

CHILD GENDER PREFERENCES AND THE POSSIBLE EFFECT ON REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR¹⁾

In the effort to identify the causes that led to and influence low fertility in Western societies, little attention has been paid to one very specific factor that may have an influence on the number of children people want and how many they have in reality. This factor is child gender preferences. This hypothesis is based on the idea that people who want to have children ascribe various advantages and disadvantages to having a boy or a girl, and their desire to have a son or a daughter or both is projected into the number of children they bring into the world. Child gender preferences do not just reflect a personal wish but are shaped by the socio-cultural context in which people live.

We can learn something about the different value placed on sons and daughters and the link between parents' gender preferences and their subsequent fertility behaviour from research done in Eastern countries, such as China, Korea, Vietnam, and India. *F. Arnold* and his colleagues (1998) documented how the much higher value placed on boys in India influences the fertility behaviour of parents. The existing (gender) structure of a family's children influences further reproduction in an attempt to bring as many boys into the world as possible, and this is especially apparent in third- and fourth-order births. The probability of the birth of a third or fourth child is much higher among women with two daughters than among women with some other gender combination of children. *U. Larsen* (1998) describes how in Korea the strong government pressure on people to have fewer children significantly reduced the number of births (total fertility fell from 6.0 children in 1960 to 1.6 in 1990), but the strong preference for sons still influences the reproductive behaviour of Korean couples. If the first child is a boy, the probability of the birth of another child is lower than if the first child is a girl. The same pattern can be observed in higher-order births, and there is a higher probability of the birth of a third child in the family if there are two daughters or a daughter and a son in the family. Studies focusing on the spread and use of contraceptives confirm the preference for sons in Vietnam, Bangladesh and Egypt based on the fact that couples who have not yet had the number of sons they want are much less likely to use contraceptives (cf. *Haughton and Haughton* 1998). The prevailing preference for sons combined with prenatal diagnosis revealing foetal sex and the induced abortion of girls has had tragic consequences, for instance, in China (*Zeng et al.* 1993). Out of interest we can add that observations of child gender preferences in 44 countries contained in the 'Demographic and Health Surveys' from 1986–1995 revealed that the only region where there was a clear preference for daughters was in the Caribbean (*Arnold et al.* 1998).

In Western societies the effect of child gender preferences on fertility is not given much attention (nor perhaps even assigned much importance). This need not be a surprising finding when we consider the different value a child has in these societies. The phenomenon of gender preferences is documented in most detail in studies by American authors, nevertheless, no straightforward pattern that would indicate whether parents prefer sons or daughters and partly accommodate their decisions about how many children to have was described (*Marleau and Maheu* 1998). Preferences for sons are apparent at a very low level. Men favour sons somewhat more than women do, but if potential parents were to express their wishes regarding the gender of their first child (even if it is their only planned child), men and women would prefer their first child to be a boy. It was found that American couples would prefer to have at least one boy and one girl, but if they planned to have more children the preference was again for boys (cf. *McDougall et al.* 1999). The same pattern (a couple's preference in the case of two children, but an inclination towards boys in the case of the first-born child and third- or higher-order children) is found in isolated European studies (cf. *Hank and Kohler* 2000).

It is a question whether in advanced Western societies it makes any sense to deal with child gender preferences, especially in connection with the number of children people plan to have and how many they have in reality. Preferences for sons and daughters derive from certain 'advantages' or higher value

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assigned to a child of one gender. In less advanced countries the value of a son stems from his greater economic utility for the family. His contribution to the household economy, dependent on agricultural production, is greater. In patrilineal societies sons are also valued as the continuer of the family line and the family name. There, unlike in Western European societies, it is also expected that sons will provide for the parents in old age, and their presence is also essential at the parents' burial. On the other hand, girls represent a form of assistance to mothers in the household and in caring for younger siblings. In some cultures the wedding feast increases the social status of the family and is even regarded as a beneficial religious act (*Kemkes 2006; Pollard and Morgan 2002*).

In industrial societies the value of a child has shifted almost entirely into the sphere of psychological and emotional benefits, a child is not seen as a source of labour and no economic advantage is derived from a child, on the contrary (cf. *Rabušić 2001*). It can be assumed then that in this kind of family environment there would be no fundamental preference for girls or boys. However, if we look at couples' preferences observed over the long term it appears that there can still be a difference between the value of daughters and sons in the eyes of their parents. If in contemporary Western culture a child is viewed as a sign of adulthood and a source of social identity, if a child imparts parents with a sense of expanding and of reproducing themselves, a feeling of affiliation, and if they represent a source of stimulation and joy (*Hofman and Hofman 1973*), then it is possible that daughters will better meet these values for mothers and sons will for fathers.

N. Williamson (1976) explains prevailing child gender preferences by the fact that boys and girls are ascribed different characteristics, skills, and interests. Given that people believe that boys form a tighter bond with their father and girls with their mother they also hope to have a gender-balanced parent-child relationship and therefore they prefer to have a daughter and a son. According to this theory parents prefer to combine boys and girls because fathers find fulfilment in the relationship with their son and the value of the child for him, as noted above, is met more by a boy, and the same applies for the mother-daughter relationship. There are also many psycho-social studies that write about the increased level of fathers' involvement in raising sons (cf. *Diekmann and Schmidheiny 2004*).

M. Pollard and P. Morgan (2002) argue that the long-term social transition from traditional gender roles to an egalitarian approach can however also be reflected in these preferences. They speak of 'emerging gender indifference' in connection with the family structure of children by gender. Using data from their research they show that in the age cohorts of mothers born in 1960 and later there has been an evident decrease in the effect of child gender preference on third-order births. While until that time in American society it was possible to observe a higher probability of the birth of a third child in families with two children of the same sex, this effect was no longer apparent in the reproductive behaviour of the above-cited cohorts. Pollard and Morgan are convinced that this is a sign of a change in views on gender roles. In societies where equal rights and opportunities for men and women have been promoted, child gender preferences have decreased in significance and cease to have an effect on reproductive behaviour. *J. Marleau and M. Maheu (1998)* concur. The process of modernisation weakens men's privileges and strengthens the status of women in society, which leads to the indifference of parents towards whether their planned children will be boys or girls.

H. Brockmann (2001) maintains the opposite view and claims that the modernisation process does not lead to neutral attitudes towards gender preferences, but on the contrary creates room for new and different preferences. She links her hypothesis to the various forms of the social state, which assumes the role of the family, and thus influences the value of daughters and sons for parents. For example, she shows how in Germany, when the social state provided little security and protection for the elderly, parents preferred sons as a potential source of economic security in old age. After the Second World War, when a strong pension system was developed, this preference for sons declines and in the western part of Germany parents are indifferent about the gender of their children. Conversely, in the eastern part of Germany, where under the communist regime access to household services and assistance in caring for the elderly was very limited, the author observes a preference for daughters as a source of assistance in this area.

What pattern can be observed in the Czech Republic? Are Czech parents open to having either boys or girls, with no fixed preference, or are they more inclined towards one gender over the other? *K. Hank and H. Kohler (2002)* made an interesting finding in their study based on data from 17 European countries in which the Family and Fertility Survey was conducted in the 1990s. They focused on women who at the time of the survey had two or more children, and based on real and planned third-order births they ascertained gender preferences. They believe that if parents favour one gender over another this will become apparent in the decision or motivation to have a third child. In one-third of the countries studied no gender preferences are observed. In other countries (including the Czech Republic) there is a higher probability that the parental couple will decide (or plan) to have a third child if the two children they al-

ready have are of the same sex. This pattern points to preferences for both genders in the constellation of children in the family. In a more detailed analytical model that takes into account the gender combination of children in a family (that is, whether there is a boy and a girl, two boys, or two girls) Czech women are found to have a strong and significant preference for girls (i.e. a higher probability of having a third child is found among women who have two boys)²⁾. This finding by these German authors inspired us to try to verify it using more extensive Czech data sources.

The Method and Source of Data

In order to ascertain the presence of any child gender preferences we conducted two analyses, each one using a different data file. In the first part of the analyses we follow the same model as Hank and Kohler and we are interested in whether among women who already gave birth to two girls or two boys there is a higher probability that they will have a third child than among mothers whose first two children are a boy and a girl, thus a pair. We set out from the same assumption as these two authors that potential child gender preferences do not become apparent until higher-order births – that is, if the first two children do not satisfy their notion of the ideal combination of children in the family, this may play a role in subsequent fertility behaviour. We are working with the real number of births, that is, how many children a woman gave birth to in the Czech Republic and how this number related to the previous gender combination of children in the family. We were able to use a data file from the Czech Statistical Office recording all births in the Czech Republic between 1993 and 2004 (a total of 1 154 158 births were recorded) together with information on the child's gender and the education of the mother and the father. The data were obtained from forms filled in on the birth of a child, which are collected by the Registry Offices and contain a complete record of all births in a given period³⁾.

In these data we looked at whether the number of children in the family reflects the gender of the first two children born and then the first three children born. We only work with those cases in which we can see the gender of all the children in the family, that is, with the records of those women who had their first child after 1993. In this part of the analysis we assess gender preference solely on the basis of real fertility behaviour, not on the basis of the expressed wish to have a boy or a girl. We depart from the assumption that the births that occur in relation to the previous gender combination of children in the family can provide good evidence of whether the wish to have a boy or a girl in any way enters into parents' decisions to have a third child or more.

About this sample we ask two questions: 1) Are third children born more often in families with certain gender combinations of previously born children? 2) Can we observe any connection between higher-order births and the gender of previously born children?

In the second part of the analysis we rely on the comments of (potential) parents about whether they would more prefer a son, a daughter, or both. We started with the results of the survey 'The Value of Child' 2001–2002 and 2006⁴⁾, in which respondents were asked how important it is to them that one of their children be a boy or a girl⁵⁾. From the responses to these two questions we created the variable 'importance of the child's gender', where those respondents who stated that it was important for them to have at least one boy and not important to have a girl we designated as parents who prefer boys. If they answered that it was important to them to have at least one girl but not important to have a boy, they were designated as parents who prefer girls. Those who indicated that both genders are important to them we designated as parents preferring a pair. The final group is those parents for whom it is not important whether their children are boys or girls. We observed gender preferences in the simple distribution of this artificial variable and then we conducted a multinomial regression analysis in order to veri-

²⁾ Outside the Czech Republic this preference for daughters was only observed in Portugal and Lithuania.

³⁾ In their data Hank and Kohler (2000) drew on the number of previously born children and the wish to have more children in the future. We observe births that have occurred. We must be aware that we are working with records on families in which the women have not yet completed their reproductive period and that the analysis does not include families that have only one child even if they are planning more. Similar limitations are connected to two-child families.

⁴⁾ This is a two-stage project of the Institute for Research on the Reproduction and Integration of Society at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, and it focuses on the attitudes of young men and women towards parenthood and children, on their reproductive strategies, and on how these attitudes change over time. In both periods (2001–2002 and 2006) data were collected from 1000 women and 1000 men aged 28–35 (quota sample representative for the Czech population in terms of education, size of place of residence, and the current division of regions).

⁵⁾ The exact question read: 'How important is it to you that at least one of your children is a boy? Would you say that it is:' (the same question was then posed about girls) and the responses were expressed on a scale from 1 = very important, to 5 = not important at all.

Table 1 Number of children in the family by sex distribution of live-born children (transition from the two-child to the three-child family) %

Sex of the first two children	Number of children born (so far)		N
	Proportion of families with 2 children	Proportion of families with 3 children	
Two boys	87.6	10.5	62 188
Two girls	87.9	10.3	55 339
A boy and a girl	89.3	9.0	115 085

Source: CSO; Author's calculations.

Table 2a Number of children in the family by sex distribution of live-born children and education (%)

Sex of the first two children	Highest father's education – Basic school			Highest father's education – University		
	Proportion of families with 2 children	Proportion of families with 3 children	N	Proportion of families with 2 children	Proportion of families with 3 children	N
Two boys	82.7	13.9	1 950	88.4	10.5	7695
Two girls	82.5	14.6	1 853	88.9	9.8	6651
A boy and a girl	84.6	12.6	3 920	89.2	9.3	13 666

Source: CSO; Author's calculations.

Table 2b Number of children in the family by sex distribution of live-born children and education of the mother (%)

Sex of the first two children	Highest mother's education – Basic school			Highest mother's education – University		
	Proportion of families with 2 children	Proportion of families with 3 children	N	Proportion of families with 2 children	Proportion of families with 3 children	N
Two boys	72.7	19.0	7 266	89.7	9.4	6 519
Two girls	72.5	19.8	6 363	90.3	8.7	5 698
A boy and a girl	75.2	17.4	13 225	90.4	8.8	11 622

Source: CSO; Author's calculations.

fy the effect of various determinants on child gender preferences (respondent's gender, education, marital status, whether the person is with or without a partner). We divided the observed sample into childless respondents and respondents with children in order to trace the possible effect of the existing gender combination of previously born children.

Results of the analysis: the birth of a third or a fourth child in relation to previously born children

By looking for possible child gender preferences in the real fertility behaviour of the Czech Republic we found that if some ideas or preferences about the ideal combination of boys and girls in Czech families exist, they do not have a very strong effect on real fertility. When they bring a third- or fourth-order child into the world it is not because they are longing for the boy or the girl they do not have but for other reasons.

Table 1 shows what share of families with the given gender combinations of children remain at two children and what share become three-child families. We can see that families in which the first two children are of the same sex somewhat more often have a third child than families in which the first two children are a pair. We can also see that there is just a negligible difference between families with two boys and families with two girls. It makes no difference whether the first two children are both girls or both boys: in these families a third child is born slightly more often than in families where there is already a boy and a girl. This suggests that there is rather a preference for a pair than for a child of one specific gender.

The relationship between two variables is very weak ($\eta^2 = 0.024$); however, there is no point thinking about statistic significance when this is a complete population. The strength of this relationship remains unchanged even when another factor that we observed is taken into consideration: the education of the father and the education of the mother. Tables 2a and 2b present the differences between parents

Table 3 Number of children in the family by sex distribution of live-born children (transition from three-child to the four-child family), %

Sex of the first three children (chronology respected)	Number of children born (so far)		N
	Families with 3 children	Families with 4 children	
Three boys	84.3	12.1	4 108
Three girls	83.1	13.0	3 414
Two boys and a girl	84.2	12.3	3 616
Two girls and a boy	86.7	10.3	3 287
Pair and a boy	84.8	11.5	6 236
Pair and a girl	83.5	12.6	6 097

Source: CSO; Author's calculations.

with basic and with university education. Although education is not reflected in the resulting coefficient of association, we can see a somewhat greater differentiation between the two groups. In families where the father has basic education a third child is usually born if the first two were girls. In families where the father has university education, the opposite applies if the first two children are boys. In both groups families were least likely to have a third child if the first two children were a boy and a girl.

When we look at the effect of the mother's education (Tab. 2b), we see that women with basic education more often have a third child if the first two children are of the same gender (regardless of whether they are both boys or girls), while women with university education have a third child somewhat more often if the first two children were boys.

Even these differences between education groups need not necessarily be indicative of the existence of a gender preference pattern that then influences fertility behaviour.

Table 3 presents data with similar information, but we shift the number of children to four-child families. We look at whether families with a certain gender combination of children more often have a fourth child. We also at least partly take into account the chronological birth order of children by gender, because the decision to have a fourth child may also be influenced by the fact of whether after the birth of two girls or two boys a third child of the opposite gender is born or not. The results do not permit a straightforward interpretation. Parents who had a boy after having two girls least often had a fourth child; a fourth child is born most often in families with three girls. The problem is the interpretation of this finding. Can we regard this 'waiting for a boy' as a sign of a preference for both genders to be represented or a preference for boys?

In the case of four-child families the father's and the mother's education again had no great effect and it is not even possible to trace any distinct pattern of preferences in relation to the gender of the previously born children, so we do not present that data here.

We can close this part of the analysis by stating that if we based the results on data from the sample survey we would be unable on that basis to determine a certain model of child gender preferences in the real fertility behaviour of the Czech population. However, given that we are looking at *all* the Czech third- and fourth-order births over the relatively long period of ten years it cannot be ruled out that finding even a one- or two-percent difference could be an expression of gender preferences. Even if this potential preference model does exist, its relationship to subsequent fertility is very small.

Results of the analysis: gender preferences as expressed by (potential) parents

Let's now look at how preference to have a girl, a boy, or both is explicitly formulated by parents themselves. Table 4 shows the distribution of the variable 'important of the child's gender' (see above for its construction). The general overview suggests that young Czech parents (or potential parents) are indifferent about what gender their children are. For more than one-half of them it is not important whether their child will be a boy or a girl, just under one-third would like to have a pair, and just a small number explicitly prefer to have a son or a daughter. When the sample is divided into men and women we can see that Czech men have more fixed in their preferences about the gender of their children. They less often feel that their child's gender is not important and much more prefer boys.

Are other characteristics of the respondent reflected in their child gender preferences? Table 5 presents the results of the multinomial regression analysis, through which we attempted to capture the effect of mainly socio-demographic characteristics of (potential) parents.

The only variable that significantly and substantially really figures in the prediction of child gender preferences is the respondent's gender. The second important factor that appears influential in this situ-

Table 4 How important is it for you that at least one of your children is a boy/girl? (%)

Preference	Male (N=671)	Female (N=719)	Total (N=1390)
Boy more important	15.2	3.5	9.1
Girl more important	3.0	6.5	4.8
Both equally important	27.9	26.8	27.3
Gender does not matter	53.9	63.1	58.7

Sources: Dataset VOC 2001–2007; Author's calculations.

Table 5 Determinants of the importance of a child's sex – the results of a multinomial regression analysis (reference category: it does not matter what sex the child is)

Indicators	Childless respondents who considered it important to have...						Respondents with children who considered it important to have...					
	...Boy		...Girl		...Pair		...Boy		...Girl		...Pair	
	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.
Male	2.5***	0.5	-1.1*	0.6	0.5'	0.2	1.5***	0.2	-0.3	0.3	0.1	0.1
Education (Secondary school and University)	-0.1	0.3	1.0	0.6	0.1	0.2	-0.3	0.2	0.0	0.3	-0.1	0.2
Married	-0.6	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.3	-0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2
Outside of marriage with partner	0.2	0.3	0.7	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.5	-1	0.6	0.1	0.3
Has son	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.3***	0.4	1	0.7	-0.7***	0.2
Has daughter	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.0	0.5	2.1***	0.6	-0.9***	0.2
Has two sons	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.9**	0.4	1.6*	0.7	-0.5*	0.2
Has two daughters	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.9	0.5	2.2***	0.7	-0.8**	0.2
Pair	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.	.	0.	.	0.	.
Constant	-3.8***	0.7	-3.4***	0.7	-1.5***	0.3	-1.9*	0.7	-2.4*	1.1	-0.5	0.5
Pseudo R ²	0.1						0.18					

Note: *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05

Sources: Dataset VOC 2001–2007; Author's calculations.

ation is the fact of whether the respondent already has children or not. Men have more fixed preferences about having a boy or a girl than women and men are the ones who tend to regard it as more important to have a boy and less important to have a girl. Compared to women they favour pair combinations somewhat more. The data indicate that the importance of having a boy and lesser importance of having a girl figures more strongly among men who are childless than men who already have a child. The real experience of parenthood probably alters their original notion about it being better to have a son.

Another significant effect that is apparent is the gender of previously born children. Respondents who already have one or two sons consider it more important to have boys, and similarly those who have one or two girls consider it more important to have a girl. For these parents who had brought just a boy or just a girl into the world a gender pair is less important than it is for parents who have a son and a daughter. However, rather than showing any general gender preferences these data indicate how previously born children influence the life of their parents. The parents of sons regard it as important to have sons, because they already have them and thus boys are a firm part of their life. The preference for girls among parents who already have one or two girls can be explained analogically. This pattern is even demonstrated by the less inclination towards the importance of having a pair: those who have one or two children of the same gender regard it as less important for the next child to be of the opposite gender. The hypothetical importance of having a boy or a girl changes with the experience of parenthood into the importance of having *the boy I already have* or *the girl I already have*.

The gender of previously born children thus predicts the importance of boys or girls for the parents based on their experience and evaluation of what 'I already have at home'. All the more interesting then is a finding relating to a sub-group of parents who have two boys: for them it is very important for at least one of their children to be a girl, who for the time being is missing from their sibling constellation. We can consider this some sign of a preference for girls, at least at the level of expressed attitudes.

Conclusion

Inspired by *Hank and Kohler's* (2000) study, according to which it is possible to detect a preference for daughters in the fertility behaviour of Czechs, we tried to test this finding on a larger data sample. We observed explicitly formulated attitudes about whether it is important to have a girl or a boy in the family and also examined the possible effect of child gender preferences on the real number of children born. Based on the observed data we are inclined towards the conclusion that Czech society is indifferent about child gender preferences and the fact of whether their child will be a boy or a girl plays little role in ideas about parenthood or in real fertility behaviour.

In an analysis of births we observed in relation to the gender combination of previously born children a very slight tendency for there to be at least one boy and one girl in the family, that is, a preference for pairs. However, this preference in no way enters the decision to have more children: the value of sons and daughters may be different for mothers and fathers, but it is not a motivating factor for further reproduction.

At the level of expressed preferences about the gender of the child, most young Czechs have no fixed attitude and the gender of their children is not important to them. If there is any pattern then it is a preference for pairs. Only few of them explicitly prefer a son or a daughter and what has the biggest influence on this is whether they are men or women. Fathers (current and future) much more often prefer a son than mothers. Also we can find a 'greater value' placed on girls among parents whose previous two children are boys. These parents more often state that it is important for them that at least one of their children is a girl.

The real meaning of the data and the results presented here can be conjectured. On the one hand it is possible to observe that indifference that *Pollard and Morgan* (2002) interpreted as a consequence of the gradual effort to assert gender equality in modern Western societies, on the other hand a preference for pairs (at least an expressed preference) persists that might suggest daughters and sons have a different value for mothers and fathers. Behind this preference is the idea of a greater affinity between father and sons and between mothers and daughters, which translates into a preference to have a boy and a girl, that is, 'one for each of them'. However, this idea has no basic influence on how parents try to achieve this. In families with two boys or two girls parents find that 'something for them' there rather than continuing to try to have a child of the opposite sex. Sons and daughters continue to have a symbolic value and these symbols can take on new meaning under the influence of the experience of parenthood.

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DIVORCES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC 1991–2006: WHAT DIVORCE RECORDS CAN TELL US*

Czech statistics on the divorce rate is drawn from the Divorce Reports (Obyv 4–12) submitted by district (precinct, municipal) courts where divorce or marriage annulment proceedings have settled or where petitions for divorce or annulment have been filed. The reports are filled out from court staff and they are required to submit them to the Czech Statistical Office. Until 2006 it was the duty of courts to submit these reports by the 15th and the last day of the calendar month, and this date was used in statistical processing in place of the date on which the decision came into effect. (Today the reports are submitted electronically and only once a month.)

Over time the content of these reports changed. For example, until 1985 the reports included information about employment and the exact date on which the court's decision came into effect. An interesting piece of information was the age group of the youngest child in the marriage which was useful for the discussion of whether couples postponed divorce for the sake of children's age or not. While the date on which the court's decision came into effect was returned to the report form in 2007, information about employment was not re-included, even though European statistical organisations call for this information.

During the observed period, 1991–2006, the forms were markedly altered on two occasions¹⁾, in 1995 and 2001. In the mid-1990s the citizenship of the man/woman was included in the form for the first time and replaced the 'nationality' (ethnic group) surveyed previously. The items in the report were also reduced or generalised: the item on the duration of the proceedings was removed, the number of (living) children in the marriage was limited to the number of dependent children, and the personal identification number of the divorcing partners was replaced by their date of birth. Conversely, since 2001 more detailed (complete) data were recorded on the date of marriage and on the submission of the Divorce Reports, which had previously been available only in a month-year format. However, the content of the report did not change.

Given that divorce reports are not used solely as a source of information for demographic statistics but are also a source for the divorce statistics maintained by the Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic, they contain different types of information, that is, they do not just contain information intended for demographic statistics. In this article I attempt to provide a more detailed picture of what kind of data could be obtained from these divorce records. Compiled statistical summaries present information on frequency, structure, and intensity both from a demographic perspective (for the purpose of analysing the break up of marriages and taking stock of the population by marital status) and from the perspective of divorce proceedings as legal acts. Information about the course of divorce proceedings is more of interest to lawyers, sociologists, or psychologists, as it tells them about cases of reconciliation, about their reasons, about the length of the divorce proceedings, and therefore, this information is not usually found in demographic literature.

For the purpose of this article the items in the Divorce Reports were divided up into three groups, and the distinguishing criterion was the area the item refers to: a) information describing the course of the divorce proceedings, b) information about the couple seeking divorce, and c) information about the terminated marriage.

Divorce Proceedings according to the Information in the Divorce Reports

According to the current legislation, a marriage can be dissolved by divorce or by annulment (or by the death of a spouse). However, judicial proceedings to annul a marriage are sporadic in the Czech Republic. In 1991–2006 courts granted annulments no more than four times a year, on the basis of bigamy or mental disturbance of one of the spouses. Conversely, the number of proceedings initiated by petition for divorce was usually between 36 thousand and 40 thousand a year during the observed period. Only in 1999, as a result of an amendment to the Family Act²⁾, specifically, to the method by which divorce proceedings are conducted, did the number decrease below 30 thousand, and the year 2000 also recorded a low figure.

¹⁾ This article was published in *Demografie*, 2008, 50 (3), p. 213–218. 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>

²⁾ In addition, social changes at the end of the 1980s led to the elimination of the item 'It was made of collaboration with: marriage counselling, employers...'. This appeared in the forms in 1991 for the last time.

³⁾ The Family Act No. 91/1998 Coll., available at: <http://www.zakonycr.cz/seznamy/094-1963-Sb-zakon-o-rodine.html>.

However, divorce proceedings need not always conclude in the divorce of a marriage. There are nine possible conclusions to judicial divorce proceedings of which only four correspond to the granting of a divorce: the marriage is divorced with the agreement of both spouses, against the man defending the petition, against the woman defending the petition, or in the case of the long-term absence of one spouse abroad. But the proceedings can be concluded on the basis of five other reasons: the court dismisses the petition for divorce, the petition is withdrawn by the petitioner, the proceedings are adjourned and then abandoned, the marriage was declared invalid and the marriage was terminated in some other way (Tab. 1). At the start of the 1990s more than one-fifth of divorce actions led to an outcome other than divorce, but over the course of the sixteen-year period under observation that figure decreased to 12%. The absolute number of divorce petitions not granted decreased from almost 9 thousand to 4.3 thousand. The only interruption of the trend towards a growing share of granted divorces out of the total number of divorce proceedings concluded was in 1998 and 1999 when owing to a failure to satisfy new legislative requirements the relative number of divorce petitions not granted increased. In 1999 proceedings abandoned after adjournment increased its share the most of all.

Table 1 Divorce proceedings by method of termination, CR, 1991–2006

Result of divorce proceedings	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	Ended in divorce															
Against the proposal male	1 126	1 019	932	988	944	1 061	1 147	1 088	779	883	884	841	837	711	878	710
Against the proposal female	602	581	525	637	505	593	552	585	451	522	578	538	515	498	511	426
Agreement both	27 502	26 897	28 703	29 225	29 592	31 359	30 644	30 512	22 270	28 071	29 884	30 148	31 191	31 611	29 645	30 029
Husband/wife abroad	136	75	67	89	94	100	122	178	157	228	240	231	281	240	254	250
Total granted divorces	29 366	28 572	30 227	30 939	31 135	33 113	32 465	32 363	23 657	29 704	31 586	31 758	32 824	33 060	31 288	31 415
	Otherwise terminated proceedings															
Rejection of proposal	533	371	283	300	318	297	280	282	217	192	163	166	134	186	91	129
Proposal withdraw	6 050	5 800	5 655	5 423	5 338	5 039	4 753	4 894	3 870	3 730	3 590	3 311	3 208	3 170	2 823	2 716
Disappeared after discontinuation	1 846	1 542	1 397	1 227	1 207	1 111	1 175	1 125	1 035	490	500	442	461	417	393	372
Spoken annulment of marriage	1	1	4	1	4	1	1	0	4	4	3	3	3	3	1	3
Otherwise	467	611	703	724	764	890	918	952	827	826	852	985	1 151	1 098	1 102	1 048
Total other	8 897	8 325	8 042	7 675	7 631	7 338	7 127	7 253	5 953	5 242	5 108	4 907	4 957	4 874	4 410	4 268
	Total															
Terminated the proceedings	38 263	36 897	38 269	38 614	38 766	40 451	39 592	39 616	29 610	34 946	36 694	36 665	37 781	37 934	35 698	35 683
– by divorce (%)	76.7	77.4	79.0	80.1	80.3	81.9	82.0	81.7	79.9	85.0	86.1	86.6	86.9	87.2	87.6	88.0
– otherwise (%)	23.3	22.6	21.0	19.9	19.7	18.1	18.0	18.3	20.1	15.0	13.9	13.4	13.1	12.8	12.4	12.0

Throughout the observed period the main reason for not granting a divorce was that the divorce petition was withdrawn (64% to 71% of cases). The share of proceedings with this outcome out of the total number of those concluded decreased continuously (again with the exception of 1998 and 1999) from 15.8% in 1991 to 7.6% in 2006. It is apparent from this that divorce petitions are increasingly often being submitted at the point where the couple is less inclined towards reconciliation. In recent years the absolute number of withdrawn petitions was around 3 thousand annually. (Given that since 2007 the Czech Statistical Office has not recorded proceedings that do not end in divorce, it does not have information on the total number of completed divorce proceedings today and so how many petitions did not end in divorce cannot be ascertained.)

In two-thirds of cases women are the initiators of the petition for divorce. This share has long remained unchanged and stable at 66% to 69%. If we look at divorce proceedings from the perspective of the plaintiff in the proceedings for divorce, men are slightly more 'successful', though not more frequent, plaintiffs (Tab. 2). The share of divorce proceedings concluding in divorce was several percentage points higher in the case of a male plaintiff than in the case of a female plaintiff throughout the observed period. However, the differences between the plaintiffs were not significant and they decreased over the years. While at the start of the 1990s a total of 80% of divorces were in which the man was the plaintiff and 76% of those in which

Table 2 Divorce proceedings by outcome and petitioner, CR, 1991–2006

Result of divorce proceedings	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	Petitioner male															
Divorce	10 357	9 865	10 206	10 155	10 233	11 012	10 352	10 336	7 685	9 496	10 355	10 613	11 101	10 950	10 516	10 469
Other	2 659	2 393	2 266	2 166	2 167	2 189	2 098	2 069	1 742	1 514	1 519	1 506	1 607	1 488	1 349	1 239
Total	13 016	12 258	12 472	12 321	12 400	13 201	12 450	12 405	9 427	11 010	11 874	12 119	12 708	12 438	11 865	11 708
– by divorce (%)	79.6	80.5	81.8	82.4	82.5	83.4	83.1	83.3	81.5	86.2	87.2	87.6	87.4	88.0	88.6	89.4
	Petitioner female															
Divorce	18 976	18 691	19 999	20 764	20 902	22 101	22 113	22 027	15 972	20 208	21 231	21 145	21 723	22 110	20 772	20 946
Other	6 227	5 925	5 763	5 503	5 460	5 148	5 028	5 184	4 207	3 724	3 586	3 398	3 347	3 383	3 060	3 026
Total	25 203	24 616	25 762	26 267	26 362	27 249	27 141	27 211	20 179	23 932	24 817	24 543	25 070	25 493	23 832	23 972
– by divorce (%)	75.3	75.9	77.6	79.0	79.3	81.1	81.5	80.9	79.2	84.4	85.6	86.2	86.6	86.7	87.2	87.4

Table 3 Reasons cited for refusal to grant a divorce, CR, 1991–2006

Reason for refusal	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Reckless attitudes towards marriage	203	134	100	120	103	70	62	45	38	23	10	12	4	5	2	5
Interest of minor children	173	116	71	72	101	113	86	98	55	35	44	43	44	53	27	31
Short insignificant disruption	85	50	47	51	59	68	64	68	39	48	32	17	10	17	5	6
Elimination of causes that disturb the marriage	33	22	29	21	14	12	17	23	7	5	6	8	5	2	6	7
Other reason	39	49	36	36	41	34	51	48	78	81	71	86	71	109	51	80
Total cited	533	371	283	300	318	297	280	282	217	192	163	166	134	186	91	129
– of otherwise terminated proceedings (%)	6.0	4.5	3.5	3.9	4.2	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.6	3.7	3.2	3.4	2.7	3.8	2.1	3.0

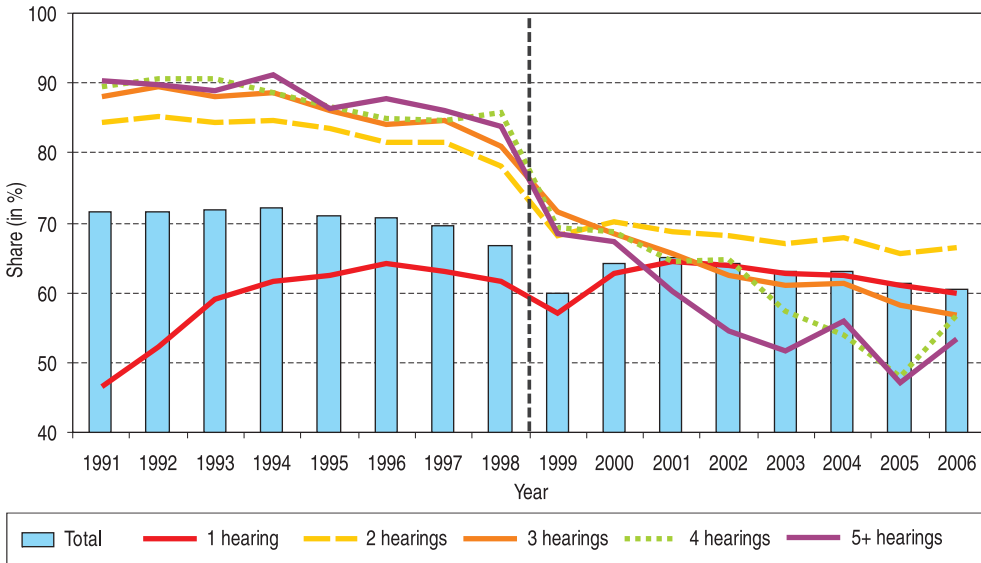
the woman was the plaintiff concluded in divorce, in 2005 and 2006 a total of 89% of male plaintiffs' and 87% of female plaintiffs' petitions for divorce were granted already.

The reason for dismissing a divorce petition was recorded in the divorce reports only for a small number of proceedings. Nevertheless, in a time series it is possible to clearly distinguish between the period before the amendment to the Family Act and the period after the amendment (Tab. 3). Starting in 1999, there was a sharp increase in the share of 'other reasons' for dismissing the petition, and in the last five years this accounted for more than one-half of all cases when a reason was listed. In the first half of the 1990s the large share of dismissed petitions were owing to 'reckless attitudes towards mar-

Table 4 Divorce by the number of hearings and dependent children, CR, 1991–2006

Number of hearings	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	All divorces															
1	10 604	12 443	15 584	17 676	18 993	21 290	21 552	22 864	17 832	23 543	26 039	27 007	27 999	28 130	26 557	26 862
2	12 341	10 915	10 090	9 057	8 220	7 838	7 331	6 385	4 021	4 347	4 107	3 575	3 682	3 835	3 651	3 554
3	4 003	3 304	2 947	2 628	2 422	2 426	2 131	1 877	1 076	1 107	863	738	783	757	723	699
4	1 432	1 073	911	904	845	869	777	651	394	373	316	258	244	211	213	180
5+	986	837	695	674	655	690	674	586	334	334	261	180	116	127	144	120
	Divorces without minor children															
1	5 675	5 932	6 380	6 782	7 121	7 634	7 971	8 777	7 667	8 767	9 240	9 755	10 442	10 575	10 333	10 784
2	1 921	1 622	1 574	1 403	1 364	1 440	1 351	1 406	1 280	1 296	1 285	1 142	1 212	1 235	1 255	1 191
3	473	344	350	302	338	385	328	356	307	348	296	276	305	292	303	303
4	150	102	86	103	114	131	119	93	121	117	112	91	104	97	111	78
5+	94	86	77	60	90	85	93	95	105	109	104	82	56	56	76	56
	Divorces with minor children															
1	4 929	6 511	9 204	10 894	11 872	13 656	13 581	14 087	10 165	14 776	16 799	17 252	17 557	17 555	16 224	16 078
2	10 420	9 293	8 516	7 654	6 856	6 398	5 980	4 979	2 741	3 051	2 822	2 433	2 470	2 600	2 396	2 363
3	3 530	2 960	2 597	2 326	2 084	2 041	1 803	1 521	769	759	567	462	478	465	420	396
4	1 282	971	825	801	731	738	658	558	273	256	204	167	140	114	102	102
5+	892	751	618	614	565	605	581	491	229	225	157	98	60	71	68	64

Figure 1 Percentage of divorces with dependent children out of total divorces, by number of hearings, CR, 1991–2006



riage’, and in 1996 this reason was surpassed by the reason that had previously been in second place, ‘in the interest of the children’. If we leave aside the category of ‘other reasons’, in the interest of the children is the main reason for dismissing divorce petitions even today. Concern for the children’s welfare plays a role in six out of ten cases of specific reasons given.

Information about the number of court hearings could reveal whether a divorce of marriage with dependent children is more complicated and therefore requires more hearings. Data from the period between 1991 and 1998 confirm this supposition (Fig. 1). The vast majority of divorce proceedings that required more than one hearing involved divorces of marriages with dependent children. While these marriages accounted for only 59% of those divorces that required only one hearing, among divorce proceedings that required two hearings a total of 83% were for marriages with dependent children and out of divorce proceedings that required five or more hearing the figure was 88%.

Over the course of the 1990s the length of divorce proceedings gradually became shorter, at least in terms of the number of days in court. While in 1991 less than one-quarter of divorce proceedings for marriages with dependent children were concluded on the first hearing and 68% in the case of other marriages, in 1997 the figure was 60% and 81%, respectively. Since 1999, however, in connection with the legislative amendment, it is basically impossible to compare the structure of divorces by the number of hearings with the period before 1999. The amendment to the Family Act (effective as of 1 August 1998) stipulates that (cit. from § 25) ‘A divorce cannot be granted until the terms of child custody have been established by the court for the period subsequent to the divorce, in a decision issued by the court in conformity with § 176 of the civic judicial code’. Prior to filing a divorce petition it must be determined by the court who will be given custody of the children and what amount of child support will be

Table 5 Average length of divorce proceedings (in months) by type of termination and type of marriage, CR, 1991–1994

Year	All marriages			Childless marriages			Marriages without minor children			Marriages with minor children		
	All divorce proceedings	Divorces	Otherwise terminated proceedings	All divorce proceedings	Divorces	Otherwise terminated proceedings	All divorce proceedings	Divorces	Otherwise terminated proceedings	All divorce proceedings	Divorces	Otherwise terminated proceedings
1991	6.0	5.7	6.8	4.7	4.5	5.5	4.8	4.5	6.0	6.4	6.2	7.1
1992	6.4	6.1	7.3	5.0	4.8	6.1	5.1	4.8	6.5	6.8	6.6	7.5
1993	7.2	7.0	7.9	5.8	5.6	6.9	6.0	5.7	7.1	7.7	7.5	8.2
1994	7.8	7.6	8.5	6.3	6.1	7.0	6.5	6.2	7.7	8.3	8.1	8.8

Table 6 Specific causes of the breakdown of marriage, CR, 1991–2006

Cause of breakdown	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
	Cause on part of male															
Hasty marriage	1 680	1 659	1 366	1 289	1 385	1 296	1 286	1 148	698	656	505	558	380	348	272	228
Alcoholism	2 945	2 870	2 877	2 851	2 915	2 907	2 818	2 629	1 509	1 719	1 648	1 560	1 453	1 379	1 332	1 140
Adultery	4 341	4 224	4 276	4 232	4 002	4 119	3 979	3 898	2 105	2 371	2 284	2 071	2 078	2 026	1 831	1 745
Family neglect	2 120	1 825	1 697	1 979	2 279	2 446	2 418	2 195	1 270	1 569	1 532	1 285	1 191	1 318	1 085	928
Brutal treatment, conviction for a criminal offense	743	610	586	565	647	640	643	620	427	481	532	426	369	396	384	336
Health reasons	314	212	175	161	155	146	167	150	80	85	79	68	61	73	74	71
Sexual incompability	714	717	631	615	514	481	482	407	195	168	156	143	136	131	112	87
Total specific causes	12 857	12 117	11 608	11 692	11 897	12 035	11 793	11 047	6 284	7 049	6 736	6 111	5 668	5 671	5 090	4 535
– Share of all divorces (%)	43.8	42.4	38.4	37.8	38.2	36.3	34.1	26.6	23.7	21.3	19.2	17.3	17.2	16.3	14.4	
	Cause on part of female															
Hasty marriage	1 680	1 659	1 366	1 289	1 399	1 283	1 301	1 197	686	667	519	557	400	362	292	255
Alcoholism	281	289	243	246	225	247	251	247	156	144	167	155	149	150	182	186
Adultery	3 985	3 830	3 648	3 554	3 277	3 136	2 925	2 718	1 510	1 676	1 480	1 267	1 312	1 325	1 163	1 048
Family neglect	658	564	432	415	574	628	552	455	321	370	404	373	426	421	331	357
Brutal treatment, conviction for a criminal offense	39	47	23	28	47	50	33	24	17	25	19	23	29	34	26	35
Health reasons	332	261	209	187	165	172	173	146	94	81	72	66	54	69	65	62
Sexual incompability	714	717	631	615	527	480	490	424	201	181	165	146	130	126	108	87
Total specific causes	7 689	7 367	6 552	6 334	6 214	5 996	5 725	5 211	2 985	3 144	2 826	2 587	2 500	2 487	2 167	2 030
– Share of all divorces (%)	26.2	25.8	21.7	20.5	20.0	18.1	17.6	16.1	12.6	10.6	8.9	8.1	7.6	7.5	6.9	6.5

paid. Only those couples that have already agreed on the custody terms pertaining to their children enter divorce proceedings, so the number of hearings does not (with some exceptions) increase as a result of complications over this issue. Hearings on the custody of dependent children fall under separate court proceedings and their length is not reflected off the number of hearings on divorce proceedings. As a result, since 2002 divorce petitions (with or without dependent children) are in 85% of cases granted at the first hearing, in 11% of cases a second hearing is required, and in only 4% of cases there were required three or more hearings.

For the period between 1991 and 1994 we also have information about the length of the proceedings (in months), that is, the length of time from when a petition is filed to the issuing of a divorce decree. The average length of divorce proceedings was longer in the case of those proceedings that ultimately did not conclude in divorce. However, there was not a pronounced difference – on average at most 1.5 months for marriages without dependent children. Generally the divorce petitions dealt with the fastest were those for marriages without dependent children (on average 4.7 to 6.3 months), and if there were independent children in the marriage then the proceedings were only a few weeks longer. Proceedings took almost two months longer if there were dependent children in the marriage. These proceedings took on average 6.4 to 8.3 months to conclude. Over time the average duration of divorce proceedings increased in every category.

The reasons cited for the breakdown of a marriage fall more within the category of information about the terminated marriage, but it is added here to fill in the picture of the course of divorce proceedings or more precisely to what extent the factor leading to the breakdown of the marriage is determined, both on the part of the man and the woman. The basic (primary) factor from which the other determined factors for the breakdown derived is supposed to be indicated. The concurrence of cause coded 0 (the court found no fault) among man as well as woman is inadmissible.

In 2006 the reason cited for more than one-half of divorces was ‘irreconcilable differences’ and for more than one-quarter the reason ‘other’ was cited. The share of this last category increased sharply after the introduction of the amendment to the Family Act in 1999. Pursuant to 24a Family Act no. 91/1998 Coll., with all other conditions met the court finds no fault for the divorce (this is a so-called ‘uncontested divorce’), as a result of which more specifically formulated reasons are statistically receding into the background.

If we focus our attention just on specifically formulated reasons for the breakdown of a marriage (alcoholism, adultery, neglect of the family, sexual incompatibility, hasty marriage, health reasons, ill

treatment, or sentence of confinement in a penal institution), there is a significant difference between men and women in terms of how often each reason is cited. Each year, throughout the observed period, women cited adultery in more than one-half of all cases in which a reason was explicitly formulated. Among men this reason also took first place, but it accounted for only one-third of all cases. In one-quarter of cases men were faulted for alcoholism and in one-fifth of cases for neglect of the family. The frequency with which the last two causes mentioned were cited increased even among women; in 2006 women were faulted for alcoholism in 9% of cases and neglect of the family in almost 18% of explicitly formulated reasons.

Information relating to the actual process of the divorce proceedings is the most abundant among all the defined categories of items contained in the divorce reports, even though it relates to divorce (as a demographic process) only partially. The piece of information in this group that is most important for calculating demographic indicators is the date on which the report was submitted, which was used to calculate the length of duration of marriages in the observed period. However, the divorce reports could provide a wealth of interesting information about divorce proceedings, whether granted or not, that could be used by scholars or experts in fields other than those with a demographic focus that, for instance, might be interested in how long divorce proceedings take or why a divorce petition may be dismissed by the court. In current practice and in conformity with legislative conditions many data are difficult to interpret owing to their limited frequency and lose their informative value. Increasingly the categories of information being recorded are general and vague or in most cases cumulated within one group. The question is whether it is at all necessary to ascertain certain kinds of information if they remain almost unused (at least as this applies to demographic statistics).

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