

Marriage

Italian statistics show troubling trends

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

ROME — Divorces and separations are up in Italy, while marriage is on the decline, according to government statistics.

There were 2.3 percent fewer marriages during the first half of 1994 as compared to the same period in 1993. Religious marriages in the heavily Catholic country led the decline, dropping 3.2 percent.

The same period saw an 8.2 percent jump in separations and an 8 percent rise in di-

vorces.

The figures were released in late January by Istat, the government's statistical office.

Almost 98 percent of Italy's 56.8 million people profess Catholicism, and that, say researchers, has helped keep the downward trend in marriage at a lower rate than in some other parts of Europe.

Several sociologists traced the reasons for the trends in marriage to strains placed on traditional family life by sociological and economic problems.

These include the growing independence of women who

enter the job market, said Marzio Barbagli, author of "Trying and Retrying," a book about Italian marriage.

"A woman, more independent from the economic point of view, can decide with greater freedom whether to break a marriage," Barbagli said. "Work outside the house has re-designed the roles within couples, feeding new tensions."

Catholicism has not stemmed the tide but has helped slow it down, he said.

"In the Mediterranean countries where Catholicism has deeper roots, the number of separations is still lower with respect to the central Europe

of the Protestant faith," he said.

Stefano Martelli, a family sociologist interviewed by the Catholic newspaper Avvenire, said severe economic problems, such as high unemployment, influence the trend away from marriage.

The biggest drop in marriages was registered in southern Italy where economic problems are the worst, he said.

The marriage trend and Italy's declining birth rate show that the government must develop policies that support family life, he said.

But, he added, "there is no political culture capable of looking beyond the immediate."

Survey on marital fidelity not news to those in the know

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Last year's survey revealing high levels of marital fidelity may have surprised its authors, but not Catholic family life leaders.

There is a "great desire for marital security" among a larger group of Americans than what is commonly believed, said Joan McGuinness Wagner, president of the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers.

"Jeepers! Wouldn't I like it that people are faithful?" asked Mary Anne Boylan of Wallingford, Pa., who with her husband, Bill, is part of the U.S. secretariat leadership team for Worldwide Marriage Encounter. "It's good to see people are recognizing Catholic values."

The survey was conducted by University of Chicago researchers, who did face-to-face interviews with more than 3,400 men and women ages 18-59. It noted that only 24.5 percent of married men and 15 percent of married women said they have had an affair.

It also showed that, compared to never-married singles and those who are divorced, separated or widowed, married people had the lowest median number of sex partners — two — since age 18. It revealed that Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants had the lowest median number of sex partners at three. The median number is the one with as many over that number as below it.

National media reacted with surprise. "Marital Fidelity Rampant" read a *New York Times* headline on the survey. "Sex in America: Contented but Surprisingly Chaste" read a *Washington Post* headline reporting survey results.

"We are not as promiscuous as they thought we were," said Bill Boylan. "I probably didn't believe the sensationalism that's given to ... sexual happenings that papers play up."

Married for 36 years, "our sex life's better now than when we started out," Mary Anne Boylan said. "There's more understanding now, more romance. It's very, very good. People think you've settled down to bonbons and knitting afghans."

She cautioned that "a lot of people think that good marriages happen and don't need work. Good marriages need work daily and communicating daily," values touted on Marriage Encounter retreats.

Dolores Leckey, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth, was grateful for the affirmation for being faithful rendered by the survey.

"We talk about the importance of fidelity" in marriage, "really being committed to the married relationship, not only to the child, but to each other, and the larger family and society."

Despite the low infidelity rates shown in the survey, "we
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