



Statistics Netherlands

Division of Social and Spatial Statistics
Department of Statistical Analysis Voorburg

*P.O.Box 4000
2270 JM Voorburg
The Netherlands*

e-mail: mhus@cbs.nl and lsnf@cbs.nl

Divorce risks for foreigners in the Netherlands

Mila van Huis and Liesbeth Steenhof

Paper for Euresco conference 'The second demographic transition in Europe'
19 – 24 June 2003, Spa, Belgium

Divorce risks for foreigners in the Netherlands

Mila van Huis and Liesbeth Steenhof

This paper describes two methods to calculate the risk of divorce by marriage duration and country of origin. Both methods, the longitudinal and the transversal method, give comparable results and provide a good estimation of the risk of divorce for couples of mixed foreign background and couples of same foreign background. Marriages between non-western foreign men and Dutch women turn out to have by far the highest risk of divorce. Half of these marriages are broken up within ten years. However, there are substantial differences between the various non-western countries of origin. Marriages between Dutch women and Turkish or Moroccan first generation men have a very high risk of divorce. Marriages between first generation Surinamese men and women are also relatively unstable. For bride donor countries, marriages between Dutch men and South American women have the highest risk of divorce. An estimated 10 percent of marriages between non-western men and Dutch women are marriages of convenience.

1. Introduction

In 2001, 37.1 thousand marriages in the Netherlands were dissolved through divorce. Thirty years ago this figure was 11.6 thousand. The substantial increase demonstrates that divorce is no longer such an exception. However, there are large differences in divorce rates between the various population groups in the Netherlands with a foreign background. Previous studies have shown that the risk of divorce increases as the partners' backgrounds differ (Janssen, 2002).

The country of origin of the partners, or of their parents, is therefore an important variable in divorce risk studies. On the one hand, as divorce is less accepted among certain groups of foreigners than among the native Dutch population, the risk of divorce is probably lower. On the other hand, in a mixed marriage the backgrounds are so different that the risk increases.

Nearly 80 percent of the 3.5 million married couples in the Netherlands are couples consisting of two Dutch partners. In just over one fifth of married couples, therefore, one or both partners have a foreign background. Until now relatively little is known about the risk of divorce among the groups of various foreign origin. The most recent study by Statistics Netherlands was published in 1999, using divorce figures from 1997 (Harmsen, 1999). This study presented divorce risks by country of birth of the partners, but not by country of birth of their parents, which meant that second generation foreigners were left out of account.

The study presented here calculates the risk of divorce by duration of marriage for various countries of origin, using two methods: a longitudinal and a transversal approach.

To calculate the divorce risks, information was taken from the municipal population registers system, a computerised system that has been in use in Dutch municipalities since 1 October 1994. On the basis of this registration a structure count was carried out, resulting in a database with personal information such as date of birth, country of birth, sex, marital status and address of everyone registered in a Dutch municipality on 1 January of a given year. It can be seen as an annual administrative census on 1 January. But the system also provides information on changes in these stock data in the course of the year, caused for example by migration, births, divorce and marriage. Statistics Netherlands compiles marriage and divorce statistics – among many others - on the basis of these flow data. Before the municipal population registers system came into use, these statistics were compiled with the aid of administrative cards for each event, which the municipality sent to Statistics Netherlands.

The present study examines the divorce risk of people with a foreign background living in the Netherlands. Statistics Netherlands defines such a person - who for the purposes of readability we shall call a *foreigner* in this paper - as someone with at least one parent born outside the Netherlands. A distinction is made between first generation foreigners, who were themselves born outside the Netherlands, and second generation foreigners, who were born in the Netherlands. The country of origin is defined on the basis of the foreigner's country of birth (first generation) or the mother's country of birth (second generation), unless the mother was born in the Netherlands, in which case the father's country of birth is taken. If the country of birth is unknown in the population register, the parents are assumed to have the same country of birth as their child.

On the basis of country of origin, foreigners are divided into the two categories: western and non-western. Non-western countries include: Africa, Asia (excluding Japan and former Dutch East Indies or Indonesia), South America and Turkey. Western countries include all countries in Europe (excluding Turkey), North America, former Dutch East Indies or Indonesia, Japan and Oceania.

2. Method

2.1 Calculation of longitudinal risk of divorce

Longitudinal divorce rates for marriage cohorts by duration of marriage are usually based on annual marriage and divorce statistics. For each year the number of marriages contracted in a certain previous year that are dissolved is established with the aid of the annual divorce statistics. The original number of marriages contracted in that year is taken from the marriage statistics. By recording yearly how many marriages from a certain year are dissolved, divorce rates of marriage cohorts by marriage duration can be calculated. However, this method does not make it possible to calculate longitudinal divorce rates for the population with a foreign background in the Netherlands as the parents' country of birth is not present in the marriage and divorce records prior to 1995, and cannot be linked to these records.

To overcome this and calculate longitudinal divorce rates for each group of foreign origin, another approach was chosen. Divorce rates of marriage cohorts can also be calculated on the basis of the annual structure count. Here marriage and divorce data from the count of 1 January 2002 are used. Two databases were constructed from this count: one containing married and ever-married men with their marriage details, and one with married and ever-married women with their details. Both databases contain personal identification code, country of birth, parents' country of birth, date of marriage, date of divorce where applicable, and the partner's (or ex-partner's) personal identification code. If someone has been married more than once the databases contain more than one record for him or her. Marriages that have ended because of the death of one of the partners are left out of account, as the structure count does not contain information on the partner who has died. By linking the databases with the aid of the (ex-)partners' identification codes, the date of marriage and - where present - date of divorce, we get a complete marriage database with complete data on both partners. This database contains all (existing and dissolved) marriages between persons who were both registered in a municipal population register on 1 January 2002. The database also contains information on country of birth of both partners, and country of birth of their parents, which can be used as a basis to establish the country of origin of the marriage partners.

This marriage database makes it possible to calculate the number of marriages contracted per year as well as the number of marriages dissolved, by duration of marriage. These longitudinal divorce rates can be broken down by country of origin of the partners.

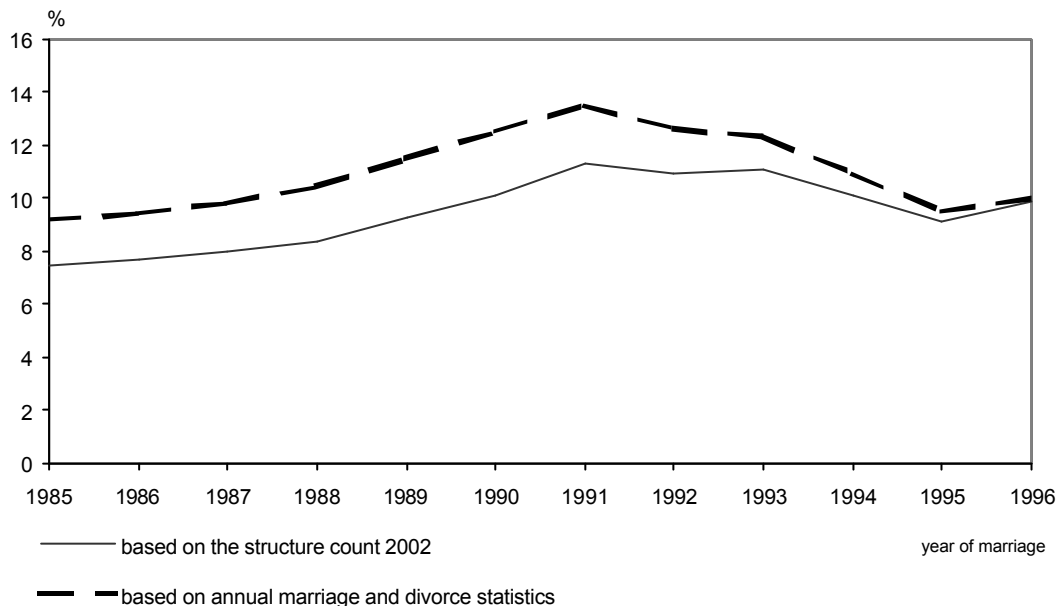
The calculation of longitudinal divorce rates based on the structure count differs from that based on the yearly marriage and divorce statistics, as described above. The differences are caused by the fact that in the marriage database based on the structure count, marriages, whether existing or dissolved, in which one of the partners has emigrated or died are not included. This means that only the more recent marriage cohorts can be studied as marriages ending in death of one of the partners plays only a small part in these. On the other hand, in the calculation of divorce rates based on annual marriage and divorce statistics, marriages contracted abroad are not taken into account; this means that divorces of immigrants who were married when they arrived in the Netherlands are counted in the divorce statistics, whereas their marriage is not included in the marriage statistics. This may lead to distortions in the divorce risk for foreigners in the Netherlands, which is precisely the subject of this study.

To find out how large (for the Netherlands as a whole) the difference is in divorce rates between the two longitudinal methods, divorce rates after five years were calculated according to both methods. As the structure count only gives the number of marriages of people alive at that moment, only the more recent marriage cohorts are compared. *Graph 1* shows that divorce rates calculated with the aid of the structure count are on average 1.5 percent points lower than those calculated on the basis of the marriage and divorce statistics. On the one hand this is because the structure count method takes more

marriages into account, as it also includes marriages contracted outside the Netherlands. On the other hand fewer divorces are included in this method, as for some of the divorces one of the partners is no longer included in the population register and thus not included in the analysis. The graph shows that trends of divorce rates for the various marriage cohorts correspond. For the most recent cohorts (since 1994) the differences between the divorce rates are smaller as the number of marriages and divorces according to the two methods differs less.

The calculation of divorce rates gives a reliable picture of frequency and trend, certainly for the more recent marriage cohorts. In the study presented here marriage cohorts from 1991 are therefore used for the calculation of longitudinal divorce rates.

Graph 1. Divorce rates after 5 years of marriage



2.2 Calculation of transversal divorce risks

The transversal risk of divorce by duration of marriage is calculated by dividing the number of divorces by marriage duration in 2001 from the divorce statistics by the number of married couples by marriage duration on 1 January 2001 from the structure count.

The divorce statistics for 2001 include all divorces in that year of marriages of which at least one partner is registered in the municipal population registers system. For each divorce these statistics include date of marriage, date of divorce and the dates of birth and countries of birth of the divorcees. The countries of birth of the parents of the ex-partners are not included, but these can be derived by linking the identification codes of the ex-partners to the structure count. In this way the country of origin of the divorcees can be established.

The number of married couples on 1 January 2001 can be established on the basis of the structure count. A disadvantage of this source is that only couples living at the same address can be recognised, so recently married couples who do not yet live at the same address are not included in the population at risk, while they do belong to this population. This is especially important in the case of marriages with duration one year in which one of the partners comes from abroad. The transversal risk of divorce after one year may be slightly too high for some groups of foreign origin. However, this error is relatively small as divorces hardly occur in the first year of marriage. With the life table method total divorce rates can be calculated for a certain period after the marriage.

2.3 Differences between longitudinal and transversal risk of divorce

The two methods described above to calculate the risk of divorce are based on different data. Both the longitudinal and transversal calculation methods have their own advantages and drawbacks, and it cannot be said that one is better than the other. The longitudinal risk of divorce is a risk for a marriage

cohort, i.e. for people married in a certain year. To calculate the transversal risk by marriage duration, information on the most recent cohorts is used. With these risks by duration life tables are used to calculate a total divorce rate. This rate can be interpreted as the average number of marriages that will end in divorce if the risk observed in that calendar year remain the same in the future. As this latter assumption will not be completely accurate, there will also be differences between the longitudinal and the transversal divorce risks. However, the differences will be small which is an indication that both methods give a good indication of what the real risk of divorce is by marriage duration for various countries of origin.

3. Transversal versus longitudinal risk of divorce

In both methods, the risk of divorce can be classified by the country of origin of both ex-partners. In this paper we have chosen to calculate the risk of divorce for marriage cohort 1995 according to the longitudinal method, as this is the longest period for which longitudinal and transversal risks of divorce are reasonably comparable. This is because a law to prevent marriages of convenience came into effect in 1994, which may have affected the divorce rates. To be able to compare longitudinal and transversal divorce risks reliably, a marriage cohort after 1994 must be taken as a starting point. The divorce rates by marriage duration for all residents of the Netherlands according to both methods are fairly constant through time at around 2 percent per year of marriage. The divorce rate after six years is 13 percent according to the transversal method for divorces in 2001, and 11 percent according to the longitudinal method for marriages contracted in 1995.

For the calculation of divorce risks by country of origin, a fairly rough breakdown was chosen first, namely a division by Dutch, western foreign, and non-western foreign. On the basis of this classification nine combinations of pairs are possible:

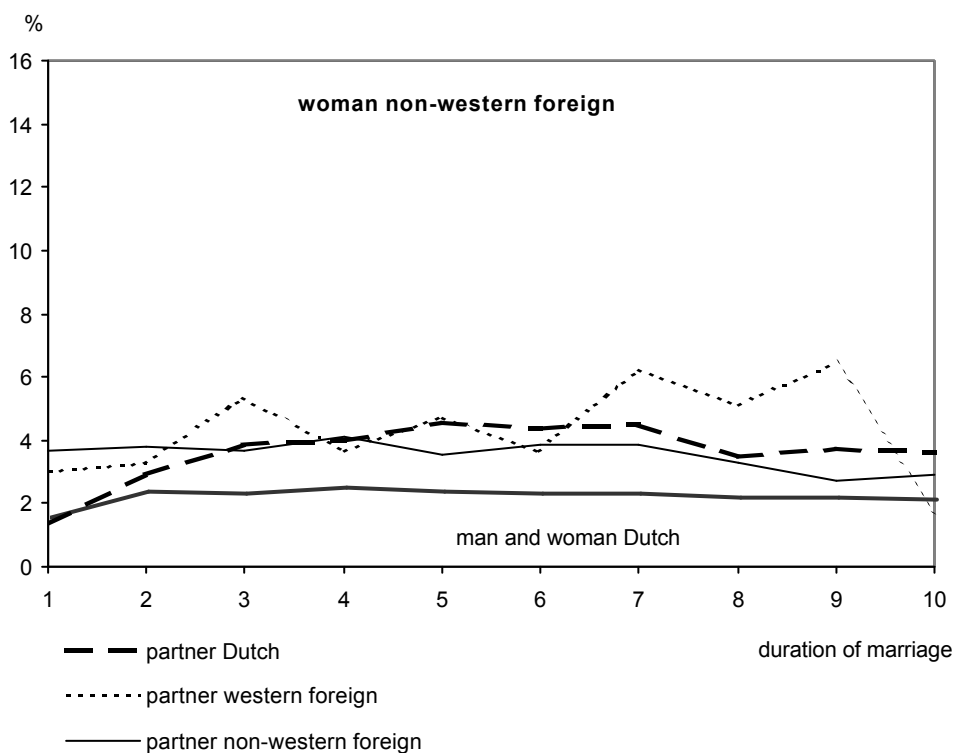
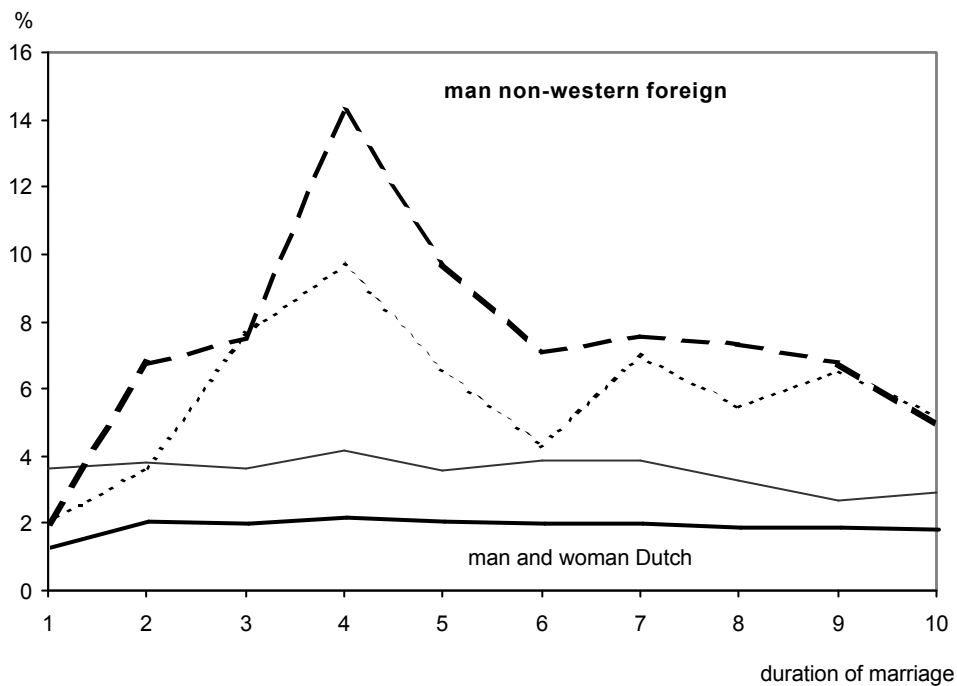
1. man Dutch – woman Dutch
2. man Dutch – woman western foreign
3. man Dutch – woman non-western foreign
4. man western foreign – woman Dutch
5. man western foreign – woman western foreign
6. man western foreign – woman non-western foreign
7. man non-western foreign – woman Dutch
8. man non-western foreign – woman western foreign
9. man non western foreign – woman non-western foreign

The divorce risks by marriage duration were calculated for all these pairs. In the transversal method the divorce risk was calculated with the aid of divorces in 2001 (*graph 2*). The longitudinal method calculated the divorce risks for marriage cohort 1995 (*graph 3*). These are divorce risks after six years of marriage, as the risks are calculated on the basis of the structure count on 1 January 2002.

Graph 2 shows the divorce risk of couples in which the man is of non-western foreign origin, and for purposes of comparison the divorce risk of all-Dutch couples. The highest risk of divorce is for mixed couples with a Dutch woman. There is a clear peak in the risk of divorce after four years: about 14 percent. The dissolution of marriages of convenience may contribute to this high risk. Mixed marriages with western women have a relatively high risk of divorce, again with a peak after four years. ‘Dutch’ marriages have by far the lowest risk of divorce, and the risk hardly varies by duration of marriage. Graph 2 also shows the transversal risk of divorce for married couples with a non-western foreign woman. Surprisingly there is little difference in the risk of divorce between the various combinations. The risk for couples consisting of a non-western foreign woman and a Dutch man is not much higher than that for non-western couples (both partners non-western foreigners). The risk is also quite stable in time. Only for couples consisting of a western and a non-western partner does the risk vary a little, because of the small numbers of couples on which it is based. For this reason this group is left out of consideration. The risk of divorce for Dutch couples is considerably lower.

The risk of divorce by duration of marriage for western foreign couples (both partners western foreign) and Dutch-western foreign couples (regardless of whether the man or the woman is Dutch) are fairly low and in the same order of magnitude.

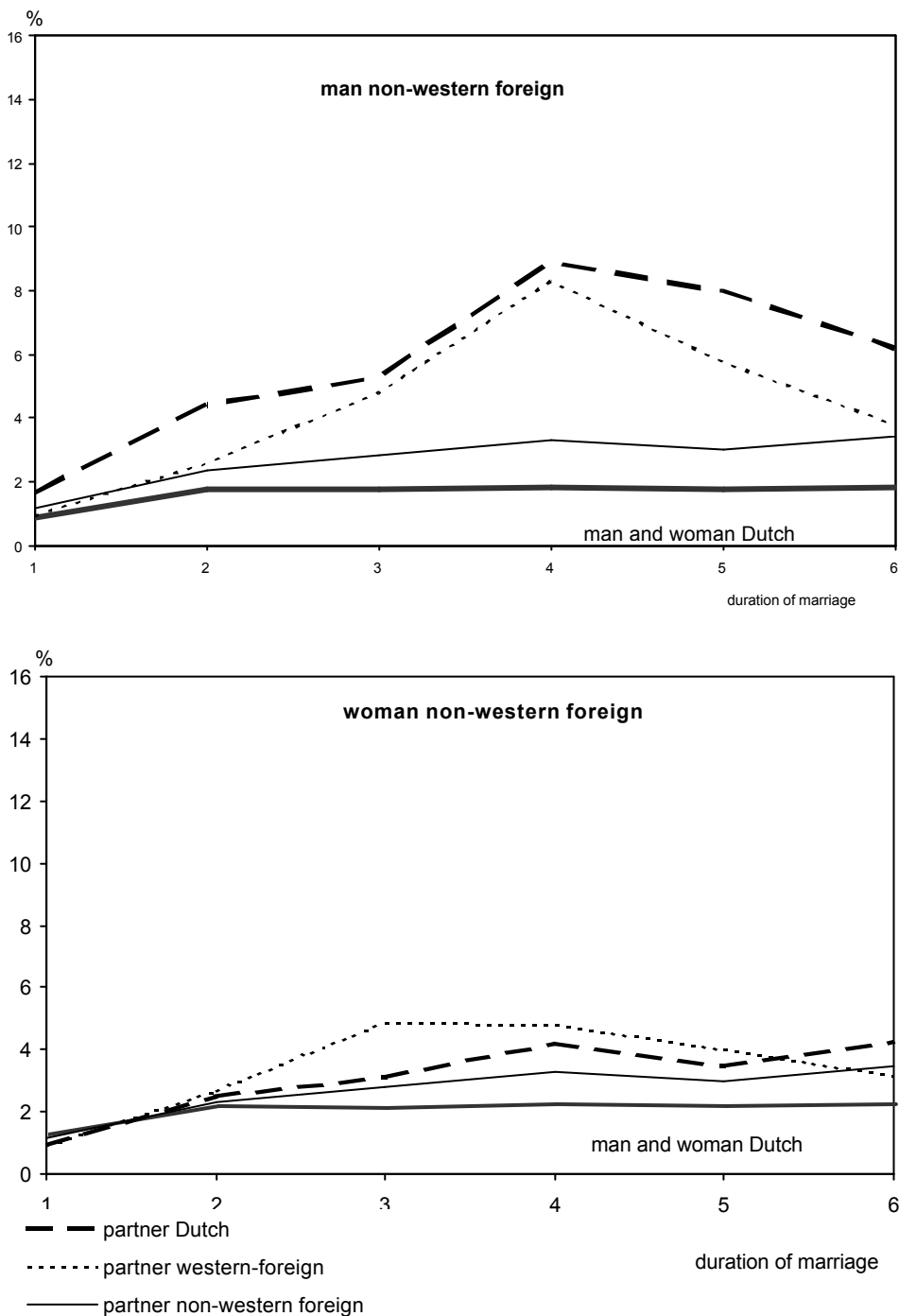
Graph 2. Transversal divorce risks of couples, 2001



The longitudinal risk of divorce for marriages contracted in 1995 (graph 3) show the same picture as the transversal risk of divorce. Dutch couples have the lowest risk, between one and two percent. Non-western men married to Dutch women have the highest risk. For the latter group, again, there is a clear peak after four years, but it is lower (9 percent) than according to the transversal calculation. This difference is caused by the fact that the transversal risk of divorce for marriage duration four years is based on a different marriage cohort (1997) than the longitudinal risk of divorce (1995), while the risk of divorce for marriages with the same duration is not constant. Just as for the transversal risk, the risk

of divorce for non-western men married to western women is relatively high, with a clear peak after four years.

Graph 3. Longitudinal divorce risks of couples, cohort 1995



With the aid of the transversal risk of divorce for 2001, the total divorce rates after ten years are calculated with the aid of life tables (*table 1*). Dutch marriages are the most stable: one in six have been broken up after ten years. Marriages between non-western men and Dutch women are the least stable: more than half of these have been dissolved within ten years. The divorce rate of non-western women with Dutch men is just over half of that: 30 percent. The divorce rates of marriages between two western foreigners and marriages between a western foreigner and a Dutch man or woman vary between 21 and 24 percent. These results confirm earlier findings (Harmsen, 1999) which showed that the highest divorce risks, those for foreign men with Dutch wives, are much higher than those for

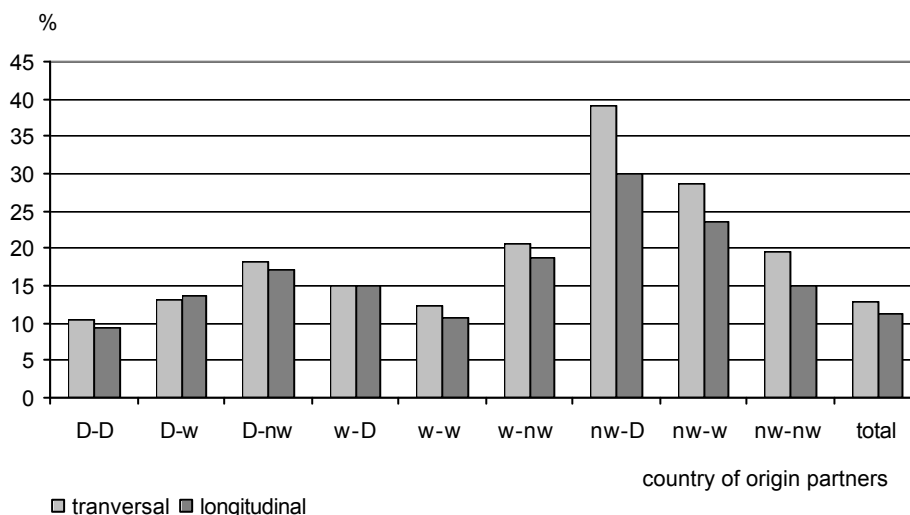
foreign women with Dutch husbands. Lastly, it is noticeable that for homogamous couples in this respect, marriages between non-western men and women had a relatively high risk of divorce at almost 30 percent. Within this group of non-western couples, however, there may be large differences between the various countries of origin.

Table 1. Transversal divorce rates after ten years, 2001

| Man | Woman | | |
|---------------------|-------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | Dutch | western foreign | non-western foreign |
| Dutch | 17 | 23 | 30 |
| western foreign | 24 | 21 | 35 |
| non-western foreign | 54 | 44 | 29 |

We also calculated total divorce rates with the aid of the longitudinal method, for a maximum marriage duration of six years. These percentages were in general slightly lower than transversal divorce rates after six years, but are in the same order of magnitude (*graph 4*). Here, too, the Dutch marriages are the most stable, with a divorce rate of 9.4 percent, and the marriages between western men and Dutch women the least stable with a rate of 30 percent.

Graph 4. Divorce rates after six years (man-woman)

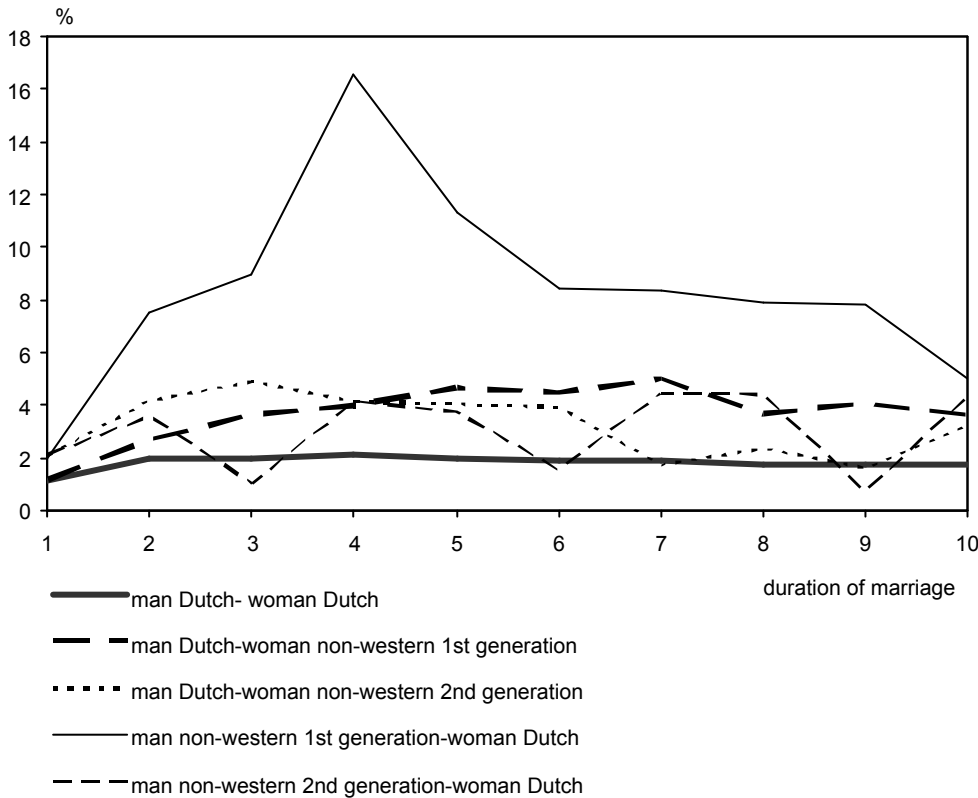


The study also examined the difference between first generation and second generation foreigners, distinguishing the following combinations.

1. man Dutch – woman Dutch
2. man Dutch – woman non-western foreign, first generation
3. man Dutch – woman non-western foreign, second generation
4. man non-western foreign, first generation – woman Dutch
5. man non-western foreign, first generation – woman non-western foreign, first generation
6. man non-western foreign, first generation – woman non-western foreign, second generation
7. man non-western foreign, second generation – woman Dutch
8. man non-western foreign, second generation – woman non-western foreign, first generation
9. man non-western foreign, second generation – woman non-western foreign, second generation.

Couples consisting of western foreigners are not taken into consideration because of the small numbers involved, although it can be noted that marriages between a Dutch man or woman and a western foreigner show much lower divorce rates than those between a Dutch man or woman and a non-western foreigner. *Graph 5* shows the transversal risk of divorce for Dutch men and women with non-western partners. Again there is a noticeable peak after four years for marriages between first generation non-western men and Dutch women. This peak is not present for marriages between second-generation foreign men and Dutch women.

Graph 5. Transversal divorce risks for Dutch men and women with non-western partners, 2001



Here too, transversal divorce rates after ten years were calculated for the nine marriage combinations of Dutch men and women with first and second generation foreigners. First generation non-western men married to Dutch women have by far the highest risk of divorce: 59 percent (*table 2*). This risk is just over twice as high as that for second generation men married to Dutch women. Marriages between Dutch men and women and second generation foreigners will probably encounter fewer cultural differences, which has a favourable effect on the risk of divorce. Also, the first generation marriages may have included marriages of convenience. The divorce rate of Dutch men married to first generation women (approx. 30 percent) hardly differs from that of Dutch men with second generation wives. Second generation women married to first generation men have a much higher risk of divorce (40 percent) than first generation women married to second generation men (24 percent).

Table 2. Transversal divorce rates after ten years, 2001

| Man | Woman | | |
|--|-------|---------------------------------------|--|
| | Dutch | non-western foreign, first generation | non-western foreign, second generation |
| Dutch | 17 | 31 | 26 |
| non-western foreign, first generation | 59 | 28 | 40 |
| non-western foreign, second generation | 26 | 24 | 30 |

4. Divorce risk for foreigners of specific countries of origin

As the previous section showed, non-western foreigners in particular have a high risk of divorce. As foreigners comprise a very heterogeneous group, we shall now look into the divorce risks for foreigners of specific countries of origin. To do this, for couples with at least one non-western foreign partner, the four main foreign countries of origin in the Netherlands were selected (Turkey, Morocco, Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles/Aruba). We shall also look at the relatively large group of couples which consist of a Dutch man and a woman from one of the countries from which relatively many brides come. These bride donor countries include Poland, the former Soviet Union, former Czechoslovakia, Brazil, Colombia, the Philippines and Thailand. As these brides usually have a very different cultural background from their husbands, the risk of divorce is probably higher (Janssen, 2000). These risks of divorce are calculated according to the transversal method, based on divorces which took place in 2001.

4.1 Divorce risks for the four largest groups of non-western foreigners

In about 170 thousand married couples in the Netherlands, at least one of the partners has a Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean background (*table 3*). There are substantial differences in partner choice between these four groups. Most Turks and Moroccans choose a partner from their own country of origin. Many of these couples are both first generation immigrants and got married a long time ago in their country of origin. These are mostly Turkish and Moroccan couples of whom the man came to the Netherlands in the sixties or seventies as a labour migrant. Their wives and children stayed in the country of origin but rejoined their husbands later.

Table 3. Married couples by country of origin, four main foreign countries, 1 January 2001

| | Turkey | Morocco | Suriname | Netherlands Antilles/ Aruba |
|--|-------------------|---------|----------|--------------------------------|
| | % | | | |
| Man and woman 1 st generation, same country of origin | 83,9 | 86,7 | 53,6 | 26,1 |
| Man 1 st generation, woman Dutch | 3,3 | 4,6 | 10,9 | 21,0 |
| Man Dutch, woman 1 st generation | 1,0 | 2,1 | 16,4 | 23,6 |
| Man 2 nd generation, woman Dutch | 0,3 | 0,2 | 4,6 | 7,1 |
| Man Dutch, woman 2 nd generation | 0,4 | 0,3 | 5,1 | 9,4 |
| Man and woman 2 nd generation | 0,8 | 0,1 | 0,3 | 0,0 |
| Other | 10,4 | 5,8 | 9,0 | 12,7 |
| | <i>abs = 100%</i> | | | |
| Total (x 1 000) | 69,1 | 49,2 | 38,4 | 11,6 |

The second generation of these countries are still quite young on average. Among the Moroccan population, in particular, the number of married second generation foreigners is relatively small. The number of married second generation Turks is slightly higher, as they marry at younger ages on average. People from Suriname and to a greater extent those from the Netherlands Antilles are less likely than Turks and Moroccans to choose a marriage partner from their own country. These differences in partner choice and the relatively small numbers of married second generation foreigners make it impossible to show the divorce risks for mixed marriages and second generation marriages for all countries of origin.

4.1.1. Turks and Moroccans

For marriages in which at least one of the partners is Turkish by far the highest risk of divorce is for couples consisting of a first generation man and a Dutch woman. Nearly 70 percent of these marriages have been dissolved ten years later (*graph 6*). Marriages between two first generation Turkish partners are considerably more durable: after ten years 80 percent of these couples are still together. This is

only slightly less than the percentage of Dutch couples. The risk of divorce for first generation Turks married to second generation Turks is lower than for mixed marriages, but higher than for marriages between two first generation partners.

Graph 6. Cumulative divorce rates by duration of marriage, 2001: Turkey

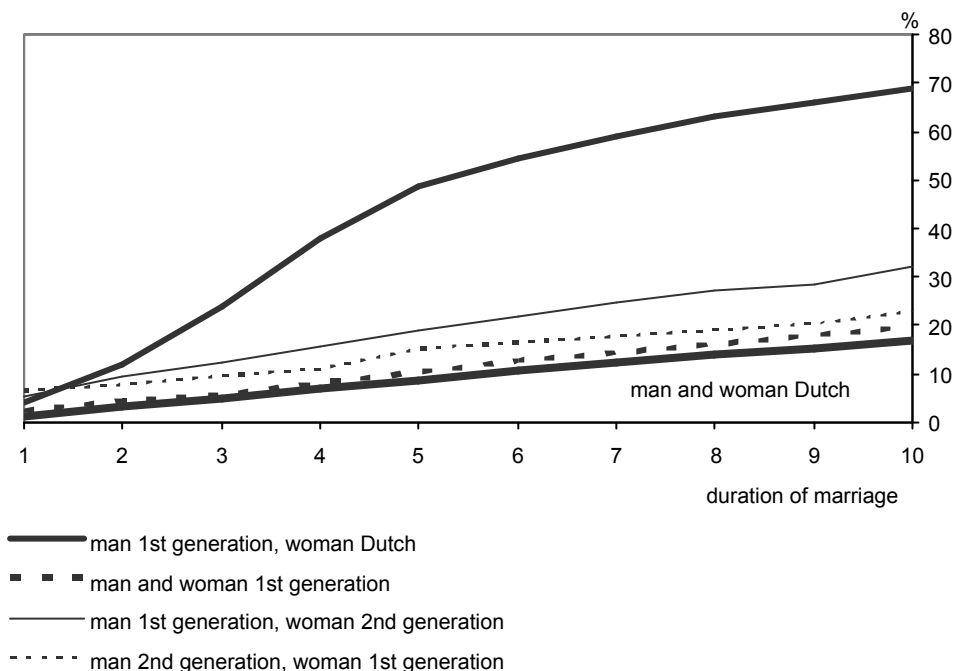


Table 4. Divorce rates after ten years, 2001

| | Dutch | Turkey | Marocco | Suriname | Neth. Ant./ Aruba |
|---|-------|---------------|---------------|----------|-------------------|
| | % | | | | |
| Man 1 st generation, woman Dutch | | 69 | 74 | 30 | 41 |
| Man Dutch, woman 1 st generation | | ¹⁾ | ¹⁾ | 28 | 29 |
| Man and woman 1 st generation | | 20 | 31 | 43 | 35 |
| Man and woman Dutch | 17 | | | | |

¹⁾ Not calculated because of small numbers involved

The pattern is similar for marriages in which at least one of the partners is Moroccan (*graph 7*), although the percentages are slightly higher than for the Turks (*table 4*). Nearly three-quarters of marriages between a first generation Moroccan man and a Dutch woman have been dissolved after ten years. If both partners come from Morocco, the percentages are much lower. A marriage between two first generation Moroccans is less stable than one between two first generation Turks, with a divorce rate of 30 percent, compared with 20 percent.

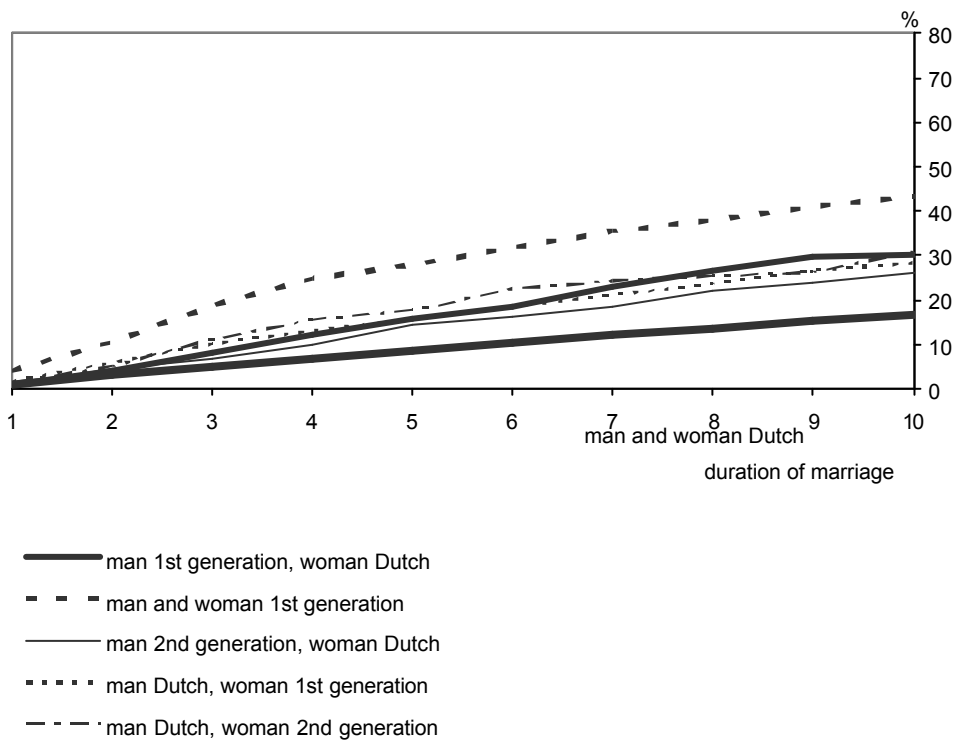
Graph 7. Cumulative divorce rates by duration of marriage, 2001: Morocco



4.1.2 Surinamese and Antilleans

The divorce rates for people with a Surinamese background show a much different pattern than those for Turks and Moroccans. The least stable marriages in this group are those between two first generation Surinamese (*graph 8*). More than 40 percent of these marriages have ended within ten years. The divorce rates of mixed marriages are 30 percent after ten years, regardless of whether the man or the woman is Dutch.

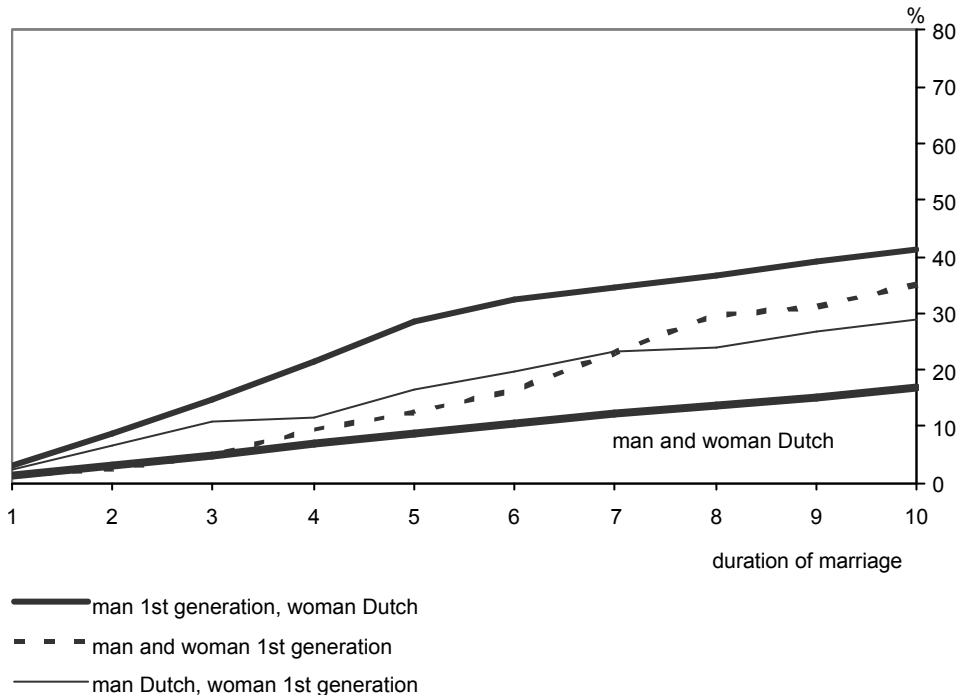
Graph 8. Cumulative divorce rates by duration of marriage, 2001: Suriname



Quite surprisingly, divorce risks for marriages of Antilleans and Arubans do not show the same pattern as the Surinamese. Although the risk of divorce for a marriage between two first generation Antilleans

is high, it is lower than that for two first generation Surinamese: about a third of couples do not make it to ten years (*graph 9*). Among Antilleans a marriage between a first generation Antillean man and a Dutch woman runs the greatest risk of divorce; about 40 percent of these couples have gone their separate ways ten years later.

Graph 9. Cumulative divorce rates by duration of marriage, 2001: Netherlands Antilles/Aruba



4.2 Divorce risks for women from bride donor countries

There are some 27 thousand couples in the Netherlands in which one of the partners comes from Poland, the former Soviet Union, former Czechoslovakia, Brazil, Colombia, the Philippines or Thailand (*table 5*). Nearly two-thirds of these couples consist of a Dutch man and a woman from the country concerned. Relatively few couples consist of two partners from these countries or a Dutch woman and a foreign husband. These countries are therefore often called ‘bride donor countries’. As only couples consisting of a first generation foreign woman and a Dutch man are numerous enough to analyse, the divorce risk is only calculated for this group. To do this, the bride donor countries are divided into the following three groups:

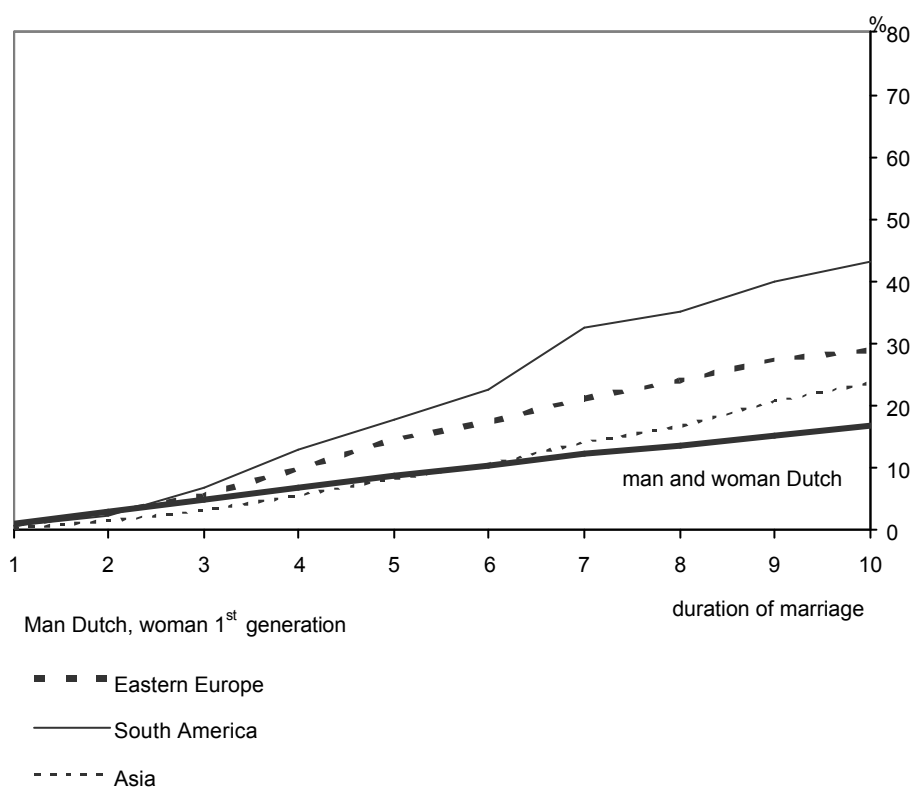
1. Eastern Europe (Poland, former Soviet Union and former Czechoslovakia)
2. South America (Brazil and Colombia)
3. Asia (Thailand, the Philippines)

With the aid of the risk of divorce by marriage duration, total divorce rates for the first ten years were calculated (*graph 10*). After ten years, the marriages between Dutch men and South American women turn out to be the least stable with a divorce rate of 43 percent. For couples in which the woman comes from Asia the divorce rate is only 5 percent points higher than that for Dutch couples. In spite of the cultural differences which also apply to these couples, their risk of divorce is significantly lower than that for Turkish or Moroccan men married to Dutch women.

Table 5. Married couples by country of origin, bride donor countries, 1 January 2001

| | Eastern Europe | South America | Asia | Total |
|--|-------------------|---------------|------|-------|
| | % | | | |
| Man and woman 1 st generation, same country of origin | 14,2 | 6,5 | 6,8 | 12,2 |
| Man 1 st generation, woman Dutch | 5,7 | 9,6 | 3,0 | 5,6 |
| Man Dutch, woman 1 st generation | 40,4 | 69,5 | 85,5 | 51,2 |
| Man 2 nd generation, woman Dutch | 17,1 | 4,3 | 1,7 | 13,1 |
| Man Dutch, woman 2 nd generation | 17,5 | 4,0 | 1,8 | 13,4 |
| Other | 5,1 | 6,1 | 1,2 | 4,5 |
| | <i>abs = 100%</i> | | | |
| Total (x 1 000) | 19,6 | 2,7 | 4,7 | 27,0 |

Graph 10. Cumulative divorce risks by duration of marriage, 2001: bride donor countries



5. Marriages of convenience?

The noticeable peak in the risk of divorce after four years for non-western men married to Dutch women has already been mentioned, along with the possible effect of marriages of convenience in relation to this phenomenon.

A law to prevent marriages of convenience came into effect in 1994. The legislation is aimed at preventing marriages of convenience taking place in the Netherlands on the one hand, and preventing marriages of convenience that had taken place abroad subsequently being authorised and registered in the Netherlands on the other. Under this law, a marriage is a marriage of convenience if:

1. it is a marriage in which one of the (intended) partners does not have the Dutch nationality, and
2. the intention of (one of) the (intended) partners is not to fulfil the obligations connected with the state of marriage, but exclusively to acquire a residence permit in the Netherlands (Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum, 2000).

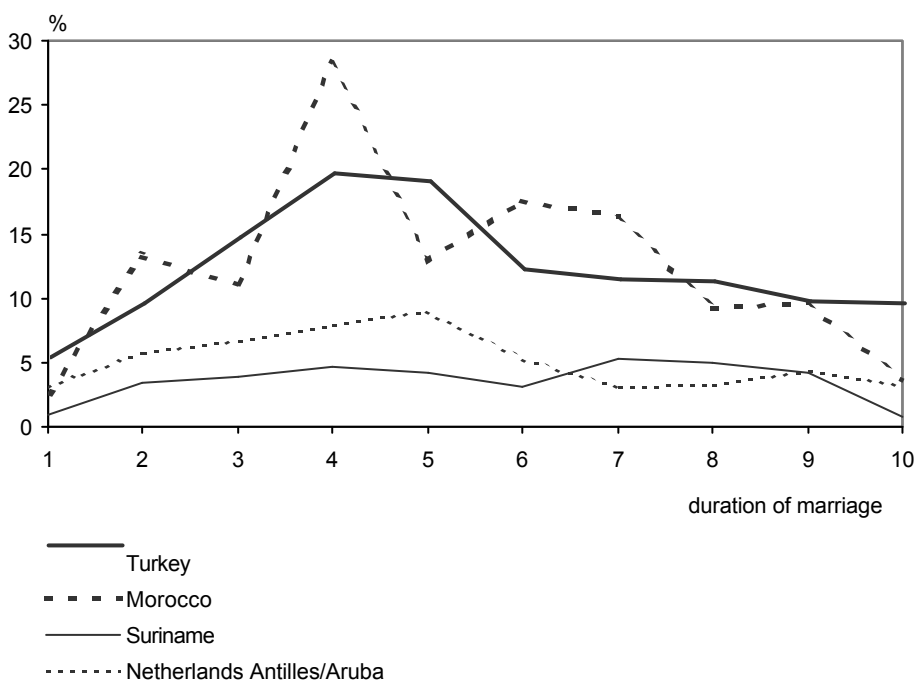
Although the law has made it more difficult for foreigners to marry for the sake of a residence permit, it probably has not prevented such marriages completely. The Netherlands remains an attractive country for many people to live in, and marrying someone who has the Dutch nationality is the only way many foreigners can realise this. When they have been married to a Dutch national for three years, they will be granted a permanent permit of residence.

It is not easy to calculate the percentage of marriages of convenience. It is plausible that the peak in the risk of divorce after four years of marriage is partly caused by the break-up of such marriages. One of the difficulties in establishing just how many of these marriages are marriages of convenience is that because of the strongly differing backgrounds this group has the highest divorce risk anyway. Some of the divorces causing the four-year peak will be for couples who - although not primarily married for convenience - delay the divorce procedures to a moment when the foreign partner can legally remain in the Netherlands. To be able to give an estimation of the maximum percentage of marriages of convenience in the total marriages between a non-western foreign man and a Dutch woman, an assumption was made that without marriages of convenience the divorce rate for these couples would be constant with marriage duration, as this is also the case of other couples. The transversal risk of divorce (see graph 5) is based on recent marriage cohorts, which makes it the most suitable to estimate the present (maximum) number of marriages of convenience.

By assuming that the risks of divorce after four and five years are between the risks after three and six years, the proportion of marriages of convenience in marriages between a non-western man and a Dutch woman is estimated to be a maximum 10 percent.

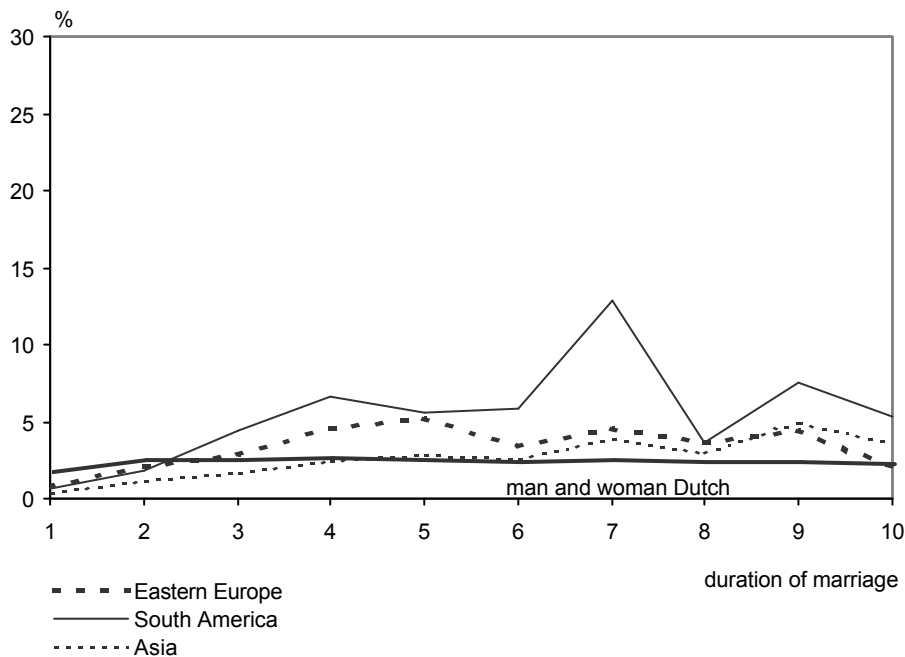
Graph 11 shows the risk of divorce (non-cumulative) of the four largest groups of non-western foreigners by marriage duration for marriages between a Dutch woman and a first generation foreign man. The graph shows that marriages between a Dutch woman and a Turkish or Moroccan man in particular are often dissolved after four years. The partners concerned have a 20 to 30 percent chance of divorcing in the fourth year of marriage. There is no peak in the risk of divorce for Surinamese and Antilleans. Based on the assumption that the increased risk of divorce after four years is connected with the dissolution of marriages of convenience, there may be marriages of convenience among couples consisting of a first generation Turkish or Moroccan man and a Dutch woman.

Graph 11. Divorce risks by duration of marriage, 2001: Dutch woman with foreign man, first generation



Graph 12 shows the risk of divorce by marriage duration for couples consisting of Dutch men and first generation women from one of the three groups of bride donor countries, mentioned before. For purposes of comparison, the risk of divorce for Dutch married couples (both partners Dutch) is given. Unlike the couples consisting of a Turkish or Moroccan man and a Dutch woman, there is no noticeable peak for these nationalities after four years of marriage. This makes it plausible that there are no marriages of convenience among marriages between women from bride donor countries and Dutch men. Higher risks of divorce are more common after longer marriage durations, for example after seven years, for South American and Asian women. It should be noted in this respect that the risk of divorce for longer marriage duration are based on a relatively small number of marriages, which means that coincidence has a large effect on the established pattern.

Graph 12. Divorce risks by duration of marriage, 2001: Dutch man with foreign woman, first generation



References

Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum, 2000, *Handboek Minderheden, (Minorities manual)* (1150) blz. 7-10. Koninklijke Vermande, The Hague.

Harmsen, C.N., 1999, Cross-cultural marriages. In: *Maandstatistiek van de bevolking (Monthly bulletin of population statistics)*, december 1999, blz. 17-20. CBS, Voorburg/Heerlen.

Janssen, Jacques P.G., 2002, *Do opposites attract divorce? Dimensions of mixed marriage and the risk of divorce in the Netherlands*. Dissertation, University of Nijmegen