



# Economic dependence and vulnerability: an intersectional perspective on risk factors for people in same-sex relationships

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## Abstract

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can manifest in various forms: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. In particular, economic violence can mark the onset of other forms of violence, from which the victim may find it increasingly difficult to escape. A context of inequalities, whether overt or subtle, in fact enables such violence by reducing the capabilities and agency of specific groups compared to others. Theoretical approaches focusing on access to resources and the inherent dependence highlight that asymmetries between partners could set the conditions for violence to occur, fuelled by power imbalances operating at both micro and macro levels, among other factors largely through gender-based differentiations. But in the absence of gender differentiation as an organizing principle of the intimate relationship, how are patterns of asymmetry and dynamics of dependence structured within same-sex couples?

The study applies a gendered and intersectional approach to the analysis of the conditions of economic dependence and vulnerability, in order to prepare the way to a further analysis of their impact across various domains, and outlines potential risk factors and their different manifestations according to gender and sexual orientation. Socio-demographic and economic indicators, including age, citizenship, education, employment, and property regime, are compared here, in order to explore asymmetries that may constitute potential risk factors of IPV and especially economic violence. The study uses a descriptive approach based on ISTAT data on marriages and civil partnerships (2019–2023).

The approach presented here is applicable across gender categories and able to highlight the specific outcomes for each group. In particular for LGBT+ people, who are exposed to specific gender-based violence that can foster conditions of vulnerability, increasing the risk of dependence on a partner, and creating a vicious cycle that is often difficult to detect before it escalates into violence.

**Keywords:** *Economic dependence; economic violence; same-sex couples; intersectionality; gender inequalities*

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## **1.Introduction**

Economic dependence, and the resulting potential vulnerability of individuals, creates a need for research and further investigation, starting with the understanding that gender-based violence is rooted in power dynamics organized around relational asymmetries (Rubin, 1975; De Rosa *et al.*, 2022; Cantillon *et al.*, 2023; D'Agostino *et al.*, 2024). This premise has underpinned a large body of literature highlighting how gender-based violence is predominantly perpetrated by men against women.

Studies have shown that domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) can negatively impact women's employment and earnings, leading to job loss, reduced productivity, and long-term economic insecurity (Boateng, 2024; Lindhorst *et al.*, 2007). This is often due to factors such as employment sabotage, where abusive partners undermine a woman's educational or career goals (Boateng, 2024), as well as the psychological and physical impacts of the violence (Lindhorst *et al.*, 2007).

At the same time, numerous studies have shown that IPV does not exclusively concern heterosexual couples but also affects couples belonging to the same gender (Badenes-Ribera, 2011; Carvalho *et al.*, 2011; Messinger, 2011; Baker *et al.*, 2013; Oliffe *et al.*, 2014; Rollè *et al.*, 2018; Barros, 2019; Laskey *et al.*, 2019; Bermea *et al.*, 2021; Trombetta & Rollè, 2023). Analyzing the potential risks in these couples is of particular interest since, in such cases, it is needed to complexify the prevailing paradigm. In relationships where both individuals belong to the same gender category, gender necessarily operates in a less obvious and direct way in the event of violence. At the same time, in this case it becomes necessary to reassess how gender intersects with other constructs functioning as power mechanisms, such as citizenship or employment status. The hypothesis is that different degrees and forms of vulnerabilisation experienced within a heteronormative social system are less identifiable in same-sex couples, as well as their links to IPV, and require simultaneous micro and macro level analyses. In particular, economic violence - one dimension of IPV - highlights the material dimension of the social relations thus produced.

IPV remains a pervasive form of gender-based violence, as evidenced by data from Italy's public helpline service (public phone number 1522). For instance, data from the first three quarters of 2024, gathered through an information storage platform recording calls, show that the majority of perpetrators of violence are partners (married or cohabiting) or ex-partners (ISTATb, 2024). These data also confirm that IPV is a gendered phenomenon disproportionately affecting women (D'Agostino *et al.*, 2024), with over 92% of calls to the helpline involving female victims. Moreover, the home emerges as the primary setting for violence. Out of the 13,312 calls, 9,789 (73.53%) reported violent acts occurring at home. IPV and domestic violence are often treated as synonymous, to the extent that the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defined IPV based on the definition of domestic violence provided in the Istanbul Convention. However, while domestic violence primarily refers to the context of violence, IPV points out the relationship between victim and perpetrator. Both aspects are crucial in producing gender and should be considered together.

In Italy (as in many other countries), data on economic violence within same-sex couples are lacking. However, we can examine the conditions that the literature identifies as conditions of vulnerabilisation and risk factors (D'Agostino *et al.*, 2024) to address the

following question: what does it mean to adopt a gender perspective in studying IPV within same-sex couples? In this context, risk factors will be viewed as “enabling” factors for violence, as they have the capacity to inhibit or promote the development of individual capabilities (Sen, 1992) in relation to a context, including the capability to escape violence (Strube, 1988; Sanders & Schnabel, 2006).

Building on the work of De Rosa, Inglese, and Napoleone (2022) on asymmetries within same-sex couples in Italy, this contribution seeks to set the terms of a potentially broader discourse cutting across micro and macro levels, while posing a theoretical and methodological issue. To this end, data on civil partnerships and marriages will be explored through an initial exploratory analysis to formulate an intersectional research proposal insofar as it will focus on the power relationship and not on the identity of the subjects involved in it. When direct information is lacking, it is indeed necessary to adopt a perspective that interrogates the limited available data, allowing possible and novel interpretations to emerge from them, serving as catalysts for future research directions.

It is important to clarify that the term “marriages” here exclusively refers to different-sex couples, while “civil partnerships” pertain exclusively to same-sex couples, as these two institutions remain segregated by sexual orientation.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that in this context trans\* people are invisible, as the only gender variable available in the dataset is the administrative sex marker, referred to by ISTAT as “sex” and “bride/groom.” In this context, the term “sex” refers exclusively to a strictly legal-institutional category, while “gender” encompasses the complex of meanings, norms, and social practices by which subjectification processes occur (Ellena & Perilli, 2012).

## 2. Economic Violence

When discussing gender-based violence, we refer to that specific form of violence rooted in power dynamics based on the sex/gender system (Rubin, 1975) and the asymmetries it generates (Vyas & Watts, 2009; Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; Laskey *et al.*, 2019). Among its various forms, economic violence particularly highlights the material conditions underlying these power dynamics.

The Istanbul Convention defines domestic violence as: “*all acts of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit, or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim*” (Council of Europe, 2011). Based on this definition, the EIGE (2014) defines IPV as “*a form of violence which affects women disproportionately and which is therefore distinctly gendered*” and, in 2017, specifies economic violence as: “*Any act or behaviour which causes economic harm to the partner. Economic violence can take the form of, among others, property damage, restricting access to financial resources, education, or the labour market, or not complying with economic responsibilities, such as alimony.*”

However, to date, no universally agreed-upon definition of economic violence exists at the international level, hindering the harmonization of data. Moreover, economic

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<sup>1</sup> The law which set the civil partnership in Italy is Law No. 76/2016.

violence remains the least addressed form of violence, often subsumed under psychological violence (Postmus *et al.*, 2020).

Nonetheless, the literature identifies three main dimensions of economic violence: control, sabotage, and economic exploitation (Postmus *et al.*, 2020). These dimensions could be analysed in terms of how they manifest among LGBTQ+ individuals and the role gender plays. For instance, sabotage might take the form of threats to out someone at work, thereby exposing them to the risk of losing their income. Additionally, discrimination in the labour market may render many LGBT+ individuals dependent and, in some cases, vulnerable to exploitation, as in instances where transgender individuals are compelled to engage in sex work to compensate for economic support from their partners (Goldberg, 2003; Laskey *et al.*, 2019).

Alongside this more liberal interpretation, another perspective focuses on access to resources, dependence, and the relationships between individuals involved (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1997; Pollak, 2005; Vyas & Watts, 2009; Eswaran & Malhotra, 2011; Bettio & Ticci, 2017; Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; Reichel, 2017). For example, the tripartition proposed by D'Agostino, Zacchia, and Corsi (2024) categorizes economic violence tactics into obstructing the acquisition and accumulation of resources, hindering the use and knowledge of personal and familial resources, and creating financial dependence. This proposal fits within the broader debate contrasting the view that violence is negatively correlated with wealth with the view that it is positively correlated with inequality (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017). While these two positions are compatible, they stem from different perspectives, shedding light on the dual micro and macro dimensions of gender-based violence. Consequently, there is a clear economic interest in adopting an intersectional perspective on the risk factors enabling IPV (Pearlin, 1975; Jewkes, 2002; Benson *et al.*, 2003).

### **3. Inequality and vulnerabilisation**

Different hypotheses are supported in the literature: first, that same-sex relationships are organized in a more egalitarian manner, and second that they tend to reproduce patterns observed in heterosexual relationships (De Rosa *et al.*, 2022). However, it is unclear how the social reproduction of inequalities at the level of family relationships resonates with a social organization that is based on hierarchical elements of status and power differentials (Cantillon *et al.*, 2023). Economic violence in particular reveals how the couple and its internal dynamics are embedded within a broader system of social relations, with the context enabling the feasibility of economic violence.

Just as gender is a relational construct, violence itself has a relational nature insofar as it can be understood through the lens of interdependence between subjects whose positions must be interpreted in relation to one another (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Vulnerability can be seen as a complex of conditions determining a person's capabilities (Sen, 1992) and agency, framed within the conceptual realm of precarity and its unequal distribution (Butler, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

In this sense, it is relevant to think in terms of conditions of vulnerabilisation. Vulnerability operates intersubjectively, enabled at the social level by specific power relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Orozco, 2021). These conditions are expressed across various

domains - gender, age, care responsibilities, citizenship, residence in an urban setting, education level, employment status and income, and financial literacy (D'Agostino *et al.*, 2024). For this reason, it is crucial to establish a foundation for further investigations into the inequalities - and the dynamics of power - that shape relationships among same-sex couples, avoiding simplistic binary interpretations of the role of gender in social relations.

#### **4. Data & Methods**

The data analyzed here come from civil partnerships and marriages surveys conducted by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). While the latter has existed since 1926, the former was created in 2018 following the enactment of Law No. 76/2016. A descriptive comparison between marriages and civil partnerships is made possible by these sources' harmonized indicators of couples' sociodemographic and economic traits.

Drawing from the literature that identify young age, migrant status, low educational attainment and difficulty in having one's own income, among others, as potential risk factors (Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; D'Agostino *et al.*, 2024), the variables chosen for this study include age at the date of the marriage or the civil partnerships, age gap between the partners, citizenship status, property regime, educational attainment, and occupational status.

The purpose of comparing formally recognized same-sex and different-sex couples is to identify patterns of heterogamy that might serve as enabling conditions for asymmetric power dynamics. Since the study's goal is exploratory, no inferential methods are used. Percentage distributions are used to summarize descriptive statistics. All of the utilized data is anonymized and available to the public.

It's important to note some limitations. First, the analysis uses administrative data, which means it can't capture the dynamics within intimate relationships that aren't officially recognized. Second, the ISTAT datasets only include the legally recognized gender of individuals, so they don't account for transgender or non-binary identities. Lastly, the approach used here is descriptive: given the limited availability of harmonized datasets and the absence of data on economic violence in Italian same-sex couples, it has not been possible to provide causal inference. Yet, the study can help suggest hypotheses and directions for future investigation.

#### **5. Power differentials analysis: a comparison between marriages and civil partnerships**

The comparison of married and civil partnerships couples with respect to the variables identified as relevant in the reference literature is presented below. The tables allow for a comparison of the frequencies calculated on the basis of the figures available in the ISTAT datasets.

##### **5.1. Community or separation of property**

Couples in civil partnerships tend to prefer community of property regime more frequently than those in marriages. However, this gap has narrowed over time, decreasing from a 5.7% difference in 2019 to just 0.9% in 2023 (Tab. 1a, 1b). Further qualitative research is needed to understand whether this preference stems from pragmatic or symbolic reasons, which will be explored in future studies.

**Table 1a – Marriage indicators**

|                                                | 2019  | 2021  | 2023  |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Marriages with joint ownership of property (%) | 27,2  | 26,6  | 25,7  |
| Marriages with at least a foreign partner (%)  | 18,6  | 13,5  | 16,1  |
| Mean age of men at marriage                    | 38,66 | 39,17 | 40,54 |
| Mean age of women at marriage                  | 34,35 | 34,89 | 36,12 |
|                                                |       |       |       |
| Mean age gap                                   | 4,31  | 4,28  | 4,42  |

**Table 1b – Civil partnerships indicators**

|                                                         | 2019  | 2021  | 2023              |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------------------|
| Civil partnerships with joint ownership of property (%) | 32,9  | 29    | 26,6              |
| Civil partnership with at least a foreign partner (%)   | 25,8  | 17,3  | 17                |
| Mean age of men at civil partnership                    | 44,46 | 46,38 | 45,9 <sup>2</sup> |
| Mean age of women at civil partnership                  | 39,62 | 39,4  | 38,98             |
|                                                         |       |       |                   |
| Mean age gap of couples of men                          | 8,86  | 8,91  | 8,34              |
| Mean age gap of couples of women                        | 5,51  | 5,25  | 5,3               |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1.POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1.POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION) - Author's own elaboration

<sup>2</sup> Figure refers to 2022, the most recent available at the time of writing

### 5.2. Citizenship

As for citizenship (Tab. 1a, 1b), we observe a convergence: in 2023, in fact, the percentages of couples with at least one foreign person seem to align between marriages (16.1%) and civil partnerships (17%), where in 2019 we had respectively 18.6% and 25.8%.

### 5.3. Age

The average age at the time of entering a civil partnership is higher than the average age at marriage (Tab. 1a, 1b). We might think that this figure is related to the fact that civil partnerships have only been recognized for a few years, allowing older couples to formalize their relationships. However, the average age at civil partnership appears to be increasing rather than decreasing, which calls for further longitudinal research (De Rosa *et al.*, 2022). On the other hand, the average age at marriage is also rising, with the age gap between partners remaining relatively stable.

This age gap differs significantly across categories: civil partnerships between men have the highest average age gap (over 8 years), followed by civil partnerships between women (just over 5 years), and marriages (about 4 years). These findings prompt further reflection on gender's role in shaping relationships, not only in terms of sexual orientation, as men and women exhibit differing behaviours.

It would be beneficial also to integrate these findings with data about the average age gap in couples who are not in a civil partnership, to try to better understand what the formalization of the partnership represents for same-sex couples and what the implications are with respect to issues of autonomy, safety, and protection from violence. It is important to note that the data analyzed pertains solely to couples who have entered into a civil partnership and does not count other people in homoaffective relationships.

Without this age gap in the latter, it could be hypothesized that, among other reasons, the former opted to formalize the partnership because of the protections it offers, in view of the social and economic vulnerability associated with the younger partner's age. Conversely, if the same gap proved to exist across civil partnership and other couples, there is a possible role played by the presence of asymmetries in couple formation. In heterosexual couples, these asymmetries often relate to gender and associated roles, whereas in same-sex couples they may be expressed through other variables, such as age.

### 5.4. Education

Moving on to education attainment, it should be noted that women who are married to men tend to have the same or higher educational qualifications than their partners (Tab. 2). In 2023, 11.24% of couples in marriage had women with a high school diploma and men with a middle school diploma; in 8.88% of cases, wives had a master's degree and husbands a high school diploma. Educational homogamy (43.24%) occurred mostly for middle school diploma (8.73%), high school diploma (22.77%), and master's degree (8.75%). Grooms had higher educational qualifications than brides in only 20.27% of marriages.

**Table 2 – Marriages, education level, 2023**

| Education level - bride<br>Education level - groom | Primary school certificate, no educational degree | Lower secondary school certificate | Diploma of upper secondary education (4-5 years) | Short university degree | Long university degree | Post-university specialization or post-diploma AFAM | <b>Total</b>   |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Primary school certificate, no education           | 1.214                                             | 1.999                              | 1.612                                            | 223                     | 34                     | 18                                                  | <b>5.408</b>   |
| Lower secondary school certificate                 | 1.673                                             | 16.096                             | 20.710                                           | 3.337                   | 3.972                  | 122                                                 | <b>45.910</b>  |
| Diploma of upper secondary education               | 1.161                                             | 13.233                             | 41.953                                           | 11.930                  | 16.374                 | 453                                                 | <b>85.104</b>  |
| Short university degree                            | 111                                               | 905                                | 4.517                                            | 4.010                   | 5.280                  | 155                                                 | <b>14.978</b>  |
| Long university degree                             | 275                                               | 1.591                              | 7.507                                            | 4.959                   | 16.121                 | 682                                                 | <b>31.135</b>  |
| Post-university specialization                     | 9                                                 | 63                                 | 259                                              | 209                     | 867                    | 265                                                 | <b>1.672</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>4.443</b>                                      | <b>33.887</b>                      | <b>76.558</b>                                    | <b>24.668</b>           | <b>42.956</b>          | <b>1.695</b>                                        | <b>184.207</b> |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP\\_1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP_1.0/POP_MARUNION)

Aware of the role of education in mitigating the risk of violence, one might argue that the tendency to acquire higher educational qualifications might be a protection tactic for those most exposed to vulnerabilization mechanisms. Without overlooking the fact, however, that despite the higher educational attainment of wives, social norms and negative



stereotypes persist in Italy, anchoring a patriarchal model of society that is still bent toward episodes of IPV.

**Table 3a** - Civil partnership, education level, 2023 – Men

| Education level partner 1<br>Education level partner 2 | Primary school certificate, no educational degree | Lower secondary school certificate | Diploma of upper secondary education | Short university degree | Long university degree | Post-university specialization | Total       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Primary school certificate, no education               | 6                                                 | 11                                 | 7                                    | 1                       | 3                      | 0                              | <b>28</b>   |
| Lower secondary school certificate                     | 30                                                | 121                                | 142                                  | 20                      | 35                     | 0                              | <b>348</b>  |
| Diploma of upper secondary education                   | 22                                                | 146                                | 332                                  | 73                      | 147                    | 7                              | <b>727</b>  |
| Short university degree                                | 6                                                 | 19                                 | 62                                   | 21                      | 50                     | 3                              | <b>161</b>  |
| Long university degree                                 | 7                                                 | 42                                 | 151                                  | 39                      | 154                    | 11                             | <b>404</b>  |
| Post-university specialization                         | 0                                                 | 3                                  | 3                                    | 2                       | 13                     | 5                              | <b>26</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>                                           | <b>71</b>                                         | <b>342</b>                         | <b>697</b>                           | <b>156</b>              | <b>402</b>             | <b>26</b>                      | <b>1694</b> |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1.POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1.POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 3b** - Civil partnership, education level, 2023 – Women

| Education level partner 1<br>Education level partner 2 | Primary school certificate, no educational degree | Lower secondary school certificate | Diploma of upper secondary education | Short university degree | Long university degree | Post-university specialization | Total |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| Primary school certificate, no educational degree      | 9                                                 | 11                                 | 9                                    | 0                       | 0                      | 0                              | 29    |
| Lower secondary school certificate                     | 8                                                 | 102                                | 103                                  | 16                      | 17                     | 0                              | 246   |
| Diploma of upper secondary education                   | 10                                                | 117                                | 299                                  | 74                      | 80                     | 3                              | 583   |
| Short university degree                                | 2                                                 | 15                                 | 54                                   | 38                      | 46                     | 2                              | 157   |
| Long university degree                                 | 5                                                 | 19                                 | 99                                   | 37                      | 121                    | 6                              | 287   |
| Post-university specialization                         | 0                                                 | 0                                  | 4                                    | 2                       | 12                     | 5                              | 23    |
| Total                                                  | 34                                                | 264                                | 568                                  | 167                     | 276                    | 16                             | 1.325 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

In contrast, educational homogamy was observed in 37.7% of male civil partnerships and 43.3% of female civil partnerships (Tab. 3a, 3b).

### 5.5. Occupational Status

In 2023, women entering marriages exhibited lower employment rates compared to their male counterparts (89.1% vs. 93.87%), although these rates increased from the previous year (87.57% vs. 93.27%). Data on marriages (Tab. 4) support the hypothesis of a traditional, patriarchal model of balance for married couples: women struggle to find and/or maintain employment, increasing the risk of economic dependence, though not necessarily subjugation. Employment levels were also lower for both men and women in civil partnerships.

**Table 4** – Marriages, professional status, 2023

| Status<br>bride<br>Status<br>groom | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a.  | Total   |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|-------|---------|
| Employed                           | 158.715  | 5.055           | 6.354     | 1.275   | 497     | 255   | 769   | 172.920 |
| Not<br>employed                    | 1.117    | 779             | 418       | 48      | 19      | 14    | 15    | 2.410   |
| Housewife                          | 29       | 2               | 8         | 3       | 0       | 1     | 1     | 44      |
| Student                            | 361      | 27              | 7         | 203     | 1       | 4     | 5     | 608     |
| Retired                            | 3.136    | 264             | 728       | 1       | 1.333   | 28    | 40    | 5.530   |
| Other                              | 114      | 22              | 49        | 4       | 3       | 61    | 15    | 268     |
| n.a.                               | 659      | 30              | 78        | 22      | 4       | 14    | 1.620 | 2.427   |
| Total                              | 164.131  | 6.179           | 7.642     | 1.556   | 1.857   | 377   | 2.465 | 184.207 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

Homogamy by employment status sees women in civil partnerships (Tab. 5b) ranked first with 89.35% of couples. Marriages follow, with 88.33% of couples, and civil partnerships between men (Tab. 5a), with 86.65%. But while the share of married couples in which the man is employed and the woman is not employed is similar to the share of couples in civil partnerships in which only one of the partners is employed, it stands out how in as many as 3.45% of marriages the woman is a housewife married to an employed man, a higher share than that of marriages with the husband employed and the wife not employed. In contrast, in the case of civil partnerships, the share of homemakers is practically non-existent. This difference could be explained by socio-cultural norms and role representations prevalent in heterosexual relationships that are not found in same-sex couples, thus bound more to the identity component of sexual orientation than to that of gender.

The 82.34% of male couples and 85.35% of female couples in civil partnerships have both partners employed. However, civil partnership couples also have the highest percentage of couples where both partners are not employed, at about 1.5% (though still lower than the 2.95% in 2022), compared to just 0.42% of marriages.

**Table 5a** – Civil partnership, professional status, 2023 – Men

| Status<br>bride<br>Status<br>groom | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                           | 1.395    | 45              | 1         | 14      | 26      | 3     | 3    | 1.487 |
| Not<br>employed                    | 25       | 25              | 2         | 7       | 5       | 1     | 0    | 65    |
| Housewife                          | 0        | 0               | 1         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 1     |
| Student                            | 10       | 1               | 0         | 13      | 5       | 0     | 0    | 29    |
| Retired                            | 54       | 5               | 0         | 3       | 28      | 1     | 2    | 93    |
| Other                              | 3        | 4               | 0         | 0       | 1       | 2     | 0    | 10    |
| n.a.                               | 5        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 4    | 9     |
| Total                              | 1.492    | 80              | 4         | 37      | 65      | 7     | 9    | 1.694 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 5b** - Civil partnership, professional status, 2023 – Women

| Status<br>Partner 2<br>Status<br>partner 1 | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                                   | 1.131    | 18              | 7         | 10      | 11      | 0     | 1    | 1.178 |
| Not<br>employed                            | 23       | 19              | 1         | 7       | 1       | 0     | 0    | 51    |
| Housewife                                  | 9        | 0               | 2         | 0       | 2       | 0     | 0    | 13    |
| Student                                    | 20       | 3               | 0         | 18      | 0       | 0     | 1    | 42    |
| Retired                                    | 12       | 3               | 2         | 4       | 9       | 0     | 0    | 30    |
| Other                                      | 0        | 0               | 0         | 1       | 0       | 2     | 1    | 4     |
| n.a.                                       | 3        | 1               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 3    | 7     |
| Total                                      | 1.198    | 44              | 12        | 40      | 23      | 2     | 6    | 1.325 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

## 5.6. Territorial inequalities

An initial look at territorial differences offers interesting insights for future research developments that may possibly establish correlations between micro and macro levels.

The highest levels of homogamy by employment status are found in central Italy, with 91.2% and 92% of civil partnerships respectively between men and women (Tab. 7a, 7b), and 91.3% of marriages (Tab. 10). It follows the South (Tab. 8a, 8b, 11), with shares of 88, 92 and 88.3% respectively, and the North (Tab. 6a, 6b, 9), with 84.2 and 87.4% of civil partnerships and 88.3% of marriages.

Given the hypothesis that more than wealth it is inequality that contributes to the occurrence of IPV, these data were compared with primary income inequality, represented by the Gini index, calculated by ISTAT including imputed rents (ISTATb, 2024). This in 2023 was 44.5% in the North, 42.2% in the Center and 47.9% in the South. Clearly, the Center exhibits lower levels of inequality but also higher levels of homogamy for all types of couples. However, this correspondence is lost in the cases of the North and the South.

**Table 6a** - Civil partnerships, Northern Italy, Professional status, 2023 – Men

| Status<br>Partner 2<br>Status<br>partner 1 | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                                   | 761      | 33              | 0         | 12      | 18      | 2     | 2    | 828   |
| Not<br>employed                            | 17       | 16              | 2         | 4       | 4       | 0     | 0    | 43    |
| Housewife                                  | 0        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 0     |
| Student                                    | 7        | 1               | 0         | 10      | 3       | 0     | 0    | 21    |
| Retired                                    | 32       | 4               | 0         | 2       | 13      | 1     | 1    | 53    |
| Other                                      | 1        | 3               | 0         | 0       | 1       | 2     | 0    | 7     |
| n.a.                                       | 1        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 3    | 4     |
| Total                                      | 819      | 57              | 2         | 28      | 39      | 5     | 6    | 956   |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 6b** - Civil partnerships, Northern Italy, Professional status, 2023 – Women

| Status<br>partner 2<br>Status<br>partner 1 | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                                   | 636      | 12              | 4         | 7       | 3       | 0     | 1    | 663   |
| Not<br>employed                            | 18       | 9               | 1         | 6       | 1       | 0     | 0    | 35    |
| Housewife                                  | 6        | 0               | 1         | 0       | 2       | 0     | 0    | 9     |
| Student                                    | 15       | 1               | 0         | 12      | 0       | 0     | 1    | 29    |
| Retired                                    | 6        | 2               | 2         | 2       | 4       | 0     | 0    | 16    |
| Other                                      | 0        | 0               | 0         | 1       | 0       | 2     | 1    | 4     |
| n.a.                                       | 3        | 1               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 1    | 5     |
| Total                                      | 684      | 25              | 8         | 28      | 10      | 2     | 4    | 761   |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 7a** - Civil partnerships, Central Italy, Professional status, 2023 – Men

| Status<br>Partner 2<br>Status<br>partner 1 | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                                   | 372      | 4               | 0         | 2       | 4       | 0     | 0    | 382   |
| Not<br>employed                            | 3        | 3               | 0         | 1       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 7     |
| Housewife                                  | 0        | 0               | 1         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 1     |
| Student                                    | 1        | 0               | 0         | 1       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 2     |
| Retired                                    | 18       | 1               | 0         | 1       | 6       | 0     | 0    | 26    |
| Other                                      | 0        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 0     |
| n.a.                                       | 2        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 2     |
| Total                                      | 396      | 8               | 1         | 5       | 10      | 0     | 0    | 420   |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 7b** - Civil partnerships, Central Italy, Professional status, 2023 – Women

| Status<br>Partner 2<br>Status<br>partner 1 | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                                   | 275      | 2               | 3         | 3       | 6       | 0     | 0    | 289   |
| Not<br>employed                            | 1        | 4               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 5     |
| Housewife                                  | 3        | 0               | 1         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 4     |
| Student                                    | 2        | 0               | 0         | 2       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 4     |
| Retired                                    | 5        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 5       | 0     | 0    | 10    |
| Other                                      | 0        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 0     |
| n.a.                                       | 0        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 1    | 1     |
| Total                                      | 286      | 6               | 4         | 5       | 11      | 0     | 1    | 313   |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP.1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP.1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 8a** - Civil partnerships, Southern Italy, Professional status, 2023 – Men

| Status Partner 2<br>Status partner 1 | Employed | Not employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                             | 262      | 8            | 1         | 0       | 4       | 1     | 1    | 277   |
| Not employed                         | 5        | 6            | 0         | 2       | 1       | 1     | 0    | 15    |
| Housewife                            | 0        | 0            | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 0     |
| Student                              | 2        | 0            | 0         | 2       | 2       | 0     | 0    | 6     |
| Retired                              | 4        | 0            | 0         | 0       | 9       | 0     | 1    | 14    |
| Other                                | 2        | 1            | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 3     |
| n.a.                                 | 2        | 0            | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 1    | 3     |
| Total                                | 277      | 15           | 1         | 4       | 16      | 2     | 3    | 318   |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP\\_1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP_1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 8b** - Civil partnerships, Southern Italy, Professional status, 2023 – Women

| Status Partner 2<br>Status partner 1 | Employed | Not employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|-------|
| Employed                             | 220      | 4            | 0         | 0       | 2       | 0     | 0    | 226   |
| Not employed                         | 4        | 6            | 0         | 1       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 11    |
| Housewife                            | 0        | 0            | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 0     |
| Student                              | 3        | 2            | 0         | 4       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 9     |
| Retired                              | 1        | 1            | 0         | 2       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 4     |
| Other                                | 0        | 0            | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 0     |
| n.a.                                 | 0        | 0            | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 1    | 1     |
| Total                                | 228      | 13           | 0         | 7       | 2       | 0     | 1    | 251   |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP\\_1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP_1.0/POP_MARUNION)



**Table 9 – Marriages, Northern Italy, Professional status, 2023**

| Status<br>Bride<br>Status<br>Groom | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total  |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|--------|
| Employed                           | 68.357   | 2.259           | 2.715     | 665     | 364     | 143   | 373  | 74.876 |
| Not<br>employed                    | 572      | 221             | 84        | 20      | 10      | 4     | 6    | 917    |
| Housewife                          | 14       | 1               | 5         | 2       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 22     |
| Student                            | 227      | 16              | 4         | 150     | 0       | 0     | 5    | 402    |
| Retired                            | 1.934    | 156             | 369       | 1       | 991     | 22    | 19   | 3.492  |
| Other                              | 54       | 9               | 21        | 2       | 3       | 37    | 3    | 129    |
| n.a.                               | 329      | 10              | 33        | 13      | 3       | 5     | 573  | 966    |
| Total                              | 71.487   | 2.672           | 3.231     | 853     | 1.371   | 211   | 979  | 80.804 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP\\_1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP_1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 10 – Marriages, Central Italy, Professional status, 2023**

| Status<br>Bride<br>Status<br>Groom | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a. | Total  |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|------|--------|
| Employed                           | 31.238   | 684             | 734       | 161     | 76      | 41    | 121  | 33.055 |
| Not<br>employed                    | 148      | 87              | 22        | 3       | 5       | 4     | 2    | 271    |
| Housewife                          | 2        | 0               | 0         | 0       | 0       | 0     | 0    | 2      |
| Student                            | 67       | 3               | 1         | 18      | 0       | 0     | 0    | 89     |
| Retired                            | 581      | 57              | 128       | 0       | 210     | 2     | 10   | 988    |
| Other                              | 23       | 6               | 4         | 1       | 0       | 6     | 2    | 42     |
| n.a.                               | 124      | 3               | 10        | 1       | 0       | 4     | 295  | 437    |
| Total                              | 32.183   | 840             | 899       | 184     | 291     | 57    | 430  | 34.884 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP\\_1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP_1.0/POP_MARUNION)

**Table 11 – Marriages, Southern Italy, Professional status, 2023**

| Status<br>Bride<br>Status<br>Groom | Employed | Not<br>employed | Housewife | Student | Retired | Other | n.a.  | Total  |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------|-------|--------|
| Employed                           | 59.120   | 2.112           | 2.905     | 449     | 57      | 71    | 275   | 64.989 |
| Not<br>employed                    | 397      | 471             | 312       | 25      | 4       | 6     | 7     | 1.222  |
| Housewife                          | 13       | 1               | 3         | 1       | 0       | 1     | 1     | 20     |
| Student                            | 67       | 8               | 2         | 35      | 1       | 4     | 0     | 117    |
| Retired                            | 621      | 51              | 231       | 0       | 132     | 4     | 11    | 1.050  |
| Other                              | 37       | 7               | 24        | 1       | 0       | 18    | 10    | 97     |
| n.a.                               | 206      | 17              | 35        | 8       | 1       | 5     | 752   | 1.024  |
| Total                              | 60.461   | 2.667           | 3.512     | 519     | 195     | 109   | 1.056 | 68.519 |

Source: IstatData [https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1\\_POP\\_1.0/POP\\_MARUNION](https://esploradati.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/dw/categories/IT1_POP_1.0/POP_MARUNION)

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

This study contributes to the discourse on IPV by proposing a framework inclusive of people outside the hetero-normative gender binary. While ample data about marriages are available to analyze patterns of heterogamy and homogamy and their potential contributions to household inequalities, the gender variable in civil partnerships operates in a less overt manner. This suggests that understanding gender's role in households requires examining its interaction with other factors. If distinct behaviours between women and men in civil partnerships are evident, it implies that asymmetries in family organization are not solely driven by partners identifying with different genders.

The most marked distinction within these categories pertains to age. Civil partnerships generally exhibit larger age gaps compared to marriages, with male couples demonstrating the greatest age disparities. Future analyses should explore whether these age differences correlate with other gaps, such as educational attainment, citizenship status, or employment conditions. Male civil partnerships, in particular, exhibit the highest asymmetries across multiple dimensions—age, education, and employment status—and warrant closer examination in contexts where more granular data are available.

Territorial differences shaped by structural and cultural factors—such as levels of homolesbobitransphobia—must also be addressed. These factors may influence decisions to formalize partnerships as well as access to education, employment, and familial support

networks for LGBTQI+ individuals. The phenomenon of *sexilio* (Lattera, 2024)—the migration of individuals to larger urban centers in search of safer and more inclusive environments—represents a dual dynamic. On the one hand, it may lead to increased economic and social vulnerabilities; on the other, it could foster the creation of alternative support systems outside the family of origin (D’Agostino *et al.*, 2024). Understanding this interplay is critical to assess how structural inequalities intersect with individual choices and broader societal trends.

This analysis contributes to highlight that the asymmetries within civil partnerships, particularly among male couples, are more pronounced than in other forms of couple formation and merit targeted investigation. Additionally, understanding how macro-level territorial and cultural inequalities interact with micro-level couple dynamics will be key to uncovering the structural drivers of disparities within partnerships.

Although the scope of this study is exploratory, its findings are meaningful not only for scientific research, but also in terms of social work practice. First, they highlight the need to check for signs of economic dependence and unequal access to resources in all types of couples, including same-sex relationships, where power imbalances might operate less overtly. In fact, in the absence of gender differentiation between the partners, the couple might organize itself around other disparity drivers.

Second, the study shows the importance of developing social services models capable of considering and addressing the intersectional challenges faced by LGBT+ people. Practitioners should be trained to spot signs of control, sabotage, or exploitation (Postmus *et al.*, 2020) even when not based on a heteronormative structure. As for measures to counter economic violence, when an approach focused on access to resources is adopted (D’Agostino *et al.*, 2024), it is important to design interventions that take into account the specific social barriers faced by LGBT+ people, such as workplace discrimination, limited social support, the fear of seeking help due to possible homophobic reactions or not being believed.

Finally, the results call for data harmonization. Without clear and standard measures of economic violence and without recognizing gender diversity in national statistics, both research and social work are hindered. Better data would support evidence-based policymaking and services, fostering more effective and structural actions against IPV.

Future research should seek to combine quantitative and qualitative methods to explore how economic dependence operates within diverse LGBT+ relationships and how institutional and socio-cultural contexts mediate these dynamics. In particular, deeper insights into the mechanisms through which structural inequalities are reproduced at the interpersonal level are needed.

### **Authors’ contributions**

This article was conceived, structured, and reviewed by both authors. Nevertheless, while parr. 1 and 6 have been written together, parr. 2 and 3 can be ascribed to R. Patimo and 4 and 5 to M. Mogetti.

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