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Social Evaluation of Individual Welfare Effects from Income Taxation

Empirical Evidence Based on Italian Data for Married Couples

Abstract:
This paper discusses methodological principles for social evaluation of tax systems and tax reforms when concern is primarily turned to who gains and who loses. The discussion is followed by an empirical analysis based on Italian household data. Using a household microeconometric labor supply model we have simulated behavioral responses and welfare gains and losses for married couples resulting from replacing the Italian tax system as of 1993 by proportional taxation.

Keywords: Labor supply, taxation, welfare gains and losses, social welfare

JEL classification: D19, D69, J22

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1. Introduction

Since the 1970s there has been a growing concern in Western societies regarding the loss in efficiency due to disincentives and distortions on worker behavior caused by progressive taxation. The perceived disincentives on labor supply appeared to be the major justification for reducing marginal tax rates in many European nations during the 80s and the early 90s. However, relaxing the degree of progression in taxes is often questioned since this reform may bring about unacceptable distributional effects. Traditionally, empirical analyses of taxation, labor supply and welfare ignore distributional effects and solely report aggregated equivalent variation, compensating variation or deadweight loss, or welfare effects for a "representative" individual. Measures of this kind are not particularly helpful when concern is primarily turned to questions about who gains and who loses. To deal with these questions a microeconometric model for simulating the distribution of gains and losses over households is required. The model which is employed in this study relies on an explicit utility representation of household preferences. Thus, we may define monetary measures of welfare in terms of the indirect utility function. We draw on King (1983) by deriving measures of welfare from equivalent incomes defined in terms of a reference household and the prices this household faces. The introduction of a reference state is made in order to obtain a common reference price vector as a basis for comparing welfare across households, and is motivated by the fact that the price of leisure in general will vary across individuals and will change when taxes are changed. However, since the conclusions of the analysis may depend on the choice of reference state a sensitivity study will be provided. Like Hausman and Poterba (1987) and Bosworth and Burtless (1992) in their evaluation of the US tax reforms we focus on labor supply and welfare effects for married couples. Our approach differs, however, from theirs by treating labor supply of husband and wife as a joint decision problem.

As an alternative to our approach Blackorby et al. (1994) propose a method for evaluation of social welfare that is independent of the choice of reference state. Moreover, they provide conditions under which social welfare prescriptions are independent from reference prices. In general, the conditions turn out to require fairly restrictive specifications of both household preferences and social welfare functions. This is demonstrated by the fact that price independence is obtained only when preferences are homothetic, which is different from the specification of preferences in the model used in the present study. However, there is a trade-off between price and/or reference state independence and flexibility or plausibility of preferences. To rely on homothetic preferences in order to obtain price independence seems to be an extreme choice along this trade-off. Whether and to what extent welfare

prescriptions are price independent is an empirical question which can be answered by a sensitivity analysis where results based on different reference states are produced.

The purpose of this paper is, first, to discuss methodological principles for social evaluation of income taxation and tax reforms, and, second, to present an empirical analysis based on Italian household data. Using a microeconometric household labor supply model we have simulated behavioral responses and welfare gains and losses for married couples resulting from replacing the Italian tax system as of 1993 by proportional taxation. The methodology for welfare evaluation is explained in Section 2, whilst a brief outline of the microeconometric labor supply model which we use in the analysis of tax reforms is given in the appendix. The simulation results are reported in Section 3. Section 4 provides a summary and a discussion.

2. Interhousehold comparison and social evaluation of individual welfare gains and losses

Applied welfare analyses of tax reforms must deal with comparison and social evaluation of the changes in welfare of different households or individuals. As will be demonstrated below the conclusions attained from these types of analyses may depend crucially on the informational basis of the employed evaluative system.

The standard approach for determining the change in welfare resulting from tax reforms is to employ monetary measures like compensation variation and equivalent variation. These measures are defined in terms of money values of indirect utilities. For given consumer prices and a reference tax regime f^* the money metric utility y_{ik} is defined implicitly by

$$\tilde{V}_i\left(y_{ik}, f^*\right) = \tilde{V}_i\left(I_i, f_k\right), \quad k = 0,1, \tag{1}$$

where $\tilde{V}_i$ and I_i are the indirect utility function and exogeneous income of household i.[1] The pre- and post-reform tax regimes, denoted f_0 and f_1, are common to all individuals. Thus, y_{ik} affords household i the same level of utility under tax regime f^* as that attained under tax regime f_k with exogeneous income I_i. It may then appear natural to employ the change in the money metric utilities, caused by moving from tax system f_0 to tax system f_1, as a measure of the welfare change. This measure, which is given by

$$WG_i = y_{i1} - y_{i0}, \tag{2}$$

[1] For expository reasons we suppress the dependence of the reference tax regime in the notation of the money metric utility.

clearly depends on the choice of reference tax system. Thus, a specific choice of reference tax system represents a particular normalization of a household's ordinal utility function even though WG_i is invariant with respect to monotonic increasing transformations of the utility function $\tilde{V}_i$. When the post-reform tax system f_1 is taken as reference system, i.e. $f^* = f_1$, then the *compensating variation* CV_i, defined by

(3) $$CV_i = I_i - y_{i0},$$

emerges as a special case of WG_i. By inserting (3) in (1) when $f^* = f_1$ it follows that CV_i may be defined implicitly by

(4) $$\tilde{V}_i\left(I_i - CV_i, f_1\right) = \tilde{V}_i\left(I_i, f_0\right).$$

As an alternative to CV we may use *equivalent variation* (EV) which emerges from (2) when the initial tax system is taken as reference system.

Compensating variation, equivalent variation and the various other measures defined by (2) represent alternative measures of the welfare change of moving from tax system f_0 to tax system f_1. These measures differ with respect to the choice of reference tax system. Thus, the magnitudes of the CVs may differ from the corresponding magnitudes of alternative welfare measures defined by (2), for example the EVs. The sign of CV_i, EV_i and any other WG_i will, however, be the same for any choice of reference system since WG_i for different reference systems represent alternative measures of the same utility difference. Thus, irrespective of choice of reference state we are nevertheless capable to determine the proportions of winners and losers of the reform from (2).

As emphasized by Sen (1974), King (1983) and Hammond (1990) one needs to compare gains of some to losses of others when concern is basically turned to the distributional impact of the reform. As a first step we might introduce interhousehold comparability *without* cardinality which allows a description of how the reform affects the *rankings* of households in the distribution of household welfare. But, of course this approach does not solve the problem of comparing the magnitudes of gains and losses. Alternatively, we may use the householdspecific WGs as basis for social judgments. The WGs or utility differences are then required to be interhousehold comparable. Judgments based on interhousehold comparison of utility differences allow for statements such as

(5) $$\tilde{V}_i\left(I_i, f_1\right) - \tilde{V}_i\left(I_i, f_0\right) > \tilde{V}_j\left(I_j, f_1\right) - \tilde{V}_j\left(I_j, f_0\right),$$

which means that household i gains more than household j from the tax reform. Alternatively, the statement (5) may be expressed in terms of money values of utility differences as defined in (2). The informational structure given by (5) allows comparisons of gains and losses of a reform as captured by the WG-measures.

Aggregating the household-specific WGs as basis for social judgement may, however, be less meaningful since the normative significance of aggregation across the distribution of WGs is still not clear. This is due to the fact that the price of leisure and the level of the pre-reform utility vary between households. The latter point simply means that we do not know whether a household with, say, a large WG had a low or high pre-reform utility. To deal with these problems King (1983) suggested to base the comparison of gains and losses on equivalent incomes defined in terms of the state of a reference household. Equivalent income $\left(y_{ik}^{R}\right)$ for household i is then defined as that level of (exogenous) income that affords the reference household (R) the same level of utility under the reference tax regime f^{*} as household i attains under the tax regime f_k, i.e. y_{ik}^{R} is defined implicitly by

$$\tilde{V}_R\left(y_{ik}^{R}, f^{*}\right) = \tilde{V}_i\left(I_i, f_k\right); \quad k = 0,1, \tag{6}$$

Thus, the difference between y_{i1}^{R} and y_{i0}^{R} emerges as a natural measure of the welfare effect of the reform to household i. Since the money values of the households' utilities are defined in terms of a reference household who faces fixed prices, this measure can be considered as a specific choice of WG that allows comparison of welfare changes across households . Thus, we denote it *comparable welfare gain* (CWG),

$$CWG_i = y_{i1}^{R} - y_{i0}^{R}. \tag{7}$$

Application of (7) requires utilities to be cardinal comparable across households. This informational structure allows gains and losses of different households to be compared. Moreover, since welfare comparisons between households are made in terms of the money metric utility of a reference household, interhousehold comparable CWGs also allow the money metric utility levels of households to be compared. However, as is also recognized by King (1983) welfare comparisons based on equivalent incomes and comparable welfare gains may depend on the choice of reference household and reference prices. Thus, it is important to examine the sensitivity of the results with regard to the choice of reference state.

An alternative to the approach above is to employ WG as a measure of welfare change and relate the householdspecific WGs to welfare relevant attributes such as age, number of children and pre-reform income. This type of approach is in line with the suggestions of Hammond (1990). In this

framework households' observed incomes and/or other welfare relevant attributes form the basis for comparisons of gains and losses and thus serve the same purpose as the reference household and equivalent income in the CWG-approach. However, although the comparisons of WGs are closely related to other welfare relevant variables the interhousehold comparability is weakened due to the fact that the WGs are computed at different prices of leisure and different household characteristics.

When evaluating the welfare effects of a tax system and/or a tax reform it may be useful to summarize the gains and losses by a social welfare function. The simplest welfare function is the one that adds up the comparable welfare gains (CWGs) over households. The objection to the linear additive welfare function is that the households are given equal welfare weights, independent of whether they are poor or rich. Concern for distributive justice requires, however, that poor households are assigned larger welfare weights than rich households. This structure is captured by the following family of welfare functions,

(8)
$$W_{ak} = \begin{cases} \dfrac{1}{1-a} \displaystyle\int y^{1-a}\, dG_k(y), & a \geq 0,\ a \neq 1 \\ \displaystyle\int \log y\, dG_k(y), & a = 1 \end{cases}$$

where G_k is the distribution of equivalent incomes under tax regime f_k and a is the inequality aversion parameter which shows increasing inequality aversion with increasing values.

Let $\tilde{y}_{ak}$ be the equally distributed equivalent level of equivalent income derived from (8). Thus, $\tilde{y}_{ak}$ is given by

(9)
$$\tilde{y}_{ak} = \begin{cases} \left[\displaystyle\int y^{1-a}\, dG_k(y)\right]^{\frac{1}{1-a}} & ,\quad a \geq 0,\ a \neq 1 \\ \exp\left(\displaystyle\int \log y\, dG_k(y)\right) & ,\quad a = 1 \end{cases}$$

Then, following Kolm(1969) and Atkinson (1970) a family of inequality measures may be defined as

(10)
$$I_{ak} = 1 - \frac{\tilde{y}_{ak}}{\mu_k},$$

where $\mu_k = \tilde{y}_{0k}$ is the mean level of equivalent income under tax regime k.

As demonstrated by King (1983) we can interpret the ratio defined by

(11)
$$\gamma_a = \frac{\tilde{y}_{a1}}{\tilde{y}_{a0}} = \frac{\mu_1\left(1-I_{a1}\right)}{\mu_0\left(1-I_{a0}\right)}$$

as the equal proportionate increase in pre-reform equivalent incomes which would give a level of social welfare equal to that attained under the post-reform tax system. King (1983) denotes γ the proportionate social gain. Since W_{ak} reduces to the sum of equivalent incomes when $a = 0$, γ_0 is simply the ratio between the mean equivalent incomes under the post- and the pre-reform systems. Thus, γ_0 only captures the efficiency effects of the reform.

The normative foundation of (8) and (9) relies on the parallel with the expected utility theory of choice under uncertainty. Similarly, we may use the non-expected utility theory (see Yaari, 1987, 1988) to justify application of the following welfare functions,

$$\text{(12)} \qquad \tilde{W}_{bk} = \begin{cases} \dfrac{b}{b-1} \int y\left(1 - G_k^{b-1}(y)\right) dG_k(y), & b \geq 0,\ b \neq 1 \\ -\int y \log\left(G_k(y)\right) dG_k(y), & b = 1 \end{cases}$$

where b is the inequality aversion parameter. Note that the inequality aversion decreases when b increases. It follows by straightforward calculations that $\tilde{W}_{bk} \leq \mu_k$ and that $\tilde{W}_{bk}$ is equal to the mean μ_k if and only if G_k is the egalitarian distribution. Thus, $\tilde{W}_{bk}$ can be interpreted as the equally distributed equivalent level of equivalent income under tax regime k.

Aaberge (1995) used (12) as basis for deriving the following family of inequality measures,

$$\text{(13)} \qquad C_{bk} = 1 - \frac{\tilde{W}_{bk}}{\mu_k},\ b \geq 1.$$

Note that $\{C_{bk}, b \geq 2\}$ is equal to the "generalized" Gini family introduced by Mehran (1976). It can be easily verified that C_{2k} is equal to the Gini coefficient. Moreover, Aaberge (1995) demonstrated that C_{1k} exhibits more inequality aversion than the Gini coefficient which in return exhibits more inequality aversion than C_{3k}.

Analogously to (8)-(11), (12) forms the basis for the following alternative measure of proportionate social gain,

$$\text{(14)} \qquad \xi_b = \frac{\tilde{W}_{b1}}{\tilde{W}_{b0}} = \frac{\mu_1\left(1 - C_{b1}\right)}{\mu_0\left(1 - C_{b0}\right)}.$$

In the limiting case when $b \to \infty$, ξ_b reduces to the ratio between the means of the post- and pre-reform equivalent incomes.

The essential difference between the social welfare measures derived from (8) and (12) is revealed by their sensitivity to transfers. While the transfer properties of I_{ak} and γ_a solely depend on

the choice of the inequality parameter a, the transfer sensitivity properties of C_{bk} and ξ_b depend on the form of the distribution(s) of equivalent income as well as on the choice of the inequality aversion parameter b. This means that the weighting-profile on transfers will depend on the relative occurence of small, medium-sized and large equivalent incomes.

3. Empirical results based on Italian data

The labor supply model outlined in the Appendix has been estimated on Italian data for married couples in 1993. The estimation results and the labor supply elasticities have been reported and discussed by Aaberge et al. (1998b). This paper uses the estimated labor supply model as a basis for examining the efficiency and welfare effects of the Italian tax system as of 1993. Note that the model we use takes simultaneously into account

- both spouses' choices
- exact representation of income taxes
- constraints on the distribution of hours.

Recently, there have been a few empirical studies of labor supply which account for constraints on available jobs and hours. Blundell, Ham and Meghir (1987) allow for involuntary employment and Ilmakunnas and Pudney (1990) and Dickens and Lundberg (1993) impose restrictions on available hours. We refer to Aaberge et al. (1998a) for a discussion of differences between these approaches and our approach.

For the purpose of comparison we replace the 1993 tax rules by a proportional taxation of personal income. The proportional tax system may then be viewed both as a reference tax and as a tax reform. The estimated microeconometric model is employed to simulate labor supply and distributional effects as well as the proportional tax rate, under the constraint of a given total tax revenue. The proportional tax rate is simulated to be 18.4 per cent whilst the average tax in 1993 was 20.4 per cent. The justification for replacing current taxes by proportional taxation is that proportional tax on wage income is considered by many to yield the least distortions among tax systems that can be implemented. However, a proportional (flat) tax system is in any case a helpful device for interpreting efficiency and welfare effects of alternative non-proportional tax systems.

Table 1. Participation rates, annual hours of work, gross income, disposable income and taxes for married couples under alternative tax regimes by deciles of disposable household income under 1993-taxes

		Annual hours of work		Households, 1000 ITL 1993		
Decile	Participation rates, per cent	Given participation	In the total population	Gross income	Taxes	Dis-posable income

		M	F	M	F	M	F			
1993-tax rules	1	95.6	14.1	1571	1030	1501	145	15221	525	14695
	2	97.5	19.9	1832	1209	1787	241	24372	2109	22263
	3-8	98.9	43.8	1991	1546	1970	677	48187	8960	39227
	9	99.3	65.5	2117	1731	2103	1133	85135	19983	65152
	10	99.4	74.4	2237	1828	2225	1361	128396	34365	94032
	All	98.5	43.7	1972	1590	1943	694	54225	11074	43150
Proportional taxes[1)]	1	95.4	19.6	1706	1264	1627	247	22933	4219	18714
	2	97.8	24.4	1924	1397	1882	342	31761	5845	25917
	3-8	99.0	44.7	2048	1585	2027	709	54142	9961	44181
	9	99.4	64.5	2162	1741	2150	1124	89459	16460	72999
	10	99.5	73.2	2267	1834	2257	1344	132888	24452	108435
	All	98.6	45.0	2036	1623	2008	731	60189	11074	49115

1) The proportional tax rate of 18.4 per cent is determined by model simulation when the tax revenue is held fixed equal to the 1993 tax revenue.

The simulation results of labor supply, gross household income, taxes and disposable household income are given in Table 1. Under the 1993 tax system the female participation rate is rather low, except for females belonging to the 20 per cent richest households. We also note that females' and males' hours supplied, given participation, increase with household income. Finally, we observe that the ratio of taxes to gross household income varies from around 3 per cent for the 10 per cent poorest households, 19 per cent for the 60 per cent in the middle and 27 per cent for the 10 per cent richest.

The results of Table 1 demonstrate that females and males in the 10 per cent poorest households are most responsive to the transition to proportional taxation. On average these females and males increase their annual labor supply by 100 hours. Note that even rich couples increase their hours supplied. The total effect is that hours supplied increase by 4 per cent.

There is one apparently counter-intuitive result in Table 1 which provides a good example of different implications of our labor supply model compared with a traditional approach based on a labor supply function. Since the flat tax (18.4 per cent) is higher than the first marginal tax under the 1993 system (10 per cent), we might expect a decrease in participation rates. A traditional model would assume that every hour of work (h) is equally available in the choice set. Moreover, given preferences, the utility associated to a particular point in the choice set would be uniquely determined by (h,w). Under these assumptions a traditional model would indeed predict a decrease in participation rates under proportional taxation. In the model presented in this paper, however, not every value of h is equally likely to be available in the choice set. Job opportunities offering less than 1846 or more than 2106 hours are relatively unlikely to be found. The opportunities in the range 1846-2106 imply lower tax rates under proportional taxation than under the 1993 tax system. Thus participation may become more attractive. Moreover, in our model the utility is random; there are unobserved components attached to every market and non-market opportunity which makes it more or less

desirable. Thus a market opportunity may turn out to be more desirable than a non-market opportunity (non-participation) even if the opposite is true when the comparison is made solely in terms of hours and disposable income. This effect is also confirmed by Table 2 which shows the flows between labor market states for men and women induced by the switch to a different tax system. In the case of men, Table 2 shows that essentially every employed men under the 1993 tax regime remains employed under flat taxation. Of those relatively few who are not employed in the pre-reform state, 12.5 per cent will choose employment after the reform. This seems to be caused by the fact that market jobs (mostly full-time jobs, in the case of men) become more attractive due to a lower tax burden under the flat tax regime. Turning to the women, the picture gets more complicated. The flow from non-participation to participation (6.3 per cent) can be given the same interpretation as above. However, here we also have a significant flow from participation to non-participation (5 per cent). This effect can be explained by the fact that women are more likely than men to be located on a job with few hours and/or low wage. For a woman in this position the employment status under flat taxation may become less attractive than under the 1993 tax regime, and even less attractive than non-participation. The increased female participation rate suggests, however, that the first effect prevails upon the second.

Table 2. Flows into and out of employment, per cent

Proportional taxation / 1993 tax rules	Not employed		Employed	
	M	F	M	F
Not employed	87.5	93.7	12.5	6.3
Employed	0.1	5.0	99.9	95.0

It is worth noting that the tax reform increases the average gross income and disposable income in all groups of households, but that taxes as proportion of income are increased for the poorest 20 per cent and decreased for the richest 20 per cent. The changes in diposable income are substantial, and are caused by increased labor supply and thus increased gross income for the poor and reduced tax burden for the rich. In accordance with these results we observe from Table 3 that the inequality in the distribution of gross and disposable household income, as measured by the Gini coefficient, increased by approximately 3 and 17 per cent, respectively. To give an interpretation of the magnitude of the change in the Gini coefficient we will employ the hypothetical intervention method suggested by Aaberge (1997). This method shows that the increase of 17 per cent for the Gini coefficient corresponds to imposing an equal-sized lump-sum tax of 17 per cent of the mean disposable household income in 1993 followed by redistributing the collected tax revenue (7 336 000

ITL per couple) as proportional transfers where each couple receives 17 per cent of its disposable income in 1993. Note that this intervention consists of regressive transfers and leaves the mean income unchanged. From the figures based on 1993-taxes, displayed in Table 1, we find that the hypothetical intervention reduces the disposable income of the 10 per cent poorest couples by 33 per cent and increases the disposable income of the 10 per cent richest couples by 9 per cent.

Table 3. Gini coefficients for the distributions of gross and disposable household income

Tax system	Gross income	Disposable income
1993 tax rules	.323	.283
Proportional taxation	.332	.332

The distributional effects of the reform that are reported in Table 3 solely concern income. However, since the replacement of the 1993 tax-system by proportional taxation leads to increased disposable income that for most couples are attained at the cost of lower leisure the welfare effects from the reform is not clear. To address this issue we report distributions of welfare gains and losses when WG defined by (2) is used as a measure of welfare. We use proportional taxation as reference tax system. The reason for this choice is that the evaluation of the equivalent income defined by (1) is computationally much more convenient than if we use a tax system which allows tax rates to be endogenous. Since the proportional tax system both acts as a tax reform and a reference tax system WG can in this case be interpreted as a measure of compensating variation.

Table 4. The distribution of WG by losers and winners, and by deciles of household income under 1993-taxes

All		Losers		Winners	
Decile	Mean WG, 1000 ITL	Per cent of population	Mean WG, 1000 ITL	Per cent of population	Mean WG, 1000 ITL
1	-2108	85.9	-3050	14.1	3664
2	-2147	81.0	-3390	19.0	3146
3-8	791	48.7	-2654	51.3	4062
9	5895	13.5	-3012	86.5	7286
10	13817	9.4	-6181	90.6	15878
All	2020	48.2	-2927	51.8	6627

Table 4 shows that

- 51.8 per cent of the population gains from the reform.

The majority of the 20 per cent poorest couples are losers whilst the majority of the 20 per cent richest couples are winners. We note that if the reform should have been decided upon in a referendum a majority would have economic motives to vote yes. Moreover, we find that the ratio of WG to tax revenue is equal to 18 per cent, which means that the cost of the 1993 tax system relative to a proportional tax system is 18 per cent when the sum of household-specific WGs is used as a measure of social welfare. However, as is demonstrated by Table 4 an aggregated measure of welfare may shadow for significant variation in welfare across couples. These results clearly support the view held by King (1983) and Hammond (1990) that it is of great importance to account for heterogeneity in applied welfare analysis.

Table 5 characterizes the 10 per cent who lose most and the 10 per cent who gain most. The latter group has on average a disposable income which is almost 2.5 times higher than the disposable income of the former. Note that the corresponding ratio of the mean disposable income of 10 per cent richest and 10 per cent poorest households is more than twice as high. This result indicates that some of the rich households are not included in the group of the 10 per cent who gain most, and that some of the poor households are not included in the group of the 10 per cent who lose most. A striking difference between the 10 per cent who lose and gain most is that in the households of winners both females and males work longer hours under the 1993 tax regime than males and females in the households of losers.

Table 5. Participation rates, annual hours of work, gross income, disposable income under 1993 rules and mean WG of the 10 per cent households who lose and gain most from a proportional tax reform

	Participation rates per cent		Annual hours of work (In the population)		Households, 1000 ITL		
	M	F	M	F	Gross income	Disposable income	WG (1000 ITL)
10 per cent who lose most	99.4	28.0	1732	367	33101	32067	-6146
10 per cent who gain most	99.4	57.5	2252	1935	112398	79082	19098

As emphasized in Section 2 welfare measures like compensating variation and equivalent variation or any other WG-measure do not provide an appropriate informational basis for making social evaluation. This is due to the fact that these measures are not designed to be comparable across households. To construct comparable measures of welfare we use a similar strategy as King (1983) and base comparisons of welfare gains and losses on equivalent incomes defined in terms of the state of a reference household and again using proportional taxation as the reference tax system. The corresponding measure of welfare gain, denoted comparable welfare gain (CWG), is defined by equations (6) and (7) in Section 2.

Table 6 gives the labor supply and household incomes under the two tax regimes by equivalent income rather than cash income under the 1993 tax regime. The median income household is used as reference household. If we compare Tables 1 and 6 we observe that labor supply and disposable incomes are more evenly distributed under the two tax regimes, when households are ranked according to equivalent income rather than cash income. This is simply due to the fact that households with low incomes normally work fewer hours than households with high incomes.

Table 6. Participation rates, annual hours of work, gross income, disposable income and taxes for married couples under alternative tax regimes by deciles of equivalent income[1)] under 1993-taxes.

Tax system	Decile	Participation rates, per cent		Annual hours of work: Given participation		Annual hours of work: In the total population		Households, 1000 ITL: Gross income	Taxes	Disposable income
		M	F	M	F	M	F			
1993-tax rules	1	98.24	39.58	1961	1488	1926	589	34364	5778	28586
	2	98.56	41.30	1965	1581	1937	653	39510	7117	32392
	3-8	98.61	43.45	1969	1585	1942	689	52649	10702	41947
	9	98.56	46.67	1978	1623	1949	759	69273	15360	53913
	10	98.47	48.43	2002	1672	1972	809	83208	18274	64933
	All	98.55	43.67	1972	1590	1943	694	54225	11074	43150
Proportional taxes[1)]	1	98.10	41.90	2074	1550	2034	649	42099	7744	34355
	2	98.52	42.55	2066	1635	2035	695	46917	8635	38282
	3-8	98.73	44.89	2032	1620	2006	728	58754	10810	47944
	9	98.52	47.73	2008	1637	1978	782	73714	13563	60151
	10	98.56	48.70	2026	1680	1997	818	86636	15941	70695
	All	98.61	45.02	2036	1623	2008	731	60189	11074	49115

1) Median income household is the reference household.

Table 7 gives the distribution of CWG by losers and winners. If we compare the results here with those set out in Table 4 we observe that the proportions of winners and losers in the total population are equal. This follows from the fact that the identification of these proportions solely requires ordinal utility information. No interpersonal comparability of utilities is required, and hence the estimates of the proportions of winners and loosers are independent of the method employed for measuring the magnitudes of gains and losses.

The results of Table 7 demonstrate that the structure of the estimated gains and losses is maintained when we change reference household, although the magnitudes of the welfare changes vary with the choice of reference household. From Table 8 we also observe that labor supply and incomes vary only slightly with the choice of reference household within the groups of winners and losers.

Figures 1-4 provide more detailed information on the distribution of gains and losses within decile groups of cash income and equivalent income. In Figure 1 households in each decile of the distribution of disposable cash income are re-ranked by the change in welfare measured by WG, and divided into subdecile groups according to the magnitude of the WGs. By arranging households in deciles of equivalent income rather than cash income, similar information as provided by Figure 1 is provided by Figures 2. For each decile of cash or equivalent income the vertical lines of Figures 1 and 2 connect the means of the first and tenth decile in the distribution of WG. Thus, the length of the vertical lines shows the dispersion of WGs within each decile group. As complementary information

we also display the mean and median WG within each decile group. By comparing Figures 1 and 2 we see that the dispersion of WGs increases with increasing household cash income and equivalent income, respectively. Moreover, when the WGs are related to cash income we find that the majority within the five lowest deciles lose from the reform and that the majority within the five highest deciles are winners. It follows from Figure 2 that this pattern almost disappear when equivalent income is used as a ranking criterion. However, when the welfare change is measured by CWG rather than by WG it is demonstrated by Figures 3-5 that the distribution of losers and winners across deciles is restored. Figures 3-5 also show that the structure of the distribution of CWG do not depend on the choice of reference household. The essential feature of this structure is that the households on average gain from replacing the 1993 tax system by proportional taxation, but that the efficiency gain is attained at the cost of increased inequality.

Table 7. The distribution of CWG by losers and winners, and by deciles of household equivalent income[1)] under 1993-taxes

Deciles	All			Losers				Winners			
	Mean CWG, 1000 ITL			Per cent of pop.	Mean CWG, 1000 ITL			Per cent of pop.	Mean CWG, 1000 ITL		
	I	II	III		I	II	III		I	II	III
1	-175	-122	-181	58.4	-10191	-5228	-5603	41.5	13858	7051	7539
2	740	457	389	56.5	-11287	-5641	-5993	43.5	16432	8310	8709
3-8	5717	2848	2862	48.0	-12050	-6029	-6190	52.0	22175	11058	11214
9	12831	6307	6241	39.9	-13201	-6607	-6544	60.1	30186	14926	14856
10	14832	7325	7292	39.1	-16663	-8299	-8119	60.9	35132	17460	17138
All	6253	3105	3091	48.2	-12206	-6121	-6282	51.8	23477	11703	11826

[1)] I = equivalent income is defined in terms of the poorest household under 1993-taxes
II = equivalent income is defined as terms of the median-income household under 1993-taxes
III = equivalent income is defined in terms of the richest household under 1993-taxes

Table 8. Participation rates, annual hours of work, gross income, disposable income under 1993 rules and mean CWG of the 10 per cent households who gain most and the 10 per cent households who lose most from a proportional tax reform

Reference household	Losers and winners	Participation rates. Per cent		Annual hours of work (In the population)		Households, 1000 ITL		
		M	F	M	F	Gross income	Disp. income	CWG
Poorest household	10 per cent who lose most	99.5	24.1	1691	303	30133	29431	-25659
	10 per cent who gain most	99.3	58.0	2244	1046	112450	79043	64767
Median-income household	10 per cent who lose most	99.5	23.8	1689	300	29864	29219	-12845
	10 per cent who gain most	99.3	58.0	2242	1046	112330	78958	32271
Richest household	10 per cent who lose most	99.5	23.5	1692	294	29158	28655	-13121
	10 per cent who gain most	99.3	57.6	2246	1042	111934	78647	32390

Although the detailed information provided by Tables 7 and 8 and Figures 2-4 are basic for evaluating the welfare effects of a tax system or a tax reform, it may be useful to summarize this information by means of a social welfare function. To this end we use W_{ak} defined by (8) for $a = 1, 1.5$ and 2 and $\tilde{W}_{bk}$ defined by (12) for $b = 1, 2$ and 3. The corresponding measures of social welfare have been calculated for both the pre- and post-reform distributions of equivalent income. The values of proportionate social gain based on γ_a defined by (11) and ξ_b defined by (14), measured as percentage changes $\tilde{\gamma}_a = 100(\gamma_a - 1)$ and $\tilde{\xi}_b = 100(\xi_b - 1)$, are given by Table 9. Note that $\tilde{\gamma}_0$ ignores distributional effects and solely captures the efficiency gains of the reform.

Table 9. Proportionate social gain of a flat tax reform. Per cent

Reference household	$\tilde{\gamma}_0$	$\tilde{\gamma}_1$	$\tilde{\gamma}_{1.5}$	$\tilde{\gamma}_2$	$\tilde{\xi}_1$	$\tilde{\xi}_2$	$\tilde{\xi}_3$
Poorest household	2.0	1.4	1.0	0.7	0.3	0.8	1.1
Median income household	2.2	1.4	1.0	0.5	0.2	0.8	1.2
Richest household	1.5	1.1	0.8	0.6	0	0.5	1.1

The results provided by Table 9 show that the social gain from introducing a proportional tax system is rather modest and that this conclusion is robust with respect to choice of social welfare function. This means that the gain in efficiency is attained at the cost of increased inequality in the distribution of equivalent income; actually, the increased inequality offsets the gain in efficiency when ξ_1 is used

as a measure of change in social welfare. Recall that ξ_1 exhibits more inequality aversion than ξ_2 and that ξ_2 exhibits more inequality aversion than ξ_3. The relative change in the inequality in the distribution of equivalent income resulting from the proportional tax reform is given by Table 10.

Table 10. Relative change in inequality in the distribution of equivalent income when the 1993 tax system is replaced by proportional taxation

	$100 \cdot \frac{I_{a1} - I_{a0}}{I_{a0}}$			$100 \cdot \frac{C_{b1} - C_{b0}}{C_{b0}}$		
Reference household	$a = 1$	$a = 1.5$	$a = 2$	$b = 1$	$b = 2$	$b = 3$
Poorest household	9.0	9.2	9.3	4.1	4.4	4.3
Median income household	8.9	9.2	9.5	4.2	4.6	4.0
Richest household	9.9	10.1	10.2	4.9	5.1	4.8

4. Summary and discussion

This study discusses methodological principles for social evaluation of income taxation and tax reforms with particular reference to distributional issues. The discussion is followed by an empirical analysis based on Italian household data. Using a household microeconometric labor supply model we have simulated behavioral responses and welfare gains and losses for married couples resulting from replacing the Italian tax system as of 1993 by proportional taxation. The model allows for observed as well as unobserved characteristics in preferences and opportunities, for spouses' simultaneous decisions, for non-convex budget sets due to the complexity of the tax system and for quantity constraints on the choice of hours of work. Altogether this gives a complex model with non-homothetic preferences. Due to the presence of corner solutions from utility maximization we find it convenient to define money measures of welfare in terms of indirect utility rather than in terms of the expenditure function. In our approach the utility function is directly specified and is thus not required to be recovered by integrating the supply function. We draw on King (1983) by deriving welfare measures from equivalent incomes in terms of a reference household and the prices this household faces. However, our approach differs from King's (1983) by using proportional taxation as a reference tax system. Since the results of the empirical analysis may depend on the choice of reference household a sensitivity study has been provided. In this study the sensitivity analysis shows that the main conclusions are not affected by the choice of reference state.

Figure 1.The distribution of WG by deciles of disposable income under 1993-taxes

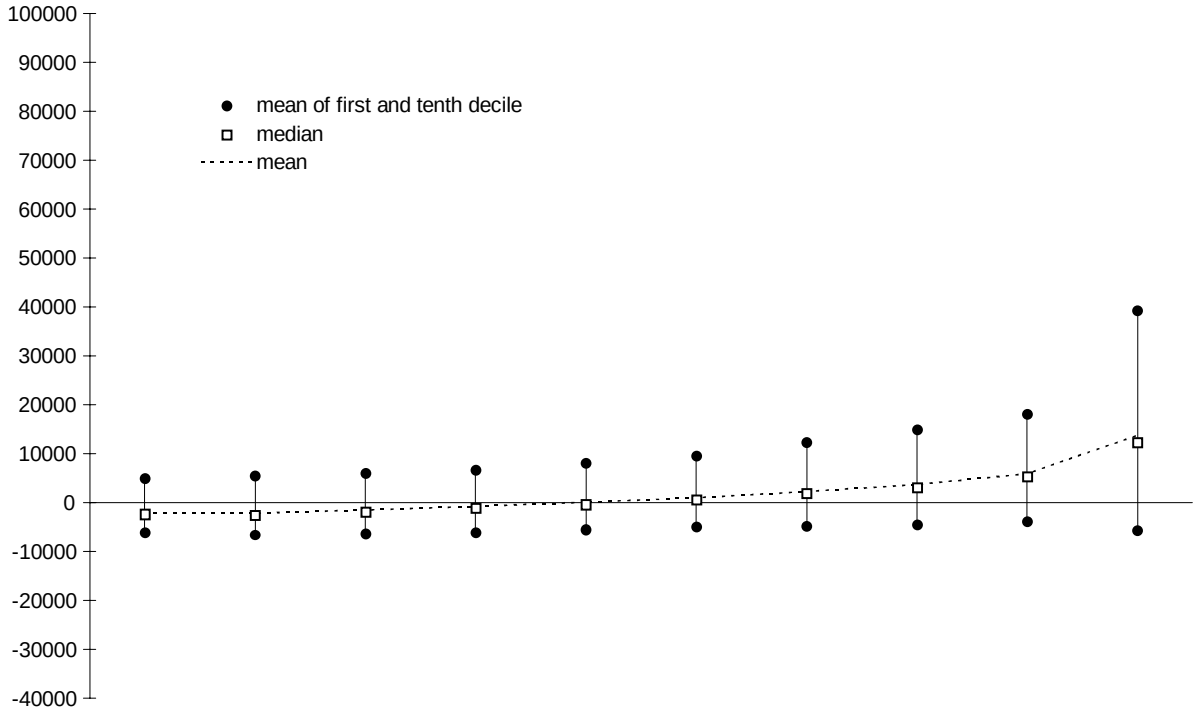


Figure 2.The distribution of WG by deciles of equivalent income under 1993-taxes

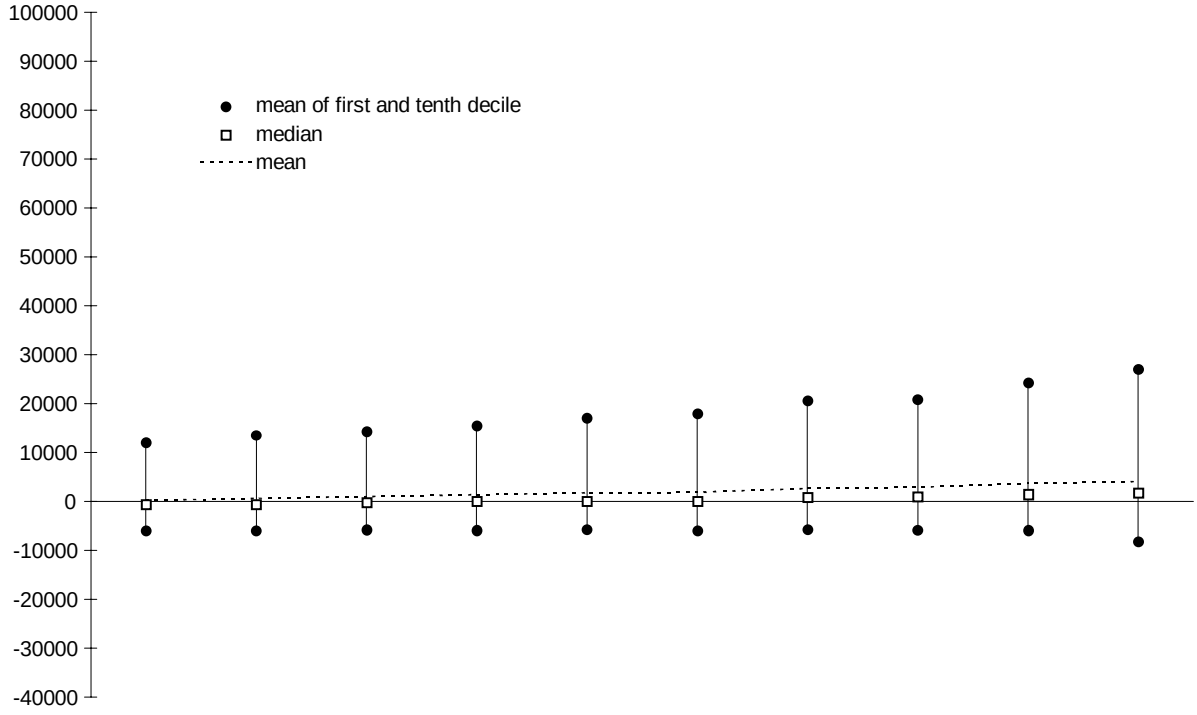


Figure 3. The distribution of CWG, defined in terms of the median income household under 1993-taxes, by deciles of equivalent income

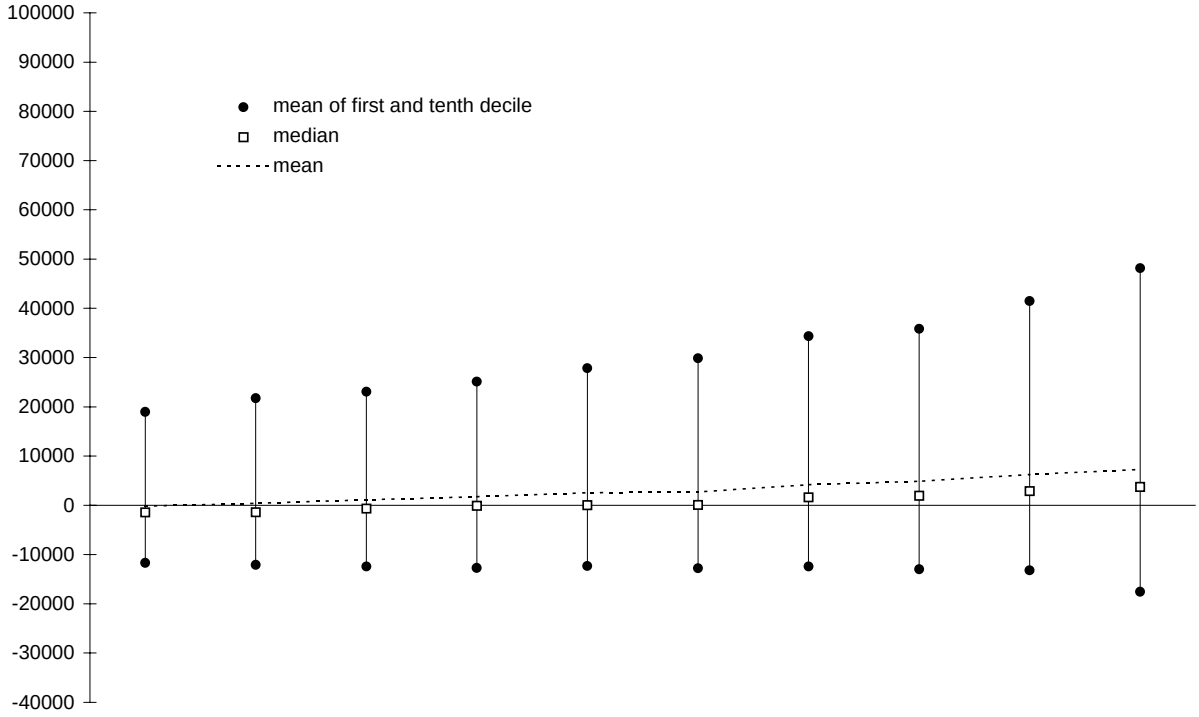


Figure 4. The distribution of CWG, defined in terms of the poorest household under 1993-taxes, by deciles of equivalent income

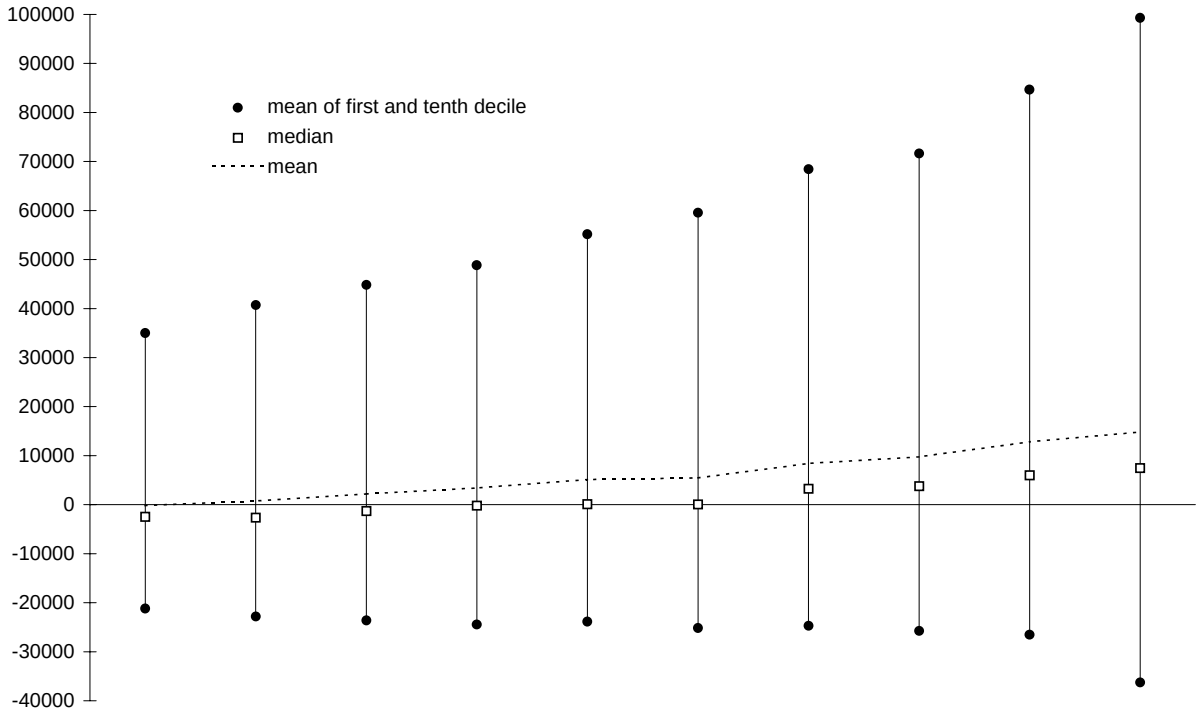
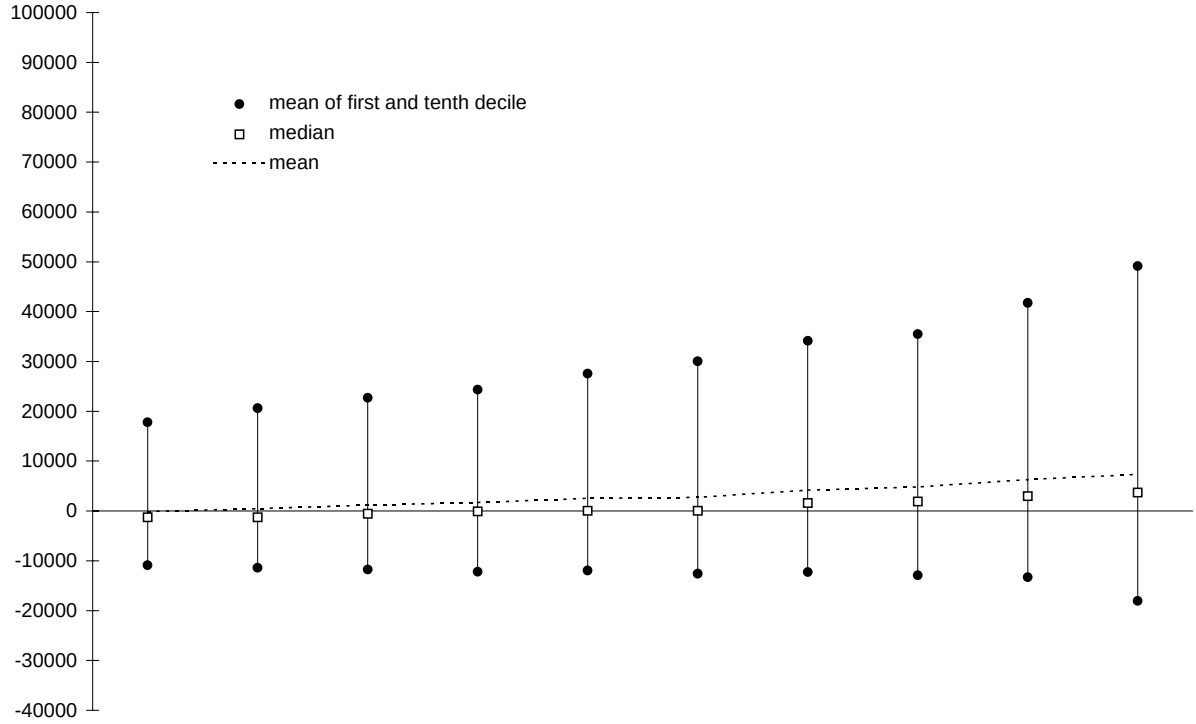


Figure 5. The distribution of CWG, defined in terms of the richest household under 1993-taxes, by deciles of equivalent income



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Appendix

The microeconometric simulation methodology

Analysis of distributional and efficiency effects from tax and benefit reforms requires a representation of household preferences with regard to each household member's leisure and their (joint) consumption. The choice of representation, either through direct/indirect utility functions or implicitly as labor supply functions, are normally affected by the objective of the analysis and by methodological convenience. When the analysis is concerned with welfare effects of tax reforms it is, due to the presence of corner solutions from utility maximization, convenient to define money measures in terms of the indirect utility function rather than in terms of the expenditure function. This paper relies on an explicit utility representation of household preferences. For expository reasons we restrict the formal discussion to single-person households which, to the analyst, have observationally identical characteristics and constraints. In the empirical specification of the model we analyse the behavior of married couples and we allow for variation in observed and unobserved characteristics across individuals, see Aaberge et al. (1995, 1998) for further details.

Let $B_i(h,w)$ denote the set of jobs with hours $h > 0$, and wage rate $w > 0$, that are feasible to agent i. $B_i(0,0)$ is the set of non-market opportunities. Let $U_i(C, h, j)$ denote the utility for agent i of consumption C, hours h and opportunity j, where $j \in B_i(h, w), h \geq 0, w \geq 0$. The argument j of the utility function accounts for the fact that the agent's preferences may vary across job types.

The economic budget constraint is given by

(A.1) $$C = y + f(wh, I),$$

where I and y is taxable and non-taxable non-labor income, and f is a function that transforms gross income into after-tax income. The price index of the composite good (called consumption) is equal to one. When inserting the budget constraint into the utility function we get $U_i\left(y + f(wh, I), h, j\right)$.

Furthermore, we will assume that

(A.2) $$U_i\left(y + f(wh, I), h, j\right) = v_i\left(y + f(wh, I), h\right)\varepsilon_{ij}(h, w)$$

where v(x,h) is quasi-concave in (x,h), increasing in x and decreasing in h. The random term $\varepsilon_{ij}(h,w)$ is assumed to capture the effect of unobservable attributes associated with opportunity j. Note that this term is viewed as random from the econometrician's point of view, while it is assumed known to the

agent. Specifically, $\{\varepsilon_{ij}(h,w)\}$ accounts for the fact that for a given agent, tastes may vary across opportunities, and for a given opportunity, tastes may vary across agents.

The agent is assumed to maximize the utility in (A.2) under the budget constraint (A.1) and given the opportunity set available for the agent. Thus, for a given tax and benefit regime the indirect utility function $\tilde{V}_i$ is defined by

(A.3) $$\tilde{V}_i(q,f) = \max_{h,w} \max_{j \in B_i(h,w)} \left[U_i\left(q + f(wh,I), h, j\right)\right].$$

The indirect utility function $\tilde{V}$ may be used as a basis for assessing the efficiency and distributional effects of tax and benefit reforms. To this end we will employ WG and CWG as money metric measures of welfare change. The values of WGs and CWGs depend on the parameters of the household specific utility functions, which in turn are derived from the estimation of the labor supply density defined by

(A.4) $$\varphi_i(h,w) = \Pr\left[\max_{j \in B_i(h,w)} U_i\left(q + f(hw,I), h, j\right) = \max_{h,w} \max_{j \in B_i(h,w)} U_i\left(q + f(hw,I), h, j\right)\right].$$

Note that $\varphi_i(h,w)$ is the probability that individual i chooses a job with hours h and wage rate w. When the random terms are assumed to be i.i.d. with c.d.f.

(A.5) $$\Pr\left(\varepsilon_{ij}(h,w) \le z\right) = \exp\left(-\frac{1}{z}\right),\ z > 0,$$

it is demonstrated by Dagsvik (1994) that $\varphi_i(h,w)$ is given by

(A.6) $$\varphi_i(h,w) = \frac{\Psi_i(h,w)\, g_{0i}\, g_i(h,w)}{\Psi_i(0,0) + g_{0i} \sum_{x>0} \sum_{y>0} \Psi_i(x,y)\, g_i(x,y)}$$

and

(A.7) $$\varphi_i(0,0) = \frac{\Psi_i(0,0)}{\Psi_i(0,0) + g_{0i} \sum_{x>0} \sum_{y>0} \Psi_i(x,y)\, g_i(x,y)}$$

where $\Psi_i(h,w)$ defined by

(A.8) $$\Psi_i(h,w) = v_i\left(y + f(wh,I), h\right)$$

is the systematic part of the utility function, g_{0i} is the relative number of feasible jobs and $g_i(h,w)$ is the proportion of feasible jobs with hours h and wage rate w.

The extension of (A.6) and (A.7) to cover the case of married couples is straightforward and completely analogous to the case of single person households. In this case the households have preferences over income, leisure for husband and wife as well as other characteristics of the job opportunities. For further details we refer to Dagsvik (1994), Aaberge et al. (1998a) and to Aaberge et al.(1998b) who also present the empirical specification of the model and report the estimation results. Based on this information we are able to compute household specific WGs and CWGs. Note, however, that the presence of unobservable attributes and tastes makes WG and CWG stochastic. Thus, to compute WGs and CWGs we have to employ stochastic simulations based on (A.3) and (A.5) and the choice sets $\{B_i\}$ described by g_{0i} and $g_i(h,w)$. Note that the empirical specification of the choice sets allows for quantity constraints which means that available hours are non-uniformly distributed. For further details on specification of the utility function and the choice sets we refer to Aaberge et al. (1998b).