

Formation and disruption of couples in Italy: main characteristics and new trends

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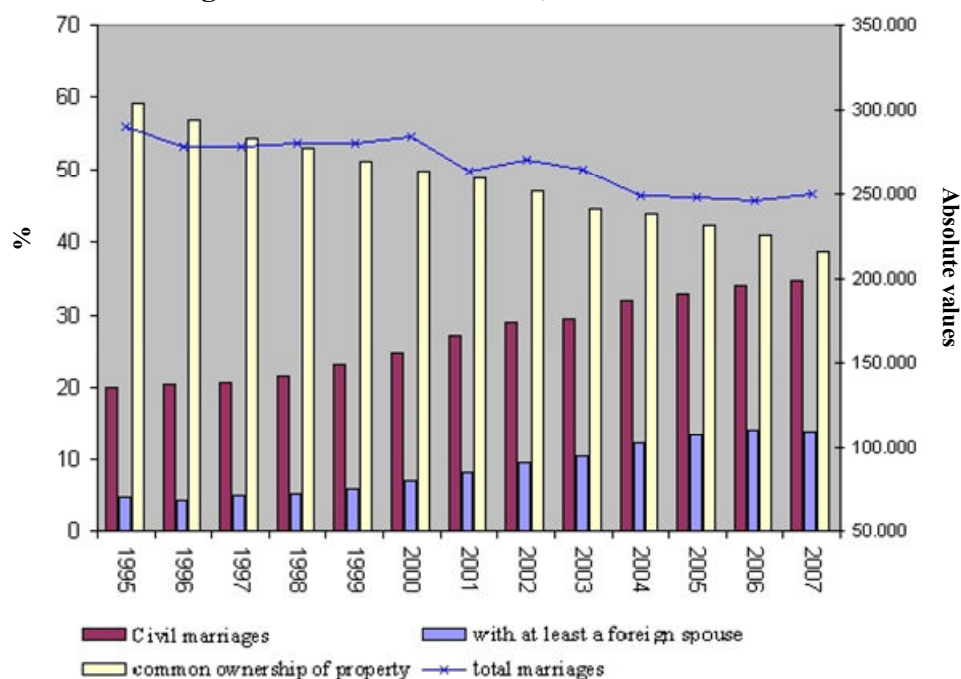
1. Family formation in Italy

Official administrative surveys represent precious sources for monitoring the larger part of the phenomenon of family formation and disruption in Italy.

In fact, despite of the growing importance of de facto unions, marriage remains the main category of family formation.

In 2007 more than 250 thousand marriages were celebrated in Italy. This amount is the result of a slow and constant decreasing trend occurred in the last years. Marriages characteristics registered several and crucial changes. In particular, it is interesting to point out the increase of civil marriages and of couples with at least one foreign spouse (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Marriages: trend and indicators, 1995-2007



Source: Istat data

2. Marriages with at least a foreign spouse: a phenomenon of increasing importance

In 2007, 34,559 marriages with at least one foreign spouse were celebrated, thus equalling 13.8% of all marriages registered in Italy. Such share, though still rather limited, is very significant, as it reveals a rapid increase (only 4.8% of all marriages in 1995), because a

marriage with a foreign citizen represents one of the most important indicators regarding the stabilisation and integration process of the immigrant communities in Italy.

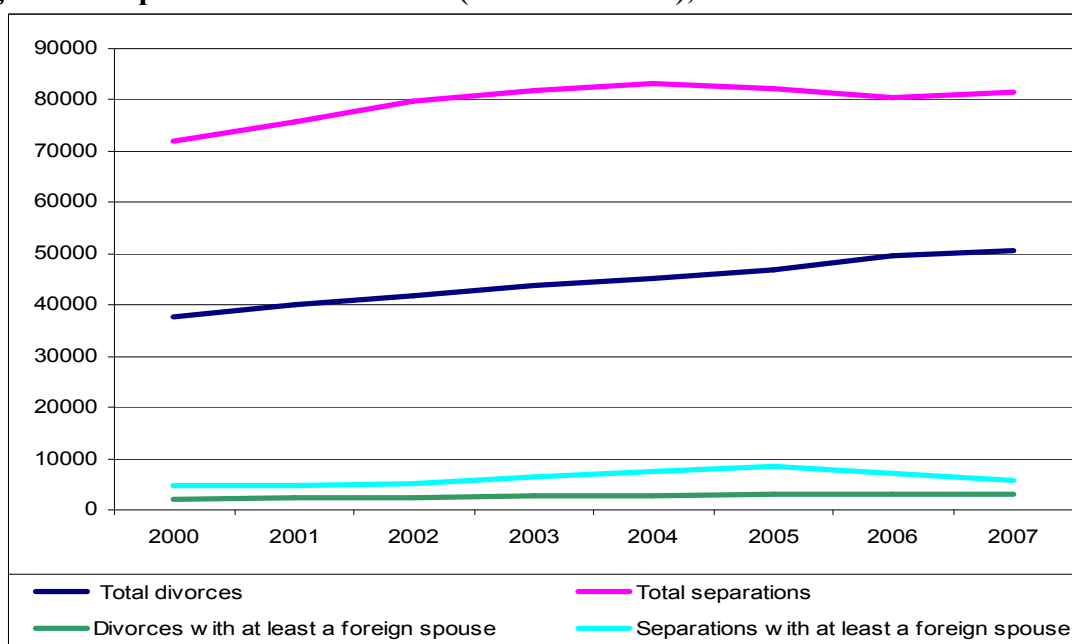
Mixed marriages - in other words marriages celebrated between Italian and foreign citizens - account for the most consistent share of all marriages with at least one foreign spouse and even totalled, in 2007, about 23,560 marriages, representing 9.4% of all the marriages. They are an example of the mingling of cultures and of the non-complete sharing of the traditional values that these unions generate. As regards the mixed couples, the most frequent type is the one in which the husband is Italian and the wife foreigner (17,663). Italian women who chose a foreign partner account for a little (5,897).

Marriages between two foreign spouses are a minority (4.4 percent of the marriages) and are even further halved when considering only marriages in which at least one of the spouses resides in Italy*.

3. The disruption of couples in Italy

In 2007 the number of separations amounts to 81,359 and the divorces to 50,669. In both cases, in comparison with the 2000 data, has been registered a clear increase (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Separations and divorces (absolute values), 2000-2007



Source: Istat data

Separations and divorces that involve foreign or foreign origin spouses are still quite moderate. In 2007, these separations were 7.2 percent of the total whereas the divorces that regard this typology of couple were 6.2 percent.

Besides marriages, also these data allow us to observe the main characteristics and implications of this phenomenon at regional level.

* Italy appears to be very attractive to many citizens coming from advanced countries (especially Europeans, Americans and Japanese) who choose it as country to celebrate their marriage.

4. Aims, methods and work hypothesis

The aim of this study is to describe the changes in terms of formation and disruption of couples occurred during the last ten years and try to verify if these changes are the result or not of the spreading of new behavior models.

In order to synthesize the phenomenon of family formation and disruption, we use both a descriptive analysis and a multivariate analysis. The idea is to create and consider simultaneously a set of indicators where the territorial level represents a crucial variable to take into account. In fact, the territorial distribution is quite remarkable to study because of different attitudes and behaviours that characterize the various Italian regional contexts with a peculiar contraposition between, on one hand, the north-centre and the rest of the country and, on the other hand, the areas with different demographic sizes.

The reasons behind the different attitudes toward marriage and the existence of less traditional models in different areas of the country are most likely to be searched both in the different socio-demographic characteristics of spouses and in the inner situations detectable in the various areas of the country.

In addition, a particular attention is devoted to the foreign population attitudes. Marriages with at least one foreign citizen assume different characteristics according to the type of marriage. These peculiar aspects deserve to be studied in detail.

References

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