

TWENTY YEARS OF SINGLE MOTHERHOOD IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC (1986–2005)*)

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Abstract: The increasing frequency of single motherhood, recently observed in the Czech Republic and mostly experienced by young, low-educated women, seems not to be a deliberate choice. The attributes of those mothers (mostly delivering only the first birth at younger age) have not changed over the last twenty years. On the other hand, traditional norms, expressed by legal marriage and subsequent parenthood, are the predominant patterns for university graduates. Social differentiation (based on educational attainment) regarding legal marriage or non-marital births has been deepening in the Czech society over time.

Keywords: single motherhood, maternal age, maternal education, child birth order, Czech Republic

Important demographic changes that have been recorded since the start of the 1990s include not just the long-term decline in the fertility rate, to well below the replacement level, and historically the lowest marriage numbers, but also the rapidly growing percentage of extramarital live births, which increased from 7.4% in 1986 to 31.7% in 2005. In many other advanced countries a similar increase in the percentage of extramarital births has been observed, especially extramarital births to single mothers. According to the most recent data from 2005, published by the Council of Europe (*Recent Demographic Developments in Europe*, 2005), high percentages of extramarital births have been recorded not only in Scandinavian countries (Norway 51%, Sweden 55%), but also in France (46%) and Great Britain (42%), and even Bulgaria (49%), Slovenia (45%), Latvia (45%) and Estonia (58%). A percentage similar to that in the Czech Republic is found, for example, in the Netherlands (32%). The growing numbers of extramarital births in the Czech Republic is sometimes interpreted in simplified terms as a manifestation of the “westernisation” of the demographic behaviour of the population. What is meant by this term is the liberalisation of behaviour, one manifestation of which is the pluralising of family forms, particularly in the sense of a shift towards cohabitation as a viable alternative to a legal marriage bond (*Inglehart*, 1997; *Inglehart and Welzel*, 2005). People with a post-modern value orientation and higher education are regarded as the vehicles of these changes (*Van de Kaa*, 1998). Such “reflections” are based on the fact that in many countries the number of marriages has decreased, while the percentage of extramarital births has increased. However, this “rough” correlation conceals a number of different facts (*Rychtaříková*, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). The decrease in the number of marriages can be accompanied by an increase in the number of children living in unmarried cohabitation or an increase in the number of children living with just one parent, usually the mother. A change in the number or percentage of extramarital births is not just about whether value

*) This article was published in *Demografie* 2007, 49, p. 1–12. The contents of the journal are published on the website of the Czech Statistical Office at: <http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/demografie>. This paper was prepared as part of the project no.2D06004 “Active ageing, family and intergenerational solidarity” and the Research Plan no. 0021620831 “Geographic Systems and Risk Processes in the Context of Global Changes and European Integration”, theme 3.4. Contemporary Trends in Demographic Behaviour in the Context of Demographic Changes over Time and the Risks in the Ageing Process”.

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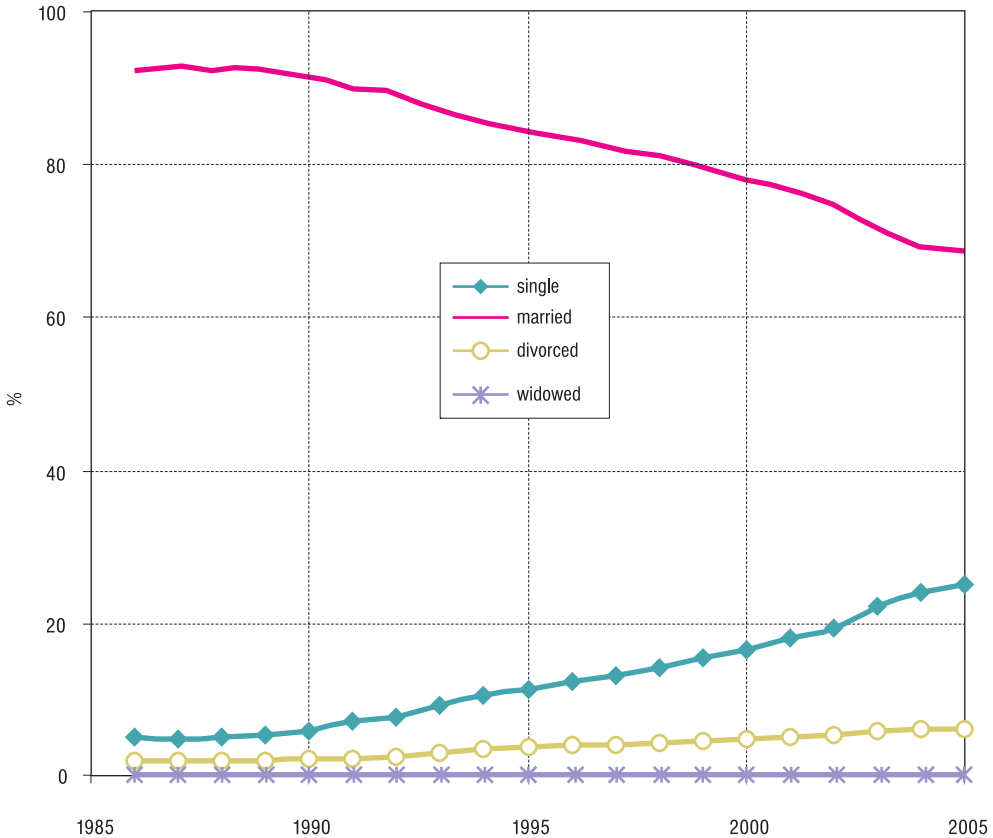
orientations are changing or remain the same, as they can also be connected with a temporary (cross-sectional) differentiated change in demographic trends and structures. The rise in the percentage of extramarital births may be the result of differences in the trends of extramarital and marital fertility or a reflection of a change in the structure of the population by marital status. For example, the percentage of extramarital births can significantly increase as a result of a more rapid decrease in the intensity of marital fertility while the intensity of extramarital fertility remains unchanged or is slowly increasing. An increase in the number of unmarried men/women can also contribute to an increase in the number and percentage of extramarital births, although the actual intensity (extramarital children born to unmarried women) may remain the same. **The scope of factors that explain an increase in the percentage of extramarital births is therefore an open and complex matter. The factors involved can be demographic** (a change in intensities and structures and their interaction) or **behavioural** (a change in the value system in society), and both these groups of factors can be influenced by the **external population climate** (changes to the system of family support), etc. The weight of these factors can vary between countries, and **multiple factors can have an effect at the same time, or they can have the same or opposite effect, and they can operate in combination.**

Table 1 Number and percentage of live-born children in the Czech Republic in 1986–2005 by the mother's marital status

Year	By the mother's marital status						
	Numbers					%	
	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Total	Married	Unmarried
1986	6 862	123 464	2 676	354	133 356	92.58	7.42
1987	6 575	121 455	2 548	343	130 921	92.77	7.23
1988	6 954	122 653	2 650	410	132 667	92.45	7.55
1989	7 061	118 215	2 748	332	128 356	92.10	7.90
1990	7 937	119 397	2 905	325	130 564	91.45	8.55
1991	9 226	116 651	3 120	357	129 354	90.18	9.82
1992	9 441	108 697	3 248	319	121 705	89.31	10.69
1993	11 269	105 702	3 730	324	121 025	87.34	12.66
1994	11 378	91 072	3 828	301	106 579	85.45	14.55
1995	10 910	81 150	3 715	322	96 097	84.45	15.55
1996	11 244	75 158	3 771	273	90 446	83.10	16.90
1997	11 946	74 532	3 852	327	90 657	82.21	17.79
1998	12 875	73 326	4 019	315	90 535	80.99	19.01
1999	13 966	71 045	4 180	280	89 471	79.41	20.59
2000	15 064	71 118	4 465	263	90 910	78.23	21.77
2001	16 359	69 439	4 653	264	90 715	76.55	23.45
2002	18 095	69 327	5 086	278	92 786	74.72	25.28
2003	20 753	66 972	5 668	292	93 685	71.49	28.51
2004	23 451	67 825	6 101	287	97 664	69.45	30.55
2005	25 753	69 802	6 354	302	102 211	68.29	31.71

The objective of this paper is to **compare the nature of single motherhood in the Czech Republic today with the situation in the 1980s.** This study focuses on **the character and context of procreative behaviour in a demographic perspective.** The study of extramarital fertility is limited just to children born to single mothers because they make up the majority of extramarital births, and the psychological and social situation of these children differs from the situation of children born to divorced and widowed mothers, that is, women who have already been married.

Figure 1 Structure of live-born children over time by the mother's marital status (%)



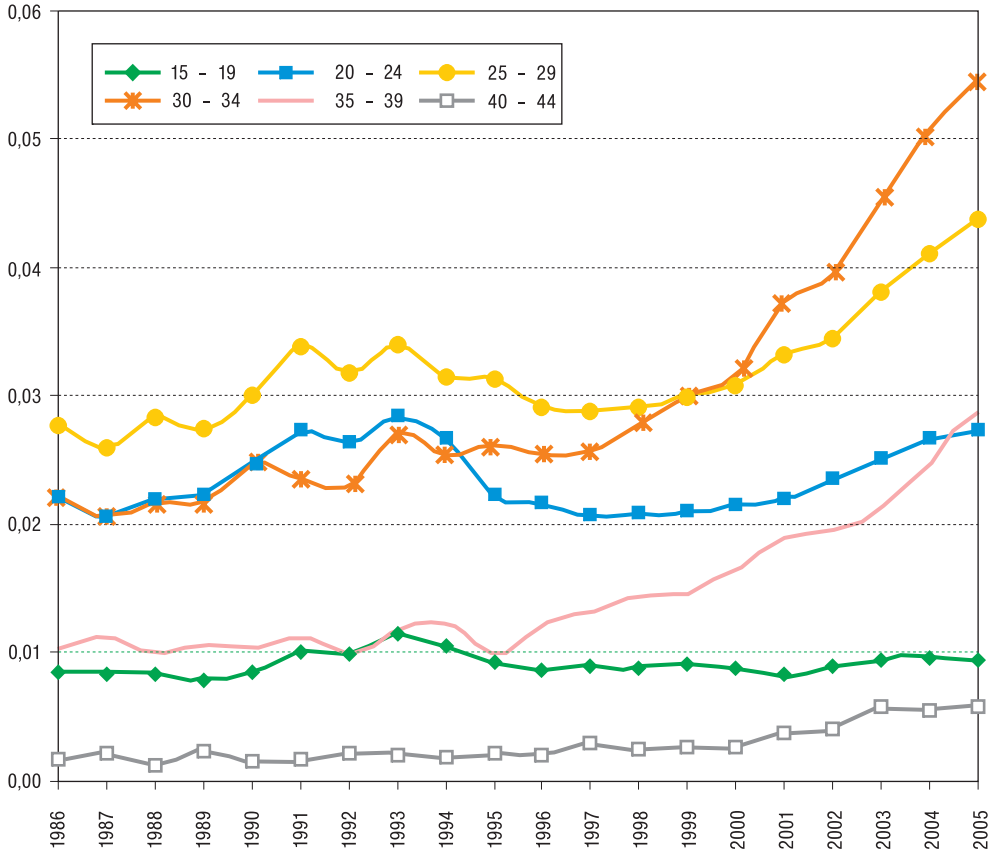
The absolute number of live births to single mothers in the Czech Republic grew from 6862 in 1986 to 25 753 in 2005 (Tab. 1). In relative terms, live births to single mothers constituted 5% of the total live births in 1986 and 25% in 2005 (Fig. 1). The percentage of children born to single mothers out of total extramarital live births also increased between 1986 and 2005, from 69% to 79%. In the Czech Republic single motherhood has the greatest weight in extramarital fertility and that weight is increasing over time. Deeper insight into the changing demographic structure of single motherhood over time can be obtained from an analysis by age, birth order (especially the first biological birth order), and the education of the mother, and by studying the change in the structure of the population by marital status. The calculated indicators presented here are based on birth data from vital statistics data collected between 1986 and 2005 and they provide a cross-sectional look at changes in single motherhood over time in individual calendar years marking the time of birth of the child. Thus, they do not reflect the subsequent situation in the life of the mother, who could eventually go on to marry. The factors that will be taken into account here are: **the mother's age, the biological birth order, the education of the mother, and the region.**

Changes in the age profile and structure of marital status

The trend in fertility intensity of single women exhibited almost no changes in relation to age up until the middle of the 1990s (Fig. 2). It is only after that point that there is an evi-

dent increase in fertility intensity among single women aged 30–34 and 35–39 and from the start of the 21st century among in women aged 25–29. However, it must be remembered that here we are on a scale that is an order below the level of marital fertility. It is also necessary to view the trend in rising fertility intensity among single women at a later age relative to other phenomena, such as the trend in the mean age at first (live) childbirth in the current marriage.

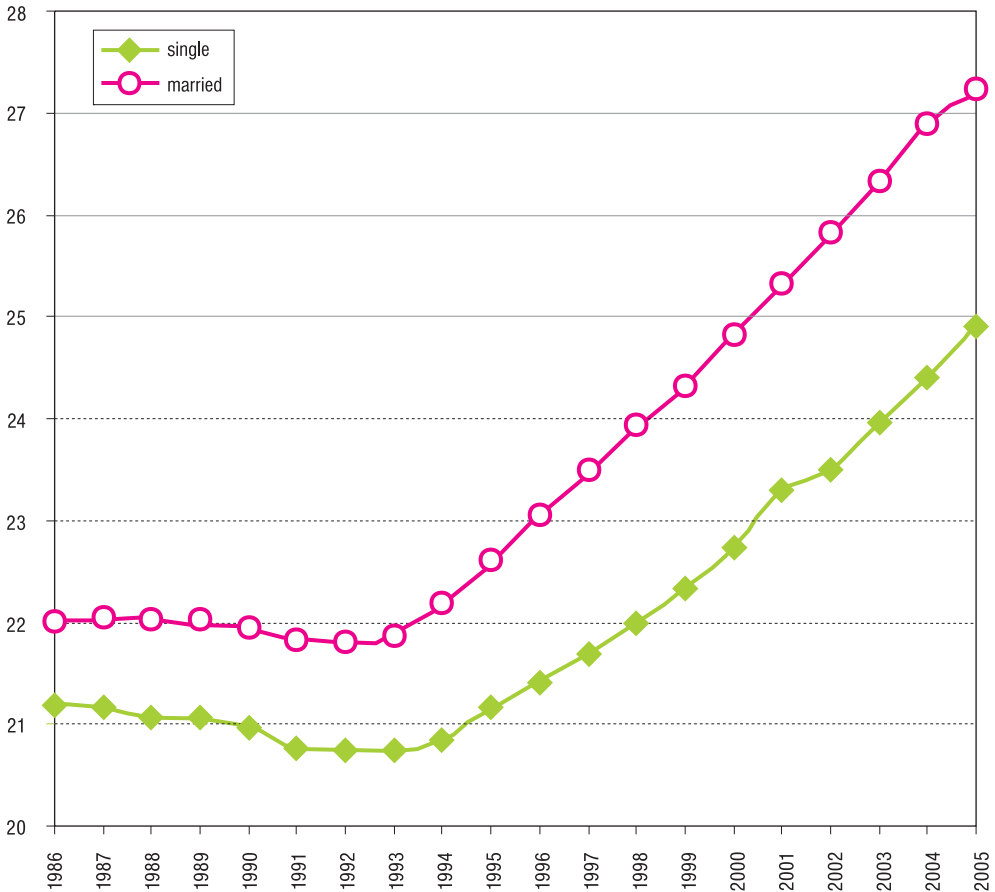
Figure 2 Fertility rates among single women over time, by age in the Czech Republic



It is clear from Figure 3 that the average age at the time of the first-order birth was always lower in the case of single mothers compared to married mothers throughout the entire period between 1986 and 2005. Moreover, it appears that the increase in the average age of a woman at the time of her first-order birth was occurring slightly faster among married mothers than among single women (calculated from the distribution of live first-order births by age and marital status). In 2005 the average age of a single mother at the time of birth of her first child was 24.9 years and for married mothers it was 27.2, while in 1986 the respective figures were 21.2 and 22.0. In this regard it is necessary to realise that there has also been an age shift in many other life events alongside demographic ones like marriage or the birth of a child. For example, the length of time spent studying and preparing for employ-

ment has grown longer. In Europe this process is referred to as “postponement transition”. It appears that in the Czech Republic these shifts are proportional, and thus the original relationship in relation to the marital status of the mother has been preserved, which is evident from the almost parallel rise in the average age of single and married mothers at the time of their first-order birth (Fig. 3).

Figure 3 Average age of single and married mothers over time



Note: Calculated for the distribution of live births.

The exact effect that the change in the age structure or marital status structure of mothers had on the change in the percentage of extramarital births between the two periods and the extent to which the increase in the percentage of children born to single mothers was connected with the changes in the intensity of marital and extramarital fertility can be determined with the aid of decomposition methods (for details, see *das Gupta, 1994, Smith et al., 1996*). Table 2 presents the results of this decomposition. Decomposition of the change in the percentage of children born to single mothers from a population of single and married mothers was calculated between the years 1986 and 2005 and encompassed changes in four factors: 1) the effect of the age structure, 2) the effect of the structure by marital status (here limited

to single and married), 3) the effect of the fertility intensity of single women, and 4) the effect of the fertility intensity of married women. Between 1986 and 2005 the number of live births to single mothers grew from 6862 to 25 753, which is an increase of 18 891 children. Conversely, the number of live births to married mothers decreased from 123 464 to 69 802, which is a decrease of 53 662 children. The percentage of children born to single mothers **out of the population of children born to single and married mothers** increased by 21.69 percentage points (from 5.26% in 1986 to 26.95 in 2005). The value of this increase, not expressed in percentages, is 0,2169, the decomposition of which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 A decomposition of the changes in the intensity of fertility among single and married mothers and in their age structure

Indicator	1986	2005	Difference 2005–1986
Percentage of live births to single mothers out of live births to single and married mothers	5.26	26.95	21.69
Decomposition of the change between 1986 and 2005		Numbers	%
Change in the age structure		-0.0028	-1.28
Change in the structure by marital status		0.2248	103.66
Change in the fertility intensity of single women		0.0413	19.03
Change in the fertility intensity of married women		-0.0464	-21.42
Total		0.2169	100.00

A change in the age structure of women of reproductive age (Tab. 2), with a value of $-0,0028$, means that the change in the age structure counteracted the increase in extramarital fertility. In other words, the altered age structure of single and married women of reproductive age in 2005 decreased the percentage of children born to single mothers. Conversely, the change in marital status towards an increase in the percentage of single women in 2005 compared to 1986 (with a value of 0,2248, Tab. 2) played the most significant role in the increase in the percentage of children born to single mothers, and therefore, it was the most important component in the change in the percentage of live births to single mothers. The increase in the fertility intensity of single women then contributed a value of 0,0413 to the change, and the decrease in the fertility of married women “contributed” with a weight of $-0,0464$. The sum of these four components ($-0,0028+0,2248+0,0413-0,0464$) produced the increase in the frequency of children born to single mothers in the population of single and married women (0,2169).

The next column in the table expresses the relative weight of each of the four components. In this perspective the change in marital status between 1986 and 2005 had the most significant effect (103.7%) and the increase in the intensity of fertility among single women had the least weight (19.0%). The increase was also influenced by the decrease in marital fertility (-21.4%). These results are based on a cross-sectional comparison of two calendar years, 1986 and 2005, and this puts some limits on their real informative value. Nonetheless, the basic context of the transformation in single motherhood between these two points in time is accurate. The 1990s were a time of dramatic change in fertility, but to a certain extent it was influenced by the contemporary socio-economic situation, and it will only be possible to provide a definitive statement about the transformation of single motherhood and its determinants from a longitudinal analysis of the procreative behaviour of the relevant generations of women in the next twenty years. It will also be important to compare the resultant data with retrospective census data, because many single mothers may marry later on, and the data from vital statistics records based on the mother’s marital status at the time of birth do not reflect that information.

Table 3 Structure of live-born children by biological order

Year	Single mothers				Married mothers			
	1	2	3	4+	1	2	3	4+
1986	78.2	13.8	4.7	3.3	45.4	39.1	11.7	3.9
1987	77.5	14.4	4.5	3.5	45.8	39.2	11.2	3.8
1988	78.5	13.5	4.9	3.1	45.6	39.2	11.5	3.7
1989	79.1	13.2	4.5	3.2	46.4	39.0	11.1	3.6
1990	78.9	13.8	4.3	2.9	46.6	38.9	11.0	3.6
1991	79.9	13.7	4.0	2.5	48.7	37.3	10.4	3.6
1992	78.6	14.1	4.3	3.0	48.5	37.7	10.2	3.7
1993	77.4	14.8	4.8	3.0	46.7	39.1	10.2	4.0
1994	75.7	15.7	5.2	3.4	45.7	39.6	10.5	4.2
1995	73.1	17.6	5.1	4.1	44.2	41.4	10.3	4.1
1996	72.2	18.3	5.4	4.1	44.5	41.5	9.9	4.1
1997	73.0	17.6	5.4	4.0	44.9	41.3	10.0	3.8
1998	71.6	18.5	5.6	4.3	45.4	41.2	9.7	3.6
1999	72.1	18.4	5.4	4.1	45.5	41.1	9.7	3.7
2000	72.7	18.3	5.2	3.8	45.3	41.0	9.9	3.8
2001	71.5	19.1	5.2	4.1	44.5	41.8	10.1	3.7
2002	71.5	19.7	5.0	3.8	44.6	41.3	10.3	3.8
2003	72.6	19.2	4.7	3.5	43.7	42.2	10.4	3.7
2004	73.5	18.5	4.6	3.5	43.7	42.3	10.4	3.6
2005	72.6	19.9	4.5	3.1	42.9	43.1	10.5	3.5

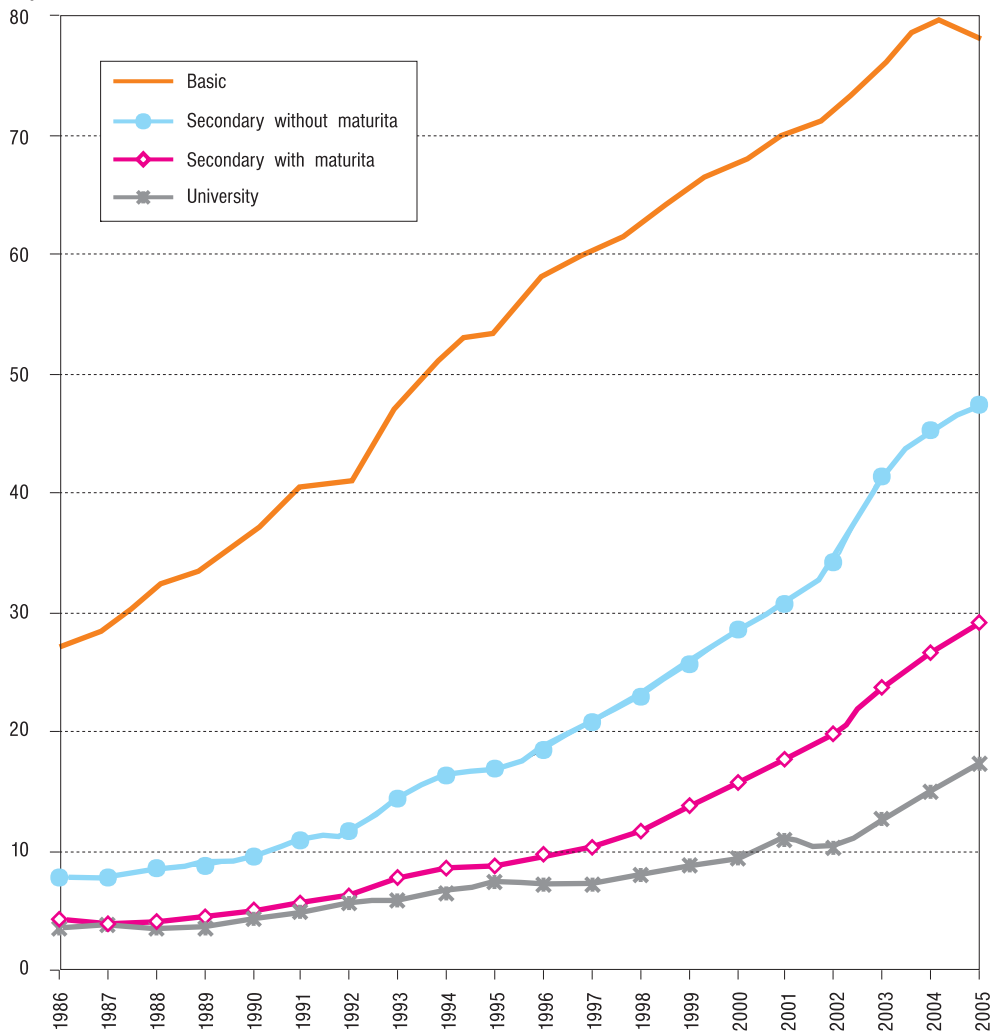
Table 4 Percentage of children born to single mothers over time by completed level of education

Year	From live births of a given mother's educational category			
	Basic	Secondary without maturita exam.	Secondary with maturita exam.	University
1986	14,0	4,2	2,4	1,8
1987	15,1	4,1	2,1	2,1
1988	16,3	4,6	2,3	1,8
1989	17,7	4,8	2,5	1,8
1990	19,8	5,4	2,8	2,2
1991	23,2	6,5	3,2	2,6
1992	25,2	7,0	3,5	2,7
1993	29,2	8,6	4,3	2,9
1994	33,6	9,7	4,7	3,3
1995	36,3	10,1	4,8	3,7
1996	40,1	11,1	5,4	3,8
1997	41,9	12,3	5,9	4,2
1998	44,7	13,6	6,6	4,7
1999	47,1	15,4	8,2	5,4
2000	48,0	16,7	9,6	5,7
2001	51,2	18,2	10,7	6,7
2002	53,9	20,1	12,2	6,7
2003	56,4	24,0	14,6	8,3
2004	59,0	26,8	16,6	9,6
2005	59,8	27,9	18,5	11,1

Birth-order structure and changes to it can provide an idea of whether single motherhood is more an unplanned event, and therefore primarily first-order children are born, or whether it is an

alternative to legal marriage and the structure by order of children born will in time increasingly resemble the structure of marital children. Table 3 clearly confirms the basic difference between the two structures. Live births to single mothers are prevalingly first-order births (70–80%) (Tab. 3), and the relative structure by birth order did not change significantly over time; there was only a slight decrease in first-order births over time with a corresponding increase in second-order births. Among children born to married women the decrease in the intensity of fertility was accompanied by an increase in the weight of second-order to the detriment of first-order, which indicates that today marital children are born to strongly pro-family couples who do not stop at just one child. In fact, in 2005, the percentage of children born in this population that were second-order children was greater than the percentage of first-order children (Tab. 3). These results attest more to the first hypothesis, that single motherhood is not an alternative to marriage.

Figure 4 Percentage of first order children born to single mothers of a given educational category over time in the Czech Republic



Gradient differentiation of single motherhood by education

As is the case with women on the whole (Konietzka and Kreyenfeld, 2002; Kreyenfeld, 2000; Upchurch, Lillard and Panis, 2002), among single women in the Czech Republic fertility intensity is negatively correlated with their level of education. Among women with basic education, in 1986, 14% gave birth to children as single mothers and in 2005 the figure was 60% (Tab. 4). Among women with higher education, the figures for the same years were 2% and 11%, respectively. If we look just at the first-order fertility of single mothers, then in 1986, 5% of all first-order births were born to single mothers (in 2005, 37%). However, among women with basic education these births accounted for 27% in 1986, and during the period under observation this figure rose sharply, reaching 78% in 2005 (Fig. 4). Conversely, women with secondary school education with the maturita exam had their first child as single mothers in fewer than 5% of the cases even in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Fig. 4). The higher the level of education of the single mother, the later the change towards an increase occurred, only taking place among women with the highest level of education at the end of the 1990s. Single mothers accounted for 17% all the first-order fertility among women with university education in 2005 (Fig. 4).

The average age at the time of first birth among single mothers was also differentiated by education: women with basic education were the youngest first-birth single mothers, and women with university education the oldest (Tab. 5). However, differentiation in time is sig-

Table 5 Average age of single mothers by education: live-born first-order

Year	Basic	Secondary without maturita	Secondary with maturita	University	Total
1986	19.25	21.23	23.92	29.56	21.18
1987	19.35	20.85	23.82	29.31	21.16
1988	19.13	20.83	24.00	29.58	21.06
1989	19.15	20.75	24.02	29.17	21.07
1990	18.82	20.77	23.90	28.67	20.96
1991	18.90	20.41	23.57	29.44	20.77
1992	18.69	20.52	23.48	29.10	20.74
1993	18.73	20.54	23.47	29.23	20.74
1994	18.72	20.82	23.72	29.18	20.84
1995	19.07	21.09	24.13	29.80	21.16
1996	19.24	21.49	24.19	29.93	21.41
1997	19.50	21.66	24.41	29.86	21.69
1998	19.67	21.89	24.34	30.01	22.00
1999	19.83	22.25	24.42	29.80	22.34
2000	19.92	22.75	24.62	29.68	22.74
2001	20.16	23.42	25.15	29.68	23.30
2002	20.21	23.62	25.38	29.81	23.50
2003	20.35	23.90	25.83	29.87	23.96
2004	20.60	24.24	26.17	29.91	24.41
2005	20.67	24.68	26.57	30.03	24.90

Note: Calculated from the distribution of live births.

nificant. Between 1986 and 2005 the average age of single mothers remained almost unchanged among women with basic education, among whom it continues to be around 20 years of age, and among women with university education, among whom it has remained at 30 years of age. The only increase in the average age of the mother at the time of first-order birth was among women with secondary education, with and without the maturita exam. These differentiated average trends also provide an answer to the question of why the corre-

lation between the percentage of children born to single mothers and their age is not very strong in Czech society. Given that the average age at which women with basic education become first-time single mothers has not changed, they form a specific and stable sub-population. Conversely, thirty-year-old single university graduates already have little room left in which a shift in age can occur.

Logistic regression can provide a more complex look at the effect of the socio-demographic factors that are of significance for the fact of whether a child is born in a marriage or to a single mother and insight into the change that occurred between 1986 and 2005. The dependent (explained) variable is birth to a single mother versus birth in a marriage. The independent (explanatory) variables (predictors) are the age of the mother (–19, 20–24, 25–29, 30+), birth order (1, 2, 3+), the mother’s education (basic, secondary without the maturita exam., secondary with the maturita exam., university), and the region. Two regression models (main effects) were calculated, one for 1986 and the other for 2005 (Tab. 6).

Today children born to single mothers are more often born to younger mothers. While in

Table 6 Binary logistic regression: a model of the main effects without interactions (being born to a single mother versus being born to a married mother)

Independent variables	1986		2005	
	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age				
–19	0.000	1.373	0.000	5.711
20–24	0.000	0.778	0.000	2.313
25–29	0.000	0.772	0.000	1.093
30+	.	1.000	.	1.000
Births by order				
1	0.000	5.704	0.000	4.778
2	0.003	1.190	0.000	1.252
3+	.	1.000	.	1.000
Educational of mother				
Basic	0.000	9.771	0.000	12.024
Secondary without maturita	0.000	2.210	0.000	3.250
Secondary with maturita	0.025	1.195	0.000	1.654
University	.	1.000	.	1.000
Region				
Karlovarský kraj	0.000	3.683	0.000	2.962
Ústecký kraj	0.000	2.780	0.000	2.904
Hl. m. Praha	0.000	2.369	0.000	1.760
Liberecký kraj	0.000	2.040	0.000	2.122
Moravskoslezský kraj	0.000	1.931	0.000	2.008
Olomoucký kraj	0.000	1.548	0.000	1.657
Královéhradecký kraj	0.000	1.536	0.000	1.488
Plzeňský kraj	0.003	1.318	0.000	1.535
Jihočeský kraj	0.039	1.208	0.000	1.476
Jihomoravský kraj	0.021	1.205	0.000	1.263
Pardubický kraj	0.229	1.124	0.000	1.390
Středočeský kraj	0.290	1.091	0.000	1.334
Kraj Vysočina	0.075	0.832	0.914	0.994
Zlínský kraj	.	1.000	.	1.000

Note: Regions are listed according to the order of the value in 1986.

1986 children were born to single mothers under the age of 20, 1.4 times more than to women aged 30 and over, in 2005 it was 5.7 times more. This sharper gradient in 2005 is connected with the postponement of childbirth to a later age, which occurred more quickly among married women. Conversely, among single mothers with lower education the age at the time of first-order birth remained almost unchanged. A divergent trend can also be witnessed in an analysis of biological birth order: In 2005 there was a slight weakening in the predominance of first-order births among the order of births to single mothers compared to 1986 (in 1986 first-order births to single mothers occurred 5.7 times more often than to married women, while in 2005 it was only 4.8 times more). Nevertheless, first-order births continue to be the dominant birth order among single mothers (see Table 3). With regard to the mother's education, the differences between educational categories are growing larger and a strong polarisation is emerging between mothers with basic education and mothers with university education. In 1986, there were 9.8 times more single mothers among women with basic education who gave birth than among married women, and in 2005 the figure was more than 12 times more. Regional differentiation exhibited the smallest changes over time in comparison with the other variables under observation. The position of the Karlovy Vary region as the region with the biggest "risk" of single motherhood, as opposed to the reference region of Zlín, and compared to the other regions, actually weakened (a decrease from 3.7 to 3.0). There also occurred a shift in the order of the regions, which are ranked by values from 1986. The "risk" of single motherhood decreased in the capital of Prague and in the Southern Moravia region, while it grew in the Liberec and the Pilsen regions, based on an evaluation of the change in order.

Table 7 Marriage is an outdated institution: strongly agree + agree

Education	Men		Women	
	18-49	50-79	18-49	50-79
Basic	28.3	10.9	17.7	7.1
Secondary without maturita	20.1	7.7	15.5	7.4
Secondary with maturita	19.2	8.9	12.4	6.2
University	11.8	7.7	9.5	9.0

Source: Generations and Gender Survey 2005.

Note: The percentage is computed within the categories.

Conclusion

Single motherhood is a specific phenomenon in the study of fertility. In the Czech Republic the number of extramarital births never exceeded 10% at any time between the Second World War and the end of the 1980s (doing so for the first time in 1992). Only later did this percentage begin to grow. An analysis focusing on a comparison of the fertility of single and married women shows that the main determinant behind the rise in extramarital births to single mothers is the change in the structure of marital status, while the increase in fertility intensity among single women and the decrease in fertility among married women contribute less. With regard to single motherhood, women with university education are particularly conservative. The current prototype of the single mother in the Czech Republic, as in the past, is a woman with basic education, who gives birth to her first child around the age of 20. In a regional perspective these are women who live either in the Karlovy Vary region or the Ústí nad Labem region. The basic structural differences in the characteristics of single mothers compared to married mothers mean that single motherhood cannot be interpreted as an alternative to legal marriage with children, and this is partly also owing to the fact that the typical attributes of single motherhood have remained intact over time. On the other hand, it appears

that it is exclusively pro-family couples who have children after they are married, and there is a growing group of people who wait and are thus adding to the contingent of singles who then ultimately “produce” the larger number of births to single mothers amidst slightly increasing fertility intensity among singles. The gradual change in attitudes is documented in Table 7, where younger people often declare that marriage is an outdated institution, especially men with lower education. Nevertheless, the change in attitudes is not yet a threat to the institution of legal marriage with children, and instead implies more the formation of specific sub-groups of men with lower education, whose “free-thinking” opinions are more a reflection of their lower value in the marriage market (McLanahan, 2004).

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