

## **Do children of divorced parents still prefer cohabitation over marriage?**

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### **Extended abstract:**

This paper explores the temporal (in)stability in the effects of family structure experienced during childhood and early adulthood upon subsequent patterns of union formation. We use data from the first wave of *Generation and Gender Survey* conducted in the Czech Republic in 2005. The country is a particularly interesting context to carry out such an analysis, since it has experienced a very rapid population change in the last two decades, which included postponement of and retreat from marriage, growing out-of-wedlock fertility, and growing incidence and prevalence of unmarried cohabitation (Chaloupková 2010; Thornton, Philipov 2009;). The current changes, however, include not only the demography of families, but also the meaning of cohabitation, its level of institutionalization and normative shifts regarding co-residential unions.

Empirical evidence shows profound implications of childhood family structure for timing and type of co-residential union. Children are more likely to choose cohabitation if they lived with single mother, in other than two biological parent households or if their parents cohabited (Teachman 2003; Ryan, Franzetta, Schelar, Manlove 2009). Experiencing parental divorce also elevates the likelihood of choosing cohabitation over marriage (Diekman, Schmidheiny

2008; Cherlin, Kiernan, Chase-Lansdale 1995; Thornton 1991). These associations have been documented across historical periods, datasets, and methodologies. The underlying mechanisms have not been fully explored yet.

While studying the association between family composition during one's childhood and subsequent union formation of children – and possibly also changes over time in the size of this association – we consider a co-action of two aspects of (self-)selection. Firstly, if divorced parents are self-selected on attitudes and values (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, McIlvane 2010), did the selectivity into divorce change across generations of parents? Secondly, if cohabitation spreads through society, and the rise of cohabitation leads to its increasing status heterogeneity (Nazio 2008; Nazio, Blossfeld 2003), did selectivity among children (here preference of cohabitation over marriage) change as well?

During the post-socialist change, we argue, cohabitation has changed its role in the family formation process in several former socialist countries including the Czech Republic as evidenced by both demographic and attitudinal indices. Looking at general population samples we find that 31 % of respondents in the 2002 ISSP survey admitted that they had ever lived in an unmarried cohabitation. The prevalence of cohabitation rises in younger cohorts. According to the 2008 ESS data, 20 % of individuals in the age category 56+ ever cohabited, while 43 % of individuals between 26 and 35 years did so (Kreidl, Štípková 2012). Moreover, data from Czech attitude surveys reveal that a significant drop in support for marriage as the best context for childbearing took place recently (Dimitrová 2007).

Heuveline and Timberlake's classification places the Czech population (surveyed in 1997) into the "prelude to marriage" ideal type, in which couples seek to test the relationship before formalizing it, but the duration of cohabitation is short and marriages are typically established before children are to born (Heuveline, Timberlake 2004).

Recent trends in the demographic behavior of the Czech population do, however, indicate that the position of cohabitation in the family formation process may be changing towards what Heuveline and Timberlake labeled “cohabitation as stage in the marriage process”. As the All the necessary criteria has been met -*shares of births* before marriage grow, *average durations* of cohabitations gets longer, and there is an *increasing children’s exposure* to unmarried unions, and also the “cultural sanctions against out-of-wedlock childbearing have eroded” (Heuveline, Timberlake 2004: 1217) in the Czech population.

Results of our analysis (discrete-time event-history analysis with competing risks) of entry into the first co-residential union (distinguishing cohabitations and marriages) reveal that selectivity into cohabitation on parental family structure has lowered significantly in the Czech society since the 1960s. Growing up with a single mother implied higher odds of choosing cohabitation over marriage for several decades. The effect, however, was very strong until the end of the 1970s, later it declined, and then (after 1998) it disappeared entirely. We attribute this change to two concurrent processes: growing divorce rates (and thus declining selectivity on values and marital conflict into divorce) among parents and to declining selectivity into cohabitation among children. While growing divorce rate was the driver of change until the early 1990s, we argue that the changing status of cohabitation in the marriage process played a crucial role in accelerating changes in the selectivity of cohabitation after 1998.

In the Czech Republic, cohabitation changed its position in the kinship system from “prelude to marriage” to “stage in the marriage process” towards the end of the 1990s. While several other variables in our models (such as own and parental education, gender) seem to continue having an impact the choice between marriage and cohabitation, the weakening effect of parental family structure nevertheless indicates that preference for the cohabitation or

marriage is increasingly stemming from idiosyncratic circumstance of people's lives that are not associated with parental behaviors, attitudes and values.

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