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# **DOES WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT INFLUENCE MARITAL DISRUPTION IN ITALY?**

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# Outline

- **The framework of reference**  
Women's employment and family dissolution
- **Objective of the study**
- **A glance at the Italian context :**  
A macro overview of the marital dissolution and occupational situation in the Italian regions
- **Micro-level analysis**
- **Discussion of the findings**

# **BACKGROUND & RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

# The framework

- Since the last decades, a diffusion of new family patterns, including **separations and divorces**, has been observed. At the same time, **female labour-force participation** has been increasing in most European countries.
- Then, a **connection is often made between these two processes**: changes in the economic role of the women are hypothesized to have led to an increasing of family dissolution.

# Women's employment status may destabilize the marriage:

1. by overthrowing **traditional marriage norms**;
2. by facilitating divorce in case of conflicts in the relationship, giving to the women a generally **higher economic ability** to cope with the family breakdown;
3. by taking women away from their traditional **responsibilities at home**, which in turn generates conflicts between the spouses.

# Critics

- The impact of women's work on family disruption may be mitigated when the **gender ideology** within the couple is considered (Sayer and Bianchi, 2000).
- In a modern society, a number of dual-earner couples have increasingly spread and **the family arrangements shifted from the *male-breadwinner* model to the *gender equity* one** (Mc Donald, 2000).
- Under this model also the role of both partners in the labour market has become more egalitarian. Therefore, **equal economic autonomy of both partners should stabilize rather than destabilize marriage.**

# As for Italy:

- As it is well-known, the Italian context is characterized by **strong family ties**, but recently data show a progressive rise of the separations and divorces.
- Between 1995 and 2005, the incidence of divorce rose from 80 to 151 divorces per 1000 marriages celebrated in the same year - with an **absolute number of divorces rose of 75%**.

# Few studies about Italy

**De Sandre (1980):** the highest number of Italian divorce and separation can be found in those **couples where the women had high socio-economic status.**

**Corsini and Ventisette (1988):** couples that dissolve the marriage are those more **highly educated and belong to more qualified occupational categories.**

**De Rose (1992):** *“the scarcity of diffusion of the model corresponding to a high divorce rate in Italy can certainly be explained, at least in part, for **the time it is taking for even the most basic aspects of the changing status of the women to manifest themselves**”*

# Objective

In what way and to what extent does the wife's employment status influence marital instability in Italy?

# Research Hypothesis

- A country like Italy, should be at an **earlier stage** in the degree of diffusion of the new family patterns.
- Moreover, **the role of men and women in the labour market** is far from being egalitarian
- Thus, we expect women's labour market participation to be positively linked with union dissolution.  
i.e. **We expect that the higher the economic status of the women is, the more likely it is that she will separate.**

# MACRO-LEVEL TREND

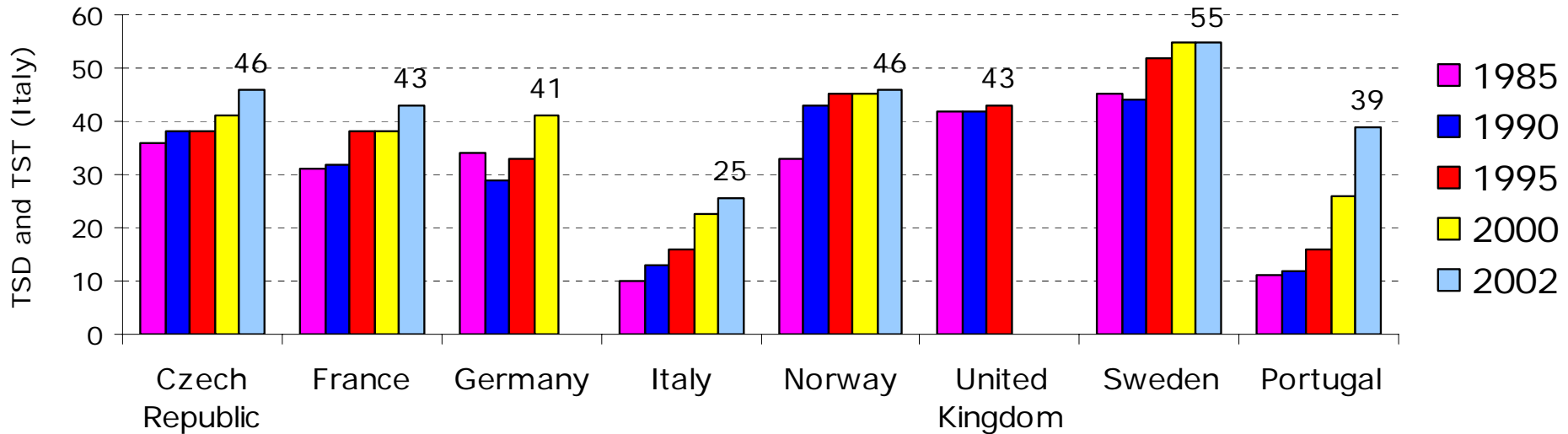
# Definition of *family dissolution* in Italy

- **Divorce** may be seen as only the final step of the process of separation.
- In accordance with law, since 1987, three years must elapse between the **legal separation** and the divorce, but the process may last much longer, or even fail.
- **e.g.** In 2003, the total legal separation rate measured 20 per 100 marriages, while the total divorce rate remains at 9.
- Moreover, **de facto separations** must also be considered, namely the status characterising those women not yet accompanied by a legal provision.

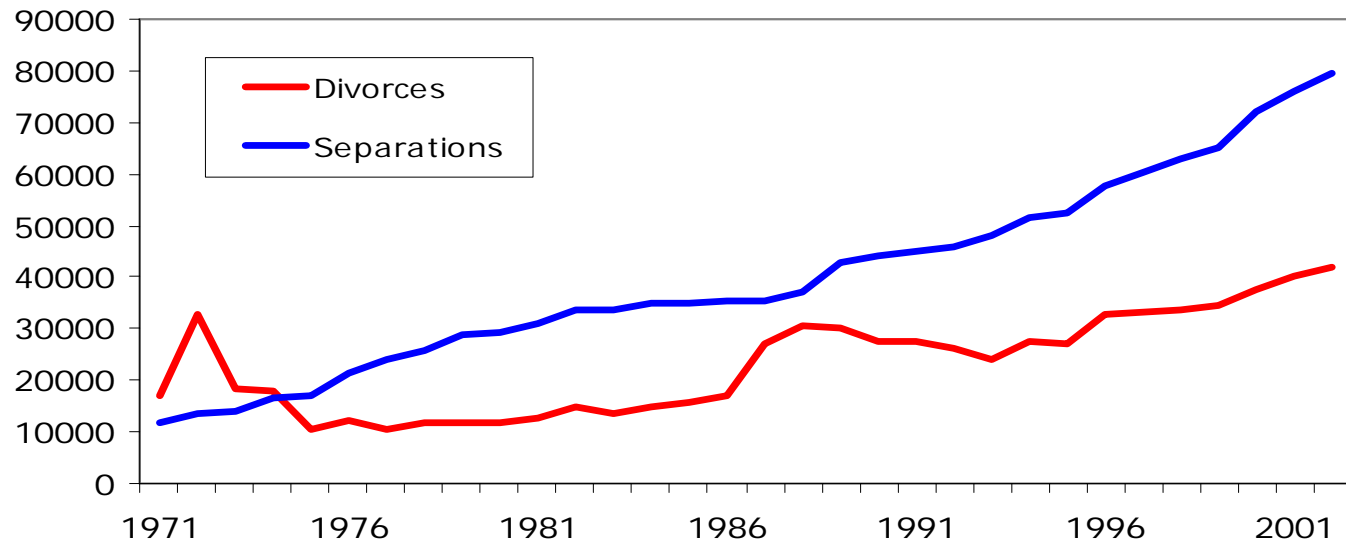
**This study focuses on the analysis of *de facto* separation**

# The increase of marital instability in Italy

Total separation rates (Italy) and total divorce rates for some european countries, 1985-2002 (per 100 marriages)

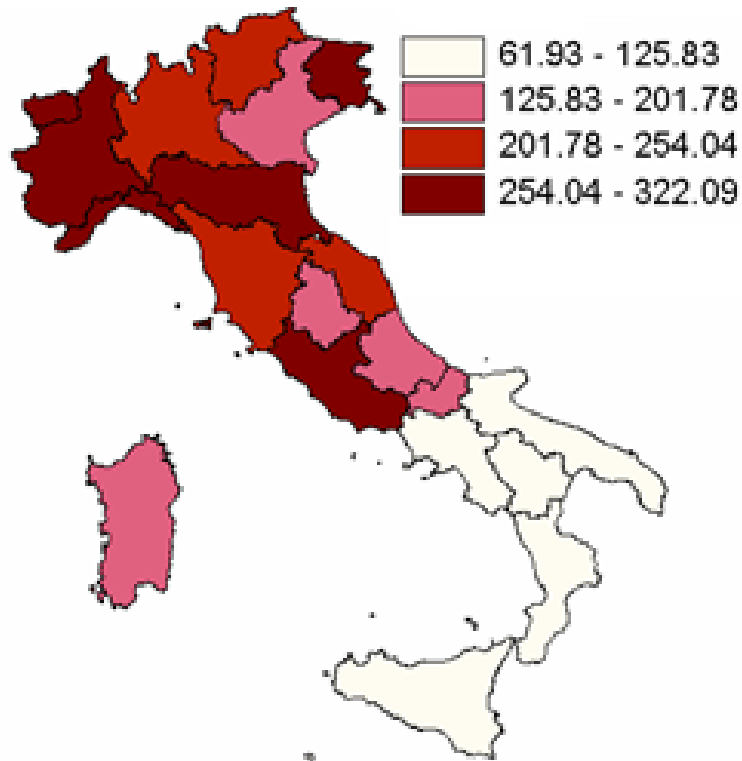


Separations and divorces in Italy, absolute numbers (1971-2002)

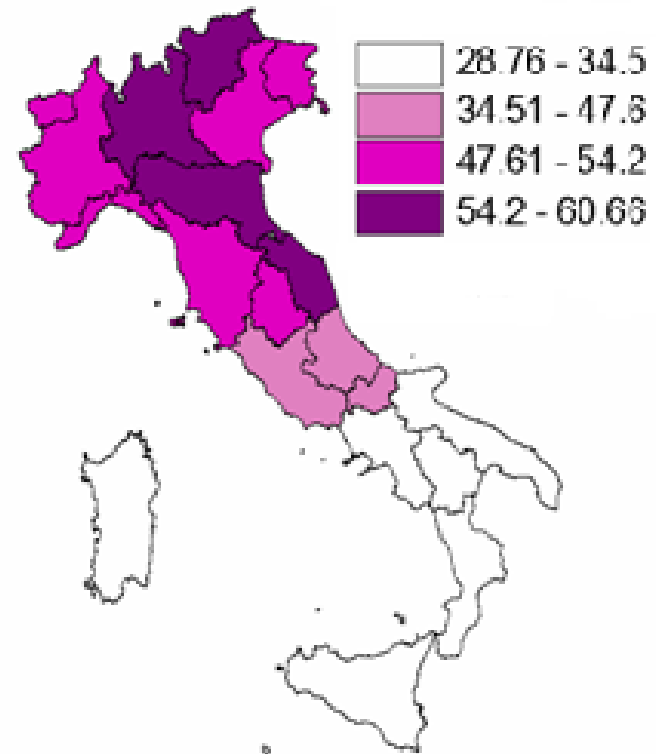


# Marital instability & Female labour force participation

## Total Separation Rate (Italy, 2003)



## Female Employment Rate (Italy, 2003)



# **MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS**

# Data & Method

- The study is based on **2003 Italian multipurpose survey “Families and Social Subjects”**, carried out by the National Statistical Office (ISTAT).
- An **event history model** is employed to measure the hazard of “de facto” separation.
- For the specification of the baseline hazard (time elapsed since union formation), a **piecewise constant function** is chosen.

# Model Specification

- **Control variables:** birth cohort; woman's age at marriage; area of residence.
- **Family background:** mother and father's educational level; parents' divorce.
- **Marriage characteristics:** rite of wedding; pre-marital cohabitation.
- **Family size:** number of children (*time-varying covariate*).
- **Women's socio-economic status:** women's educational level; women's labour market status (*time-varying covariate*)

# Model results: *control variables*

Control variables	Relative Risk
<b><i>Cohort</i></b>	
1938-1954	1.00
1955-1964	<b>2.48</b>
1965-1983	<b>3.86</b>
<b><i>Age at marriage</i></b>	
<30	1.00
≥30	<b>0.73</b>
<b><i>Region of residence</i></b>	
North	1.00
Centre	<b>0.79</b>
South and Islands	<b>0.64</b>

Values in **red** indicate significance at  $p < 0.05$ .

*The values are standardised for: rite of wedding; pre-marital cohabitation; mother and father's educational level; parents' divorce; number of children; women's educational level; women's labour market status.*

# Model results: *family background*

Family background	Relative Risk
<i>Mother's educational level</i>	
Low	1.00
Medium-high	1.24
<i>Father's educational level</i>	
Low	1.00
Medium-high	1.22
<i>Parents' divorce</i>	
No	1.00
Yes	<b>1.56</b>

Values in **red** indicate significance at  $p < 0.05$ .

*The values are standardised for: birth cohort; woman's age at marriage; area of residence; rite of wedding; pre-marital cohabitation; number of children; women's educational level; women's labour market status.*

# Model results: *socio-economic status*

Women's socio-economic status	Relative Risk
<i>Educational level</i>	
Low	1.00
Medium	<b>1.11</b>
High	<b>1.34</b>
<i>Employment status</i>	
No work	1.00
Temporary job	<b>1.89</b>
Permanent job	<b>1.98</b>

Values in **red** indicate significance at  $p < 0.05$ .

*The values are standardised for: birth cohort; woman's age at marriage; area of residence; rite of wedding; pre-marital cohabitation; mother and father's educational level; parents' divorce; number of children.*

# DISCUSSION

# Who are the most divorce-prone?

- As expected, the highest-risk life course and socio-economic context in which a marital disruption is developed characterise:
  - those women born in the more recent decades,
  - marrying younger,
  - residing in the Centre or Northern regions of Italy,
  - having a less traditional view of marriage,
  - well-educated, and
  - **employed.**

# The role of women's work

- Women's employment status has the strongest impact on marital disruption: ***Employed women have a doubled risk of a marriage disruption when comparing to those not working.***
- This may be interpreted as a result of a **strong independence effect**: having an own earning lowers the wife's constraint to stay in an unhappy marriage.
- Thus, **women's degree of economic autonomy** is one factor which plays a pivotal role in the effective possibilities to handle a separation.

# Limitations of the study

- **A first limitation** is related to the **partner's role**.  
The analysis would benefit when a *couple-level perspective* is considered, in order to look at how couples jointly arrange their work and family lives.
- **A second limitation** of this research is the absence of control with respect to marital satisfaction.  
Measurement of marital commitment and happiness may be better predictors of marital dissolution than measures of economic independence (e.g. Sayer and Bianchi, 2000).

**Thank you very much  
for your attention!**

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