



THE MEANING OF COHABITATION AND MARRIAGE IN SLOVAKIA: COMPARING GENERATIONS

Michaela Potančoková

Demographic Research Centre

Bratislava, Slovakia

QUESTIONS

- **What is the social meaning of marriage and cohabitation?**
- **Is cohabitation dis/approved and from which reasons?**
- **What is the nature of cohabitation?**

DISCOURSE ON COHABITATION IN SLOVAKIA

- A threat to traditional marital family, a particular threat to the well-being of children , an „imported“ phenomenon (Matušík et al. 2002, Pástor 2002)
- Modification and transformation of family formation process, cohabiting unions function similarly to marriage and are rather a variety of marriage than an alternative conventional model; in many cases, premarital cohabitation not a sign of disapproval to marriage, rather a probatory period on the way to marriage (Chorvát 2002)
- Plurality of family forms an inherent part of secularisation and modernisation process (Piscová 2002, Mládek and Širočková 2003)

DATA: SURVEYS AND CENSUS

- **% persons living in cohabitation**
 - Censuses 1980, 1991, 2001
 - EVS 1999 and 2008
- **Attitudes towards cohabitation and value of marriage**
 - EVS 1991, 1999, 2008, ISSP 2002 Gender and family
- **Problems: inconsistency in asking questions on cohabitation, do not reveal why people dis/agree to cohabitation**

QUALITATIVE CASE-STUDY: SAMPLING

- **The fieldwork carried out** October 2005 to January 2006, capital Bratislava
- **Sampling strategy**
 - gradual purposive sampling, start with typical cases
 - snowball for specific cases (through social networks of the interviewees): single mothers, working mothers, and for contrasting cases: 2 childless women
- **39 in-depth interviews: 29 biographical and 10 semi-structured**
 - older cohorts (born in the late 1940s and during 1950s) and younger cohorts (born 1968-1980)
 - 12 with women who started a family and had their first child in the 1970s = 'the mothers'
 - 27 with women born in the 1970s = 'the daughters'
 - 7 mother-daughter dyads

QUALITATIVE CASE-STUDY: INTERVIEWING AND ANALYSIS

○ Biographical interviewing

- Generative narrative question:

“I would like you to tell me about the part of your life, which is connected to your family, how did you start your family and how the children came about. You can start at the moment, when you started to think about having a family or about having children.”

- Autonomous narration followed by additional questioning — questions to further elaborate the narrative and external questions

○ Analysis: coding procedures of the Grounded theory, within-case and across cases constant contrasting, semantic networks

QUALITATIVE CASE-STUDY: SAMPLE STRUCTURE

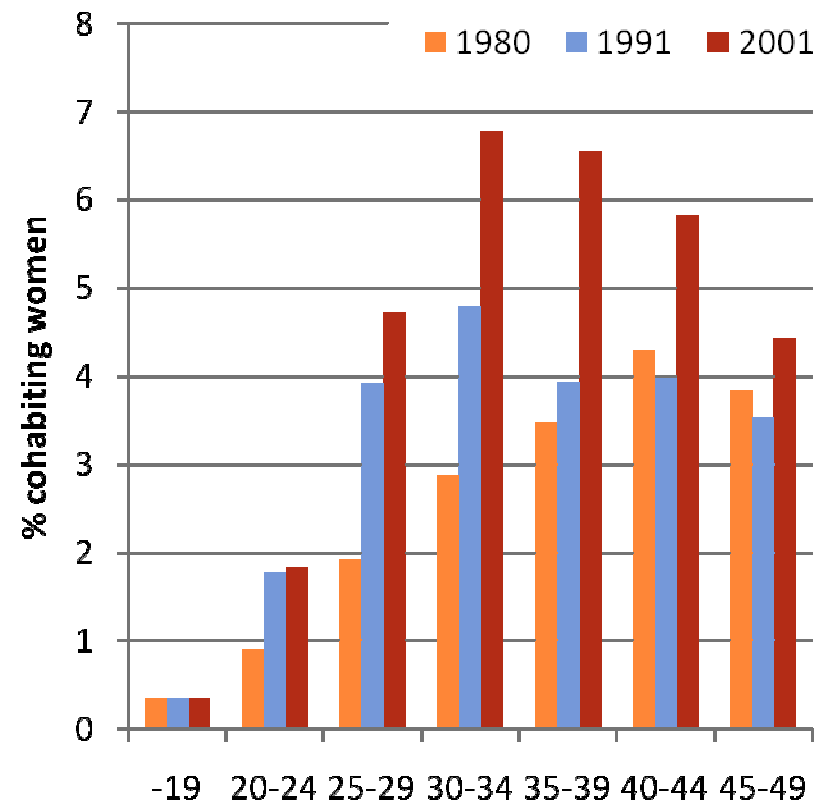
Characteristics		Mothers (N=12)	Daughters (N=27)
Educational attainment	University	4	20
	Secondary	8	7
Religious identity	Practicing RC	4	10
	Not practicing	1	6
	None	7	11
Number of children	0	0	2
	1	2	17
	2	6	4
	3+	4	4
Intended number of children	1, 1-2	1	8
	2	5	7
	2-3, 3+	6	12
Number of siblings	0	3	0
	1	4	17
	2+	5	10
Premarital conception*	yes	4	7
Extra-marital birth*	yes	0	3
Cohabitation	yes	1	13

* Only population at risk included (without childless women).

ESTIMATED INCIDENCE OF COHABITATION

- EVS 1999: living with a partner without being married about 6% never-married, 1/4 widowed, 1/3 divorced men and women
- EVS 2008: registered partnership (0,5 -3,4% women depending on birth cohort)
- Cross-sectional bias: premarital cohabitation is a temporary, transient state => underestimated value for never-married

Proportion cohabiting never-married women by age at census



Source: censuses 1980-2001, author's computations

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION

- Surveys show high, although weakening, value of marriage...

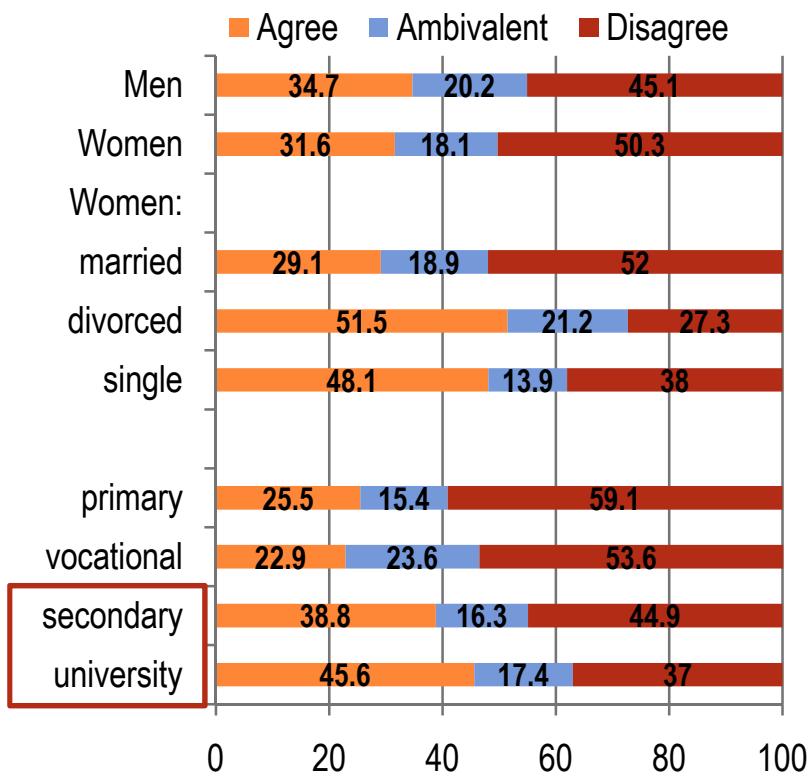
% disagree to the statement "marriage is an outdated institution"

	EVS1991	EVS1999	EVS2008
do 1944	90,1	87,9	91,7
1945-1959	83,7	83,4	89,3
1960-1974	81,4	79,5	82,4
1975-1990	x	70,3	79,8
Total	85,6	81,4	84,9

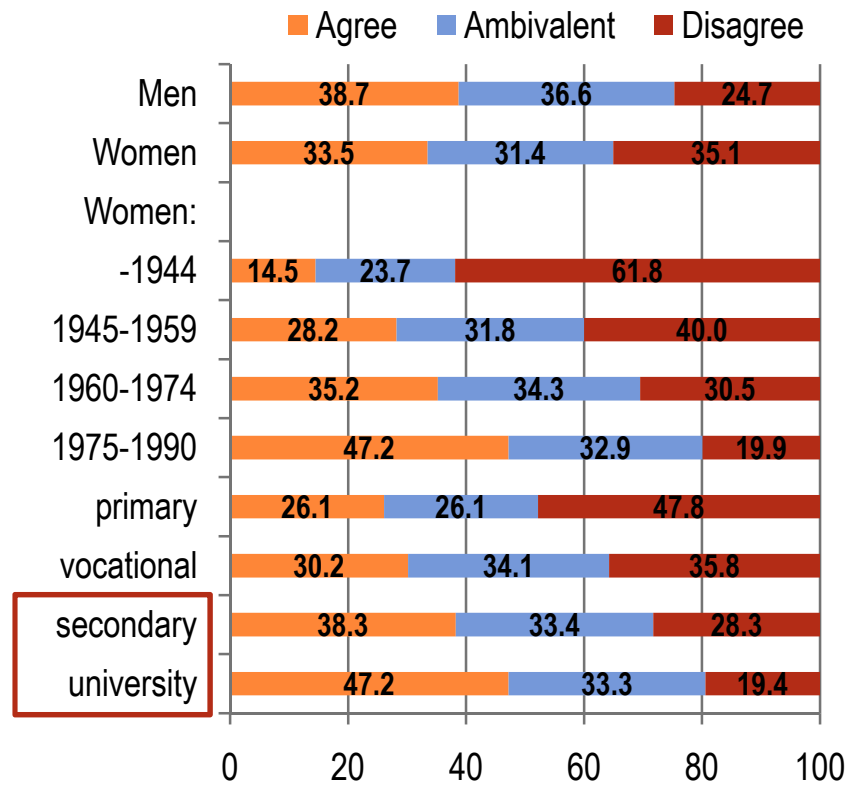
- ... and polarised attitudes towards cohabitation across cohorts and educational spectrum

DO YOU AGREE IF A COUPLE LIVE TOGETHER WITHOUT MARRIAGE?

ISSP 2002



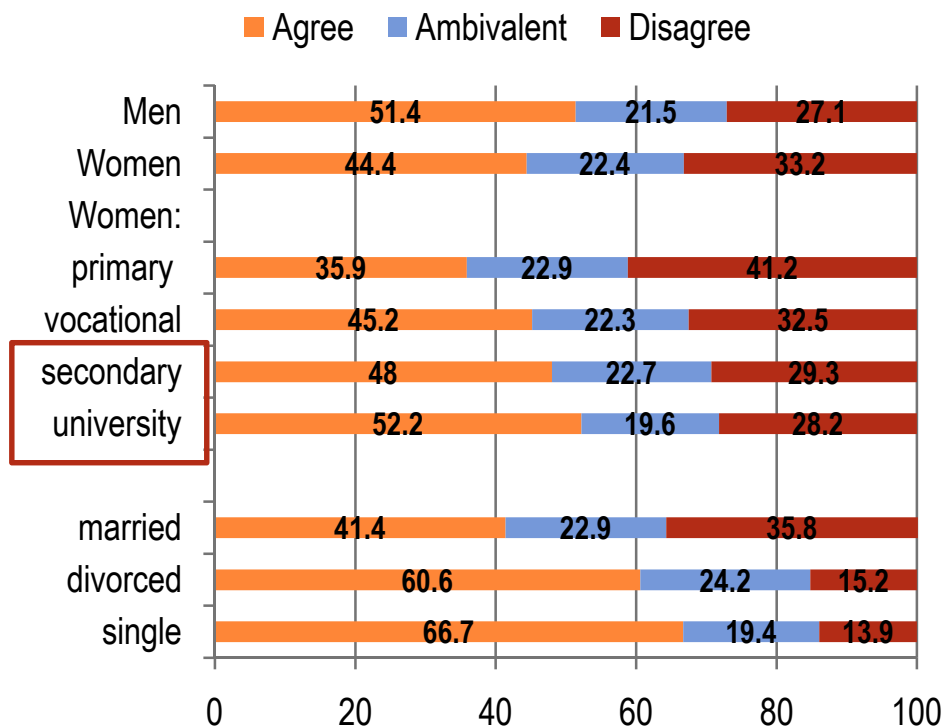
EVS 2008



ACCEPTANCE OF AND EXPERIENCE WITH PREMARITAL COHABITATION

- Premarital cohabitation approved more than cohabitation as an alternative to marriage

ISSP 2002: Do you agree to a couple living together before getting married?



EVS 2008

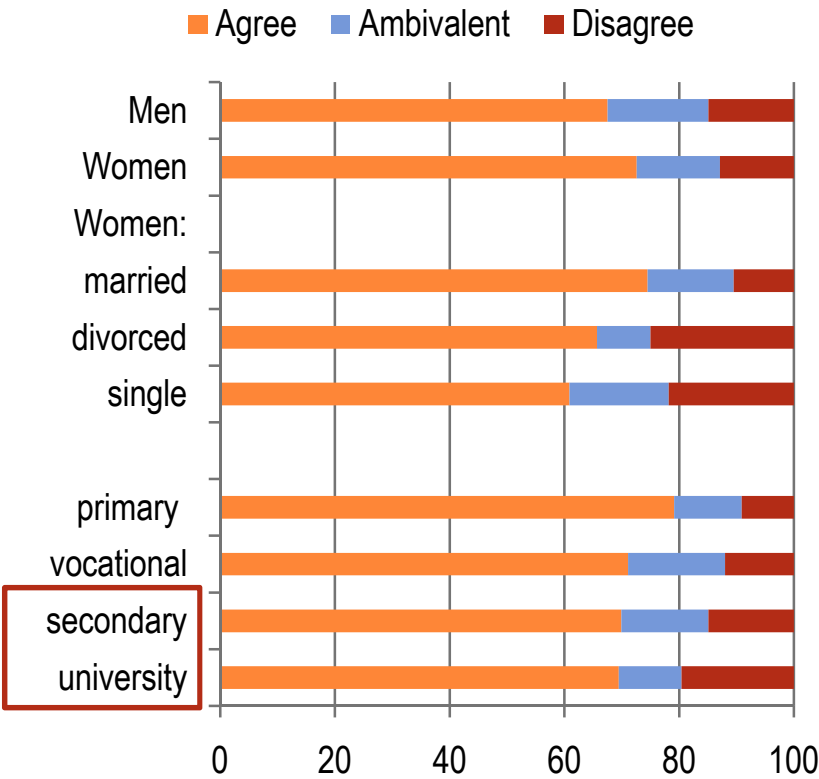
% women who ever cohabited before marriage

Birth cohort	%
do 1944	3,7
1945-59	10,3
1960-1974	22,9
1975-1990	32,6

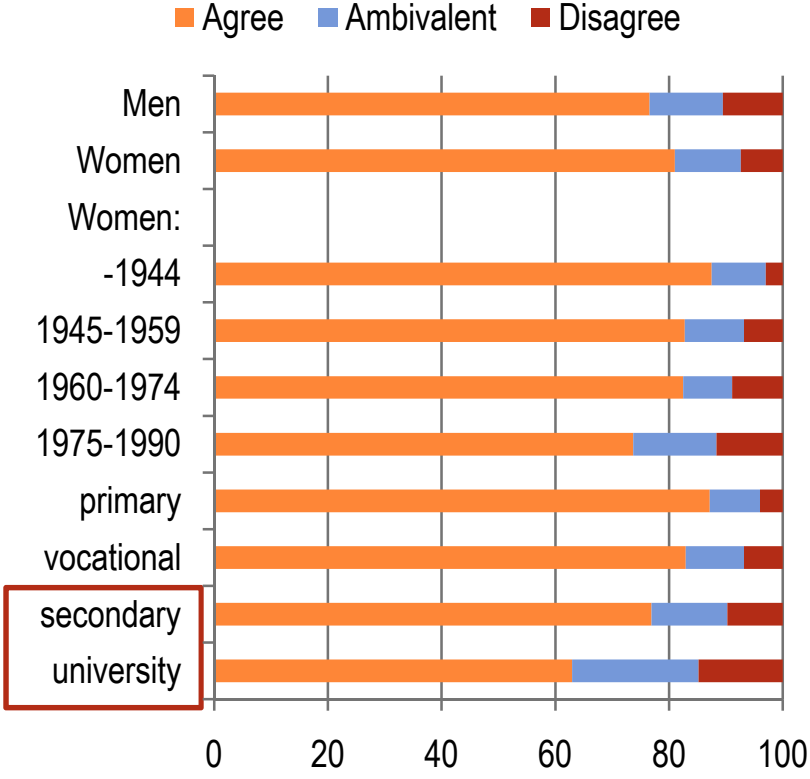
University educated women more likely to cohabit: 27% compared to 17 % among other educational categories

PEOPLE OUGHT TO GET MARRIED IF THEY WANT KIDS

ISSP 2002



EVS 2008



COHABITATION AND INCREASING HETEROGENEITY OF LIFE-COURSE PATHWAYS

- Increasing variability in ordering of reproductive life events
- Changing timing of life transitions in young adulthood

Sequencing of reproductive life events	Mothers		Daughters	
	N = 12	%	N = 25	%
Dating - Marriage - 1st conception - 1st birth	7	58%	9	36%
Dating - 1st conception - Marriage - 1st birth	4	33%	4	16%
Dating - 1st conception - 1st birth	0	0%	4	16%
Cohabitation - Marriage - 1st conception - 1st birth	1	9%	3	12%
Cohabitation - 1st conception - Marriage - 1st birth	0	0%	3	12%
Cohabitation - 1st conception - 1st birth - Marriage	0	0%	2	8%

COHABITATION – OLDER INTERVIEWEES

*“Well, before [in the 1970s] it was kind of WEIRD because, (.3) before it was the way that * people did not have a reason to live unmarried. They even had advantages when they got married. They could take newly-wed loans and that was an important thing.” Tanja’s mother, G1, 1946, artist, mar, 3 kids (original emphasis)*

“At that time, it did not exist that partners would live together not being married. That did not exist. Simply, all people I know would look at me- they would think I was a slut. (...) because a woman should live with a man only after marriage.” Livia, G1, marr, 1B 24

“Everyone was married and the one who was not was unstable. Like there was a woman who lived one month with one man, then next month with another and so on.” Tanja’s mother, G1, marr, 1B 25

COHABITATION – CATEGORIES OF DISAPPROVAL

- **no legal protection**
- **unstable, lack of commitment = irresponsible behaviour towards the partner**
- **high risk of union dissolution**
- **tradition = not a normal phenomenon in Slovak society**
- **against the religious moral code, life in sin**
 - **all younger interviewees who identified themselves deeply religious disapproved cohabitation**

COHABITATION – YOUNGER INTERVIEWEES

“I think that it is a very valuable experience. To test in this way to live together before they have kids and get married. Because wedding is more kind of a social event, it does not play such a role, but before they have a child, they should definitely try it because it’s something totally different.” Margita, G2, 1979, teacher, mar, 1 child

- Co-residence important transition in partnership, next step in partnership
- A testing phase, probatory period before making a permanent commitment
- Premarital cohabitation prevents divorce
- Should become a universal premarital experience

- disapproval to raising children in cohabitation

MARRIAGE – YOUNGER INTERVIEWEES

“Somehow it is a logical consequence for me: if a child, then a marriage as well. I am perhaps a little more conservative kind of person in this respect, I think.” Eva, G2, 1973, accountant, coh, childless

“The first thing my mum asked was when are we going to get married, cos’ she couldn’t take it that, that we’re living together not being married. And since then it’s been all the time the core of the discussion. So, it was her who provoked it.” Emma, G2, 1973, manager, mar, 1 child

- A setting for upbringing children
- Start a coresidential partnership, intimate life – in case of practicing catholics
- Live in an orderly way – if religious, or one of the partners religious

MOTIVATION TO ENTER MARRIAGE – YOUNGER INTERVIEWEES

- **Having a child**
- **Social pressure:**
 - Prevents longer cohabitation spells
 - Prevents cohabitation, in particular when a couple shares a household with parents
- **Influence within a peer group, social network**

MARRIAGE – OLDER INTERVIEWEES

“For me it was an escape from that pri- well, prison. Because I was feeling there [at home] awful. Not all friends of mine had so strict upbringing. And I admit I envied them. Well, but when we were dating with my husband and we were getting along and everything was ok I have very quickly agreed to get married, because I wanted to leave from there, I wanted to leave from my family.” Livia, G1, 1952, administration, mar, 2 kids

- Marriage lost its meaning as a start of intimate partnership before the 1970s – premarital sex commonly accepted
- Linked to leaving parental home process, a means of gaining independence and autonomy from the family of origin
- Status of an adult person
- Transition to coresidential partnership
- A commitment, permanency of the partnership
- Security, protective role - support during the time of no or low income, parental leave

MARRIAGE AND PREGNANCY – OLDER INTERVIEWEES

“We were brought up in a way that a woman who would get pregnant must marry the partner she conceived with (...) I think, I do not know any girl who would get pregnant and did not get married. She simply must have stepped into marriage. ALTHOUGH she knew that they do not get along at all and maybe they would get divorced after three years. But the wedding took place. ... And it was always considered better, when she was a divorcee with a child compared to a SINGLE girl with a child.” Livia, G1, 1952, administration, mar, 2 kids (original emphasis)

“My mother told me I do not have to get married. That was, like, taking that era into consideration, I was getting married in 1977, and that upbringing was kind of like, that it cannot be - to become a single mother. There was one in our street and everyone gossiped about her. That’s her, the single mother.” Erika, G1, 1950, lawyer, div-coh, 1 child

- Important for legitimating child [due to social pressure, not legal constraints]
- A strategy to avoid single motherhood [stigmatisation]
- Status of a married woman or a divorcee more acceptable than a single mother

PREGNANCY AND MARRIAGE – YOUNGER INTERVIEWEES

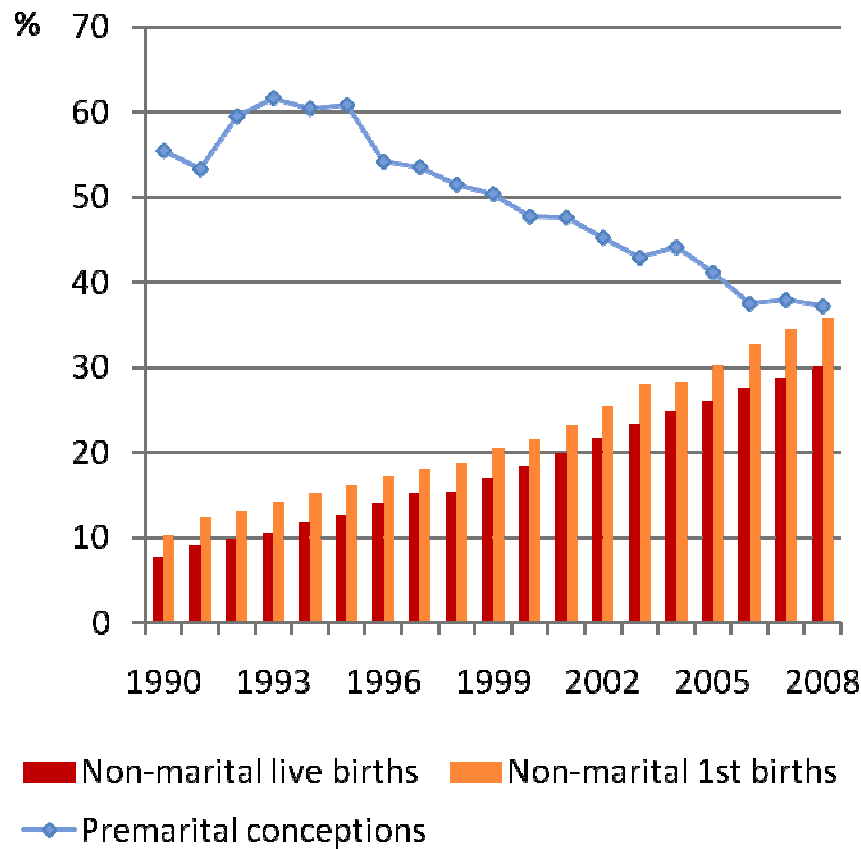
“...It is not, like, automatic for me that I have a child with you and I will marry you, that he has to marry me. Life if, that child is mine and I will take care of it, I would have to accept it, but I would not marry a man if I knew I do not want to be with him, or that I do get along with him, just because he is the father of my child. Simply, if I made one mistake I would not make another one and marry him.”
Danica, G2, marr, 1B 25

“I do not like it if people get married just because of the child and they, like, do not like each other so much, or they did not know each other much before.” Klara, G2, cohab, childless

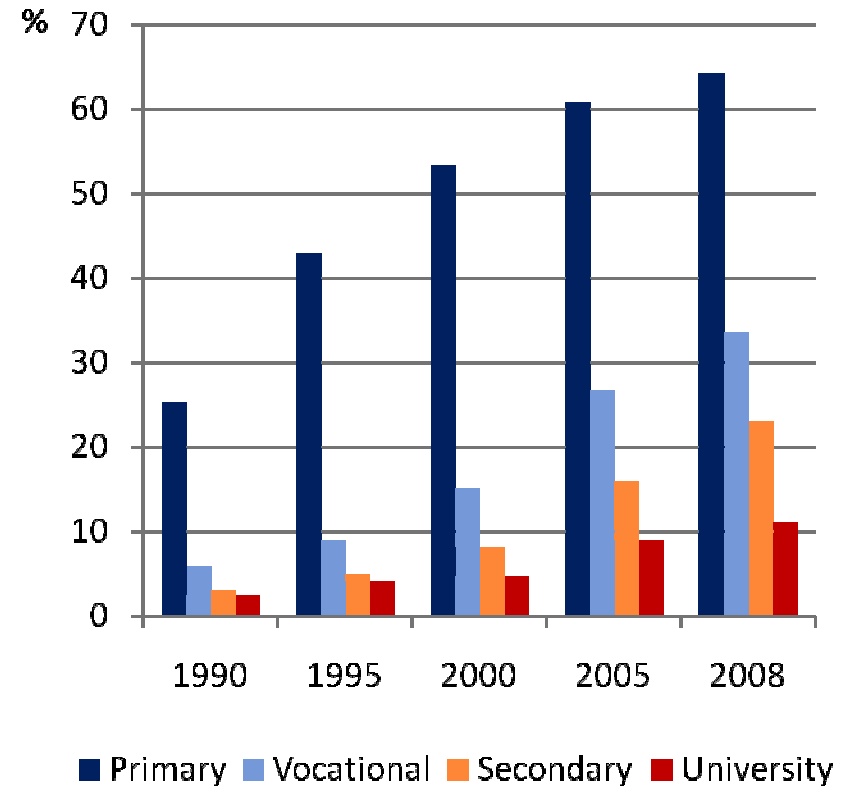
- Negative perception of shotgun marriages
- Emphasis on partnership quality and stability
- Single motherhood not stigmatised

NON-MARITAL CHILDBEARING

Premarital conceptions and % non-marital births



Non-marital births by educational attainment of the mother at birth



Source: Potančoková (2009)

CHANGING UNION FORMATION: PARTNERSHIP TRANSITION

- Partnership transition (Kiernan 2002)
 - 1st stage: deviant or avantgarde phenomenon practiced by a small group of population; majority marries directly; *childbearing highly institutionalised into marriage, legitimating the child a strong motivation to enter marriage.*
 - 2nd stage: cohabitations functions as a prelude to marriage, predominantly a childless phase. *Childbearing within cohabitation largely disapproved, however, justified exceptions, emphasis on the quality of the relationship between the partners, not on legitimating the child and avoiding single motherhood.*
 - 3rd stage: becomes socially acceptable as an alternative/variation to marriage, becoming a parent no longer restricted to cohabitation
 - 4rd stage: cohabitation indistinguishable from marriage
- Different meaning / function of cohabitation across cohorts, social strata

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

- Premarital cohabitation is becoming a normative part of the courtship process
- Power relationships in family and living arrangements, in the past social policies influential, institutional context?
- Approval across younger cohorts and decreasing disapproval among older cohorts => weakening social pressure, further increase in future
- Issue of commitment, engagement, intention to enter marriage
- emphasis to partnership stability, reaction to the perceived increasing instability of marriage and divorce
- urban phenomenon?
- Few reasons to enter marriage — postponement, waiting for an impulse to get married?



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

potancok@infostat.sk

LANGUAGE

- A problem how to ask about cohabitation
- EVS: living with a partner; living with a partner as men and wife prior to marriage
- Older cohorts, especially interviewees who disapproved cohabitation often used pejorative collocations and expressions, some religious women addressed it a life in sin
- Younger cohorts — living together, cohabiting partner commonly addressed as a boyfriend/ partner; an exclusive term does not exist
- A missing common term equivalent to cohabitation (an academic term) signals that cohabitation is still not fully institutionalised

QUALITATIVE CASE-STUDY: INTERVIEWING

○ Biographical interviewing

- **Generative narrative question:**

“I would like you to tell me about the part of your life, which is connected to your family, how did you start your family and how the children came about. You can start at the moment, when you started to think about having a family or about having children.”

- **Autonomous narration followed by additional questioning — questions to further elaborate the narrative and external questions**

- **Life trajectory sketch (biogram) and a short questionnaire (main personal data)**

