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Changing Family in Lithuania

Abstract

During the 20th c. the family of Lithuania has experienced major changes. Family patterns have been changing: in the second half of the 20th c. the "European marriage" pattern was replaced by the "traditional family" pattern, and in the beginning of the 1990s the replacement of the latter by the "modern family" pattern began. Recent family changes in Lithuania were first manifested through the decrease of marriage. The findings of the FFS show that this phenomenon is one of the manifestations of the fundamental, recently started family transformation in Lithuania, which is identified through the ageing of marriage, the spread of cohabitation in the youngest cohorts and increase of extra-marital childbearing.

1. Introduction

During the 20th c. the Lithuanian family has experienced significant evolutionary and rapid revolutionary changes. During the century the Lithuanian family has been changing from the pattern of the "European marriage" (Hajnal, 1965), which predominated in our country until the middle of the 20th c. to the "traditional family" pattern, which prevailed to the very 1990s, and eventually, to the "modern family" pattern, which since the mid-1960s has become quite universal in the post-modern European countries (Kaa, 1987, 1997). Since the 1990s the spread of the latter family pattern in Lithuania has been developing in a revolutionary manner. This phenomenon called the second demographic transition (Kaa, 1987), has its distinct specifics in Lithuania, both in comparison with the countries which had experienced the process much earlier, and with the East European countries with a similar experience of the soviet time living conditions, ideology and the changes of the recent years.

The paper aims at discussing the family modernisation trends, sequences and specifics of the changes in Lithuanian families against the background of the experience

of other countries and with respect to the paradigm of the second demographic transition, at drawing attention to the effect of the ethnocultural environment of the country, soviet experience and of transition to the market economy on the diversity of family changes. The paper is mostly based on the *Fertility and Family Survey in Lithuania* and demographic statistics data.

2. Prehistory of recent family changes in Lithuania

“European marriage” pattern. Until the middle of the 20th century the so-called European marriage pattern (Hajnal, 1965) was typical for Lithuania, the most important features of which was late marriage and a high proportion of never married. Consolidation of the European marriage pattern and its duration in the West European countries has been thoroughly investigated and described (Hajnal, 1965; Hoffmann, 1987, etc.). However, in the Baltics including Lithuania this phase of family evolution has been until recently investigated inadequately. Predominantly late marriages accompanied by a high proportion of single persons and a low rate of nuptiality as indicators of the demographic transition in Estonia in the context of the western countries experience have been dealt with at some length by Vikat (1994). In Lithuania the predominance of late marriages observed until the middle of the 20th century and the rejuvenation of marriage after the WWII, changes in the proportion of unmarried people have been casually discussed by Stankuniene (1989, 1995, 1997). Demographers of other countries have also observed that Lithuania was among the countries in which the European marriage pattern prevailed (Vishnevskij, 1977; Vishnevskij, Tolc, 1983; Volkov, 1986; Blum, Rallu, 1993). It has been observed that the Baltics constituted the confines of the eastward spread of the European marriage pattern corresponding in area terms with the spread of Catholic and protestant faith (Vishnevskij, 1977).

It should be noted that both the time and causes for the consolidation of a late marriage in Lithuania as in many other countries (Hajnal, 1965; Volkov, 1986) are not

definitely established. It can only be clearly seen that in Lithuania the pattern of a late marriage and a considerable proportion of the never married was a fact until the middle of the 20th century. On the basis of the church registry the historian Marcinkevichienė (1999) has made an estimate that in Lithuania of the end 19th and early 20th centuries (1875-1915) the mean age at marriage constituted for men 33 years, for women – 26 years¹. In 1925-1939 the mean age of men at marriage was nearly stable and stood close to 30 years (shifting in the range of 29.1-30.3), women – about 26 years (25.7-26.0)¹. According to the 1923 population census of Lithuania, in the age group of 25-29 single men constituted 60%, women – 43% (calculated by author from Lietuvos, 1927-1940 and Lietuvos, 1925). In the western and northern Europe, similar rates typical for the European marriage pattern were observed at the beginning of the 20th c. (in Sweden and Belgium of 1900 the indicators by sex were correspondingly 61% and 50%, and 52% and 41% (Hajnal, 1965). In 1923 the proportion of the never married Lithuanian population in the age group 40-49 years was 11% for men and 13% for women (calculated by author from Lietuvos, 1925).

“Traditional family”. However, in transition from the agrarian-rural to the industrial-urbanised society (Vikat, 1994), a turn from a late to an early marriage is made, and the proportion of the never married drops considerably. In many countries of western and northern Europe this process started in the early 20th c.

In 1965 Hajnal while analysing the changes of the marriage patterns, maintains in his famous work that the most rapid rejuvenation of marriage in most European countries was observed during the latest two decades. According to Hajnal (1965), during two decades an actual revolution took place in the field, resulting in a nearly complete vanishing of the so-called European late marriage pattern.

Meanwhile in Lithuania the rejuvenation of marriage started in the second half of the 20th century. However, the poorness of the post-war demographic statistics does

¹ All marriages (not only first)

not permit to make an accurate assessment of the timing and development rate of the marriage rejuvenation in Lithuania. In the mid-1960s the mean age of men at first marriage was 26.5 years, women - 24.8 years (calculated by author from statistical data).

In Lithuania, the rejuvenation trend of the first marriage and the features of the so-called traditional family (early and universal marriage; Family, 1997) continued into the early 1990s. The youngest mean age at first marriage both for men and women was registered in 1992. At the time, the indicators constituted, correspondingly by sex, 23.6 and 21.9 years. In the age group of 45-49 years the proportion of never-married men was, according to the 1989 population census data, 5.6%, and 5.1% of women.

Family transformation. However, in Lithuania the last decade of the 20th c. began by changing timing and strategy of family formation. In the neighbouring Baltic countries the process had started a few years earlier. Thus, in Lithuania until the late 1980s family formation through its official registration was universal in character, marriage was still rejuvenating, consensual unions and childbirth outside marriage were poorly tolerated by the society, low-prestigious and quite uncommon. Meanwhile in the western countries, the so-called transformation of family had been taking place from the mid-1960s, i.e. more than twenty years earlier: marriage had been ageing, the number of consensual unions, single people and child births outside marriage had been growing fast (Kaa, 1987, 1997; Manting, 1994; Roussel, 1994, etc.).

While the trends, causes, options, sequence of the phenomena in the western and northern European countries have been thoroughly discussed (Hoffman-Nowotny, 1987; Dumon, 1993; Ekert-Jaffe, 1996; Haskey, 1993; Kaa, 1987, 1997; Kiernan, 1996; Lesthaeghe and Moors, 1995; Liefbroer, 1991, 1996; Manting, 1994; Roussel, 1994, and many others), their emergence and spread in Lithuania has only been identified by the FFS. The investigation of the changes as well as the processes themselves is in their initial stage .

2. Trend fluctuation in timing first marriage

In Lithuania the liberation movement of late 1980s which resulted in the recovery of the country's independence in 1990, subsequent radical political, social and economic restructuring accompanied by economic instabilities, emergence of new socio-economic relations, liberalisation of the society, formation of new life styles and value orientations, made basic changes in the living conditions of all individuals and families and had an impact on their behaviour. Family, the forms of its formations and functioning were subjected to rapid changes.

The recent family changes have been primarily stimulated by the economic, social transformations of the revolutionary period of late 1980s - early 1990s in passing to new political and economic status of Lithuania and through the economic crisis of early 1990s. Such environment became imperative for the adaptation to the new conditions. Therefore, the demographic processes were considerably distorted and impossible to identify unequivocally as the formation of a new demographic behaviour and attitudes. In order to survive the period and adapt to the rapidly and controversially changing conditions, young people were forced to change their matrimonial behaviour rapidly as well. The behaviour of cohorts with only a year's age difference between them, on entering the marriageable age, was quite different due to the concrete and highly commanding conditions of the period.

Frequently inconsistent revolutionary changes of social, economic and political nature conditioned a number of specific and temporary manifestations of demographic behaviour, as well as fluctuations of demographic indicators. A turn of the country from a closed society with a centrally managed economy to a democratic market economy society caused fundamental demographic changes as well. In matrimonial behaviour features typical for the post-modern western societies started spreading in Lithuania. The westernising value orientations and the consolidating new economic systems and

technologies have started changing fast the seemingly conservative ethnocultural norms based on the principles of Catholic culture.

The society, in experiencing the complexities of the period, responded to the environmental instabilities of the first transformation years by a specific adaptive reaction. Therefore, some of the recent year family changes are, partially, the result of the temporary, adaptive forms of matrimonial behaviour. Matrimonial behaviour is still under the effect of the former soviet conditions, long-time experience, inertia of the evolutionary development, specific ethnocultural factors and, together, the current temporary conditions and the elements of new environment observed in their manifestation or anticipated in future. Thus, the changes of matrimonial behaviour exhibit the features of both transient and the new fundamental changes. However, only the results of the FFS have made it possible to reveal the first, albeit ambivalent features of weakening traditional family attributes and strengthening modern ones.

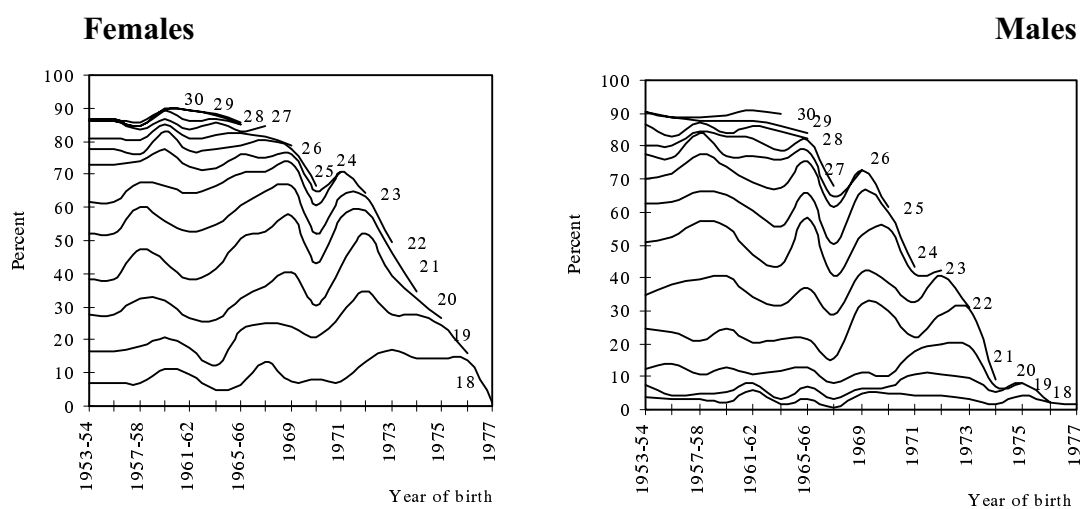
In Lithuania, the recent family changes were first expressed through the decrease of marriages. The process has been observed since 1991. It can be seen from the rough marriage indicators of statistics: the absolute number of marriages dropped from 34.6 thous. in 1989 to 18,5 thous. in 1998, crude marriage rates have correspondingly lowered from 9.4‰ to 5.0‰ (Demographic, 1999). However, directly before the decrease of marriage, the number of marriages in Lithuania had suddenly risen, notably among the men of the youngest marriageable age. In 1990, 36.3 thous. marriages were registered, crude marriage rate was 9.8‰ (Demographic, 1999).

This increase of marriage rates observed at the youngest marriageable age is also seen in the FFS findings (fig. 1, 2). Cumulative percentages of the 1968-73 birth cohort show that the persons of this cohort entered into marriage at the age of 18-22 considerably more frequently than the representatives of the older cohorts (fig. 1, 2, 3)².

² Figure 3 presents the dynamics of cumulative percentages of the different five-year birth cohorts, and fig. 2 shows, in order to reveal rapid and inconsistent changes of the recent years, the data on the

This was mostly conditioned by very specific and temporary conditions brought about by the political instabilities of late 1980s. At the beginning of the revival and the independence movement as well as directly after the declaration of independence when the statehood of Lithuania was still not recognised young men tried to escape service in the Soviet army. Having young children in a registered marriage was one of the legal ways of the time to escape military service, through the exemption from service or its postponement for a later time. Therefore, at that time the number of marriages among the conscription age men (18-20 years) rose considerably. In 1990, age-specific marriage rates among men under 20 (conscription age) were even 1.8 times higher than in 1985 (Lithuanian, 1991). However, already since 1991 male marriage rates in Lithuania have been constantly lowering (in comparison to 1990, crude marriage rate has dropped correspondingly by year, by 18% and 35%). All this was taking place during the years of economic crisis in Lithuania. At the time marriage rates of young men experienced the sharpest decline. In 1991-1998, age-specific marriage rates of men under 20 years of age decreased by 63%, 20-24 years - 53% (Lithuanian, 1992; Demographic, 1999). At an older age the decline of marriage rates is less pronounced.

Figure 1. Cumulative percentage of first marriage at selected ages by birth cohorts



youngest cohort by every subsequent year of birth, and for comparison – on the changes of matrimonial behaviour of the five-year birth cohort of 1960-65.

A similar trend for marriage decrease has been observed among women as well. Age-specific marriage rates in the age groups above declined during the period correspondingly by 58% and 47%.

Figure 2. Cumulative percentage of first marriage, by age and birth cohort

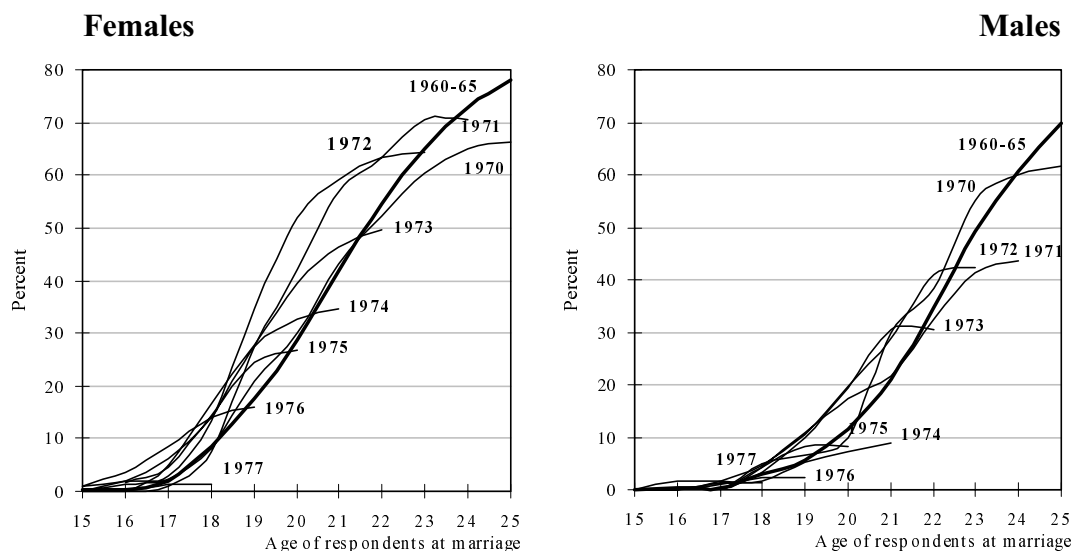
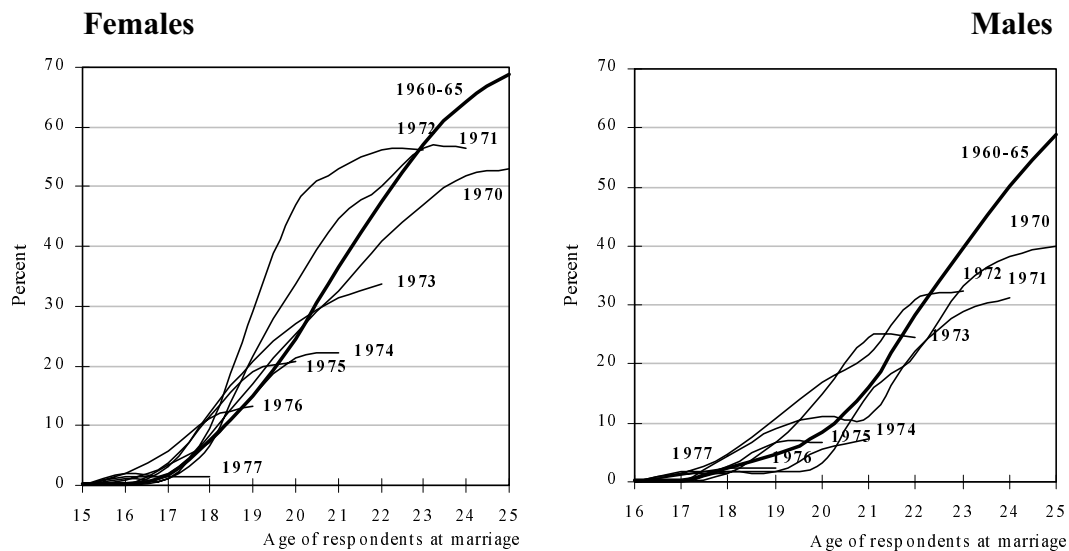


Figure 3. Cumulative percentage of first marriage which has been not preceded by cohabitation, by age and single year birth cohort



These changes are evident in the FFS findings (fig. 1). Following a sharp increase of marriage at the youngest age, nuptiality rates started falling rapidly. A turning point of matrimonial behaviour is observed: a rejuvenation of marriage witnessed until the end of the 1980s, and a fluctuation of marriage of late 1980s - early 1990s have given way to the ageing of marriage. According to the FFS data, persons of

the 1968-73 birth cohort entered into marriageable age exhibiting a specific matrimonial behaviour. Figs. 1 and 2 show that the time of marriage formation for the men and women of this cohort, and, particularly, for the 1970-73 birth cohort, is highly unusual in shape: quite a number of this cohort men and women entered marriage somewhat earlier: at 18, 19, 20 years (marriages formed in late 1980s - early 1990s), and from the age 22-24 years the marriage rates of this cohort are significantly lower than in the previous cohorts (fig. 1, 2).

However, at this point, at least a short additional note on some other specific conditions of late 1980s - early 1990s and of subsequent years in Lithuania which had an impact on the matrimonial behaviour of young people reaching marriageable age should be made. Those conditions had an effect on the fluctuation of family formation indicators of the recent years. The avoidance of the Lithuanian youth to serve in the Soviet army mentioned above directly before the recovery of the country's independence and shortly after the important historic event (while the Soviet troops have still stationed in Lithuania) urged some young people to enter into marriage earlier. Another portion of young men had beneficial conditions for enrolling in the universities³. The laws in force at the time also provided for a postponement of military service until the graduation. Still another portion of young men who did not marry or enter universities at the time, went into hiding. Thus, the first portion married earlier than usually producing an impression of continued phenomenon of marriage rejuvenation and even its acceleration, the second and the third portion postponed their marriage, part of them because of studies, and part because of a semi-legal way of life. Such a situation continued for about three years (1989-1991) until the international recognition of Lithuania's independence. Later, in 1991 an economic crisis set in, hitting the hardest in 1992, and continuing through 1994. All this made another

³ At that time special measures were introduced in Lithuania aimed at protecting young men from the Soviet army offering them priority rights at enrolment in universities.

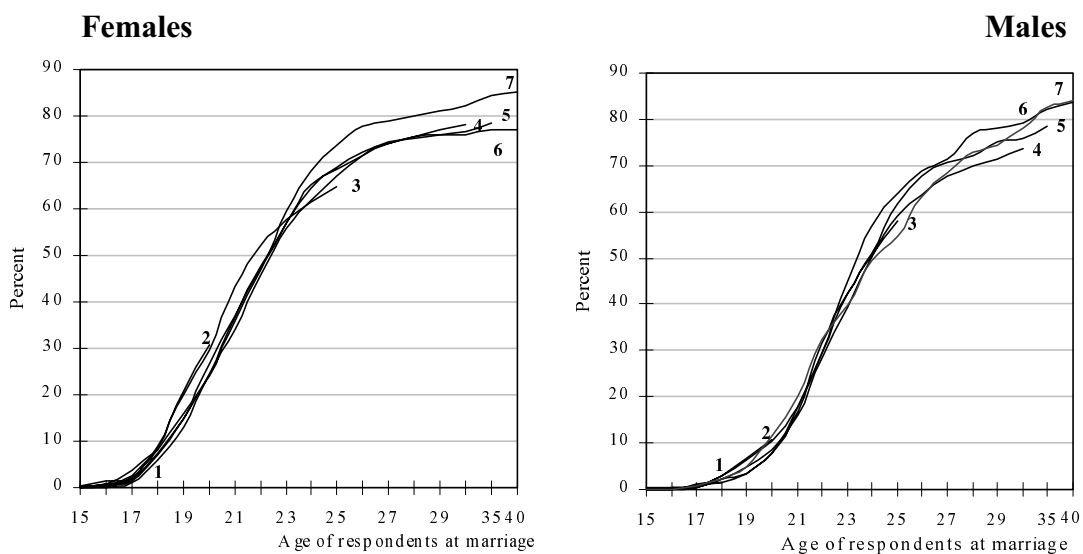
correction in the matrimonial behaviour of the cohorts mentioned above, this time through a strong impact of economic factors. In search of living means quite a number of young people engaged in commercial (petty trade) migration flows directed to the Western countries. Other types of relations with the western countries were as well opened bringing western values and attitudes towards our society life. Therefore, the ones who did not marry at reaching marriageable age in late 1980s - early 1990s, started postponing their marriage further. In this group new forms of partnership were spreading the fastest, family formalisation started weakening, consensual unions were growing.

3. Fading away of the "traditional family" pattern

Marriage postponement is mostly practised by those who form marriage in a traditional way, i.e. when starting family coincides with marriage (fig. 3). Although the trajectories of curves in figs 2 and 3 are very similar in shape, figs, 2, 3 and 4 show that postponement of marriage among families started in the traditional way had already begun in the earlier cohorts. Cumulative percentages of respondents who started their first family by marriage were already decreasing not only among the youth who entered marriageable age in the 1990s (born in 1970-76), but also among the persons five years older (born in 1965-70, and among the men even older than that (curves 3, 4 and 5, fig.4). However, the process of marriage decrease had an effect on them at a slightly older age. In other words, at the marital career of these cohorts, the trajectories of the traditional matrimonial behaviour were still under the influence of the continuing marriage rejuvenation and the specific features of matrimonial behaviour mentioned earlier. However, at a slightly older age their behaviour was already under the influence of factors stimulating marriage postponement or rejection. Thus, a considerable proportion of those who did not marry before the 1990s has not married since. This holds true for men mostly.

Regardless of the contradictory trends in marriage changes, the FFS findings make a basis for the assertion that a decrease of marriage observed in Lithuania for a number of years is, in first place, the result of marriage postponement for a later age. This could signify the first features of family transformation in Lithuania. However, its manifestation in the country was considerably distorted by the specific conditions indicated above, where a portion of the 1965-75 birth cohort men and women entered into marriage earlier, and the rest-substantially later than the representatives of the older cohorts. In Lithuania, marriages which had been "rejuvenating" throughout the post-war period, started "ageing" since the beginning of the 1990s. This could signify the beginning of the change in family timing, one of the fundamental features of family transformation to a modern pattern. Because of specific conditions the turning point of this trend started by a pronounced fluctuation, which, in the absence of a deep analysis of the circumstances causing the process, could be given an erroneous interpretation. Temporary fluctuations of marriage timing of the early 1990s were very strong, thus making considerable distortions in the fundamental changes.

Figure 4 Cumulative percentage of first marriage which has not been preceded by cohabitation, by age and birth cohort

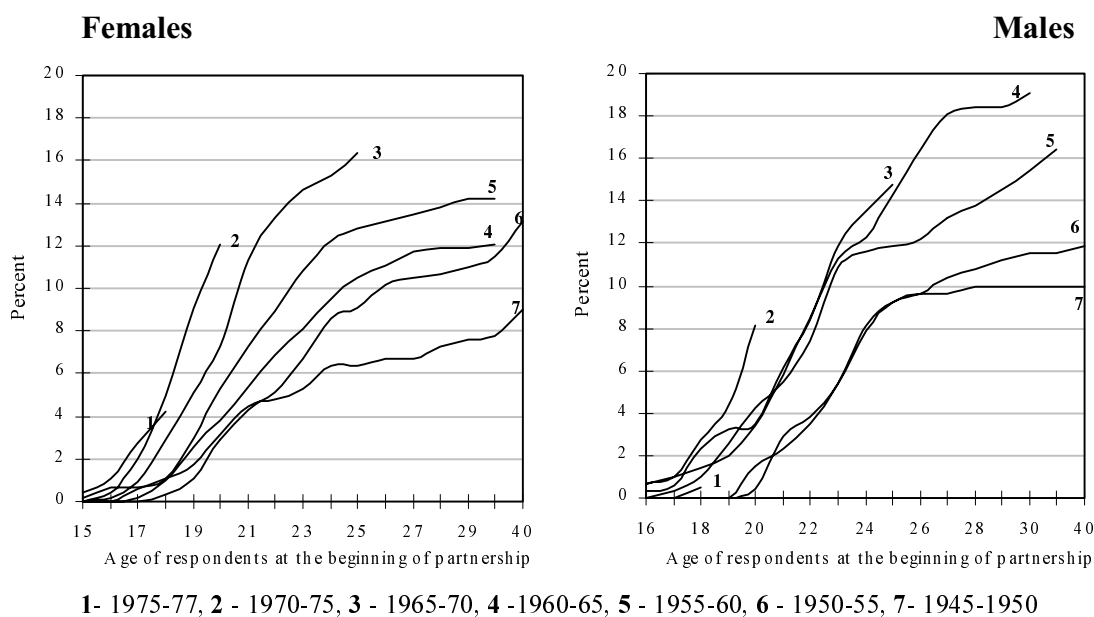


1- 1975-77, 2 - 1970-75, 3 - 1965-70, 4 -1960-65, 5 - 1955-60, 6 - 1950-55, 7- 1945-1950

4. Cohabitation

The FFS results show a rapid increase of cohabitation in recent years. More and more frequently partnership is started by a consensual union which indicates the spread of new forms of partnership involving marriage postponement, changes in the formation of family strategy and the rate of nuptiality (Manting, 1994; Beets, 1991; Liefbroer, 1991; Liefbroer, 1996; Haskey, 1991).

Figure 5. Cumulative percentage of first partnership that was consensual union



Until now the spread of consensual unions in Lithuania has been strongly impeded and its identification complicated by the ethnocultural factors prevalent in the environment of Catholic values and attitudes. It could be assumed that the number of consensual unions in Lithuania is considerably higher than the surveys show. Even in anonymous surveys the respondents are reluctant to admit the fact of cohabitation. Refusals to respond the questions on marital status are not infrequent in cases of cohabitation. More openly such questions are answered if cohabitation has resulted in marriage, i.e. concerning a former consensual union as a prelude to marriage. Reluctancy is also felt in responding questions on later cohabitation, following divorce

or death of a spouse. Thus, it could be assumed that the information on the spread of consensual unions obtained during the survey is not complete.

Regardless of that the FFS findings reveal the fact that in every subsequently younger cohort the number of persons starting their first partnership by cohabitation has been growing and in its shape the spread of the phenomenon reminds of an explosion (fig. 5). In a way it has echoed the revolutionary changes of family formation experienced by the Western countries (Bumpass, 1990) during the last two three decades.

The fact that such families in Lithuania become more popular with every subsequently younger cohort is also confirmed by one of the indirect indicators of the process: increasing number of children born outside marriage since the beginning of 1990s. In Lithuania the proportion of such children has increased from 7% in 1990 to 18% in 1998 (Demographic, 1999).

An extremely sharp rise in the phenomenon of cohabitation is observed in the youngest cohorts (fig. 5). At the age of 20 years 8% men and 12% women of the 1970-75 birth cohort had already had an experience of cohabitation. In the 1965-70 birth cohort these rates correspondingly for men and women were 3.5% and 7.3%, and in the 1946-49 cohort – 0.4% and 3.1%. The 1971-73 birth cohort stands out from the rest considerably. According to the FFS findings, in this cohort more than 20% of men and 14-19% women had started their first partnership by cohabitation by the age of 22.

The FFS data suggest that this type of family formation became practised by men earlier than by women. However, it could also be the case of less reluctancy on the part of men to disclose the fact of cohabitation and of their higher tolerance towards such matrimonial behaviour. Women, much more frequently than men, are inclined to conceal this form of family life.

In Lithuania, the spread of the phenomenon is still short in duration. Its beginning coincided both with a sudden drop in living standards and with a transition to

an open society adopting the western lifestyle and behaviour. Both circumstances were sufficient to stimulate postponement and decrease of marriage, and together the spread of cohabitation as an alternative to the traditional family formation.

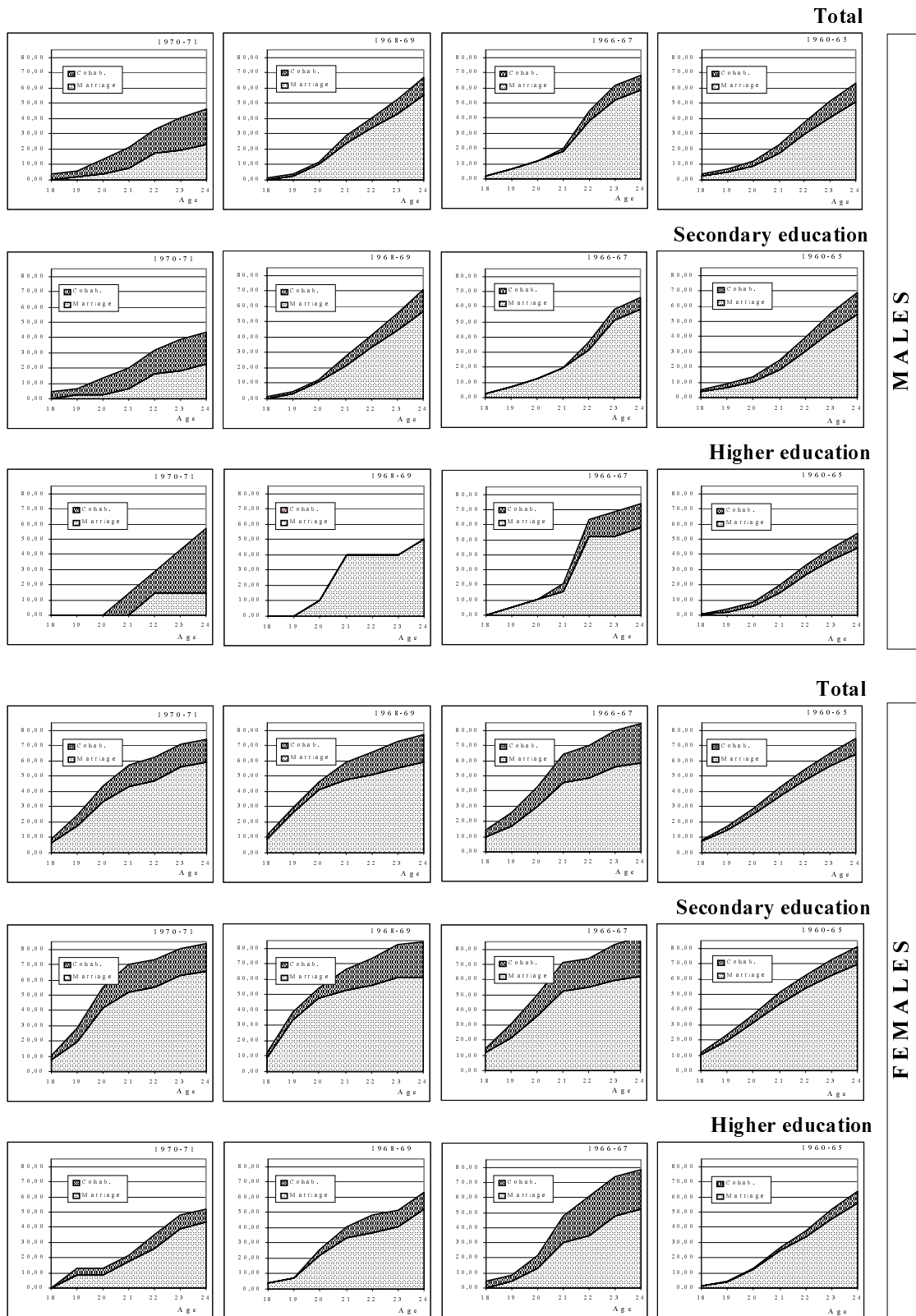
However, if the manifestation of cohabitation in Lithuania is compared to the level of cohabitation in the Western, notably Scandinavian, and the neighbouring Baltic countries, it becomes clear that the spread of such families in Lithuania is still in its budding phase. According to the FFS findings, 78% of Swedish women aged 25-29 (respondents age at survey time) had an experience of the first partnership as consensual union by the age of 25, in Finland – 71%, France – 64%, Norway – 61%, Estonia – 63%, Switzerland – 55%, Latvia – 42%, and in Lithuania – 16% (Klijzing, Macura 1997).

5. Sociodemographic differences in partnership

For all that does the postponement of marriage which has started in the 1990s signify a postponement of partnership for a later age as well, or is it compensated by consensual unions as an alternative partnership?

A thorough analysis of matrimonial behaviour across different social demographic groups indicates that the revolutionary family changes of the period have had the strongest and the most universal effect on the cohort born in early 1970s and, notably, the men, both by marriage timing, size of cumulative marriage indicators, spread of cohabitation, and by the total pattern of partnership formation (fig. 6). Specifically the men of the cohort somewhat more frequently than representatives of the older cohorts entered partnerships at the youngest marriageable age (18-20 years), only, not through marriage, but mostly through consensual unions (fig. 6). Among the men of the 1970-71 birth cohort, total cumulative percentage of first partnership at the age of 20 was 14%, among the 1960-65 birth cohort – 12%, and the cohabitation rates, correspondingly by the birth cohorts, were 10% and 3% (fig. 6). At a slightly older age (at 21-24 years), for which until the recent changes most active matrimonial behaviour

Figure 6. Cumulative percentage of first partnership, by selected birth cohorts



was characteristic, cohabitation rates of the 1970-71 birth cohort have still been rising, however, owing to very low marriage rates, the total level of partnership was considerably lower than in the older cohorts. At the age of 24, 23% of the men of the 1970-71 birth cohort have had entered marriage for the first time, 23% had an experience of the first consensual union and totally 46% of the cohort men had an experience of the first partnership (either marriage or cohabitation). Meanwhile the men of the 1968-69 birth cohort have the corresponding partnership experience by the age as follow: 55%, 12% and 67%, and of the 1960-65 birth cohort – 51%, 12% and 63% (fig. 6).

Although cohabitation is highly spread among the men born at the beginning of the 1970s, their total partnership rates are low due to low marriage rates, which are particularly low among the residents of small towns and having higher education. Notably the men living in the small towns have an early and frequent experience of first partnership as cohabitation (13% of men of this group had experience of cohabitation at the age of 18 years, 33% - at 34 years) and very low rates of the first marriage. Although among the men with the higher education consensual unions are very frequent as well and dominant before the age of 24, but such partnerships in this group are formed somewhat later – from 21 years. Striving for education stimulates a postponement not only of marriage but of consensual union as well. Such matrimonial behaviour is typical for the men of major Lithuanian cities where universities are located.

According to the survey data, the least changes have been observed in the partnership pattern of the rural male population. In comparison to the matrimonial behaviour of the different cohorts, this group has experienced insignificant changes in the timing and level of marriage, cohabitation and total partnership. However, it should be noted that in rural areas objective information on partnership status, especially in case of cohabitation, is difficult to obtain. Different types of additional information

show that cohabitation in rural areas has been spreading as well, only this partnership form has not yet gained acceptance from the rural community.

Thus, although the youngest male cohorts of different social demographic groups under study exhibit highly increased rates of cohabitation, they do not compensate for the notably fallen marriage rates. An extremely reduced number of marriage leads to the fall of total partnership rates. The increase of consensual unions only slightly mitigates the decrease of men's partnership rates at a young age.

Among women in every subsequently younger cohort the change of partnership pattern by timing, level and forms leads a course rather different from men's. First, females exhibit more pronounced partnership differences by their social status. Besides, a much more active matrimonial behaviour of the predominant group with secondary level education has formed, in recent years, rather different from men's trends of family formation.

In the 1970-71 birth female cohort, total cumulative percentage of the first partnership was 44% at the age of 20 years (marriage – 33%, consensual unions – 11%) and in the 1960-65 birth cohort, correspondingly, 29% (25% and 4%). At the age of 24 years female partnership rates correspondingly by birth cohorts were: 74% (59% and 15%) and 75% (65% and 10%).

However, in the youngest cohorts (born in the beginning of the 1970s) partnership rate of women with higher education is, at the age of 24 (having lived through the most active family formation period of the recent time), considerably lower than of the 1960s and earlier birth cohorts women of the same status (fig. 6). In seeking education and career, a much smaller than in the older cohorts proportion of this age women have married or entered consensual union before the age of 24. Also, considerably fewer women than in older cohorts, try to combine educational and matrimonial behaviour. Whereas females with secondary education in the youngest

cohorts under study marry earlier and more frequently than their contemporaries with higher education and their matrimonial behaviour is less different by birth cohort than among women with the higher education. They also start cohabitation much earlier and their cohabitation level is substantially higher. At the age of 24, 84% of women born in 1970-71, already had experience of first partnership (66% of marriage, 18% of cohabitation) whereas among the women with the higher education these indicators of matrimonial behaviour stood, correspondingly at 52% (43% and 9%). In the 1960-65 birth female cohort the indicators by education are, correspondingly, 81% (70% and 11%) and 63% (56% and 7%).

6. Conclusions

The extensive and rapid political, economic, social changes in Lithuania, as in other post-socialist countries, during the years of transition from the centrally planned to market economy have caused fundamental changes in all the areas of human life, affecting every individual and every family. This is reflected in the dimensions of demographic processes. Transformation of the country economy, privatisation, economic instability, significant decline in living standards in the first years of independence, consolidation of market relations, emergence and spread of unemployment and other phenomena related with market economy have brought changes into the family life and pattern. In order to survive, families facing the new social phenomena and problems had to adapt themselves to the rapidly transforming surroundings, to change their economic activity, lifestyle, attitudes, behaviour. The rapidly westernising value orientations have made a solid impact on the family changes. Family formation ways and time have been changing as well. A rapid erosion of "traditional family" has been observed in Lithuania since the beginning of the 1990s.

Recent-year family changes in Lithuania were first manifested through the decrease of marriage. The findings of the *Fertility and Family survey in Lithuania* show

that this phenomenon is one of the manifestations of the fundamental, recently started family changes in Lithuania. Marriages which had been “rejuvenating” in Lithuania throughout the post-war period, at the beginning of the 1990s started “ageing”. The marriage postponement phenomenon is partly compensated by the spread of consensual unions. An increasingly larger number of the youngest marriageable-age men and women live in consensual unions. In Lithuania, the spread of the alternative partnership has of late acquired an explosion proportions: in every successively younger cohort more and more individuals start living together by cohabiting. This is, in fact, a new phenomenon in Lithuania, the Catholic culture-dominated country and therefore has until recently been negligible in scope and low-prestigious. However, uncertainty for one’s future which became evident in the period of economic recession in Lithuania, strengthening of market relations, deepening individualisation, lead towards the avoidance of formal marital bonds and encourage the creation of alternative partnership forms to the traditional family. However, due to the specific conditions of Lithuania related both to the ethnocultural norms of life and to the living conditions of the recent years, marriage ageing in Lithuania has been observed slightly later than in the neighbouring Baltic countries and has been accompanied by considerable trend fluctuations in the dimensions of the phenomenon. Furthermore, in different sociodemographic groups the options of family transformation proceed at different pace and vary in their strength.

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