



Familia values not a problem for Italians

DATELINE: Italy
By Artie Zimmet

As the American nuclear family becomes more and more of a rarity with high divorce rates, the Italian family stands as a sharp contrast with its solidarity. Sociologists count the Italian family unit among the strongest in the world.

"The family is the state for Italians," wrote the prolific Italian novelist, Leonardo Sciascia.

Family members and the Italian government work almost equally as hard to support a nuclear family with strong ties. Italian families' solidarity has its roots in the past and continues as one of many Italian traditions.

Many families have lived in the same house for centuries. Grandparents take pride in knowing their grandchildren will be reared in the same house their grandparents were born in.

Babysitters were a foreign idea in Italy until recently, and even now they are mostly a northern phenomenon. Grandparents also help raise young children while the parents are at work.

Many Italians take a siesta from work each day to go home and eat lunch with their family and to nap.

Many women prefer teaching as a career so they can spend more time with their children, and in a recent survey, a large majority of women chose family over a career in order of importance.

While Italians, in general, work hard to keep their family close-knit, the government also encourages a close-knit family.

After giving birth, women are given a year to care for their babies while the government guarantees that their jobs will be there after the year is over. If a woman wants, she may take an additional year off and take a pay cut, but her employer must rehire her when she returns after two years away from work.

The Italian government even grants time off for fathers who wish to spend time bonding with their children. The government grants them three months off from work while their job is guaranteed without a pay cut.

The government also grants everyone a month long vacation every year to facilitate family bonding.

In the quest to retain the nuclear family, the Italian government has enacted divorce laws that Americans may find stringent.

In 1974, the public voted into law a referendum that required divorcing couples to remain legally married for five years until the divorce is granted. The law was amended recently to three years, however, reflecting the slight increase in Italy's divorce rate.

Although some people may find the law unfair, the rationale is that if only one out of 10 marriages are saved, the inconvenience caused to the other nine couples is worth it.

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