

Loghi Marzia – D'Errico Alessia – Burgio Alessandra – Crialesi Roberta

## **Induced abortion: the Italian issues of foreign women in an international perspective**

### *Background*

In Italy, induced abortion (IA) rate per 1,000 women aged 15-44 was 11.1 in 2006. In an international context Italian figure is quite low; higher than Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, but lower than many other countries. Even excluding Russia and the European Eastern countries, Italian induced abortion levels are significantly lower than USA, Canada and other European countries like Sweden, England and Wales, France, Norway and Denmark. This can be due to several reasons: differences in the laws, in the age structure of the female population, in the reproductive behaviour, and in a different recourse to IA.

A general description of the Italian trend shows that from 1980 to nowadays (2006 data) there has been a considerable descending trend for IA rates (from 15.3 cases per 1000 women aged 15-49 to 8.8). Three phases can be identified: a) an initial irregular growing trend due to the progressive adjustment of the statistical survey and to a share of illegal abortions becoming legal (1980-1984); b) a constant and steady decrease of the abortion levels (1985-1995); c) the decrease stopped (1995-2006) because of the different recourse to abortion by marital status, age and nationality.

### *Aim*

Two are the purposes of this analysis: a) to study the recourse to induced abortion by foreign women resident in Italy compared to Italian women; b) to compare levels of induced abortion of foreign women resident in Italy with levels referred to women living in their country of origin.

### *Data*

Data come from the national survey on IA carried out by Istat since 1979.

Individual data are collected, and for each case of IA several information are provided: socio- demographic variables of the woman (age, nationality, marital status, place of residence,...) as well as other medical information about the abortion.

### *The presence of foreigners in Italy*

During the last ten years the number of immigrants in Italy progressively raised. As concerns, resident foreigners rose from 739,789 in 1996 to 2,670,514 in 2006 (+261%), while permits of stay passed from 731,155 to 2.286.024 (+213%). Such rising trend is similar for men and women. Actually resident female immigrants are 4.4% and permits of stay are 3.8% out of the total resident female population in Italy. Reproductive outcomes (live births and IAs) show even higher proportions: live births from foreign women are 13.1% out of the total live births, while the percentage increases to 31.3% if referred to IAs.

These huge differences among the proportions of IA and the other phenomena suggest that foreign women experience higher levels of abortion with respect to Italians.

Then focusing on the nationality it emerges that Romania is the first country of origin for all the aspects considered above. In particular in 2006 almost 30% of IAs from foreigners in Italy was performed by Romanian women.

### *The recourse to abortion*

In order to verify and measure the different recourse to IA, crude and standardized rates per 1,000 resident women aged 18-49 are calculated for Italian and foreign women. Between 1996 and 2006 IA rates decreased in both population groups, even if showing different levels. Italian crude rate was 8.9 and dropped to 6.8 while values referred to foreign women were, respectively, 30.3 and 26.3 (see table). With reference to age-standardized rates the recourse to IA of foreign women was nearly 3 times higher than Italian women in 1996. This ratio became 3.4 in 2006. Considering age, the highest ratio (4.0) was in correspondence to young women (18-24 years) and the lowest (1.9) to women aged 45-49.

In both population groups rates by age decrease when age increases.

Focusing on Romanians, marked differences were observed by age and marital status, since they experienced nearly 50 IAs per 1,000 women compared to 26 of all foreign women in 2006. With respect to Italians, even controlling for age structure, IA rates for Romanians were more than 6 times higher.

IA rates per 1,000 women by age and nationality

Age	1996		2006		
	Italian	Foreign	Italian	Foreign	Romanian
18-24	10.9	51.6	11.1	43.8	106.0
25-29	11.6	38.1	10.1	36.6	53.8
30-34	11.9	27.5	9.0	29.6	44.6
35-39	10.7	19.5	7.6	22.7	37.4
40-44	5.3	9.0	3.7	9.3	18.7
45-49	0.5	1.0	0.4	0.7	1.6
18-49	8.9	30.3	6.8	26.3	48.9
STD	8.8	25.4	7.3	24.8	45.7

Both for Italians and Romanians IA rates decrease with age and are higher for never married than for married women. It means that abortion profiles are similar but the propensity to interrupt pregnancy is very different. Then a first conclusion of the analysis is that more vulnerable women needing intervention are above all young, unmarried and with a foreign nationality.

#### *Analysis carried out by a logistic model*

The analysis by nationality, age and marital status helped to identify groups of women who experienced the greatest difficulties in preventing unintended pregnancy. In order to estimate the net effects of the above mentioned variables on the chance to interrupt a pregnancy, a multivariate analysis, based on a logistic model, has been applied. The data set used in the analysis includes IAs and live births occurred in 2006. The estimated coefficient indicates the effects of the independent variables (marital status, age, geographical area of residence and nationality) on the odds of having an IA vs. a live birth.

The model was chosen on the basis of convergence parameters, using the test of the maximum likelihood to evaluate the goodness of fit.

Results confirmed the descriptive analysis: young women, never married women and foreign women (Romanians in particular) are subgroups with a higher probability to have recourse to IA instead of a live birth. In particular an estimated reduction of 93% in the risk of induced abortion was found for married women (OR=0,07) vs. ever married woman). After controlling for independent variables, the chance to interrupt a pregnancy for Romanians increases by 111% with respect to Italians. Interaction effects involving nationality and marital status show an higher probability for the Romanians in case they are married (OR=2,329).

#### *Focus on Romanian women*

Do Romanian women resident in Italy change their recourse to IA with respect to women living in their country of origin?

In order to answer this question total fertility rate (TFR) and a similar indicator referred to IAs (total abortion rate – TAR) were calculated in 2006 for Italian women, Romanian women resident in Italy and Romanian women resident in their country. The average number of births per woman was equal to 1.24 for Italian women and 1.32 for Romanian women resident in their country: fertility levels look similar. But TFR is higher for Romanian women resident in Italy (1.98).

The picture related to TAR is completely different since the average number of IAs per woman was only 0.21 referred to Italian women, and 0.91 for Romanian women resident in their country. These figures showed that the recourse to IA in Romania was much higher than Italy due to cultural and legislative differences between the two countries. Maybe cultural factors have a deeper influence as, according to the classifications of countries by restrictiveness of abortion law, made by the *Center for Reproductive Rights*, Romania and Italy are classified as countries with the least restrictive abortion laws. Therefore there are no differences in restrictions as to reason. And, as concerns the period during which women can readily access the procedure, in Italy we have the gestational limit of 90 days, while in Romania it is equal to 14 weeks. TAR for Romanian women resident in Italy was even higher and equal to 1.31.

It seems clear that Romanians living in Italy have higher TFR and higher TAR with respect to their peers in Romania, and the relationship between fertility levels and abortion levels looks similar within the two groups. According to these results the high recourse to IA of Romanian women resident in Italy seems to be more affected by their cultural background than by their migrant condition.

#### *Conclusions*

Romanians living in Italy have higher IA levels than Italian women and than Romanian women living in their country.

Since there are no deep differences between Italian and Romanian legislations, the gap could be explained by various factors to be investigated more in-depth:

- 1) recourse to IA in Romania has always been much higher than other developed countries, even if decreasing (cultural factor);
- 2) economic and social difficulties related to the condition of being a migrant can have an influence on the decision to have an abortion (managing job and family can be a hard burden);
- 3) the access to contraceptive methods, limited in the country of origin, could be more difficult in a foreign country.