	
Liguria	73.2	86.5	84.6	
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	74.8	89.3	83.8	
Puglia	64.9	80.6	80.5	

Source: Personal data processing based on Istat data

### Are men less suited to housework?

It is useful to understand whether it is right that in Italy women sacrifice part of their free time or the commitments that work requires to devote themselves to the daily care of the family or, maybe, if the biggest problem of Italian males is that they are ashamed to say they have become househusbands. Are men good at housework a valuable help for women or have to be considered guilty of committing an invasion in a female field?

Unfortunately, in the twenty-first century, perhaps for a mere matter of tradition and mentality, in a society where it is customary to define women as

"emancipated", most of the household chores "belong" to women. Tradition and mentality play a predominant role in the men who lived their youth in a period when the interchangeability of roles, between parents, was not the norm.

In fact, the percentage of disagreement on the submitted question, for both sexes, is in balance: 47.0% for men and 47.3% for women. The low rate of response recorded in women (47.3%) denotes the male tendency to repeat over time behaviours and ways of thinking learned in the family of origin.

In a couple, the common goal must be the well-being of the family. In the daily housekeeping there must be no defined male or female chores and an alternation or interchangeability of roles should prevail. All that for the sake of the family but, of course, without altering their personality.

All this seems to have been understood by young generations (18-29 years), who seem to be moving towards the overcoming of this stereotype with response rates above 50%: 51.6% for boys and 52.4% for girls. Response rates decrease as age increases for both sexes. Therefore, the stereotype is more entrenched among adult age groups (Table 10).

On the other hand, the response rate for the educational degree increases as the level of education increases. As for the lack of adaptability of men to do household chores, the level of disagreement does not reach 30.0% for men and women belonging to the elementary/no degree educational level, while for those who have a university degree or diploma, equally for both sexes, this level does not exceed 60.0% (Table 11).

**Table 10 – Age groups**

Age groups	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
18-29	51.6	52.4
30-44	48.7	49.4
45-59	48.5	49.1
60-74	39.1	39.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>47.0</i>	<i>47.3</i>

Source: Istat

**Table 11 – Educational level**

Educational degree	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
Elementary/no degree	28.7	27.8
Junior High School	44.3	42.2
High School diploma	48.5	52.5
University degree or diploma	56.7	57.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>47.0</i>	<i>47.3</i>

Source: Istat

Analyzing the masculinity ratio in Italian regions, ordered in a decreasing way, it is evident that the answers about this stereotype have divided our country into two groups. In the first group (9 regions) there are the regions that have a masculinity ratio value greater than 100 and where the disagreement to the submitted question is more widespread among men than women with a marked difference in the Campania region (128.0%), while in the second group (11 regions) women's greater dissent prevails (Table 12).

**Table 12 - Stereotype spread among men and women**

Regions	Men	Women	Masculinity ratio	Stereotype spread
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement		
Campania	43.4	33.9	128.0	Spread among women
Molise	39.1	34.3	114.0	
Basilicata	36.9	33.9	108.8	
Calabria	43.7	40.4	108.2	
Sicilia	39.4	36.6	107.7	
Abruzzo	45.0	42.0	107.1	
Lombardia	53.5	51.4	104.1	
Lazio	46.8	46.5	100.6	
Umbria	47.6	47.3	100.6	
Toscana	48.8	49.1	99.4	Spread among men
<b>Italy</b>	<b>47.0</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>99.4</b>	
Puglia	42.1	42.4	99.3	
Trentino-Alto Adige	53.0	54.4	97.4	
Veneto	51.3	54.2	94.6	
Emilia-Romagna	48.5	52.9	91.7	
Piemonte	45.9	52.1	88.1	
Valle d'Aosta	46.6	53.0	87.9	
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	49.2	57.1	86.2	
Liguria	45.3	54.0	83.9	
Marche	41.6	52.4	79.4	
Sardegna	47.6	62.4	76.3	

Source: Personal data processing based on Istat data

### **For men, rather than women, is it very important to succeed at work?**

Wrongly, in Italian society, work for men and women is evaluated in a different way. It is considered as a pillar of their identity and social role for men, and as a need for subsistence for women. Sometimes, however, a specific motivation takes over: men "must" be successful at work not to lose their women's appreciation or even because the loss of prestige could compromise the relationship with them.

The submitted question aims at finding out whether the opinion expressed by the respondents leads to a rooting of the stereotype and whether succeeding at work is considered as an important value by men. Moreover, it helps understand women’s level of disagreement and whether the female interviewees think that men having a leading role in the world of work is a right thing.

As far as the whole country is concerned, the disagreement is predominant among men (51.4%) by about 3 percentage points compared to that of women (48.6%). This male majority is also felt in the age groups, with the exception of the very young people age group (18-29 years), where the belief in the stereotype is more widespread among girls (51.8%) with a difference of 1 percentage point.

Among the age groups of men, the greatest disagreement is found in the adult age groups (45-59 years), where the response rate reaches about 55.0% (Table 13).

As already seen for the other questions, the trend in response rates, for both men and women, follows the increasing trend, starting from the lower to the higher educational level, but in this case, there is a peculiarity concerning women: the response rate given by those having a university degree or diploma decreases (50.2%) compared to that of women with a High School diploma (52.1%) (Table 14).

**Table 13 – Age groups**

Age groups	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
18-29	50.8	51.8
30-44	49.3	45.0
45-59	54.9	50.4
60-74	49.2	48.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>51.4</i>	<i>48.6</i>

Source: Istat

**Table 14 – Educational level**

Educational degree	Men	Women
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement
Elementary/no degree	31.6	39.3
Junior High School	50.8	47.0
High School diploma	53.6	52.1
University degree or diploma	55.2	50.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>51.4</i>	<i>48.6</i>

Source: Istat

The series of the masculinity ratio of the Italian regions in descending order shows that in 14 regions this ratio is greater than 100 (Table 15).

**Table 15 – Stereotype spread among men and women**

Regions	Men	Woman	Masculinity ratio	Stereotype spread
	Complete disagreement	Complete disagreement		
Abruzzo	56,6	45,0	125,8	Spread among men
Piemonte	56,5	46,1	122,6	
Lombardia	51,6	46,7	110,5	
Valle d'Aosta	63,0	57,1	110,3	
Lazio	50,8	46,4	109,5	
Emilia-Romagna	55,8	51,7	107,9	
Marche	60,5	56,5	107,1	
Sardegna	59,1	55,3	106,9	
Sicilia	46,0	43,1	106,7	
Veneto	55,4	52,1	106,3	
<b>Italy</b>	<b>51,4</b>	<b>48,6</b>	<b>105,8</b>	
Umbria	53,2	51,1	104,1	
Trentino-Alto Adige	53,6	51,8	103,5	
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	51,8	50,9	101,8	
Puglia	50,0	49,5	101,0	
Toscana	54,2	56,8	95,4	Spread among women
Liguria	48,0	50,4	95,2	
Campania	40,8	43,2	94,4	
Calabria	48,9	52,3	93,5	
Basilicata	44,6	52,6	84,8	
Molise	43,7	52,9	82,6	

Source: Personal data processing based on Istat data

The gap is very marked in Abruzzo (125.8%) and Piemonte (122.6%), where the masculinity ratio exceeds 120.0%.

In the other 6 regions, however, this belief is more widespread among women than men and the ratio of masculinity is less than 100. Again, there is a marked gap in Basilicata (84.8%) and Molise (82.6%).

### **The regions where stereotypes are more deeply rooted among men**

In this regard, to have a homogeneous classification of the regions under observation, referring to men only and through cluster analysis, regions were grouped according to the indicator "complete disagreement" concerning the five questions included in the Istat survey, thus obtaining five clusters (Table 16).

From the analysis of the clusters, as far as men are concerned, the regions where stereotypes are less widespread belong to cluster 3 – (Lombardia, Veneto, Piemonte, Toscana and Lazio), where average values higher than the other groups and the Italian one are found in the following

questions: “Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?” (76.2%), “Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?” (79.8%) and “Are men less suited to housework?” (49.3%) and cluster 2 – (Valle d'Aosta, Sardegna and Marche) with answers to the following two questions: “Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?” (58.2%) and “For men, rather than for women, is it very important to be successful at work?” (60.9%). It is not superfluous to point out that the rejection of the stereotypes under consideration comes from men concentrated in the North-Central regions of our country with the sole exception of Sardegna.

On the other hand, there are regions where stereotypes about the role of both sexes are more concentrated among men. As many as four questions have been answered with an average value level lower both to the other groups and to the national one by the members of the regions inserted in the cluster 4 (Campania, Basilicata, Molise, Sicilia, Calabria and Puglia), that is “Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers - give priority to men over women?” (59.2%), “Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?” (67.2%), “Are men less suited to housework?” (40.8%) and “For men, rather than for women, is it very important to be successful at work?” (45.7%). On the contrary, in the region inserted in cluster 5 (Abruzzo) men are less convinced that “Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?”, as the percentage is very low (30.5%).

**Table 16 – Average values per cluster – Men**

Stereotype	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Italy
1) Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?	72.7	74.1	<b>76.2</b>	<b>59.2</b>	64.6	70.4
2) Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?	49.9	<b>58.2</b>	57.4	41.0	<b>30.5</b>	50.9
3) Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?	75.2	79.3	<b>79.8</b>	<b>67.2</b>	71.7	75.4
4) Are men less suited to housework?	48.7	45.3	<b>49.3</b>	<b>40.8</b>	45.0	47.0
5) For men, rather than for women, is it very important to be successful at work?	52.5	<b>60.9</b>	53.7	<b>45.7</b>	56.6	51.4
Regions' total	5	3	5	6	1	20

Considering this aspect, it is easy to verify that the acceptance of the stereotypes under consideration comes from men concentrated all in the South of Italy.

### **The regions where stereotypes are more deeply rooted among women**

Referring only to women, the cluster analysis identifies four groups of regions that are homogeneous within them and based on the "complete disagreement" indicator concerning the five questions included in the Istat survey (Table 17).

Examining the groups, the regions where stereotypes are less widespread belong to cluster 4 - Piemonte, Lombardia, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Liguria, Veneto, Toscana and Sardegna, where average values, higher than in the other groups and in the Italian one, are found in the following questions: *"Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?"* (77.0%), *"Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?"* (64.4%), *"Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?"* (88.9%) and *"Are men are less suited to housework?"* (54.3%) – and cluster 3 - Umbria, Lazio, Trentino-Alto Adige, Emilia-Romagna, Valle d'Aosta and Marche, as for question: *"For men, rather than women, is it very important to be successful at work?"* (52.4%). Also for the female sex, the geographic situation is similar to men's one. The refusal to the stereotypes under consideration comes from women belonging to the Centre-North regions of our country, always with the sole exception of Sardegna.

On the other hand, the regions in which the rooting of stereotypes is most widespread among women are included in cluster 2 (Abruzzo, Sicilia and Campania). Also in this cluster four questions have been answered with a lower average value level than both the other groups and the national one, that is: *"Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?"* (43.1%), *"Is it man who has to make the most important decisions concerning the family?"* (71.7%), *"Are men less suited to housework?"* (37.5%) and *"For men, rather than for women, is it very important to be successful at work?"* (43.8%), while in cluster 1 (Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria and Molise) it is widely believed, among women, that *"Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?"* (58.9%). The geographical situation does not change: the rooting of stereotypes, even for women, is widespread among those belonging to the South of Italy.

**Table 17 – Average values per cluster - Women**

<i>Stereotype</i>	<i>Cluster 1</i>	<i>Cluster 2</i>	<i>Cluster 3</i>	<i>Cluster 4</i>	<i>Italy</i>
<i>1) Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?</i>	<b>58.9</b>	59.1	72.5	<b>77.0</b>	70.5
<i>2) Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?</i>	51.1	<b>43.1</b>	59.3	<b>64.4</b>	57.1
<i>3) Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?</i>	78.6	<b>71.7</b>	84.2	<b>88.9</b>	82.9
<i>4) Are men less suited to housework?</i>	37.8	<b>37.5</b>	51.1	<b>54.3</b>	47.3
<i>5) For men, rather than for women, is it very important to be successful at work?</i>	51.8	<b>43.8</b>	<b>52.4</b>	51.2	48.6
<i>Regions' total</i>	4	3	6	7	20

### **The regions where stereotypes are more deeply rooted among both sexes**

Every comment seems superfluous. Starting from the classification, with a clear distinction between men and women of the regions in clusters, Italy appears divided into two parts. People of the Central-North regions reject any kind of stereotype in a decisive way, while in the South stereotypes are very rooted. The cluster analysis of both sexes, of course, confirms this orientation.

In Table 18, which shows the average values per cluster, it is evident the increasing progression that these values undergo passing from cluster 1 to cluster 3. This means that in cluster 1 (Puglia, Calabria, Molise, Basilicata, Sicilia, Campania and Abruzzo) there are only southern regions that present a wide spread of stereotypes, while in cluster 3 (Piemonte, Toscana, Lombardia, Veneto and Sardegna) there are regions where the phenomenon is very limited.

**Table 18** – Average values per cluster – Men and Women

<i>Stereotype</i>	<i>Cluster 1</i>	<i>Cluster 2</i>	<i>Cluster 3</i>
<i>1) Under conditions of labor shortage, should employers give priority to men over women?</i>	<b>59.4</b>	73.1	<b>77.1</b>
<i>2) Is it above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family?</i>	<b>43.6</b>	56.7	<b>61.1</b>
<i>3) Is it man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family?</i>	<b>71.8</b>	80.6	<b>85.2</b>
<i>4) Are men less suited to housework?</i>	<b>39.5</b>	49.8	<b>51.7</b>
<i>5) For men, rather than for women, is it very important to be successful at work?</i>	<b>47.8</b>	53.3	<b>53.4</b>
<i>Regions' total</i>	7	8	5

## Conclusion

Stereotypes are beliefs, more or less shared in society, that a group shares with respect to another group, thus creating immutable models that lead to the crystallization of reality. Gender role stereotypes are among the most frequent and approved by a reference society.

What generally emerges from the analysis carried out on the main results of the Istat Survey on traditional gender roles stereotypes is that Italy is practically divided into two. In the Central-North part, according to the answers given to the submitted questions, it is clear that the stereotypes proposed have a very limited effect on the male and female population. On the contrary, the same stereotypes are very rooted in the South.

When the specific questions are analyzed in order to create a ranking of the most rooted stereotypes, and through the average values of the cluster carried out to both sexes (Table 18), what is clear is that: 1) there is a belief that men are less suited than women to housework; 2) for men, rather than women, it is very important to be successful at work; 3) it is above all man who must provide for the economic needs of the family; 4) under conditions of labor shortage, employers should give priority to men over women and finally 5) it is man who must make the most important decisions concerning the family.

As demonstrated here, gender role stereotypes are still present in our society and are also transversal to the two genders. Consequently, also the interventions to be implemented in the labor market must be transversal, aiming at the realization of a humanized vision of work where people and not tasks or roles occupy a central place. A new, inclusive and sustainable sociality is at stake (Sacco G., Sacco P., Zizza A., 2021). The emancipation and economic autonomy of women is, especially in the South, hampered by

cultural factors that persist. Sometimes it is women who want to dedicate themselves only to the family, thus neglecting the possibility of a working career and giving up their free time, so as not to "betray" the behaviours and stereotypes acquired in the family of origin.

Fortunately, as previously shown, younger generations with a higher level of education want a more socially active life and a less widespread adherence to stereotypes. This poor adherence to stereotypes has been possible thanks to gender education. Messages sent to young people especially through schools are starting to hit the mark. This is the reason why stereotypes are less common among young people with a high level of education.

It is a cultural revolution. A civilized and democratic country strives for a more just and balanced society, and as such, it must involve all men and women. Women should work in better conditions. Motherhood should not be considered as an obstacle to work, but compatible to working life. Housework should not be done exclusively by women, but by men as well, thus creating a balanced occupation on equal terms. A more equitable division of domestic work should include better support measures for the family, like the provision of childcare services and the promotion of corporate welfare systems for female workers. The increasing feminization of the labor force requires greater flexibility in the labor market, less uncoordinated working time and social time with care systems that in the future must make up for the change that has already occurred in the family scenario (Sacco G. 1995).

Despite the fact that great progress has been made towards gender equality, in order to give priority to educational and training forms that help bridge the gap, it is therefore essential a change of mentality that abandons the still persistent gender role stereotypes.

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