

# CHANGES IN THE NATURE OF NON-MARITAL FERTILITY IN THE CZECH LANDS SINCE THE 18TH CENTURY<sup>\*</sup>)

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**Abstract:** The increase in the percentage of children born to unwed parents is one of the more significant changes that have occurred in the reproductive behaviour of the population of the Czech Republic since 1989. However, the increase is primarily a consequence of the substantial decrease in the marital fertility rate, and not a rise in the fertility rate of unmarried women.

**Keywords:** fertility, extra-marital fertility, historical demography, Czech Republic

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The issue of non-marital fertility can be approached from various perspectives. It can be viewed either as a particular social phenomenon, and thus mainly from the perspective of society's attitude towards non-marital intercourse and related attitudes towards single mothers and their children (cf. *Tinková*, 2004), or as a phenomenon connected with a particular aspect of demographic behaviour that influences the overall fertility rate (*Horská*, 1980; *Pavlík*, *Rychtaříková and Šubrtová*, 1986)<sup>1)</sup>. The latter approach is considerably easier because, owing to the traditionally negative attitude of the Catholic Church in particular towards extramarital children, it is possible to trace extramarital as well as marital fertility essentially from the time records of christenings began to be kept up to modern times. The negative view of the Church and the public towards unmarried mothers and their children in general is likely why in the past the majority of extramarital children born were unwanted children. Nonetheless, there always existed a number of extramarital children that unmarried mothers brought into the world deliberately. Such would have been the case of children born to couples who for various reasons never married but lived together in the same household, and children born to couples who intended to marry, had intercourse, and married after the birth of the child or children.

Since the emergence of *Pavla Horská's* summary study (1980) on the subject, extramarital fertility in the 19th and early 20th centuries is not a subject that has received much more attention in the Czech Republic, but certain factors had to be taken into account in the analysis of the overall fertility rate, both in the period of the old demographic regime (*Dokoupil et al.*, 1999) and during the demographic revolution (*Fialová*, 1990). Demographic research based on aggregate data cannot distinguish the real background to the birth of individual children, but it can trace some aspects. From the percentage of extramarital births it is possible to deduce whether the extramarital fertility rate is a marginal phenomenon, so the children are probably unwanted, or whether conversely the percentage of extramarital births indicates that

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<sup>1)</sup> An interesting topic in itself would be the genesis of the change in how this phenomenon is referred to, from "non-marital" to "extramarital" fertility.

these were children born to parents in an informal relationship, who for various reasons never made the effort to legalise their union. An in-depth micro-survey undertaken by Alice Velková (2002) in the parish of Štáhlavy and some recent sociological studies (Chaloupková, 2006), for example, indicate that a key factor in the intensity of extramarital fertility is the social and cultural environment.

The study of extramarital fertility is an example of how researchers begin to take a greater interest in a certain issue the moment its intensity changes, or specifically, when the change in intensity signifies a change in behaviour. This is particularly apparent in this case. Researchers began to take a deeper interest in the structure of births by marital status of the mother along with other related phenomena in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was a time when in many countries in Western Europe the percentage of extramarital births began to rise. Historical demographers tried to find certain parallels to this in the past, as they were interested in observing differences or similarities connected with this phenomenon, which had ceased to be a marginal issue. When the first large international study on this issue came out (Laslett, Oesterveen and Smith, 1980), the percentage of extramarital births in the Czech Republic had slightly increased from the past, but it was still less than 6%. That characteristic feature of the Czech situation at the time was one of the reasons why Pavla Horská's paper (1980) long remained the only such work on the topic. And even though an analysis of extramarital fertility was a standard part of most studies of population development or fertility trends in the Czech lands in the past, it was not usually an accented part of research (Fialová, 1981; Fialová, Pavlík and Vereš, 1990; Dějiny, 1995). The approach taken by sociologists was the same.

It was only when reproductive behaviour began to change at the start of the 1990s that the fertility of unmarried women became a more common research theme, both among demographers and sociologists. Almost every analysis of fertility or family behaviour now touches on the topic. But unlike before more space is now devoted to the topic and an effort is made to understand the phenomenon and to situate it within a wider context (Rychtaříková, 2003; Šalamounová and Nývlt, 2006).

In this article I will try to point out the similarities and differences in the character of extramarital fertility in the long-term perspective, as there is now already a relatively rich collection of data on the topic providing general information on the rate of extramarital fertility over a relatively long period. In her work, Pavla Horská (1980: 346) identified three stages in the development of extramarital fertility: the early modern period (roughly from the start of parish records on natural population growth to the first third of the 19th century), when around 5% of children born were extramarital; from the start of the second third of the 19th century to the end of the first half of the 20th century, when the figure was around 12% to 15%; after 1950, when the figure decreased to around 5%. Obviously, Pavla Horská could not yet have dealt with the fourth stage, which only began after 1990 and continues to date. In this most recent period the percentage of extramarital births has grown continuously (surpassing 33% in 2006).

### Sources and research methods

Demographers analysing family behaviour are interested in how widespread a given phenomenon is among the population, its intensity, timing, and differentiation, and any regional variations. This is no different in the case of extramarital fertility. They usually observe the percentage of children born to unmarried women and the age structure and other characteristics of the mothers of these children. Usually only simple indicators that are available for a longer time period and are comparable are necessary to analyse long-term trends. For this reason I limit myself just to observing the percentage of extramarital births and for more recent periods to the age structure of the mothers of these children, or the age-specific fertility rate of unmarried women.

Demographic statistics provide data on the rate of extramarital fertility on the territory of the Czech Republic today since the year 1787<sup>2)</sup>. The fertility rate of unmarried women by age can be observed for the period between 1900 and 1970 mainly the census years and then also annually<sup>3)</sup>.

The quality and the informative value of indicators vary, but they do reveal the changes in attitudes towards extramarital fertility among a part of the population and indicate the internal differentiation of these differences.

### **The low rate of extramarital fertility (the period up to 1810)**

The vast majority of extramarital children born in the early modern period can be deemed to have been unwanted children, who were usually born to single mothers, often housemaids. The data suggest that the birth of a child out of wedlock was not an exceptional event, but nor was it a particularly common one.

It can be deduced from a deeper analysis of data mainly from before the mid-18th century (Tab. 1) that illegitimate births were under-registered. In order to highlight the illegitimate status of these children they were not supposed to be recorded in the same register as children born in wedlock. Sometimes the parish registrar did not heed this recommendation, and all children were registered chronologically, regardless of their legitimacy. More often two registers were maintained, but it was not always that both of them survived. The fact that until 1770 registration was done at a fee may also have resulted in the under-registration of extramarital children, whose mothers often came from the poorer social strata. The low number of extramarital births registered in some parishes would suggest such a conclusion. For example, in the parish of Broumov in 1725–1742, out of 3498 christenings recorded in the register, only one related to an extramarital child; in Domažlice in 1760–1769, out of 1267 christenings there were none. Both *Eliška Čáňová* (1981) and *Petr Mužík* (1984), who studied the data on these localities, explain the low numbers by under-registration.

But even in cases where it is possible to work with more complete or even complete data the number of extramarital births is not usually high, especially in rural areas. For example, in the small parish of a church in Poruba (today in the district of Karviná) only rarely were there more than four extramarital births a year (which was between 2% and 5% of the total number of children born), and the percentage was the same in the large district of Smečno (11 villages), where the number of extramarital births annually was rarely more than 10. It can generally be said that in the countryside the percentage of extramarital births was constant and low over the long term, usually less than 4%. However, the extramarital fertility rate grew in periods of unrest, especially during wars. This can be shown in data from the parish of Dobrovice (Mladá Boleslav district), where the percentage of extramarital births grew in the 1740s – during the War of the Austrian Succession, when the Czech lands were the site of military conflict – from just over 2% to 5%, and then in the following decade – during the Seven Years War – to 7% (*Dokoupil et al.*, 1999: 49).

A somewhat different picture is provided by data from urban parishes, where the percentage of children born to unmarried mothers was usually higher, though the difference was not too great, especially in smaller towns<sup>4)</sup>. It can be judged from the available data that until the

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<sup>2)</sup> Demographic statistical data can be used to determine the percentage of children born out of wedlock in the Czech lands in 1787 and 1792 and after that from the years 1806 onward (though up to 1822 either only for Bohemia or Moravia or Silesia). The data used in the study for the period before 1918 are drawn either from parish registers or from *V. Sekera's* books (1978, 1979).

<sup>3)</sup> The calculation is dependent on the availability of data on the structure of women by age and marital status. Such data were contained only in manuscripts or in the internal documentation of the statistics bureau; starting in 1986 such data have been published in *Pohyb obyvatelstva (Population Change – since 2005 Demographic Yearbook)*.

<sup>4)</sup> Most towns in Bohemia and Moravia were not large enough to form a separate parish, and most of the parishes that had their base in a particular town also encompassed surrounding rural settlements. From the available data it is not possible to distinguish between children born to parents living in the town and those whose parents lived in rural villages within the town parish.

**Table 1 Percentage of children registered at christening as born out of wedlock – selected parishes between the 17th and 19th centuries**

a) Rural district parishes							
Period	Králíky <sup>1</sup>	Smečno <sup>1</sup>	Poruba <sup>1</sup>	Kralice na Hané <sup>1</sup>	Vracov <sup>2</sup>	Lochenice <sup>3</sup>	Žitenice <sup>4</sup>
1601–1650	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1651–1700	-	-	-	2.1	0.5	-	-
1701–1750	-	4.2	4.5	3.7	1.5	-	-
1751–1800	2.8	4.2	1.9	4.2	3.2	1.5	-
1801–1850	4.1	-	7.7	-	7.0	9.2	18.5
1851–1900	-	-	-	-	-	7.9	17.8
b) Urban district parishes							
Period	Broumov <sup>1</sup>	Domažlice <sup>5</sup>	Plzeň <sup>1</sup>	Budyně nad Ohří <sup>1</sup>	Litoměřice <sup>6</sup>	Ústí nad Labem <sup>7</sup>	Praha <sup>8</sup>
1601–1650	0.4	0.1	-	-	-	1.3	2.0
1651–1700	0.5	1.0	-	-	-	0.9	5.8
1701–1750	0.4	0.4	-	4.8	2.7	2.0	13.5
1751–1800	0.4	2.1	9.8	5.0	7.8	3.8	18.8
1801–1850	-	4.2	-	9.7	-	15.9	-
1851–1900	-	-	-	-	-	17.9	-

**Note:**

<sup>1</sup> Dlouhodobé populační trendy na území ČSR, předstatistické období (Long-term population trends in the Czechoslovak Republic, pre-statistical period). Praha: Acta demographica IV, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Nesiádková, 2003: 156.

<sup>3</sup> Kalousková, 2006: 98.

<sup>4</sup> Vaňková, 2006: 164.

<sup>5</sup> Mužik, 1986: 147 (1630–1830 period).

<sup>6</sup> Rukopisné tabulky (Manuscript tables), excerpted by L. Dušek (1700–1799 period).

<sup>7</sup> Dušková, 2000: 133 (1800–1850 period).

<sup>8</sup> Souhrn dat pro vybrané farní obvody (Summary data for selected parishes), (Fialová, 2006).

end of the 1750s even in towns the number of extramarital births was below 5%, and after that the number doubled relatively quickly (e.g. in Litoměřice and probably also in Pilsen).

An exception to this pattern was Prague, where the number of children born to unmarried mothers was much higher<sup>5</sup>. Even in the second half of the 17th century the number of extramarital births exceeded 5%. In the first half of the 18th century the number grew to 14% and in the second half of the century to 19%. To an increasing degree the rise in numbers was influenced by the existence of hospital for abandoned infants<sup>6</sup>. A certain number of mothers of these children would have been women who came to Prague from rural areas in order to conceal their predicament; this can also be judged from the fact that in the records of Prague birth registers, alongside the names of such mothers there is a note like “mother-newcomer”. But in the city there were also larger strata of society for whom marrying was difficult (the urban poor, domestic servants).

The increasing percentage of extramarital children in the 18th century can be linked to a softening of the state’s attitude towards such children – or to an “improvement” in the conditions faced by unmarried mothers and the option of being able to place an unwanted child in the special Provincial Maternity Hospital (with a foundling ward or *nalezinec*), cf. Tinková, 2003). National data from the very end of the 18th century and the start of the 19th century corresponds with these findings. In 1787 and 1792 the percentage of extramarital births in the Czech Lands was 4% and in 1806 it was 5%. In Bohemia the number of extramarital

<sup>5</sup> Information on the extramarital fertility rate in Prague is based on a sample that encompassed one-half of children recorded in birth registers in Prague in the second half of the 17th century and two-thirds to three-quarters in the 18th century (Fialová, 2006).

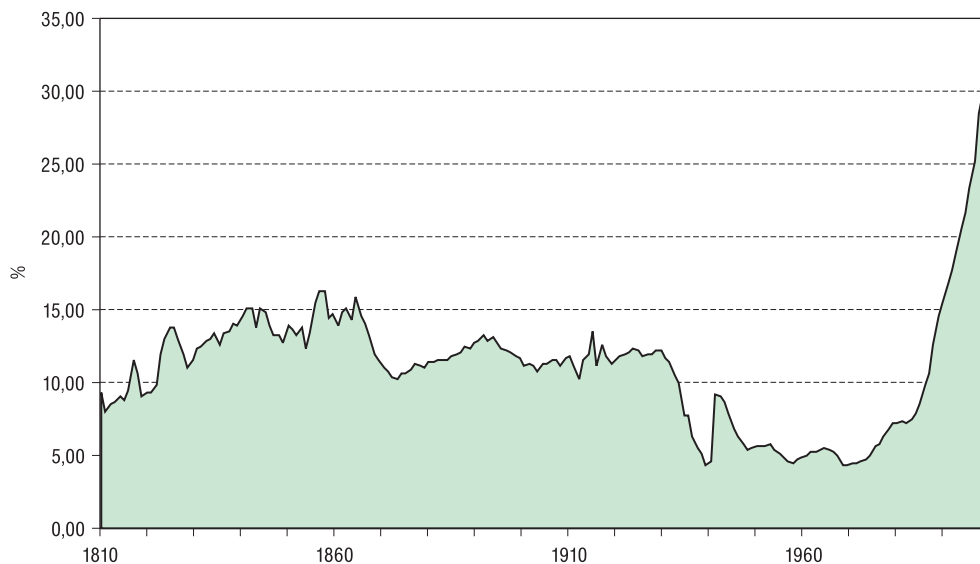
<sup>6</sup> However a foundlings hospital (*nalezinec*) is an altogether distinct category, as such children could be born in wedlock as well as out of wedlock.

births at this time was around 0.05–1.5 of a percentage point higher than in Moravia and Silesia.

### The increase in extramarital fertility between 1810 and 1937 by nationality

The percentage of children born to unmarried mothers on average in the Czech Lands began to rise in the second decade of the 19th century and in 1817 it for the first time surpassed the level of 10% and remained above this level until 1937<sup>7)</sup>. The totals for all the *země* or provinces in the Czech Lands – Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia – show that the numbers of extramarital births increased especially in the years between 1810 and 1842, when the figure was greater than 15%. There ensued a period in which the rate did not increase, and on the contrary the figures tended to be lower. The maximum rate (16.3%) was recorded in 1865–1866. After 1870 the rate never usually exceeded 13%. Even in these years a difference between the provinces persisted – in Bohemia relatively more children were born to unwed mothers than in Moravia and Silesia: until 1870 approximately 1–2 percentage points more, after 1868 3–4 percentage points more. In the 20th century the difference decreased to previous levels.

Figure 1 Percentage of live-born extramarital children out of wedlock in the Czech Lands 1810–2005



Note: In the years 1938–1944 data are only available for the Czech population in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

The growing percentage of extramarital births in the first decades of the 19th century tends to be linked to the postponement of first-time marriage. In the first half of the 19th century the average age at the first marriage increased on average by 2 to 3 years, both among men and women, and the percentage of the population never married grew: in 1880 more than 10% of women and 6% of men in the 45–49 age group had never married.

<sup>7)</sup> Up to this year the demographic statistical data are comparable; in 1938–1945 data are only available on the Czech population of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

Table 2 Live-born children by legitimacy in the Czech Lands 1823–2005 (averages for the indicated periods)

Period	Live births, total	Live births out of wedlock		Period	Live births, total	Live births out of wedlock	
		Number	%			Number	%
1823–1829	229 749	29 135	12.7	1920–1929	228 688	27 376	12.0
1830–1839	237 211	30 715	12.9	1930–1939	162 758	18 043	11.1
1840–1849	252 713	36 204	14.3	1940–1949	165 824	10 698	6.5
1850–1859	274 700	38 936	14.2	1950–1959	164 956	9 313	5.6
1860–1869	284 174	41 356	14.6	1960–1969	140 437	7 034	5.0
1870–1879	308 262	33 743	10.9	1970–1979	175 360	8 320	4.7
1880–1889	313 354	36 381	11.6	1980–1989	137 553	9 477	6.9
1890–1899	320 352	40 755	12.7	1990–1999	106 643	14 970	14.0
1900–1909	316 165	36 221	11.5	2000–2005	94 662	25 581	27.0
1910–1919	214 195	24 595	11.5				

Source: Sekera, 1978, 1979, Pohyb obyvatelstva ...

Note: 1937 (total population) – 11.0 %, in years 1938–1946 (Czech population): 1938 and 1939 – 8.3 %, 1940 – 6.8 %, 1941 – 5.8 %, 1942 – 5.4 %, 1943 – 4.6 %, 1944 – 4.9 %, 1945 – 6.9 %, 1946 – 7.8 %, 1947 – 9.6 % (total population).

Findings from micro-regions correspond with the data from national statistics, both in terms of the increase in the percentage and in terms of regional differentiation, which was somewhat more complex than in the preceding period. In addition to the urban-rural differentiation there were differences stemming from the varying responses of populations to deteriorating opportunities to marry in connection with nationality or a particular national culture. The increase in the number of extramarital births was stronger in areas inhabited by the German-speaking population; for example, in Jáchymov and Kraslice in 1881–1882 the figure was 27%; both districts were inhabited almost exclusively by German-speaking populations: in 1880, 99.9% of the population was recorded as German speakers. This percentage of extramarital births was roughly similar to the percentage in the Austrian Alps and some other Central European regions inhabited by German-speaking populations. Conversely, the rates in areas inhabited by a majority Czech population (i.e. an average of 5–10% of extramarital births) were comparable to the rates in France, Italy or Denmark (*Shorter, Knodel and van de Walle*, 1971).

Research by *Alice Velková* on the parish of Starý Plzenec indicates that the rate of extramarital fertility increased in the late 18th and early 19th centuries primarily among the lower social strata: in the cited parish in 1791–1800 one-quarter of women had an extramarital child and three-quarters of these women married later, though not always with the child's father (*Velková*, 2003: 220–221). An analysis of data obtained for Jablonec nad Nisou (a location with mainly a German-speaking population) for the years 1800–1869 points to very similar findings: the percentage of marriages in which the bride was a woman who had had a child when she was single increased from just under 5% in 1800–1809 to 12% in the following decade, and in 1820–1859 the figure was between 14% and 18%, and in 1860–1869 it reached 24%<sup>8)</sup>. In Jablonec nad Nisou in 1800–1859 the period that passed between the birth of an extramarital child and the mother's marriage, if she married, was 2.1 years on average. Around 40% of the women who had a child while still single married within one year and 45% within four years; thus only around 15% of women remained unmarried. The fact that the woman's eventual husband was also the person listed as the father in the birth register indicates

<sup>8)</sup> The results are based on family forms reconstructed by *Walburga Wowková* for Jablonec nad Nisou (marriages that took place between 1800 and 1869, a total of 1512 family forms). I thank PhDr. Walburga Wowková for the opportunity to use these data.

that these children were born into a more or less permanent relationship. However, some children born to unmarried mothers were unwanted children<sup>9)</sup>.

It is only possible to verify obtained data against national statistics back to 1895. *Markéta Srbová* (2003: 65) worked out that in 1895–1913 for every 100 children born to an unwed mother 35–40% of them were made legitimate by the marriage of their parents and roughly every sixth wedding took place between partners who acknowledged living with a child they had conceived together. She also identified significant regional differences, as a higher rate of extramarital fertility and a higher percentage of extramarital children subsequently legitimised was recorded in areas with a German-speaking population (in 1900–1904 in some places more than 50% of extramarital children were later made legitimate by marriage). Based on data from demographic statistics the differences in the rate of extramarital fertility by nationality can be traced since 1925. That year 18% of children born to mothers of German nationality in the Czech lands were extramarital births, 9.5% of those born to Czech and Slovak mothers were; in 1937 the situation was similar, though the rate was lower (14.4% and 8.4%, respectively).

**Table 3** Frequency by district of the percentage of extramarital children born in selected years in the Czech Lands

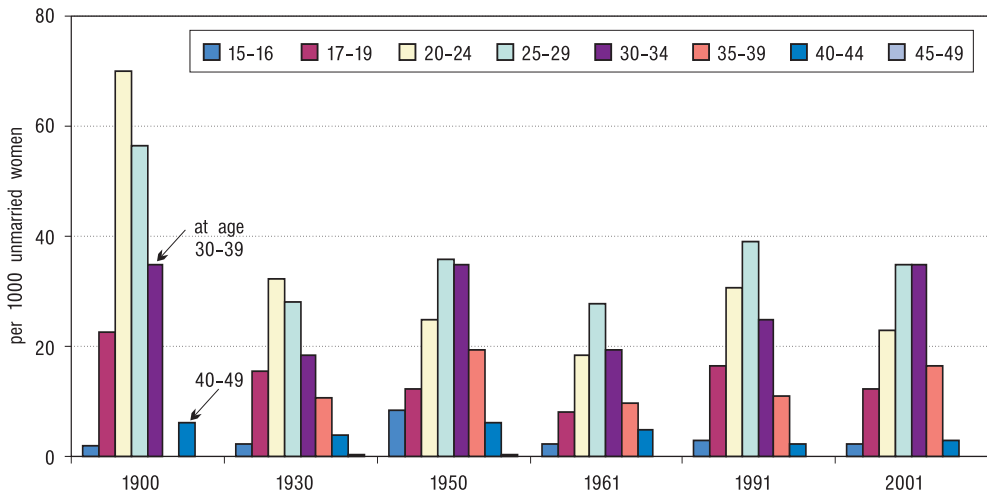
Percentage of extramarital children born	Percentage of districts in selected years					
	1880	1910	1930	1950	1961	2001
0–4	2.2	1.9	–	53.3	71.1	–
5–10	48.9	50.3	31.8	33.0	19.7	–
10–14	30.7	28.9	37.2	12.6	9.2	11.7
15–19	11.7	15.7	17.6	1.1	–	35.1
20–24	3.6	1.9	9.5	–	–	22.1
25–29	2.1	0.6	2.0	–	–	10.4
30–34	–	–	1.4	–	–	5.2
35–39	–	–	0.7	–	–	7.8
40–44	–	–	–	–	–	5.2
45–49	0.8	0.7	–	–	–	1.3
50–54	–	–	–	–	–	1.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of districts	127	147	148	182	76	77

Source: Bewegung der Bevölkerung... Pohyb obyvatelstva...

In the Czech Lands differentiation by nationality corresponded to regional divisions (the Czech population was concentrated more in the centre of Bohemia and Moravia, the German population lived in the border regions, although some settlements were located well within the country's interior), and consequently distinct cultural patterns were also reflected in the regional differentiation of extramarital fertility. In one-half of districts the number of extramarital births was less than 10%, and in every twentieth district the figure was more than 20% (in 1880; in 1910 it was in every fiftieth district). In Prague the Provincial Maternity Hospital (with a foundling ward) increased the percentage of extramarital births until 1925, when the system of processing data changed, and children were classified according to the mother's place of residence: in Prague the percentage of extramarital births decreased from 20% in 1924 to 13% in 1925.

<sup>9)</sup> *Alena Luxová* indirectly identifies this factor in an analysis of women convicted of killing their newborn child and imprisoned in Řepý: in 1865–1918 93% of these women were unmarried, in 1919–1948 87% of them were; they tended to come from the lower social strata (*Luxová*, 2005: 147, 195).

Figure 2 The age-specific fertility rates of unmarried women by age in the Czech Lands in selected years



The extent of extramarital fertility is documented by the relatively high value of the Cole index *ih*, which in the late 19th century was at a level of more than 0,10 (at the same time the Cole index for marital fertility *ig* was 0,70), i.e. 10% (respectively 70%) of marital fertility of the Hutterites; a decrease of the *ig* index to a level below 0,60–0,65 usually indicates the limiting of marital fertility, so it is evident that at this time in the Czech Lands marital fertility was not yet significantly limited<sup>10)</sup>. The proportion of unmarried women in the population in relation to their age can be told from the index of the fertility of married women (*im*), which at the end of the 19th century was only 0,50, i.e. up to one-half of all potential fertility could not be realised because the women remained unmarried.

Table 4 Percentage of extramarital live-born children out of the total live-born children by size of the place of residence of the mother (%) in the Czech Lands 1921–2004

Period	Total	In municipalities up to 10 thous. inhabitants	In municipalities above 10 thous. inhabitants
1920–1929	12.0	11.8	13.4
1930–1939*	11.1	10.8	11.9
1940–1949*	6.5	6.3	7.5
1950–1959	5.6	5.2	6.4
1960–1969	5.0	4.8	5.4
1970–1979	4.7	4.3	5.2
1980–1989	6.9	5.3	7.8
1990–1999	14.0	10.6	16.1
2000–2005	27.0	23.8	29.8

Source: Pohyb obyvatelstva ...

Note: See the note to Table 2.

When in the 1870s the rate of realised fertility began to decrease as a result of the conscious limiting of the number of children in a family, this was reflected in a slight decline in the rate of extramarital fertility and a slight decrease in the percentage of children born out of wedlock. But given that the level of the indicator remained fixed even amidst a further decline in the rate of realised fertility, it would seem that the previous type of family behaviour continued. Of those children born out of wedlock a certain portion were later made legitimate by the parents' marriage. From 1895 it is possible to trace the age structure of the mothers of children born out

<sup>10)</sup> On the method of constructing the index and its use in the analysis of fertility, see A. J. Coale and S. C. Watkins (1986) *The Decline of Fertility in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. On its application to development in the Czech Lands, see Fialová (1991).



**Table 5 Percentage of extramarital live-born children out of the total live-born children by the age of the mother in the Czech Lands**

Age	1900	1930	1950	1961	1991	2005
Percentage of extramarital children out of live-born children in the given age group (%)						
Total	11.9	12.0	6.3	4.6	9.8	31.7
15-19	58.0	45.6	15.7	11.4	20.0	86.6
20-24	25.6	18.0	5.9	3.2	6.8	50.6
25-29	8.1	7.6	4.7	3.0	7.1	25.2
30-34	3.9 <sup>1</sup>	5.1	5.6	4.2	11.2	23.8
35-39		4.8	5.9	6.5	17.2	31.6
40+	3.3	5.5	6.6	12.1	24.2	36.5
Number of extramarital live-born children	39 925	24 926	11 884	6 007	12 684	21 259

Source: Sekera, 1979; Pohyb obyvatelstva...

Note: <sup>1</sup> 30-39.

of wedlock – the maximum rate was observed among women aged 20–24, and the highest rate of age-specific extramarital fertility was also found in this group (Tab. 6 and Fig. 2).

There was no significant change in the extramarital fertility rate even during the first three decades of the 20th century and the average was around one-tenth of children born. However, at the same time the rate of realised fertility decreased significantly: in 1900–1930 the fertility rate decreased by 55% among married women and by 53% among unmarried women.

From 1926 it is possible to trace the differences in the extramarital fertility rate by the size of the mother's place of residence. It was found that in larger communities the percentage of

**Table 6 Women's fertility by age and marital status in the Czech Lands in selected years (live-born children per 1000 women in the given age group and marital status)**

Age	1900	1930	1950	1961	1991	2001
Married women						
15-16	134.4	511.7	467.9	780.6	759.7	500.0
17-19	554.1	442.7	466.6	465.5	520.2	468.9
20-24	419.3	296.4	322.8	276.7	261.5	228.2
25-29	395.0	182.1	191.0	127.1	115.5	132.3
30-34	256.3 <sup>1</sup>	108.6	113.3	55.2	38.1	52.5
35-39		62.4	57.0	20.5	11.1	14.8
40-44	59.7 <sup>2</sup>	23.5	19.8	6.0	1.7	2.4
45-49		2.4	1.6	0.0	0.2	0.2
Total	240.4	109.0	111.6	79.4	74.0	58.0
Unmarried women						
15-16	1.9	2.2	8.5	2.4	2.8	2.1
17-19	23.3	15.6	12.2	8.1	16.6	12.4
20-24	72.7	32.2	24.7	18.3	30.7	23.0
25-29	59.1	28.1	35.8	27.8	39.1	34.8
30-34	38.9 <sup>1</sup>	18.3	35.0	19.4	25.0	34.8
35-39		10.6	19.2	9.6	10.9	16.4
40-44	6.4 <sup>2</sup>	4.0	6.2	4.7	2.2	2.9
45-49		0.4	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.1
Total	37.5	17.9	15.7	9.3	14.7	18.0

Source: Sekera, 1979; Pohyb obyvatelstva...; Census data.

Note: <sup>1</sup> 30-39, <sup>2</sup> 40+.

children born out of wedlock was always somewhat larger, though the difference was not too great.

### **The period of low extramarital fertility (1945–1990)**

Immediately after the Munich Agreement was signed the legal status of the Republic of Czechoslovakia was altered, and so too was the way in which population change was documented. Although demographers tried later to reconstruct the data for this period, they were not entirely successful. For the years between 1938 and 1945 data on the extramarital fertility rate are only available for the Czech population in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia<sup>11)</sup>. The change in the rate is apparent, but it need not be connected just with the changes in the ethnic composition of the population: during the war the rate of extramarital fertility decreased significantly and remained low even after the end of the war. It was lower than the extramarital fertility rate of the Czech population in the interwar period. The number of children born out of wedlock returned to roughly the level observed in the last decades of the 18th century, and the difference between the urban and rural populations persisted. Extramarital fertility stabilised at a low rate (the numbers were around one-fifth of what they were at the start of the 20th century); women who gave birth out of wedlock were most often between the ages of 25 and 29; on average every fiftieth unwed woman in this age group had a child (Tab. 6). As in the case of other demographic characteristics, the situation in this regard became very homogenous, and the distribution of districts by percentage of extramarital births attests to this (Tab. 3).

A decrease in the number of extramarital births could to some extent have been a reflection of a high marriage rate, a rising divorce rate, and changes in social conditions. The spectrum of women who became unwed mothers basically changed very little and encompassed the typical examples of women seduced and abandoned, women who were careless, and women who voluntarily opted for single motherhood. From 1958 the low rate of extramarital fertility certainly stemmed in part from the fact that women had the possibility of requesting an abortion for social reasons, and one of the factors that made it easier to obtain permission for an abortion was marital status (the fact that the woman was unmarried). And although the use of modern contraceptives was still limited, the effect of their gradual spread should not be underestimated. However, the decisive factor influencing the low rate of extramarital fertility was marital conditions: the majority of unmarried women, even after an unplanned pregnancy, managed to marry before giving birth. According to *M. Kučera* (1994: 105), at the start of the 1950s 40% of first-order children were born within nine months of a marriage; from the start of the 1970s the figure was more than one-half, and later sometimes as much as 60%.

The lowest percentage of extramarital births occurred in 1974 (4.3%). It is no coincidence that 1974 was the year of the peak in the rising birth rate in the Czech Republic, a trend that had been significantly influenced by the advantages offered to married couples. From 1975 the percentage of extramarital births increased slightly but consistently to reach 8% in 1989. However, at that time some Western states were recording extramarital birth rates of around 20–40%. A slight increase in the percentage signalled an increase in the extramarital fertility rate among unmarried women also in the Czech Republic. The maximum rate continued to be in the 25–29 age group, and in the late 1980s and early 1990s the structure of fertility among unmarried women came to resemble closely the situation in the 1930s. However, at that time also social benefits began to advantage mothers raising children on their own (including mothers who never married). It can therefore be assumed that some children born to

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<sup>11)</sup> The state statistics bureau collected and processed data only for the population on the territory of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, from 15 March 1939, for the population under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, not including Germans, because as citizens of the Third Reich the laws of the Protectorate did not apply to them.

unmarried mothers were wanted (and it is possible that they were born to relatively stable, cohabiting couples).

### The rise in extramarital fertility after 1990

The percentage of children born to unwed mothers continued to rise in the 1990s: there was almost a regular year to year increase in the percentage and in 2006 it reached 33%. The unprecedented increase, however, was more the result of a decrease in the fertility rate among married women than an increase in fertility intensity among unmarried women. If we compare the fertility intensity of unmarried women in selected years in the 20th century, we find that in 2001 it was roughly at the same level as in the 1930s, which was when the first demographic revolution was coming to an end in the Czech Republic, and when reproduction of the population occurred in the circumstances of free-market capitalism and traditional marriage rates. However, the intensity was double the level observed in 1961, when it was at its lowest, and half what it was in 1900, which can be regarded as representative of the high fertility rate of the 19th century. And it has barely changed since 1991. The fact that every third child is born to an unwed mother is therefore the result of other changes, the effects of which are coincidentally co-acting: changes in the age structure of the female population, and changes in marital behaviour. Since the 1990s the large birth cohort born in the 1970s has been reaching reproductive age, but this generation typically exhibits different marital behaviour than previous generations: the postponement of marriage to a later age and lower marital intensity than before.

**Table 7 Extramarital live-born children by birth order and average order in the Czech Lands 1950–2004 (five-year averages)**

Period	Live births children out of wedlock	Extramarital births out of children born in the given birth order			Share of first-order births out of total live-born extramarital children	Average birth order of extramarital children
		1.	2.	3. +		
1950–1954	10 290	8.1	3.9	4.9	52.3	2.1
1955–1959	8 336	7.3	3.3	5.5	50.8	2.2
1960–1964	6 565	5.5	2.5	6.5	53.2	2.1
1965–1969	7 503	6.1	2.7	7.8	56.9	2.0
1970–1974	8 140	5.9	2.5	7.7	55.7	1.9
1975–1979	8 499	6.4	2.2	6.0	57.1	1.9
1980–1984	9 073	8.4	3.0	8.6	57.6	1.9
1985–1989	9 881	9.4	3.7	10.8	58.7	1.8
1990–1994	13 542	13.9	6.1	14.4	60.9	1.7
1995–1999	16 387	21.9	11.1	23.0	57.6	1.7
2000–2004	24 216	32.2	16.9	28.6	59.9	1.7

Currently few women are marrying at a young age. For example, out of the generation of women born in 1979 only 33% of them had married by age 25, while out of the generation born in 1964 the figure was 84%. This fact means that among women currently at the age of highest fertility a large number are unmarried and usually still single. So, although only 4% of unmarried women aged 25–34 gave birth in 2005, it was enough to increase their share of total births to 32%. However, that the relationship is not that simple is demonstrated by looking at this from a different perspective: although in 2005 relatively the most extramarital births were among young women (in the 15–19 age group nine out of ten live-born children were born to unmarried women, in the 20–24 age group it was every second child), the frequency of extramarital births significantly increased among older women, too. In 1900 only

4% of extramarital children were born to women aged 30–39 (amidst a still high rate of fertility in this age group) and this situation did not change significantly in the ensuing decades, but fundamental changes nonetheless did occur in the population's reproductive behaviour. Only from the 1990s did the number of extramarital births begin to increase even among older women and in 2005 accounted for a full one-quarter of children born. These mothers were mainly divorced women, with two-thirds of those over the age 35 being divorced.

As *Jitka Rychtaříková* recently pointed out (2006, 2007), one factor that can significantly influence the structure of live-born children is social policy and whether a distinction is made between applicants for social benefits on the basis of marital status (i.e. favouring mothers raising children on their own). When society does not stigmatise single mothers and the financial benefit it provides to help raise the child is better than the benefit for married mothers, this situation can influence the decision to become a single mother. *Jitka Rychtaříková* has in this regard also pointed out that a significant part of the increase in the percentage of children born out of wedlock in the Czech Republic was made up of children born to single mothers with basic education, i.e. women who have greater difficulty finding work in the labour market and for whom social benefits (including the parental allowance) can be an advantage when they lose their job.

*Soukupová and Sunega* (2006) inclined towards similar conclusions on the basis of an analysis of the financial advantages of various forms of living arrangements in the Czech Republic. The findings from an analysis of a large sociological study carried out in 2006 and focusing on examining extramarital fertility indicate the heterogeneity of circumstances leading up to single motherhood – a substantial proportion of unmarried mothers were not living with the father's child at the time of birth and usually they were younger and less educated women. Some of these women remained unmarried, some because their partner refused to marry them or the partner was already married. Some did not see marriage as a favourable prospect (*Chaloupková*, 2006). This also reveals that a certain proportion of children born out of wedlock will always be made up of mothers in difficult personal and social situations. The same can be deduced from an analysis of the following marriage rates of single women presented by *V. Polášek* (2005): among women who in 1991–2005 had their first child as a single mother increasing numbers are remaining unmarried: 16% of women who had their first child as a single mother in 1991 married within one year, but in 2003 the figure was only 6%; 40% of these women married within five years in 1991, but in 1999 the figure was just 28%.

## Conclusion

We encounter the phenomenon of extramarital fertility in the history of the majority of European populations, as it is connected with a type of behaviour that is common to many European countries – it is more common in places where people tend to marry at a later age and where a portion of the adult population never marries, which in its modern age history was also common in the Czech Lands. However, the rate of extramarital fertility was usually low, only rarely exceeding 2%–5% (an exception being some parts of the German-speaking population in the 19th century). The relatively low rate continued even after the completion of the first demographic revolution (a typical feature of which was a decline in marital fertility).

With the exception of the period from the start of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, on the whole relatively few children were born out of wedlock in the Czech Lands (under 5%). It tended to be younger women who had them, a fact that corresponds with the higher average age at first marriage. The highest percentage of extramarital births occurred among women under the age of 20. The percentage of extramarital births only began to increase again at the end of the 1980s, at which time the composition of mothers also changed. The largest percentage of these children is still among mothers under the age of 20, but there has been a significant increase in the percentage born to older mothers.

When the rate of extramarital fertility began to rise in advanced countries during the 1960s this trend was placed in the context of the increase in unmarried cohabitation, and the increase in the percentage of women born to unwed mothers was to a considerable extent seen as signalling the reproductive behaviour of the emerging generation, which typically adopted new forms of family behaviour. Informal unions were one of the basic pillars in this new behaviour and were interpreted as a sign of the liberalisation of society, its democratisation, the equality of women, and, last but not least, of the economic progress of the country. This was accompanied by the assumption that modern contraceptives should provide a guarantee that the children born are wanted or planned children, even if the mothers are unmarried, and regardless of whether they have a partner or not. There is no doubt that there are women who want a child but do not want to get married (not even to the child's father). They want to have and raise the child alone, and sometimes they do not even want any financial or other support from the child's father.

Given the traditionally difficult social standing of single mothers and their children, in the majority of European countries these women and their children were gradually included in the welfare system for the socially disadvantaged during the second half of the 20th century, just as earlier on widows and orphans were incorporated into the system (usually they gained equality in legislation earlier). This fact makes it difficult to distinguish between children born to parents in more stable unions who are interested in this form of social benefit (without having to worry about the negative reaction of those around them) and children being raised by the mother alone.

Some researchers nonetheless incline towards the opinion that the phenomenon of extramarital fertility need not just signal the replacement of marriage by unmarried cohabitation and the emancipation of women. Not all children born out of wedlock are wanted children, and thus the single-mother syndrome may persist even in contemporary society (McLanahan, 2006; Chaloupková, 2006). The issue is all the more complex in that assistance provided to mothers raising children alone is one of the most common forms of social benefit provided in all economically advanced countries, and for some social strata it is a benefit that may be vital to maintaining the minimum living standard. However, what percentage of individual types of women annually become mothers of extramarital children cannot be determined.

In the Czech Republic the increase in the percentage of children born out of wedlock ranks among the most significant changes in the reproductive behaviour of the population since 1989. However, when we take a closer look we find that this has occurred amidst circumstances of low nuptiality and low marital fertility. The rate of extramarital fertility at the turn of the millennium is in reality lower than it was at the turn of the 20th century.

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