

First childbearing and Union Formation in Russia

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During the Soviet time two fertility features were dominant in Russia: early and universal marriage and first childbearing. Since woman born 1931 cohort total fertility have been less than 2.1 children/woman (Ivanov et al 2006). The period mean age at first childbearing declined in the Soviet Union at the same time when it increased in Western Europe. On the other hand Russia was among the first countries where TFR declined under replacement level at mid 1960s. Since 1988 TFR declined rapidly in Russia and partly this is due to postponement effect and partly structural reason (Avdeev and Monnier 1995); at 1980s when the SU introduced pro-natalist politics and better social benefits for parents many advanced their childbearing.

Earlier studies have shown that partnership status (single, consensual union or marriage) explains fertility differences between cohorts in Russia (Kesseli, forthcoming; Scherbov and Van Vianen 1999, 2001). This presentation will focus on this relationship – union formation and first birth. Aim of the study is to examine how the timing of first birth related to first union formation (cohabitation or marriage) is changed over cohorts.

Intuitively the relationship between first childbearing and first union formation is quite clear; especially in Russian context where both events happened almost all women and the timing was also quite homogenous. But study of the related timing and sequence of these events will give more information from family formation pattern in Russia. These changes in timing might be consequence of change of value/norms of marriage/cohabitation/ motherhood or reaction to changing realities of society e.g. sex ratio, family legislation.

In the Soviet Russia early marriage and childbearing were encouraged by institutional settings. Married couples were favoured at housing market as compared to single or cohabiting adults. Also long and generous maternity leave and infant care leave was guaranteed, as well as universal and free day care and shorter working hours and longer holidays were offered for mothers. (Thernborn 2004; Zdravomyslova 1996.) Childbearing was encouraged also by a tax on childlessness, collected from childless

people aged 18+. This tax was an average rate of 6% of earnings. (Spielauder, Koytcheva, Kostova 2007.)

Soviet Russian society was dominated by the gender contract of the wage-working mother. (Zdravomyslova 1996.) Woman participated to working life and she was also expected to run the household and be a mother. By the mid 20th century, women's participation in the workforce reached 50%. By the late 1970s, 85% of able-bodied 20 to 55 year-old women were employed fulltime (Lapidus 1978). This large scale of female labour force participation was possible due to state supported childcare. Not only state kindergarten, but also grandparents were important childcare help. It was common that children spent longer time in grandparental care, for instance during weekends and vacations. (Lapidus 1978, Rotkirch 2000)

Early childbearing and marriage were also part of Soviet ideology and everyday morality. Postponement of childbearing for social or professional reasons was unusual and considered selfish. Also woman themselves consider 25 years to be old for a first-time mother. (Rotkirch 2000, Rotkirch and Kesseli, forthcoming.)

The data comes from Russian Generation and Gender Survey. I follow birth cohorts born from 1930 to 1986. I estimate continuous time-hazard models capturing time since age 15 to first birth, to first cohabitation, and to first marriage. In case the cohabitation is first union then the transition to marriage is studied. Also role of education (as time-varying) and childhood conditions are included into the analysis.

As mentioned above in the Soviet Union / Russian context study of first childbearing and union formation might seem too self-evident. Primary results show that there are differences between cohorts on family formation pattern.

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