J. biosoc. Sci. (1997) **29**, 471–489
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CHANGING PATTERNS OF EXTRAMARITAL CONCEPTIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, 1960–93

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Summary. Patterns of reproduction associated with extramarital conception are examined using data on non-marital births, marital births occurring during less than 8 months after marriage, and spontaneous and induced abortions experienced by unmarried women. Trends in the incidence and demographic outcomes of conceptions resulting from extramarital coitus are analysed by means of age-specific probabilities of becoming pregnant outside marriage; and of terminating such a pregnancy by abortion, by legitimating it through marriage before confinement, or by having a baby while remaining unmarried. Substantial increases in the proportion of extramaritally conceived pregnancies leading to non-marital births are detected for the period since the late 1980s, and ascribed mainly to rising levels of unmarried cohabitation. The demographic effects of the post-1989 transition from state to market economy are discussed.

Introduction

In the Czech Republic the level of extramarital sexual activity has always been substantial, although probably never to the same extent as in some Western countries in recent years. However, there are no survey data available to directly support this assertion. Rather one must rely on the statistics of certain vital events, namely annual tabulations of non-marital births, marital births by duration of marriage in months, and spontaneous and induced abortions experienced by unmarried women. Although some of these data were routinely recorded in the pre-World War II Czechoslovakia, a complete series is available only for the period since 1960, the year when reasonably reliable and detailed statistics of induced abortions for non-medical reasons became published on an annual basis.

Several previous studies have examined demographic aspects of extramarital fertility in the Czech Republic, both in national context and against the background of world-wide developments: for instance, Mozny (1987), Bartonova (1991), Rychtarikova (1992), Kucera (1994), Pavlik (1994, 1996), Kucera & Fialova (1996). None, however, has considered in detail trends since 1989, the year when the communist regime collapsed and a new socio-political and economic climate began.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932097004719 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Estimating extramarital pregnancies

Researchers have long been aware of the need for an index to describe the incidence and demographic effect of extramarital conceptions in a population. Measures such as the proportion of children born out of wedlock understate the overall level because they ignore those extramaritally conceived pregnancies which resulted in marital births. A better approach is to consider all statistically identifiable pregnancy terminations—abortions and births—which can reasonably be suspected of being the consequence of extramarital conception; in other words, those which occurred (a) out of wedlock or (b) within marriage but less than 8 months after the wedding.

One problem associated with this kind of analysis is that abortions and births recorded in one calendar year are not necessarily the product of pregnancies conceived in that year, and therefore measures based simply on annual sums of these two types of events are not completely satisfactory for a period-specific examination. A useful technique for estimating the true age-period-specific numbers of conceptions from all pregnancy outcomes recorded within a one-year period was developed by Carmichael (1985). Employing principles of the Lexis diagram, Carmichael inferred that the number of conceptions to women aged x in year t which lead to births can be estimated by taking 7·36% of births recorded in age group x in year t; 19·77% of births in age group $x+1$ in year t; 19·77% of births in age group x in year $t+1$; and 53·11% of births in the age group $x+1$ in year $t+1$. This calculation is based on the simplifying assumption that all births occurred after exactly 38 weeks of gestation and that they were evenly distributed within the relevant age-period 'squares' of the Lexis grid. Using the same logic, and taking into account that the average period of gestation at which abortions occurred was close to 8 weeks during most of the calendar years studied (Institute for Health Statistics, 1996), the number of conceptions to women aged x in year t which resulted in abortions may be estimated by taking 71·67, 12·99, 12·99, and 2·35% of abortions recorded in the four respective age-period units of observation. Thus, by focusing on conception, Carmichael's method enables extramarital pregnancies, whether terminated outside or within marriage, to be jointly related to a single population at risk.

Applying this approximation procedure to the existing Czech data sets on extramarital births, marital births occurring in the first 7 months after marriage, and spontaneous and induced abortions to unmarried women, numbers of extramarital conceptions specific for age and period were estimated. Because the published data on marital births by duration of marriage are not classified by mother's age, age-specific numbers of premarital conceptions for a given year were estimated by assuming the same age distribution as in the case of first marital births in that year. Rates of extramarital conception were then computed by dividing each age-specific sum of extramarital conceptions by the mid-year number of never married, widowed, or divorced women of that age. The estimated age-period-specific sums of extramarital conceptions were then partitioned according to the eventual status of confinements to yield age-specific proportions of conceptions leading to (1) marital confinement, (2) non-marital confinement, (3) non-marital induced abortion, and (4) non-marital spontaneous abortion. The first of these proportions may likewise be called the legitimation ratio as it measures the tendency to 'legitimate' extramarital pregnancies by marrying before the birth.

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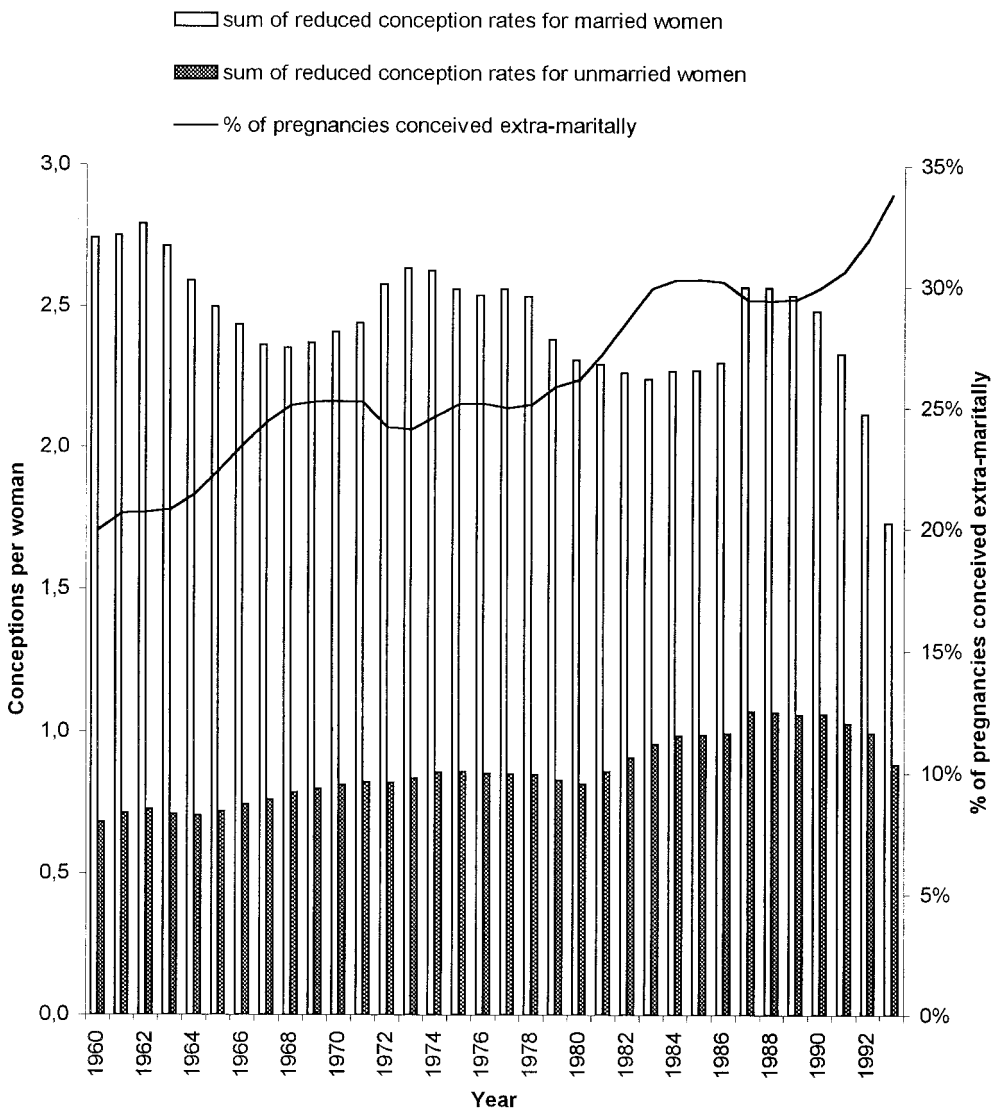


Fig. 1. Reduced conception rates for married and unmarried women, and proportion of pregnancies conceived extramaritally.

Overall trends

Figure 1 displays the sums of reduced conception rates for married and unmarried women for the Czech Republic in the period 1960–93 (the sum for married women was calculated by summing the ratios of estimated marital conceptions at a given age to the total of women of that age, for each of the years considered; the corresponding index for unmarried women was obtained by summing the ratios of extramarital conceptions at a given age to the total of women of that age). The graph shows two different

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patterns of temporal variation. The figures for the total marital conception rate oscillate in time, reaching relatively high levels (of 2·6 marital conceptions per women or more) in the early 1960s, between 1972 and 1975, and during 1987–88; and low levels (2·4 or less) in 1967–69, 1979–86, and after 1991. Part of this variation is clearly attributable to changes in political circumstances relevant to fertility and reproduction, namely to the introduction in 1962 of a more restrictive policy towards women seeking abortion for non-medical reasons; the implementation of a series of pronatalist measures during the years 1968–73; the enactment of a new law effective from 1987 which abolished the so-called abortion committees and made induced abortion available basically upon request; and, finally, the emergence of new societal conditions following the bloodless revolution of 1989. (For more information about demographically relevant policies implemented in the Czech Republic during the post-World War II period, see, for instance, Frejka, 1980; David & McIntyre, 1981; Heitlinger, 1987; and Pavlik, 1996.)

Population policy interventions of the communist period were primarily aimed at influencing behaviour within families. This is why political changes affected the rates of marital conception quite dramatically, but had much more limited impact on the incidence of pregnancies conceived outside marriage. The trend in extramarital conception, as measured here, was by and large one of a long-term increase, with the hypothetical lifetime number of extramarital conceptions rising from 0·7 per woman in the early 1960s to 1·1 in 1987–90. This development was to some extent a reflection of shifting marriage patterns and rising divorce rates causing changes in the composition of unmarried women of childbearing age. It has only been during the early 1990s, when the Czech population embarked on a qualitatively different, less extensive reproductive regime, that the total reduced rate of extramarital conception declined to levels below 1·0.

Due to changes in the composition of risk populations and dissimilar trends in reproductive activity within and outside marriage, the period under consideration saw a substantial rise in the proportion of pregnancies conceived extramaritally, from slightly less than 20% in 1960 to more than 30% in the early 1990s. The growth was not absolutely linear in time (Fig. 1), but the general tendency has clearly been towards more pregnancies resulting from extramarital coitus. In 1993, more than one-third of registered pregnancies seem to have been conceived extramaritally.

Age-specific rates

The probability that a woman becomes pregnant while being single, divorced, or widowed is likely to be linked to the underlying age patterns of nuptiality, divorce, fecundity, sexual activity, and contraceptive use. The rates in Fig. 2 attest that age was a powerful determinant of extramarital conception during the period 1960–93. The incidence was low among women aged below 19 and over 35 years; that is, at the beginning and towards the end of reproductive life. The age group 30–34 exhibited an intermediate level. The highest rates of extramarital conception, and the biggest variation over time in its incidence, can be found among women aged 20–24 and 25–29 years. Thus, the stereotype of the pregnant unmarried woman as a young adult in her normative reproductive ages conforms best with reality during the period under review.

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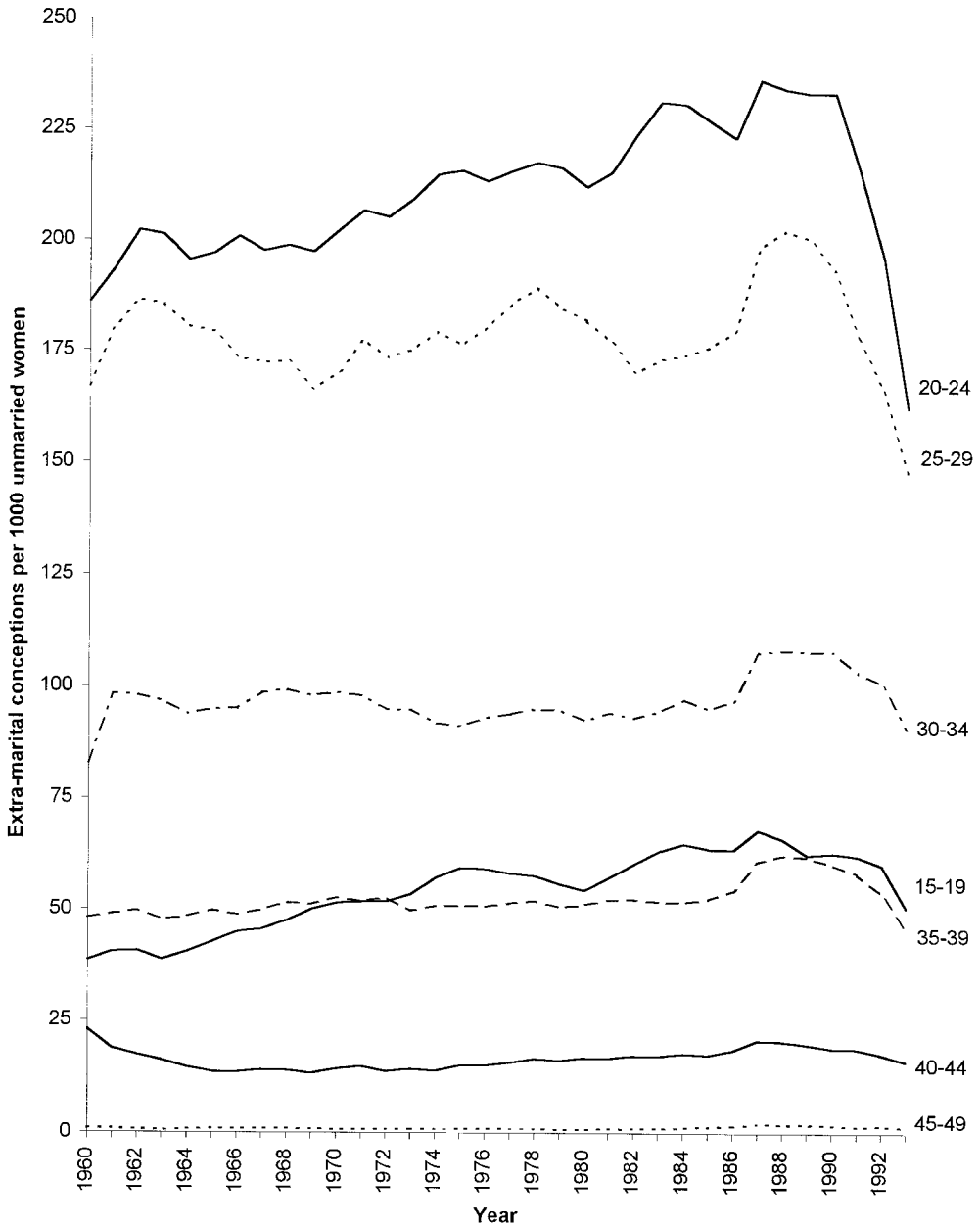


Fig. 2. Age-specific extramarital conception rates.

None of these findings is very surprising. Ages 20–29 are the prime childbearing years and highest level of sexual activity, but the proportion of unmarried women is far from negligible (according to data from population censuses, the proportion of unmarried among women aged 25–29 years was 12·6% in 1961, 14·6% in 1970, 14·8%

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in 1980, and 18·4% in 1991). When the access to reliable contraception is limited—as was the case in the Czech Republic during much of the period 1960–93—women in their twenties are inevitably exposed to the greatest risk of extramarital conception. The much lower levels for younger and older women are the result of rather different factors. For the age group 15–19, the main explanation seems to be that most teenagers do not have permanent partners and are under close parental control, and therefore have limited possibility to engage in sex. Moreover, courtships of teenagers tend to be brief, thus reducing the chances of conception. Among unmarried women over 30 years of age, levels may be low as a consequence of widespread celibacy (having no partner) and thus relatively low exposure to coitus; but they also may reflect a more responsible use of contraception and the declining ability to conceive at older ages.

As Fig. 2 indicates, the rates for ages 15–19 and 20–24 generally increased during the period 1960–87, but fell precipitously in the years that followed. Rising levels through the 1960s, 1970s, and most of the 1980s seem to have one logical explanation: an increase in non-marital sexual activity among younger women. It is possible that this trend has been precipitated by increases in consensual partnering; unfortunately, given the virtual absence of relevant data on unmarried unions, one can only speculate how important a role this factor may have played. Both these behavioural changes might have been accelerated by the introduction of the more permissive abortion law in 1987 which, by simplifying the administrative process, made the termination of pregnancy resulting from non-marital sexual intercourse much easier. Levelling of the trend in the late 1980s and the sharp declines over the period 1990–93, experienced by all groups of unmarried women in the age range 15–39 years, probably partly reflect the arrival of a more efficient family planning regime, which is based not so much on abortion but rather on oral contraceptives and other modern methods of pregnancy prevention (figures from the official registration of contraceptives prescribed by doctors in the public health service show that the proportion of women aged 15–44 using the pill increased from 3·8% in 1989 to 19·1% in 1994). As shown in Fig. 2, rates fell most significantly in the age groups 20–24 and 25–29 years, suggesting that the improvements in contraception have mainly reduced conceptions in less committed relationships of unmarried women in the peak childbearing ages.

However, the main factor behind the downward trends observed in recent years is that the events of 1989 brought to an end a particular type of political, economic and welfare system, and marked the advent of the process of post-communist reform. Policies generally promoting the principles of market economy have greatly accentuated the need for rational economic calculation as a means of individual survival and well-being. Moreover, the radical socio-political changes have brought about declines in real incomes for many, if not most, of the population (Pavlik, 1996), thus provoking feelings of economic uncertainty on a scale not experienced before. To these developments the Czech population reacted by abandoning its old reproductive habits and adopting ‘wait-and-see’ forms of behaviour, including a more cautious approach to sexual risk-taking outside marriage.

The age-specific rates are not the only indicators that can be used to detect age patterns of extramarital conception. An alternative analytical approach is to relate extramarital conceptions at a given age to the number of identifiable conceptions to all women of that age, irrespective of their marital status. Ratios calculated in this way

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show to what extent pregnancies that might have started extramaritally really did so start. The pattern of age-specific ratios of extramarital conceptions (Fig. 3) is quite different from the pattern of conception rates. Ratios tend to decline from very high levels at ages 15–19 to moderate levels at ages 20–24, and are relatively low and little differentiated for all groups of women in the age range 25–49 years. The generally elevated ratios for women younger than 24 years of age are likely to be a product of several factors: low proportions of women entering into formal matrimony, especially before reaching legal majority; the earlier start, and therefore gradually increasing overall level, of non-marital sexual activity; and generally low efficacy of contraceptive use at younger ages. Rising incidence of extramarital coitus is also one possible explanation for the upward trend during the period 1960–93; an increase in consensual partnering among the young is another. The ratios for women older than 25 years are lower because the majority of these women are married and therefore an overwhelming proportion of their pregnancies are conceived in marital circumstances. The slow but steady increase in the ratios for all age groups in the broad age range 25–49 years is consistent with the argument that non-marital cohabitation was becoming more widespread in the population at large, partly as a consequence of more marriages resulting in divorce and more middle-aged women being ready to enter new, potentially reproductive relationships.

Distribution by eventual status of confinements

Extramaritally conceived pregnancies can be analysed in relation to the demographic circumstances under which they were terminated. From the existing data sources, four possible categories of pregnancy outcome following extramarital conception may be examined: (a) marital confinements; (b) induced abortions occurring outside marriage; (c) non-marital confinements; and (d) spontaneous abortions occurring outside marriage. In the present analysis, no distinction is made between live births and stillbirths. Because the available abortion data are unsuited to making adjustments for women's marital status at the time of conception, marital abortions following an extramarital conception are also ignored; some observations may thus be distorted by extramaritally pregnant women marrying before abortion, although it seems improbable that the behavioural pattern 'extramarital conception–marriage–abortion' was very frequent.

The following discussion is based predominantly on age-specific proportions of extramaritally conceived pregnancies leading to different pregnancy outcomes, related to 100 known pregnancies to unmarried women of a given age (Fig. 4). Age-specific rates of extramarital conceptions per 1000 unmarried women of that age, partitioned according to the nature of confinement, are displayed in Table 1.

Marital confinement

Figure 4a shows that the proportion of extramarital conceptions resulting in marital confinements was always highest among women who conceived when they were between 15 and 29 years of age (in terms of age-specific rates, the peak ages were in the range 20–29, see Table 1). Why were so many pregnancies of these women

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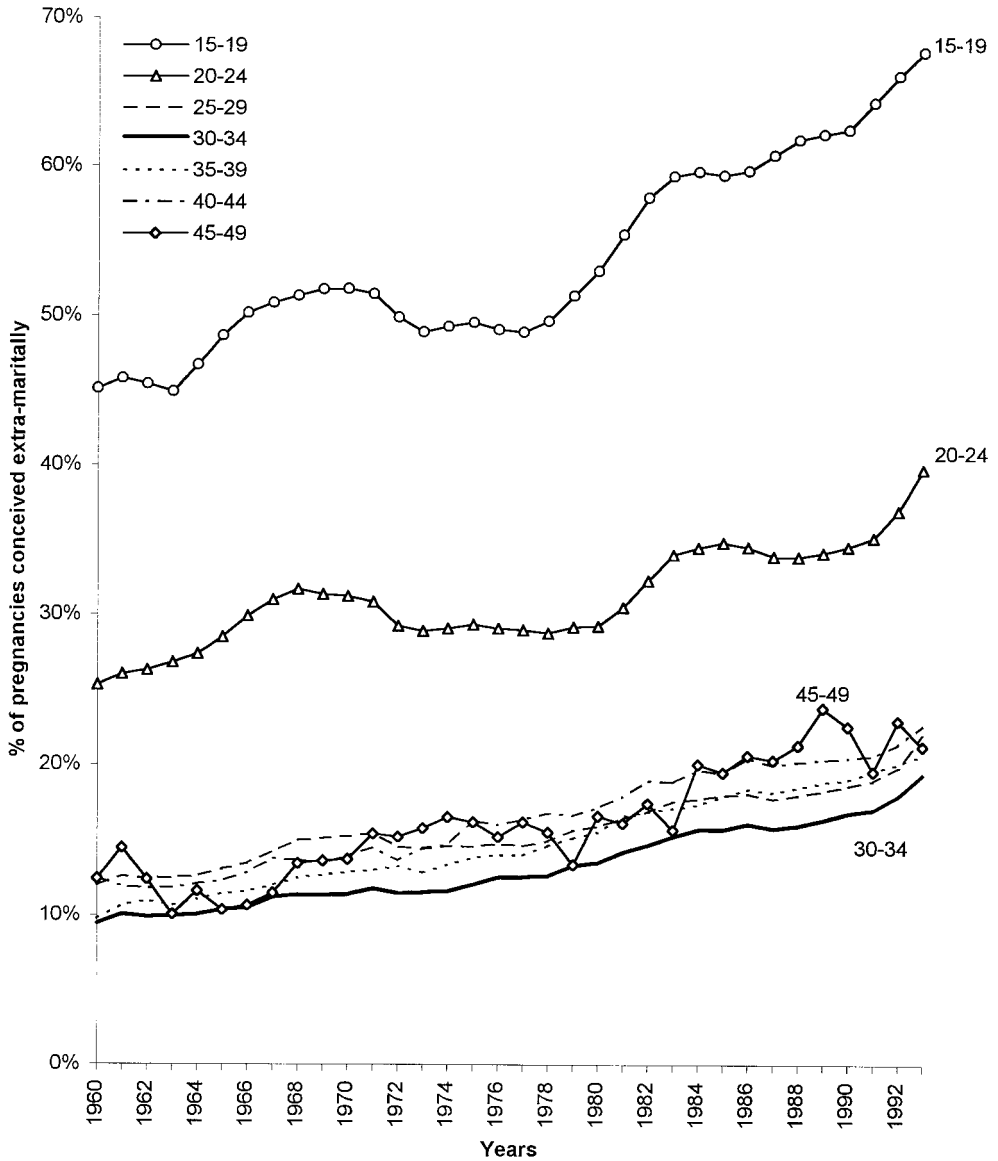


Fig. 3. Age-specific ratios of extramarital conceptions per 100 known pregnancies.

legitimised through formal marriage of the parents-to-be? The tendency to react to an extramarital conception in this manner was most pronounced among women in their early 20s, that is, at a life cycle stage which many Czechs would consider ideal for having children and establishing a family. It is possible that many of these pregnancies were products of committed relationships or, especially in the more recent years, of stable *de facto* unions, and that they were not conceived merely by chance. In addition, a direct parental involvement, in the form of a persuasion to marry rather than to have

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an abortion or to become a single mother, may not have been atypical in these situations. An early marriage under parental supervision could have some advantages for mothers and children, as well as for fathers. It was also a path to economic advancement. Due to a range of social policies implemented by the government during 1968–73, married people, and newly-weds with young children in particular, were entitled to numerous social benefits, ranging from family allowances and low-interest loans to preferential allocation of housing (Frejka, 1980). Given the existing political and economic realities, which offered few sources of satisfaction and time use that could compete with family involvement, many single persons may have viewed the married state and parenthood as much more advantageous than celibacy or cohabitation. From this psychology, coupled with inadequate sex education and low levels of efficient contraceptive use, it was but a short step to seeing pregnancy as a natural precursor to marriage. But other important factors were full employment and equalising wage policy, which fostered carefree social behaviour and lessened the concern for economic considerations of marriage. The resulting demographic pattern reached its zenith around 1975, when children conceived outside marriage were most likely to be born to already married mothers.

Compared to younger age groups, pregnancies of unmarried women older than 30 years culminated in marital births only exceptionally. Presumably, for these women the problem of finding a suitable husband tends to be more difficult, notably when the man responsible for the pregnancy is reluctant to accept the burden of fatherhood or is already married. Marrying at an older age may also conflict with certain life style preferences which already have proved to be satisfying (such as the feeling of being single and independent), or may be completely undesired because of a bad experience with an unsuccessful relationship in the past. Formation of a new union may frequently be a consequence of a broken partnership, and legal or psychological barriers can inhibit formalising such unions. Some divorced women, for instance, may have commitments towards their children from previous marriages, a circumstance which is likely to reduce their willingness to marry again and have another baby.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, marital confinement was gradually becoming a less popular outcome of an extramarital pregnancy, particularly among women in the prime childbearing ages, and reflects the declining willingness to put up with pregnancy-induced marriages at young ages. Apparently, the environment changed and the scope of culturally acceptable, socially useful, and practically accessible alternatives to that of legitimising an extramarital pregnancy via marriage has broadened. A complementary explanation is that the nature of extramarital sexual activity itself altered, with extramarital coitus becoming acceptable ever earlier in the dating process. This resulted in more pregnancies being the product of unstable, casual relationships, which were not ready to develop into marriages. This is consistent with a survey of 899 individuals aged 15–30 years conducted in 1993 which indicates that the time interval between the onset of a heterosexual relationship and first coitus tends to be shorter for members of younger generations (Petrova, 1994).

Induced abortion

In the Czech Republic, induced abortion represented one of the most common outcomes of extramarital conceptions, particularly for women over 30 years of age

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Table 1. Age-specific rates of extramarital conceptions (per 1000 unmarried

	Marital confinement					Induced abortion				
Year	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39
1960	19·8	127·8	85·2	22·7	7·5	10·8	32·3	47·5	37·9	27·0
1961	20·8	131·5	88·0	24·1	6·8	12·1	36·4	57·6	49·4	29·6
1962	22·1	141·1	95·2	24·8	6·9	10·6	33·4	52·2	45·3	28·5
1963	23·1	147·0	99·3	25·3	7·1	7·0	24·6	42·4	40·7	25·3
1964	23·5	141·2	95·4	25·2	7·3	8·1	26·6	41·9	38·1	25·1
1965	24·1	139·1	92·1	23·2	7·0	9·6	31·3	46·0	41·7	27·2
1966	25·1	139·3	87·2	22·2	6·5	10·9	35·9	49·4	43·8	27·0
1967	25·2	134·2	85·7	22·3	6·3	11·4	38·3	51·8	47·6	28·8
1968	26·1	132·1	84·2	22·5	5·6	12·0	41·3	54·4	48·2	31·4
1969	26·7	131·1	79·0	21·8	5·0	13·4	40·8	55·4	48·4	31·7
1970	27·1	134·4	84·6	23·6	5·9	14·0	41·2	52·9	47·6	32·7
1971	27·3	138·4	90·6	24·6	6·2	14·2	40·7	52·7	45·6	31·2
1972	28·1	141·1	90·5	25·0	5·9	13·6	36·7	48·7	42·2	30·2
1973	31·0	149·9	94·8	26·3	6·2	11·9	31·3	43·8	38·6	27·3
1974	33·8	154·0	97·0	25·6	6·2	12·0	31·1	43·0	37·8	27·2
1975	35·9	155·4	96·6	25·7	6·6	12·0	30·5	41·3	37·1	27·3
1976	36·5	154·0	99·0	26·5	6·5	11·1	29·4	41·3	36·6	26·9
1977	36·1	156·0	101·4	25·8	6·8	10·5	29·5	42·5	38·3	28·2
1978	35·6	156·3	102·5	25·3	6·5	10·2	29·8	44·2	38·6	28·3
1979	33·4	153·1	97·1	23·3	6·0	10·9	30·8	45·7	40·6	29·3
1980	31·4	149·1	92·4	21·7	5·6	11·8	31·8	48·7	41·5	29·9
1981	32·2	149·4	87·3	21·2	5·5	13·2	33·8	49·3	43·7	30·6
1982	34·0	156·3	83·2	19·9	5·1	13·8	34·0	47·8	44·0	31·4
1983	35·0	160·1	82·6	19·8	4·9	14·8	35·4	50·0	45·0	32·4
1984	34·6	156·2	81·2	19·0	4·6	16·4	38·3	53·0	48·6	32·9
1985	33·8	150·9	81·1	18·2	4·3	16·7	41·0	55·0	48·2	33·6
1986	32·8	146·3	82·7	17·9	3·9	17·8	43·6	57·3	51·4	36·7
1987	32·2	143·0	84·5	17·3	3·9	23·0	60·2	72·6	61·5	43·3
1988	30·1	138·8	85·2	16·0	3·8	23·3	61·1	75·0	64·2	44·1
1989	28·6	138·0	83·3	15·8	3·3	21·2	59·4	74·3	63·4	44·9
1990	26·9	133·2	73·6	14·8	3·3	22·0	60·8	73·9	63·2	43·3
1991	26·0	122·5	67·8	15·1	3·2	22·2	54·1	65·9	58·4	41·0
1992	23·9	107·3	62·4	15·6	2·9	21·2	48·1	57·8	51·7	35·9
1993	18·7	85·7	55·8	15·0	3·1	17·4	37·6	46·0	41·2	27·8

(Fig. 4a). The trend in proportions of such abortions of extramarital pregnancies closely reflects changes in official abortion policy. Thus, the restrictions promulgated in 1962 and 1973 produced a fall in most age-specific ratios, whereas the periods characterised by a more relaxed approach towards abortion seekers—between 1963 and 1969, and after the mid-1970s—were also the years when ratios were mostly increasing. The steep declines in the early 1970s were undoubtedly caused by the pronatalist

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women of given age) by eventual status of confinement, selected age groups

Extramarital confinement					Spontaneous abortion				
15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39
5·8	18·3	26·5	16·9	9·9	2·2	7·7	7·9	5·3	3·8
5·4	17·9	26·3	18·7	8·9	2·1	7·5	8·3	6·1	3·7
5·8	19·7	30·8	21·0	10·5	2·2	8·0	8·3	6·9	3·9
6·2	20·7	33·0	22·6	10·6	2·4	9·0	10·7	8·0	4·7
6·4	19·0	32·7	23·1	11·2	2·5	8·5	10·5	7·4	4·7
6·5	18·3	31·4	22·6	10·7	2·4	8·2	9·8	7·4	5·0
6·6	17·5	27·7	21·5	9·9	2·4	8·2	9·1	7·6	5·4
6·6	16·9	25·7	20·1	9·6	2·5	8·1	9·3	8·7	5·1
6·9	17·1	24·5	20·9	10·0	2·4	8·3	9·5	7·6	4·6
7·3	17·3	22·8	20·0	9·7	2·7	8·0	9·3	7·6	4·7
7·5	18·0	23·3	20·2	9·2	2·9	8·6	9·5	7·3	5·0
7·3	18·4	24·3	19·8	9·5	3·0	9·0	9·9	7·8	5·1
7·0	18·1	23·8	20·0	10·9	3·1	9·3	10·4	7·6	5·7
7·2	18·5	25·5	21·5	11·1	3·3	9·5	11·2	8·4	5·1
7·8	19·4	27·4	20·2	11·0	3·5	10·2	12·0	8·1	6·4
7·8	19·2	28·1	20·2	11·8	3·7	10·5	10·2	8·2	5·3
7·8	19·1	28·4	21·5	11·6	3·8	10·7	11·7	8·4	5·7
7·7	19·8	30·1	21·7	11·1	3·9	10·4	11·8	8·0	5·4
8·0	20·6	31·4	22·6	11·1	3·8	11·0	11·2	8·6	6·2
8·0	21·7	31·2	22·5	10·3	3·6	10·6	10·7	8·4	5·0
7·8	21·7	30·2	21·7	10·0	3·5	9·4	10·8	7·6	5·7
8·1	22·3	30·2	21·6	10·5	3·8	10·0	10·5	7·6	5·6
8·5	23·2	29·5	21·6	10·5	4·0	10·4	9·9	7·4	5·3
9·1	24·7	30·2	22·5	9·6	4·3	11·1	10·4	7·2	5·0
9·4	24·5	29·6	22·3	9·4	4·4	11·7	10·4	7·2	4·7
9·1	23·7	30·3	21·6	9·9	4·1	11·3	9·9	6·9	4·6
8·8	22·3	29·7	20·6	9·3	4·1	11·0	10·0	7·1	4·5
8·9	22·6	31·7	21·5	9·3	3·9	10·6	9·7	7·3	4·3
8·7	23·4	32·3	21·3	10·0	3·9	11·0	10·0	6·7	4·6
9·0	25·4	33·6	22·5	10·0	3·7	10·5	9·4	6·3	3·7
10·1	28·6	36·6	23·4	9·7	3·8	10·6	9·4	6·4	4·1
10·3	29·8	36·1	23·5	9·8	3·7	9·7	8·4	6·5	4·2
11·4	31·8	38·3	26·9	11·1	3·6	9·0	8·1	6·7	4·0
11·2	31·1	38·5	28·4	11·0	3·2	8·2	7·7	6·4	3·9

policies of that time, which were chiefly aimed at promoting childbearing within marriage, and thus had the effect of suppressing the propensity of unmarried women to seek abortions. (That these interventions boosted the 'marital confinement' category, especially for women aged 15–29 years, can also be seen in Fig. 4a.)

In general, however, the relatively significant role of induced abortion as a response to extramarital conception was clearly a component of the overall pattern of fertility

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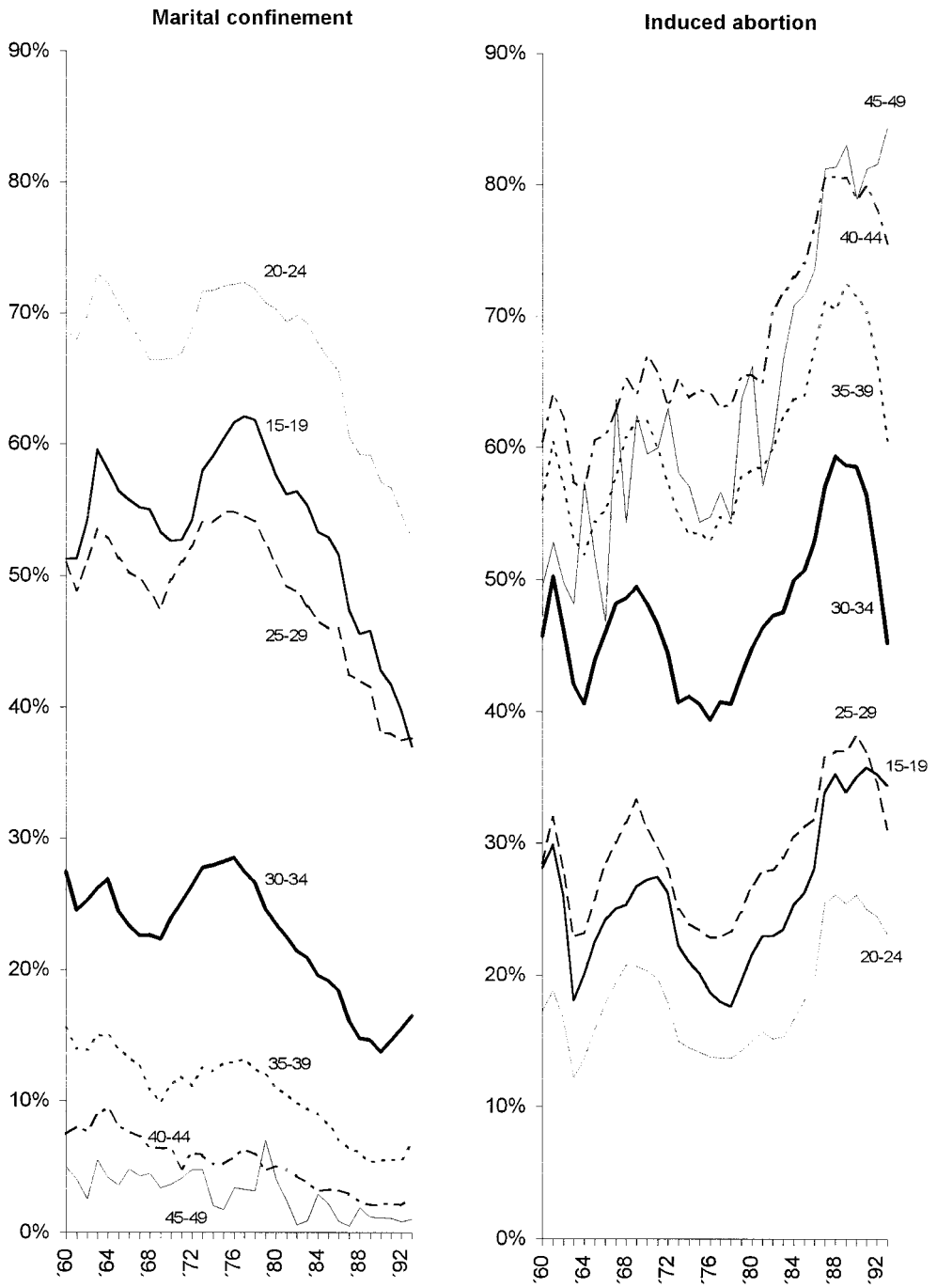


Fig. 4a. Age-specific proportions of extramarital conceptions by eventual status of confinement.

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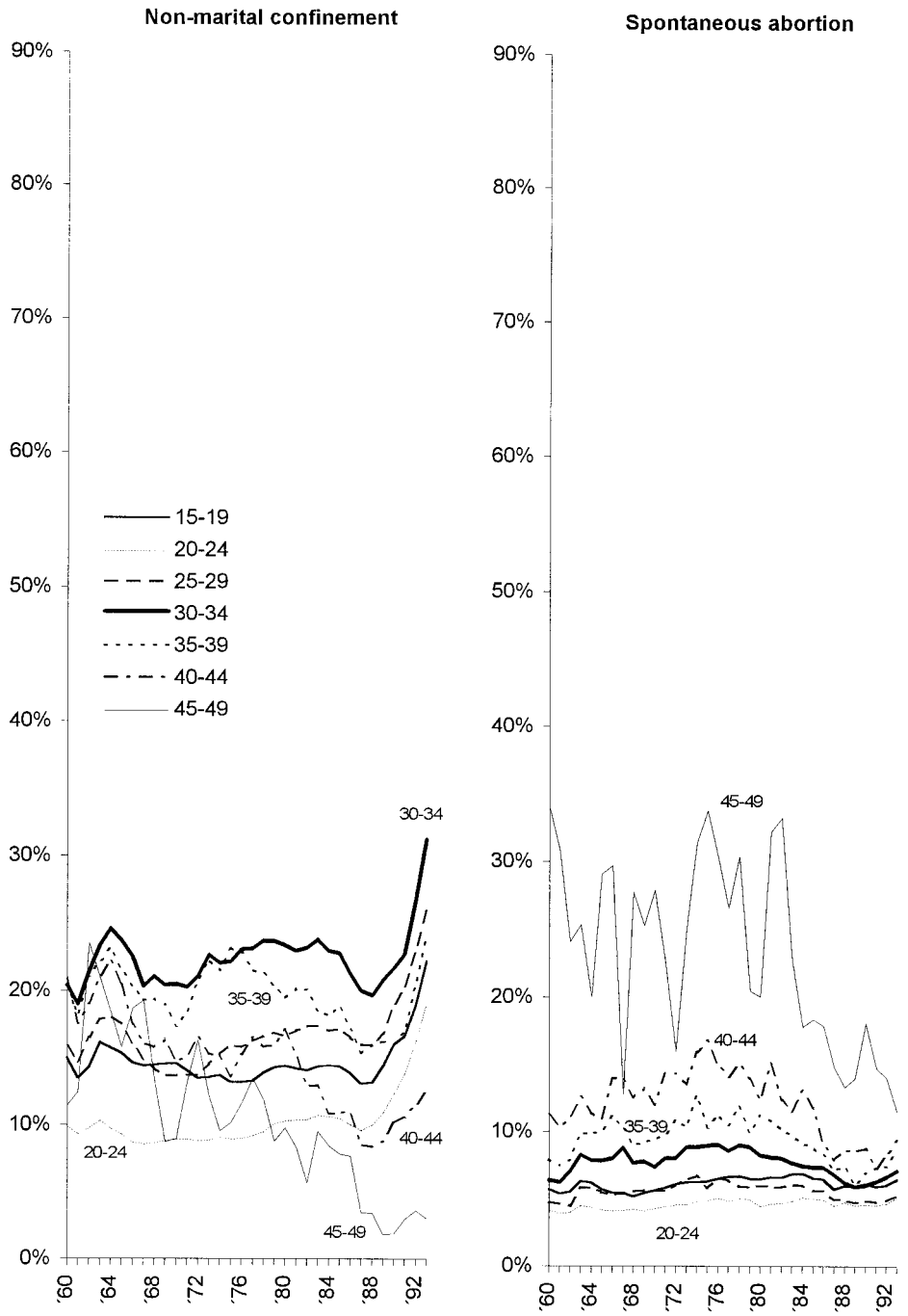


Fig. 4b. Age-specific proportions of extramarital conceptions by eventual status of confinement.

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control, which for many years was weighted heavily towards high-risk methods of pregnancy prevention. Inconsistent contraceptive use due to the irregular sexual activity of those living without a husband, plus the circumstance that unmarried people tend to engage in sexual intercourse for recreational rather than for reproductive purposes, might have been additional reasons for the high proportions of unwanted pregnancies to unmarried women. It may be speculated that most of these conceptions would not have occurred had contraceptive practice been more effective. It is even possible that some unmarried women adapted themselves to the chronically short supply of modern contraceptives by opting for abortion-oriented attitudes and behaviour. The pattern described also suggests that as extramarital sexual activity increased, coitus tended to take place at ever earlier stages of the process of courtship, thus limiting the willingness to carry an eventual pregnancy to term and increasing the chances of resorting to abortion.

After 1989, proportions of extramarital pregnancies leading to induced abortion declined abruptly for women of nearly all ages, but especially for those aged between 30 and 39 years (an analogous trend in the incidence of extramarital conceptions ending in induced abortion can be seen in Table 1). Part of this shift can be explained by changes in the accessibility of abortion, namely the introduction of a moderately expensive fee for abortion for non-medical reasons in 1992 (according to the regulation effective in 1995, the maximum fee a medical facility can charge for an induced abortion is 3634 Czech crowns (Sracek, 1995), which equals roughly US$135 or about 40% of an average monthly salary). More general determinants of the shift away from induced abortion are to be sought in the social and political conditions of the period immediately following the collapse of the communist regime, particularly in factors leading to a change in the social consequences of childbearing in and out of wedlock.

Non-marital confinement

During most of the period studied, giving birth outside marriage was a rather rare form of behaviour following an extramarital conception, in spite of the fact that children born outside wedlock had equal legal rights. Compared to the two categories of pregnancy outcomes already discussed, the proportions of extramarital pregnancies culminating in non-marital births are in general lower and less differentiated in regard to female ages (Fig. 4b). Some decreases in these proportions occurred between 1961 and 1964, mainly among women aged 30–44 years. Apparently, the restriction of abortion regulations in 1962 caused more unmarried women to elect to retain their babies without marrying than had been the practice before. However, the effect was short-lived, and already in 1966 the situation became similar to pre-1962 conditions. Compared to the 1962 policy intervention, the enactment of pronatalist policies in the early 1970s had a less dramatic but more enduring effect, resulting in moderate increases in the ratios for 30–34 and 35–39 year-olds. The main change came only in the late 1980s and, especially, during the early 1990s, when non-marital childbirth following extramarital conception became significantly more common. Between 1989 and 1993, ratios increased at all ages, except for women aged 45–49 years; they also rose faster at ages 20–34 than at ages 15–19 and 35–44 (the same is true for the exposure rates of extramarital conceptions leading to extramarital confinement, see Table 1).

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This trend marks the beginnings of a tendency to resist marrying in response to pregnancy, especially among women at the peak maternal ages. The changing socioeconomic climate following the end of the communist regime and the substantial re-conceptualisation of policies relevant to families have apparently been important factors of this development. Compared to the period of 'real socialism', the differences between monetary and other benefits available to married and unmarried people with children are nowadays considerably smaller (Kocourkova, in press). Formal marriage has thus lost much of its previous economic importance. But an equally significant factor may be that the post-1989 era brought new opportunities for individual decision-making, many of which were previously inaccessible to large sections of the population. An example is the greater availability of part-time jobs, one consequence of the boom in private enterprise, which gives individuals greater scope for combining employment with child-care and related domestic tasks. Consequently, many women previously destined to become pregnant brides may be reluctant to marry because they see no immediate benefit in doing so, while remaining formally single will give them, among other things, a possibility to test the emotional as well as economic viability of their relationships. Also, the rise in age of female first marriage observed during the early 1990s (Rychtarikova, 1995) lengthens the average period of exposure to non-marital sexual intercourse, and of increasing the likelihood of a birth occurring outside marriage. Consistent with this, rising economic uncertainty in the population has resulted in a more careful marital search, and a further dissociation of sexual activity and fertility from nuptiality.

This 'political' interpretation slightly oversimplifies matters, however. Judging from the trends depicted in Fig. 4b and their timing, it seems that whatever caused extramarital childbearing following extramarital conception to increase had already started in 1987–88, some time before the political situation changed. The same observation follows from age-specific rates of extramarital conceptions leading to extramarital confinement (Table 1). Perhaps the most powerful underlying factor is that, from the mid-1980s, the formation of *de facto* relationships has increased, with non-marital childbirth as a not uncommon outcome. Because the social transformation after 1989 provoked significant declines in the overall rates of extramarital conception (Fig. 2), the population experiencing extramarital pregnancies is nowadays likely to comprise more couples who live together in fairly stable consensual unions. Many of them may be unwilling or unable to marry, but are determined not to let economic hardship disrupt their long-term fertility plans. Thus, extramarital fertility has become to a much greater extent planned fertility.

Spontaneous abortion

During 1960–93, spontaneous abortion was the least frequent outcome of extramarital pregnancies. Its share of total extramarital conceptions has been quite stable and relatively low for all ages, except for the age groups 40–44 and 45–49 (Fig. 4b). This largely fits the overall picture of spontaneous abortion as being associated with biological and environmental risk factors which tend to increase with rising age of the woman. This form of pregnancy termination is inevitably subject to statistical misreporting, due partly to some early spontaneous abortions not being recorded at

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all, and partly to some self-induced or illegally induced abortions being falsely declared as spontaneous. However, given the conditions of the Czech population, where legal abortion has been easily available to unmarried women since 1957, it seems unlikely that the practice of declaring clandestine pregnancy terminations as spontaneous abortions was widespread.

Overall perspective

Figure 5 shows the changing overall distribution of extramaritally conceived pregnancies by eventual status of confinement. Much of the period 1960–89 appears to be characterised by fairly stable and generally low proportions of extramarital conceptions leading to spontaneous abortion and non-marital confinement; and high but variable proportions of conceptions culminating in induced abortion and marital confinement. Troughs in induced abortion tended to correspond with peaks in marital births, reflecting behavioural responses to shifts in social policies which regulated access to induced abortion and affected the relative appeal of marriage to people. Marital confinement was traditionally the most common outcome of extramarital conception. However, after the mid-1970s, when marital births accounted for as much as 60% of all extramaritally conceived pregnancies, their relative importance has gradually declined, at first due to increasing use of induced abortion, and since 1989 due to more extramarital pregnancies resulting in extramarital confinements. The period around 1989 thus appears to represent a turning point in the behaviour of women experiencing extramarital pregnancies as it marks the commencement of a significant shift from marital confinement and induced abortion to non-marital confinement.

Conclusion

The early 1990s were a watershed in the Czech Republic, as in other East European countries previously under Soviet influence (Holzer, 1995). This period witnessed not only the re-birth of democracy and market economy, but also a renaissance of independent thinking which has subjected to critical scrutiny a range of social norms, including life-style strategies and behavioural stereotypes that developed under the previous regime. Aided by the virtual abolition of communist welfare policies and the atmosphere of economic uncertainty, marriage ceased to be the norm for many individuals. Family, with its responsibilities and restrictions, is increasingly being perceived as inhibiting the quest for individual self-fulfilment and limiting the scope for future options. The recent trends in extramarital conception, leading to generally lower levels but also to proportionately fewer pregnancies culminating in marital confinements, have been a part of the general shift towards more cautious, less family-oriented attitudes and forms of individual behaviour. Thus, changes in politics and economy have proved to be capable of generating, or at least significantly accelerating, substantial demographic responses. However, one question remains: to what extent are the women experiencing extramarital conceptions forerunners whose behaviour indicates the likely direction of future developments in the population as a whole, and to what extent do they represent a specific subgroup which has little in common with the rest?

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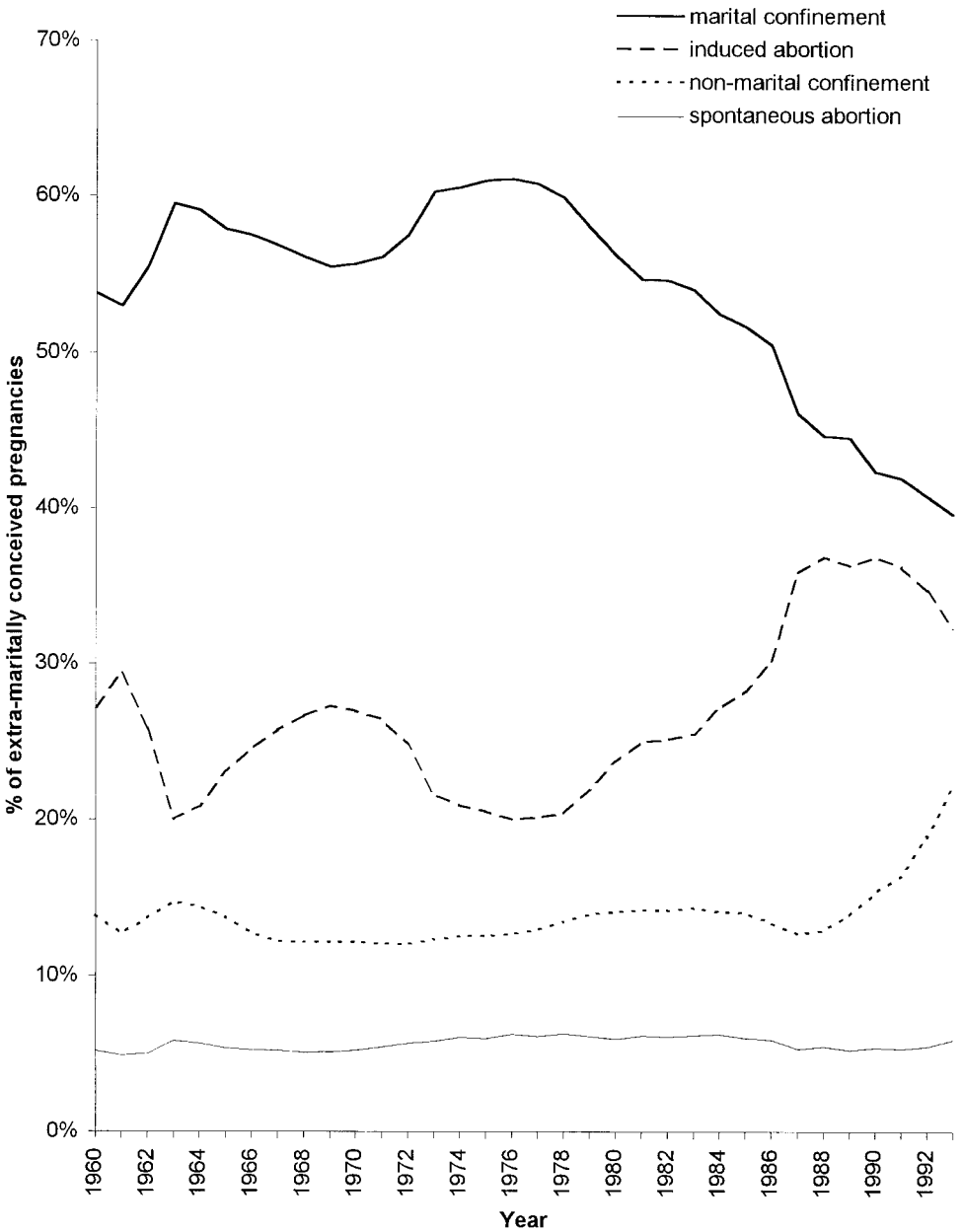


Fig. 5. Distribution of extramarital conceptions by eventual status of confinement.

For some observers, recent demographic trends in the formerly Soviet-dominated countries may signal the advent of the second demographic transition in Eastern Europe, and there is indeed a similarity between the behavioural changes which appeared in the West during the 1960s and 1970s and those that are currently emerging

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in Eastern Europe. But the analogy is not perfect. Most importantly, whereas the spread of innovative forms of behaviour in the West was largely explainable in terms of ideational shifts and changes in contraceptive technology, the recent developments in Eastern Europe seem to be more related to politics. Given the well-known inertia of cultural and social norms relevant to reproduction, it could be argued that the great 'demographic shocks' (Eberstadt, 1994) evident in Eastern Europe today are merely transitory reactions to changing socioeconomic conditions, namely price liberalisations, inflation, reforms of the tax system, and transformation of labour markets. The vision of the West and the East of Europe jointly converging to a single pattern of reproductive behaviour may reflect a poverty of imagination. Factors such as historical experience, psychology, religion, and value orientation of the people are likely to be instrumental in shaping the demographic future of particular Eastern European populations.

Finally, the gender-related aspects of post-communist developments and the sex-specific consequences of societal transformation need to be considered. A critical factor influencing the declining attractiveness of marriage and parenthood throughout much of Eastern Europe may be the increasing availability of personal opportunities outside the family—a process which is likely to have a different significance for men and for women. If so, this emphasises the importance of adopting a two-sex approach in analysing the determinants of nuptiality and fertility. Whether or not political and economic developments are playing leading roles, the shifts in reproductive behaviour of Eastern European populations need to be considered in the context of changing gender roles, as well as in relation to the cultural, ideational, administrative, and technological forces. Findings presented in this paper also imply an urgent need for research based on individual-level surveys which would permit a more subtle treatment of demographic and cultural characteristics of women and men involved in extramarital reproduction than can be obtained from official statistics.

Acknowledgments

The paper was originally prepared for the seminar 'Politiques Démographiques, Politiques Familiales', Paris, 28–30 May, 1996. I wish to acknowledge the comments and suggestions received from my colleagues Jirina Kocourkova, Milan Kucera, and Zdenek Pavlik from the Department of Demography, Charles University, Prague. I am also grateful to Gordon A. Carmichael from the Demography Program at the Australian National University in Canberra, who supervised my PhD work at the ANU during 1992–95, and whose paper on extramarital pregnancies in New Zealand between 1945 and 1980 inspired me to produce an analogous analysis for the Czech Republic.

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