Divorce in Europe: A Comparative Study between France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland Using Fertility and Family Surveys in the 1990s

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Summary

The model of families as forming after a marriage has gradually found itself in competition with many new familial configurations. There are now numerous ways of living as a couple: in or outside wedlock, or even separately. Among the younger generations, there has also been a rise in the number of separations in cohabiting couples. This questioning of traditional unions is also found among married couples, who now frequently divorce. Comparative studies on the factors leading to divorce are rare in Europe and the frequently proposed causal models have only rarely been tested identically in different countries. In this paper, we will try to weigh the role of individual factors, those characterizing the formation of the couple, and those linked to conjugal history in cases of divorce using data collected in the 1990s by FFS studies in France, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland, countries that represent the gamut of marital and fertility situations found in western Europe, as well as biographical methods.

Introduction

The model of the family as forming upon marriage has gradually come into competition with other forms of family configurations. There are now numerous ways of living as a couple: in or outside wedlock, or even separately. Among the younger generations, there has also been a rise in the number of separations in cohabiting couples. This questioning of traditional unions is also found among married couples, who now frequently divorce.

This evolution of marriage has taken place despite an increased life expectancy that has theoretically made a longer and healthier life together as a couple possible. Although in the past, the death of one of the two spouses was the typical end of marriage, divorce is now the most frequently observed cause.[1]

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[1] In Switzerland, for example, the number of newly divorced residents actually exceeded the number of newly widowed residents in 1988 (OFS, 1990).

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This is a relatively recent phenomenon, having existing for less than half a century and even less in some countries where it was forbidden or severely restricted until very recently (The mid 1970s in Portugal and Italy, 1981 in Spain, and not until 1997 in Ireland). Divorce is not only a legal instrument freeing a couple from wedlock, but an act that is at the heart of familial and social processes.

To understand the rise in the number of divorces in various countries, one must first understand the reasons causing couples to marry. Because France, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland are representative of the diversity of marital and familial situations existing in Europe (see Insert 1: The Familial Situation in these Countries), the following analysis was carried out on individual countries. Although in Sweden, France, and Switzerland, cohabiting outside of marriage is a common step both for men and women, it does not occur in the same way in all three countries. In Switzerland, premarital cohabitation rarely results in children whereas in France and Sweden, the number of children born to such unions has been growing steadily over the last few generations. Despite the increase in the number of divorces, the family is still largely based on marriage in Switzerland. By contrast, in Italy, both cohabitation and marriage are relatively rare, but similarly, parenting almost always takes place within the confines of marriage.

In countries where marriage appears to be a quasi-mandatory rite of passage to found a family, changes to the couple (whether in the relation between them and their expectations for their relationship and family) can also be associated with the evolution of divorce. Similarly, in countries where marriage is more or less dissociated from living together and fertility, it seems important to ascertain what leads couples who married without first living together and those who did not to sever their marital ties.

Comparative studies on factors leading to divorce are rare in Europe and the causal models that are often proposed have only rarely been tested identically in different countries. This is the case, for example, in the frequently mentioned relationship between one of the spouses being from a separated family and the increased statistical risk of their experiencing a similar breakup (Kiernan and Cherlin,

1999), or the association between age at marriage and the statistical probability of divorcing.[2]

In this article, after studying several possible determinants for divorce, we will attempt to ascertain, using a semiparametric survival model (see Inside 2: The Model), the respective roles of individual factors, those characterizing the formation of the couple, and factors related to their life together, in the frequency of divorce. This approach is not new (Roussel, 1980; Kellerhals et al.; 1985, Cherlin, 1992; Berrington and Diamond, 1999), although to our knowledge, few recent studies have used it.

A Cox semiparametric model was used to measure the role of various variables on the frequency of divorce. For each marriage length (the originating event is considered to be the marriage itself), the probability of going from a married to a divorced state were calculated. The models were tested separately for men and women in France, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland. The model applied to men in Italy will not however be discussed here due to the absence of representivity of the results due to the low number of divorced individuals in the sample. In addition, only the first observed marriage in the FFS survey samples are considered here (see Insert 1: Introduction to Surveys). The length of marriage before divorce or the outcome of the observation was expressed in months after marriage as a function of the wedding dates given by study subjects. The wedding date is considered as the starting point since marriage represents a primordial condition for an eventual divorce. However, since marriage today is not always synonymous with the start of life as a couple, another originating event, i.e. the date the couple came together, could have been chosen.[3] Using the date of definitive cessation of cohabitation, instead of the date a divorce was granted to estimate the period of time from marital union to divorce, was also considered. Legal separations, which are most frequently followed by divorce after some period of time, were taken into account along with divorces.

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[2] In other words, the earlier one marries, the more likely one is to divorce.
[3] An analysis, not included here, comparing statistical risk as a function of length of time together or time married nevertheless shows that parameters of the respective models are of roughly similar size.

Insert 1: Introduction to FFS Studies and the Countries Examined

At the start of the 1990s, the United Nations' European Economic Commission (EEC) launched a vast comparative study on family and fertility (Fertility and Family Surveys, FFS) in 24 economically developed countries. Every country participating in the project undertook a study using a standardized questionnaire with two independent samples of men (minimum of 2000 subjects) and women (minimum 3000 subjects) representative of the native population. The goal of these studies was to observe and analyze the family and professional histories of adults from age 20 to 49. Detailed information was collected on various important events in a couple's relationship, from meeting, to childbirth, to conception, to contraceptive practices, or even outside information on subjects' lives such as employment and educational changes (EEC, 1989).

France, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland were chosen for this study as they are representative of the diversity of family behaviour and its evolution in Western Europe. Sweden can be seen as a leading edge country for family change starting from the 1960s. Italy is the country where family behaviours have most retained a traditional, institutional template. Switzerland is the only country in Europe where, despite a high level of premarital cohabitation, marriages outside of wedlock remain rare. Finally, France is the country where family behaviours most closely resemble Sweden, albeit in a different cultural context. (Roussel, 1992).

Insert 2: Introduction to the Semi-Parametric Model

The Cox semi-parametric model (1972) was used as it allows us to measure the role of various explicative variables on the occurrence of divorce. For each interval, (the event-origin is the marriage) the probabilities of going from a married to a divorced state are obtained by dividing the number of observed events (divorces) by the number of people not experiencing the event (still married individuals) and still present in the scope of observation. From these transitional probabilities, instant quotients are calculated, representing the probability of divorcing during a minimal time interval. The Cox model can be expressed by the equation $h(t, Z) = h_0(t) * exp(Z'\beta)$ with $h(t, Z)$ representing the instant divorce quotient during time t for married individuals whose individual characteristics are defined by vector Z. Term $h_0(t)$ represents, for a reference individual, the "base risk" of going from a married to divorced state. This risk is influenced by the different individual or relative characteristics of the couple and can be represented in the model by $exp(Z'\beta)$. Thus, $exp(Z'\beta) = exp(Z_1,\beta_1 + Z_2,\beta_{2+} Z_2,\beta_{2+...})$, represents vector Z of the individual or relative characteristics of the couple, multiplied by vector β of the coefficients of proportionality associated with each of the characteristics of the model including some which are dependent covariables of time (Blossfeld et al., 1995). The Cox model's goal is to measure the statistical risk of divorcing as a function of the time elapsed since marriage. The fact that some people have already lived together as a couple while others have only been observed for a few months is taken into account when estimating model parameters. One hypothesis of the Cox model is the proportionality of risks. In other words, the probabilities of risk of different sub-populations defined by the modalities of the variables are supposed to evolve proportionally regardless of the time elapsed since the event-origin. This hypothesis was tested by different non-parametric survival analyses. Although it is not possible to strictly exclude an absence of proportionality, the results obtained by these non-parametric survival analyses appear to justify the use of the Cox model for these analyses.

1. Factors Leading to Divorce

Various factors have been mentioned as explanations for divorce. L. Bumpass et al. (1991) proposed a four part classification: Characteristics of the families of origin, Characteristics of the spouses, heterogamous factors at the time of marriage, and the socio-professional situation of the spouses in their first year of marriage. D. Manting (1992), as well as K. Kiernan and J. Hobcraft (1997), insisted on the role of behaviour during the period before marriage. The approaches adopted by the authors are widespread as a result of the multitude of variably complex conditions in which divorce occurs. It is therefore difficult to limit the study to one frame of reference, as one couple's history and dynamics can vary dramatically from another's depending on the social context.

The analytical framework proposed in this paper is founded on a three dimensional approach to the suspected factors leading to divorce including individual factors, factors related to the formation of the couple and the marital situation of the spouses, and finally those linked to the couple's conjugal and family life. These factors are identified and described in this paragraph, in which some theoretical and empirical works are also mentioned along with their respective roles.

1.1 Individual and Family Environment Factors

Individual factors, more or less known at the time of marriage, can contribute to modifying the probability of divorce in one direction or the other. We can distinguish factors that are intrinsic to the person studied as well as those that are related to his or her spouse.

In terms of characteristics unique to individual subjects studied, we are primarily interested in the number of cohabitational experiences before a first marriage, as well as their prior couple experiences (length, children, etc.). It is assumed that people having cohabited at least once before marriage are more demanding in their marriages and therefore more prone to separation (Haskey, 1983)[4].

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[4] But it is just as feasible for people who have had other conjugal experiences to be less demanding of a partner as they are less 'on the lookout' for the 'ideal mate'.

In our case, the first marriage has been chosen for study and any prior relationships cannot have involved marriage.

Turning to spousal characteristics, one can add to the above-mentioned items the marital status of spouses at the time of marriage[5], which represents an indicator of prior officially sanctioned conjugal relationships. The status of formerly married does appear to be closely linked to the risk of future divorce (Haskey, 1983). In addition, the presence of a partner's child from a prior relationship appears to "jeopardize" conjugal bonds[6].

Spousal age adds information on the number of years between spouses and is often suspected to play a determining role in the stability of a relationship. An age gap between spouses is in fact often used as an indicator of the degree of equality between them [7].

Religious observance[8] and nationality[9] are frequently cited as important factors in the evolution of marriage. The effect of these variables on marital behaviour has for example been shown by M. Maréchal (1997). Various hypotheses have also been put forward as to the role played by the family environment in the divorce process. The first series of hypotheses referring to the family environment in choosing a spouse and the type of union chosen, has shown variations with divorce as a function of parents' socio-educational level, their employment, identity, and religious beliefs. The second series of hypotheses was more correctly related to the impact of parental environment on subjects' opinions on divorce. Parental divorce and its role on the outcome of married couples has been the subject of several studies. N. Wolfinger (1999) and G. Hullen (1998) most notably noticed its influence on marriages in the United States and Germany and more specifically observed a higher probability of divorce among couples with separated parents.

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[5] Except for Sweden where information was not collected.
[6] Information was not provided by the Swedish study, but it is possible to refer to Andersson's article, for example (1997).
[7] Information not provided by the Swedish study and not usable for the French study due to a large number of missing values.
[8] No information for France.
[9] Information available only for Switzerland.

1.2 Factors Linked to Couple Formation and Spouses' Situations within Marriage

A couple must also face various events concerning its formation. Many factors linked to couple formation and their status at the time of marriage can be mentioned here. Premarital cohabitation (Kiernan and Cherlin, 1999) is one of the most frequently discussed factors when studying divorce, most notably because of the simultaneous emergence of these two phenomena (premarital cohabitation and divorce) in northern and western Europe. It is thought on one hand that this premarital period may serve to lower the number of divorces, as it can be considered as a kind of test marriage. By contrast, it is also possible that couples who have lived together outside of marriage may also be more disposed to separate when the relationship no longer satisfies them. C. Villeneuve-Gokalp (1990) identifies a distinction between a "premarital cohabitation," which leads to marriage within a year, and a "trial marriage," a longer period of premarital cohabitation (one to three years), allowing the couple to test the strength of their relationship before making it official. The risk of divorce may be linked to the type of cohabitation preceding marriage as a result of a possible difference in the meaning attributed to living together. In addition, it is possible to assume that the notion of stability is dependant on the length of the union.

Age at marriage gives us an indication of the life experience of the respective spouses and the timing of marriage in their individual life cycles. Several studies (Goode, 1963; Festy and Prioux, 1975 ; Perreira, 1991 ; Leridon, 1994) have shown that early marriages were often followed by divorce, the assumed reason being the immaturity of the partners and their unreadiness for married life as well as the difference between their expectations and the reality of married life (Booth and Edwards, 1985).

When pregnancy precedes marriage, particularly in countries with low rates of childbirth out of wedlock and where parents must be married to have the same rights and duties vis-à-vis their child, it is probable that this stigma will incite a certain number of couples to make their relationship official, more for parental recognition than a genuine desire for institutional recognition of their relationship. In other words, the hypothesis is that this type of union is 'less resistant' than 'expected' and 'planned' ones. Although the risk of divorce among couples conceiving outside marriage has

only recently been studied in Switzerland along with the risk of divorce connected to marriages undertaken to legitimize a birth (Charton and Wanner, 2001), no comparative study between European countries has apparently been completed to date.

The level of education, along with employment status at the time of marriage, can also be considered as indicators of the degree of spousal independence (Dechter, 1992). Some studies have shown, for example, that more educated women are more likely to doubt the viability of their relationship when it does not satisfy them (Hoem, 1997; Bracher and Santow, 1997). A more egalitarian situation between spouses, at least from an economic point of view, could also frequently lead to questioning one's marriage.

1.3 Factors Related to Conjugal History

When a couple is formed, a conjugal history begins involving the various events that can play a role in the eventual outcome of the relationship including the birth of a child or children (Andersson, 1997). It should also be noted that other aspects of life together can have a significant influence on the risk of divorce such as economic or professional troubles (Ermisch, 1996; Lester, 1996), even periods of illness. These factors are not studied here due to a lack of available data.

The variables considered therefore depend on the information available. Employment status at the time of marriage was estimated using employment histories gathered during various studies. In the Cox model, the birth of a child was considered as it related to the marriage schedule while examining the relative length of observation of the individuals (dependent covariable of time).

2. The Influence of Individual and Family Factors on the Risk of Divorce

The distribution of all characteristics is shown in Table 1 of the appendix. The proportion of divorced persons, depending on the modality studied, is also shown in the table 1 for all variables (except for men living in Italy, as the results are not significant). On the whole, for the male sample and the female sample respectively in France there were 279 (or 14.1% of marriages) and 707 divorces (or 17.1%), in Italy

26 (or 4.5% of marriages) and 172 divorces (5.2%), in Sweden 155 (18%) and 355 divorces (21.3%) and in Switzerland 192 (13.5%) and 478 divorces (14.8%)[10].

The proportion of divorced subjects appears particularly small for women and men in Switzerland and women in Italy who reported being religiously practising. (respectively 7.8%, 4.9% and 3.4%), whereas it is relatively high for women whose husband had been previously married (12.5% for women in Italy and 25.8% for women in Switzerland) and for men living in Switzerland who had not become fathers during their marriage (21.9%). Subjects interviewed in France and Sweden whose parents had divorced or who had married around the age of 20 were also at high risk of divorcing.

2.1 A Heightened Risk of Divorce among Younger Generations

Men and women under age 35 in France, women under 25 in Italy, men under 35 in Sweden and under 30 in Switzerland are significantly more likely to divorce than subjects aged 40-44. Date of birth does not however appear to have an effect on the risk of divorce among women in Sweden and Switzerland.

2.2 More Frequent Divorce Among Non-Religious Subjects

Religious observance among women in Italy and Switzerland plays an important role in breakups. We observed that women who are not observant or only occasional churchgoers have a statistically higher risk of divorcing than their more observant counterparts (the relative risk is equal in Italy at 2.08 for non-religious women and 1.70 for occasional churchgoers and in Switzerland 2.71 and 1.45 respectively). A more or less pronounced involvement in religion does not however affect the probability of divorce for men in Sweden, while a lack of religious affiliation among women in Sweden and men in Switzerland increases the risk of divorce. These people are 1.78 and 2.90 times faster to divorce than those who reported being religiously observant. The role of religion on conjugal behaviour has

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[10] The difference observed in each country between the male and female samples is mainly due to the respective number of subjects.

been shown before in other research. For example, it has been observed that non-practising people are also more likely to start off a first union with premarital cohabitation and are less quick to officialize a union begun out of wedlock. Religious activity appears therefore to be an important factor in the evolution of conjugal behaviour.

2.3 Less Frequent Breakup in Sweden for First Unions

Sweden is the only country in our study where the number of cases of living together before marriage significantly alters the risk of divorce. Men and women who had not lived with a partner before marriage had half the risk of divorce(RR=0.49 and 0.45, respectively). It is quite probable in a national context of high cohabitation that couples marrying in Sweden before living with a partner make up a specific group in terms of conjugal and family behaviour. This variable does not however appear to have an influence on the risk of divorce in France, Switzerland and for women in Italy. Nevertheless, as marriage most frequently occurs in these countries as part of a first episode of cohabitation, interpreting the role of prior conjugal setbacks on marriage must be done carefully as a result of the lack of 'power' in the data.

2.4 Heightened Risk of Breakup for Children of Divorce

Those who have lived through a parental separation in childhood appear more likely overall to leave a marriage, although this result was not significant for the male sample in Switzerland. J. Kellerhals et al. (1985) for Switzerland, but also K. Kiernan (1986) and P. Amato (1996) for Great Britain, A. Diekmann and H. Engelhard (1999) for Germany or J. Dronkers (1999) for the Netherlands had already noted these trends, i.e. that children from broken families appeared more frequently to sever marital ties than those from "intact families." In a preceding research (Charton, 2003), it was also noted that women from broken families are the least anxious to have their unions officially sanctioned. The fact that children of divorce are less inclined not only to marry, but also more likely to be doubtful of the institution itself, can probably be attributed to a specific image these people have of marriage.

2.5 A Higher Risk of Divorce in Switzerland in Cases with a Child from a Previous Relationship

Whereas differences in age and marital status between spouses at the time of marriage do not appear to have a significant effect on the risk of breakup, the presence of a spouse's child from a prior relationship does however appear to make relationships more fragile in Switzerland. The risk of breakup is, in fact, 2.20 times higher for men whose spouse has a child from a previous relationship. This result is only present for male subjects (presence of the woman's child), apparently because in this country, the woman always has sole parental authority over any children born out of wedlock and in the event of a divorce, custody is granted to the mother the vast majority of the time. The number of men living with their children and a new companion is therefore numerically reduced. The presence of a child from a prior relationship does not seem to have an effect on the outcome of marriages in France and Italy[11].

Finally, the marital status of spouses and the age gap between partners do not have a significant impact on the outcome of marriage in our models.

3. Factors Linked to Couple Formation: Relationship and Marriage Conditions at Breakup

Nowadays, the image of the "ideal" couple is mainly transmitted to us through literature and the media. The media is also probably responsible for the banalization of marriage breakup.[12] Applicants for divorce now have a wide variety of services at their disposal: from marriage counsellors to psychologists as well as lawyers to inform and guide them through the procedure. The appearance of the notion of 'amicable' divorce marked a softening of the laws governing it,[13] and had two fundamental

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[11] Information not provided in the Swedish study.

[12] As is suggested by the titles of articles in a Swiss daily: 'Second Chance after Divorce', 'How to Pull off Your Divorce,' 'We failed at marriage, let's succeed at divorce' (L'Hebdo n° 21, May 24 1995 and n°39, September 25 1997), and S. Medvedowsky's 2003 novel *Le merveilleux divorce de Juliette B.*, Paris : Plon, 249p.

[13] No fault divorce already existed in six countries in 1960: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Norway, and Sweden, although it was integrated into the principle of at-fault divorce in the first five (See Commaille et al., 1983). No fault divorce was adopted in England in 1969, the Netherlands in 1971, France, Italy and Portugal

effects. First, separation no longer carries its former social stigma for ex spouses (Roussel, 1993). Next, as marriage has evolved from a strictly functional institution towards an alliance based on feelings of love, divorce has also been transformed in Europe from 'Sanctioned Divorce' to 'Liberating Divorce' (Rezsohazy and Vanderputten, 1991). People now seem more ready to make a quicker decision to put an end to an unsatisfying relationship; divorce is now often perceived as a 'new start' (Kellerhals and Roussel , 1987).

3.1 The Effect of Age at Marriage on the Risk of Divorce

By analyzing the factors related to spouses' situation at the time of marriage on the risk of breakup, it first appears in all countries studied, that women marrying for the first time before age 23 have a significantly higher risk of divorcing than those who married later (after age 25 in Italy, and after 30 in France, Sweden, and Switzerland). Among men, those who married before 23 were also much more likely to divorce than those who married between 23 and 25, whereas men who married between age 26 and 29 in France and above age 26 in Switzerland have a lower risk of breakup.

3.2 Influence of Level of Education and Employment Status on Occurrence of Divorce.

In France, Italy and Sweden, although the risk of divorce increases with women's educational levels, it does not appear to be influenced by men's level of education. Additionally, in France, Italy, and Switzerland, women who were not employed at the time of their marriage were less likely to divorce than those who worked for wages (RR=0.44; RR=0.46 and RR=0.52 respectively). In addition, women in Sweden and men in France who are in school or searching for a job at the time of marriage have a greater risk of breakup (RR=1.94 and RR=1.58 respectively).

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in 1975, Germany in 1976, and Austria in 1978. In Switzerland, mutual divorce only came into effect on January 1, 2000.

3.3 Less Frequent Divorce in Cases of Premarital Pregnancy

Premarital conception appears to play a role in the non-occurrence of divorce for both women and men in Sweden, as well as for men in France and Switzerland. It is therefore not the case that the timing of pregnancy with regards to marriage makes a partnership more fragile.

3.4 Reduced Risk of Breakup for Premarital Cohabitation in Sweden, and Increased Risk in France and Switzerland

In Switzerland, having lived with a partner before marriage significantly increases the risk of divorce as it does in France when the cohabitation is a short-term one (less than one year). Even though the probability of divorce among couples who lived together before marriage invariably, "exceeds," as observed by P. Festy (1985 :182)[14], "the risk for people who did not live together before marriage," it is nevertheless difficult to make a connection between premarital cohabitation and more fragile marriages (Axinn and Thorton, 1992 ; Trussell et al. (1992); Demaris and MacDonald, 1993). In Sweden for example, the risk of divorce goes down for men and women who lived with their partner before making their relationship official.

It can be assumed that in France, short-term premarital cohabitation takes place in a context of preparation for an upcoming marriage. In the case of Switzerland, it can be noted that premarital cohabitation was, until very recently, restricted to a small segment of the population (in terms of religious behaviour and attitudes towards marriage, notably). It remains difficult to establish causal links as religious behaviour (such as non-observance) and the symbolic importance accorded to marriage (probably lesser) are factors that may favour divorce whereas cohabitation itself is more a way to avoid it (a test before a long shared life together). A differentiated representation of marriage using a possible premarital cohabitation probably does play a role in the probability of divorce (Booth and Johnson, 1988; Thomson and Colella, 1992). Those who live together before marriage are definitely the same people who consider marriage to be a private affair between couples. Divorces whose causes "underlie the duties of marriage," to use the phraseology of J.

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[14] See also: Haskey, 1992; Klijzing, 1992; Hall and Zhao, 1995.

Carbonnier (1979), appear to have evolved at the same pace as the concept of marriage and the couple.

4. Divorce in a Conjugal Setting

The birth of a child is the only event in a couple's life picked out in our models of FFS study data. Both for men and women, the birth of a child reduces the risk of divorce, regardless of the timing of birth or the country studied (Andersson, 1997). It is not possible to firmly conclude, however, that children reduce the statistical risk of divorce or if the timing of divorce is simply retarded in the case of couples with children.

By observing the distribution of divorces over the first twenty years of marriage for different areas, it appears on one hand that Italy always has fewer divorces than France, Sweden and Switzerland. Similarly, the length of marriages at the time of divorce is becoming shorter over the years in all countries studied (Graphs 1-4). Divorce frequently takes place at the start of a marriage. The median length of marriages has gone down significantly over the years. The length at which half of all marriages broke up (among all failed marriages) went from 13 years for marriages before 1970, to 8 years for marriages performed between 1975 and 1979 in France. For Italy, length dropped from 12 to 10 years for the same period. Sweden went from 10 years to 7, and Switzerland from 11 to 9 years. For marriages started between 1980 and 1990, the median length of failed marriages is even shorter, with 6 years in France, 7 in Italy, 4 in Sweden, and 5 in Switzerland. These observations must still be confirmed however when the length of marriages between all the time periods are comparable.

Graphs 1-4: Distribution of Divorces Over the First 20 Years of Marriage in Various Time Periods Using FFS Data, France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland (adjusted values)

Sweden
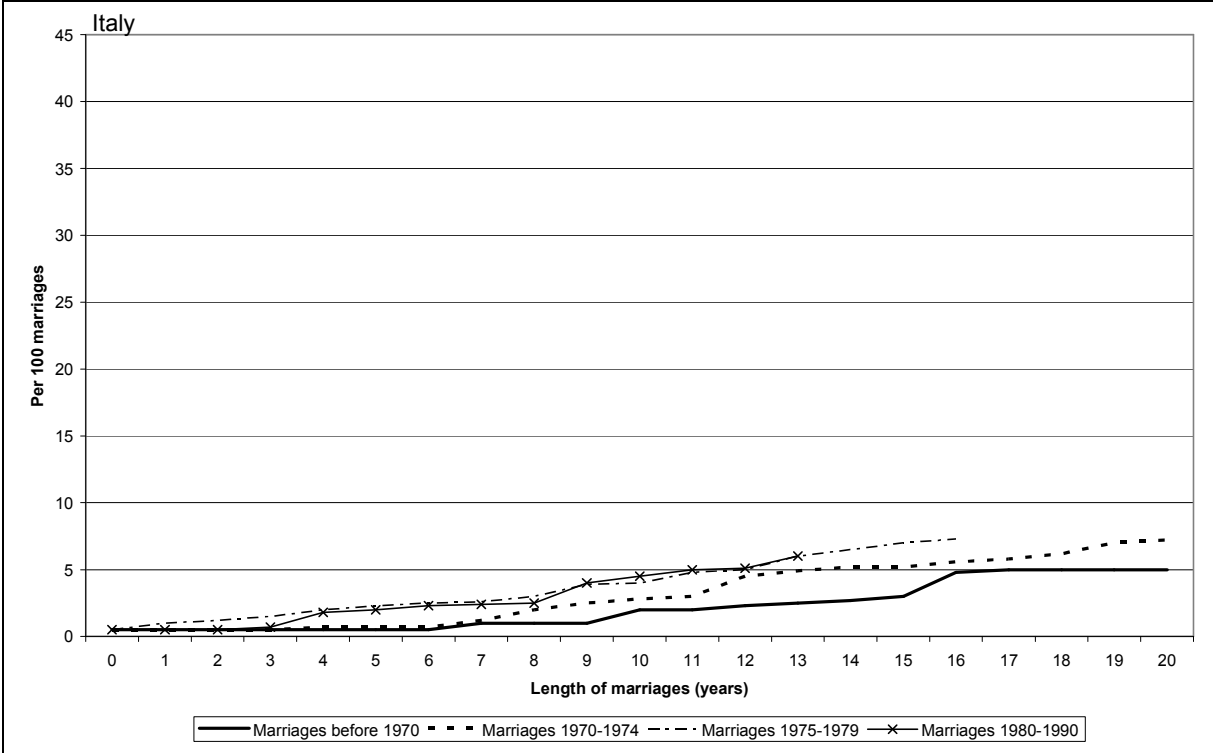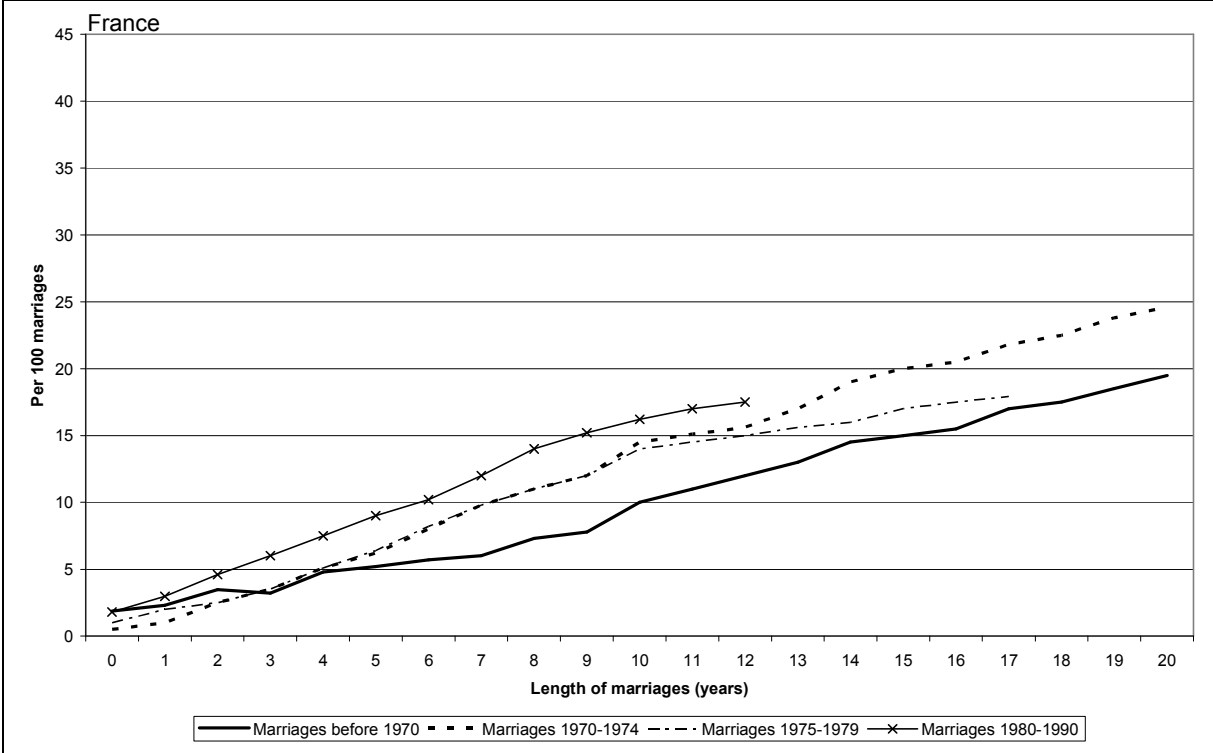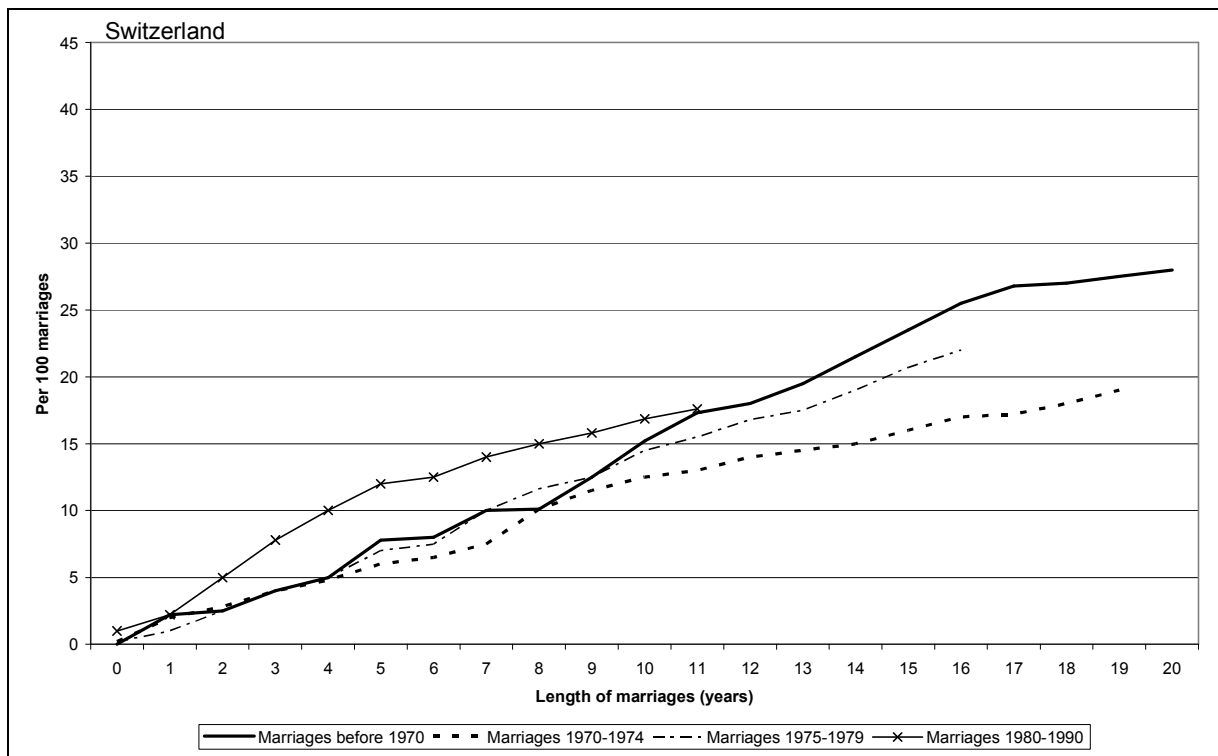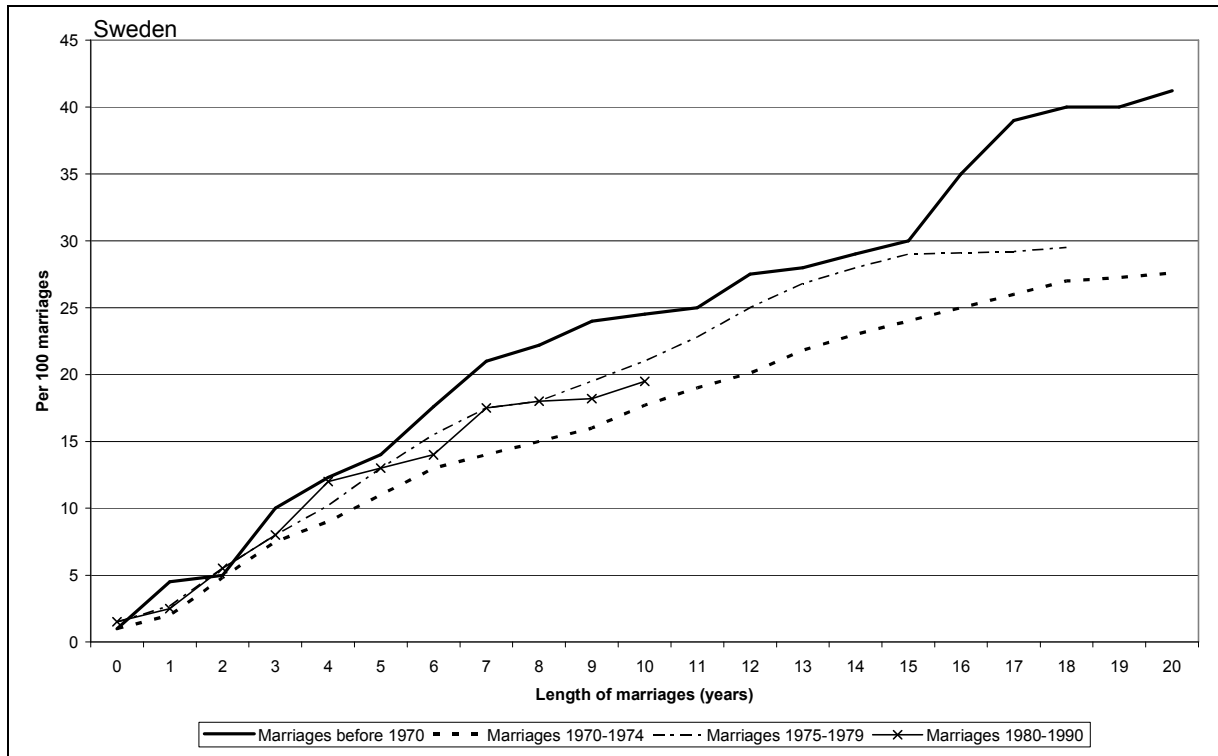
Switzerland

These results confirm the divorce rates that have already been observed in other studies (for France: Festy, 1983; Switzerland: Charton and Wanner, 2001; The United States: Morgan and Rindfuss, 1985). They are part of, as noted by F. de Singly

(1999), a current of "individualization of the conjugal relationship," where marriages take place for purely affective reasons in such a way that when couples 'fall out of love,' they are more willing to separate and such separations take place much more quickly. A divorce may also take place later, depending on the meaning attributed to the marriage in the couple's lives, their personal histories, and the presence of children.

CONCLUSIONS

A certain number of individual factors, with couples and couple formation act as a check to divorce. Religious observance is key among these. Other factors, however, seem to increase the risk of divorce, such as parental divorce and premarital cohabitation. In Switzerland, this is possibly because most couples make their first union official, whereas premarital cohabitation tends to reduce divorce in Sweden where a first cohabitational experience frequently ends in separation, or a relatively young age at marriage. It has also been noticed that some factors frequently suspected of playing a role in the instability of relationships, such as premarital pregnancy, for example, do not significantly affect relationship stability.

In general, the social and family environment appear to retain, at least in France, Italy and Switzerland, an important role in the formation and preservation of conjugal ties. The greatest number of breakups are observed in social environments that are the most deviant from traditional (including religious) values, most notably in the roles assigned to men and women within a couple (for example, when a woman has a higher degree of education than a man and is employed at the time of marriage). By contrast, women with lower educational levels who are not financially independent are more likely to be married and remain so. In Sweden, as new issues seem to be linked to marriage (for example, it is no longer the primary paradigm for child-rearing, nor a decision made at the expense of a career), it would appear that divorce is more of an individual choice with lessened social and economic constraints.

Reasons to divorce or not to divorce appear to be correlated to the meaning that individuals, whether consciously or not, attribute to marriage, their relationship,

and the role of each gender within the couple. This may also allow for a certain way of viewing one's family and personal history.

Table 1: Factors influencing the probability of divorce between the probability of divorce between the date of marriage and the study for men and women in France and Italy (Semi-Parametric Models- Relative Risks)

Factors	France					Women					Italy				
	Men										Women				
	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant
	967	85,9	14,1			1724	82,9	17,1			3213	94,8	5,2		
Year of Marriage															
before 1970	91	85,0	15,0	0,85		254	76,5	23,5	0,63		261	95,1	4,9	0,75	
1970-1979	421	79,2	20,8	1,37		797	80,9	19,1	0,79		1190	93,0	7,0	1,23	
1980-1989	350	90,2	9,8	reference		528	84,6	15,4	reference		1148	95,1	4,9	reference	
1990 and after	104	97,1	2,9	0,36	*	145	96,5	3,5	0,34		614	98,0	2,0	0,23	
FFS Study age groups															
20-24						49	95,0	5,0	6,39	***	100	97,2	2,8	10,14	**
25-29	78 [2]	95,3	4,7	4,48	***	195	91,5	8,5	2,01	**	440	97,0	3	2,06	
30-34	199	91,3	8,7	2,24	**	323	83,8	16,2	1,83	***	676	96,1	3,9	1,60	
35-39	226	86,9	13,1	1,23		443	83,0	17,0	1,14		663	93,9	6,1	1,22	
40-44	252	80,1	19,9	reference		394	78,8	21,2	reference		687	92,8	7,2	reference	
45-49	212	82,5	17,5	0,74		320	79,4	20,6	0,64	**	647	95,1	4,9	0,79	
														[3]	
Number of pre-marriage relationships															
None	910	85,8	14,2	1,27		1666	82,7	17,3	1,03		3198	94,9	5,1		
One or more	57	87,0	13,0	reference		58	88,2	11,8	reference		15	91,7	8,3		
Religious Observance															
Regular											1657	96,6	3,4	reference	
Irregular											1066	94,5	5,5	1,70	**
Non praticing											490	89,9	10,1	2,08	***
Parental Divorce															
Divorced	114	75,2	24,8	reference		238	75,8	24,2	reference		117	88,2	11,8	reference	
Non divorced	853	87,1	12,9	0,56	***	1486	83,9	16,1	0,70	***	3096	95,1	4,9	0,44	**
														[3]	
Spouse's marital status at start of relationship															
Single	917	86,1	13,9	reference		1651	83,0	17,0	reference		3188	94,9	5,1		
Formerly married	50	81,0	19,0	1,24		73	81,3	18,7	0,87		25	87,5	12,5		
Age difference between spouses															
Man at least 5 years older											1278	95,4	4,6	0,71	
Man 1-4 years older											1103	94,4	5,6	0,97	
Less than a year difference											672	95,4	4,6	reference	
Woman 1-4 years older											34	98,2	1,8	0,84	
Woman at least 5 years older											126	89,9	10,1	2,10	
Did spouse have at least one child?															
No	896	86,1	13,9			1635	83,2	16,8			3179	94,9	5,1		
Yes	71	81,6	18,4	1,01		89	75,2	24,8	1,16		34	91,7	8,3	1,54	
Age at marriage															
Under 20						545	76,0	24,0	2,89	***	625	92,6	7,4	3,39	***
20-22	379 [3]	83,4	16,6	1,40	*	635	81,4	18,6	1,81	***	1040	94,2	5,8	1,78	*
23-25	316	84,2	15,8	reference		323	89,5	10,5	reference		862	95,6	4,4	reference	
26-29	186	92,0	8,0	0,54	**	150	89,7	10,3	0,90		485	97,1	2,9	0,43	**
Over 30	86	88,4	11,6	0,59		71	92,8	7,2	0,40	**	201	95,8	4,2	0,35	*
Pregnancy in progress															
No	687	85,0	15,0	reference		1191	85,5	14,5	reference		2644	95,5	4,5	reference	
Yes	280	88,2	11,8	0,48	***	533	75,8	24,2	0,87		569	91,1	8,9	0,86	
Level of Education [1]															
Primary	246	83,8	16,2	reference		543	82,8	17,2	reference		683	97,5	2,5	reference	
Secondary	652	86,5	13,5	0,88		1012	83,6	16,4	1,29	**	2242	94,3	5,7	2,93	***
Tertiary	69	86,4	13,6	0,76		169	79,2	20,8	1,66	***	288	92,5	7,5	5,16	***
Employment Status [1]															
Actively employed	699	88,0	12,0	reference		963	80,8	19,2	reference		2222	93,8	6,2		
Unemployed-student	268	79,5	20,5	1,58	****	568	82,7	17,3	1,01		113	94,2	5,8	1,35	
Not active						193	89,2	10,8	0,44	***	878	97,7	2,3	0,46	**
Length of premarital cohabitation															
None	509	86,5	13,5	reference		1041	82,6	17,4	reference		3032	95,2	4,8	reference	
Less than a year	166	83,3	16,7	1,64	**	267	78,8	21,2	1,39	*	72	92,8	7,2	1,60	
1-2 years	121	86,5	13,5	1,30		166	86,9	13,1	1,03		39	87,5	12,5	1,74	
More than 2 years	171	85,9	14,1	1,45		250	85,5	14,5	1,13		70	88,0	12	1,58	
Birth of a child during marriage															
None	225	77,5	22,5	reference		355	73,6	26,4	reference		532	88,0	12,0	reference	
In first 12 months	272	88,2	11,8	0,36	***	507	79,9	20,1	0,43	***	1003	95,7	4,3	0,20	***
In second year	196	87,1	12,9	0,29	***	382	87,1	12,9	0,28	***	826	96,8	3,2	0,12	***
In third year	110	89,0	11,0	0,23	***	189	87,8	12,2	0,27	***	371	97,0	3,0	0,12	***
After the third year	158	89,0	11,0	0,25	***	291	88,9	11,1	0,23	***	481	95,3	4,7	0,20	***

[a] The model examining men in Italy is not shown for significance of results due to the low number of divorced subjects
(1) At the time of marriage; (2) 20-29 years old; (3) variable not shown in the model
Significance * 5 (%); ** 1 (%) and *** 1 (per thousand)
Reading: women in France not professionally active at the time of marriage are 0.44 less likely for all lengths of relationship (statistical risk 1 per 1000) than women employed at the time of marriage to divorce, all else being equal

Table 1 cont.: Factors influencing the probability of divorce between the date of marriage and study for men and women in Sweden and Switzerland (semi-parametric models-relative risks)

| | Sweden | | | | | | | | | | Switzerland | | | | | | | | | |
| | Men | | | | | Women | | | | | Men | | | | | Women | | | | |
	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant	Unadjusted Number	% not divorced (adjusted)	% divorced (adjusted)	Relative Risk	Significant
	898	83,0	17,0			1866	78,7	21,3			1468	86,5	13,5			3074	85,2	14,8		
Year of Marriage						122	58,2	41,8	1,42		49	74,6	25,4	1,31		247	71,9	28,1	1,00	
before 1970	356[4]	74,8	25,2	2,90	*	652	71,6	28,4	1,66	*	428	79,2	20,8	1,02		970	79,4	20,6	1,11	
1970-1979	397	84,4	15,6	reference		859	87,2	12,8	reference		638	87,1	12,9	reference		1265	87,1	12,9	reference	
1980-1989	145	96,7	3,3	0,20	**	233	97,1	2,9	0,17	***	353	98,0	2,0	0,12	***	592	97,5	2,5	0,30	***
1990 and after																				
FFS Study age groups						93	93,6	6,4								79	100,0	0,0	0,00	
20-24	189	90,0	10,0	6,43	***	302	91,1	8,9	2,67		156[2]	95,3	4,7	4,26	**	407	95,8	4,2	1,14	
25-29	206	84,5	15,5	3,85	***	426	84,0	16,0	1,43		304	90,1	9,9	1,56		664	89,8	10,2	1,27	
30-34						482	80,7	19,3	1,39		393	88,0	12,0	1,05		723	82,3	17,7	1,22	
35-39	503	79,5	20,5	reference		563	71,9	28,1	reference		318	83,5	16,5	reference		629	79,0	21,0	reference	
40-44											297	80,5	19,5	1,11		572	80,4	19,6	0,89	
45-49																				
Number of pre-marriage relationships	757	84,1	15,9	0,49	**	1555	79,4	20,6	0,55	***	1358	86,6	13,4	0,58		2811	85,3	14,7	0,89	
None	141	78,0	22,0	reference		311	76,2	23,8	reference		110	85,1	14,9	reference		263	85,9	14,1	reference	
One or more																				
Religious Observance	82	83,1	16,9	reference		231	85,3	14,7	reference		195	95,1	4,9	reference		564	92,2	7,8	reference	
Regular	206	89,3	10,7	0,77		566	80,9	19,1	1,32		535	89,1	10,9	1,52		1283	88,2	11,8	1,45	*
Irregular	610	81,1	18,9	1,37		1069	76,4	23,6	1,78	**	738	82,3	17,7	2,90	***	1227	79,1	20,9	2,71	***
Non praticing																				
Parental Divorce	85	71,3	28,7	reference		214	65,2	34,8	reference		148	80,6	19,4	reference		361	78,4	21,6	reference	
Divorced	813	84,3	15,7	0,59	*	1652	80,2	19,8	0,61	***	1320	87,2	12,8	0,78		2713	86,3	13,7	0,61	***
Non divorced																				
Spouse's marital status at start of relationship											1425	86,7	13,3	reference		2926	86,0	14,0	reference	
Single											43	81,3	18,7	0,72		148	74,2	25,8	1,08	
Formerly married																				
Age difference between spouses											296	89,8	10,2	1,41		997	82,5	17,5	0,85	
Man at least 5 years older											432	86,6	13,4	0,96		1130	86,5	13,5	0,87	
Man 1-4 years older											511	84,9	15,1	reference		727	87,0	13,0	reference	
Less than a year difference											63	87,1	12,9	0,84		47	83,5	16,5	1,88	
Woman 1-4 years older											166	85,5	14,5	0,86		173	88,8	11,2	1,24	
Woman at least 5 years older																				
Did spouse have at least one child?											1403	87,0	13,0	reference		2925	85,9	14,1	reference	
No											65	76,9	23,1	2,20	*	149	75,1	24,9	1,20	
Yes																				
Age at marriage						210	59,7	40,3	3,57	***						254	72,7	27,3	3,85	***
Under 20	154[3]	70,7	29,3	1,65	*	506	73,0	27,0	1,94	***	217[3]	81,2	18,8	1,61	*	939	82,3	17,7	1,73	***
20-22	231	80,5	19,3	reference		451	80,7	19,3	reference		430	84,2	15,8	reference		843	88,1	11,9	reference	
23-25	283	86,1	13,9	0,63		379	83,3	16,7	0,86		499	87,3	12,7	0,64	*	688	88,9	11,1	0,79	
26-29	230	89,5	10,5	0,63		320	92,3	7,7	0,40	**	322	93,9	6,1	0,19	***	350	91,4	8,6	0,37	***
Over 30																				
Pregnancy in progress	384	83,6	16,4	reference		863	78,8	21,2	reference		1085	87,0	13,0	reference		2195	86,9	13,1	reference	
No	514	82,7	17,3	0,45	***	1003	78,9	21,1	0,40	***	383	85,2	14,8	0,52	**	879	81,5	18,5	0,87	
Yes																				
Level of Education[1]	74	73,6	26,4	reference		68	84,8	15,2	reference		123	92,4	7,6	reference		382	82,8	17,2	reference	
Primary	575	81,9	18,1	0,80		1205	76,6	23,4	1,91	*	939	84,7	15,3	1,70		2332	85,4	14,6	1,07	
Secondary	249	88,3	11,7	0,70		593	82,8	17,2	2,32	*	406	88,8	11,2	1,62		360	88,0	12,0	1,06	
Tertiary																				
Employment Status[1]	848	78,0	22,0	reference		1659	79,2	20,8	reference		1369	86,6	13,4	reference		2756	85,1	14,9	reference	
Actively employed	50	83,4	16,6	1,14		174	70,2	29,8	1,94	***	98	86,1	13,9	1,16		175	83,9	16,1	1,23	
Unemployed-student						33	81,9	18,1	1,09							143	91,2	8,8	0,52	*
Not active																				
Length of premarital cohabitation	154	79,3	20,7	reference		366	74,2	25,8	reference		636	88,3	11,7	reference		1370	84,6	15,4	reference	
None	130	73,7	26,3	0,75		276	69,9	30,1	0,98		256	83,5	16,5	1,59	*	587	84,4	15,6	1,32	*
Less than a year	147	85,2	14,8	0,53	*	280	78,0	22,0	0,78		202	83,6	16,4	1,64	*	385	82,2	17,8	1,36	*
1-2 years	467	86,2	13,8	0,64		944	84,1	15,9	0,69	*		86,7	13,3	1,66		732	89,6	10,4	0,91	
More than 2 years																				
Birth of a child during marriage	485	80,3	19,7	reference		963	75,4	24,6	reference		368	78,1	21,9	reference		720	76,6	23,4	reference	
None	180	82,3	17,7	0,43	***	374	79,2	20,8	0,30	***	425	87,4	12,6	0,39	***	952	85,3	14,7	0,35	***
In first 12 months	115	86,4	13,6	0,23	***	256	84,5	15,5	0,15	***	294	89,8	10,2	0,25	***	606	90,1	9,9	0,27	***
In second year	51	90,4	9,6	0,15	***	107	77,1	22,9	0,21	***	142	88,6	11,4	0,21	***	326	89,5	10,5	0,21	***
In third year	67	94,6	5,4	0,07	***	166	89,4	10,6	0,08	***	239	91,9	8,1	0,11	***	470	89,9	10,1	0,20	***
After the third year																				

Significance: * 5 (%); ** 1 (%) and *** 1 (per 1000)

Reading: At the time of FFS study in Switzerland, men not actively practicing a religion had a 2.90 times higher probability of divorcing for all lengths of relationship(at a statistical risk of 1 per 1000) all other things being equal

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