

## Cohabitation before marriage or instead of marriage. Poland in a process of cohabitation diffusion.

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Families in a Changing Europe. Challenges, Conflicts and Interventions.  
6th ESFR Congress, Lillehammer, September 26-29, 2012

### Model of cohabitation diffusion (Kiernan 2002)

1. Non-marital cohabitation is rare and limited to marginal groups of society, deviant or avant-garde behaviour
2. Incidence of cohabitation increases. It spreads to other social groups and becomes perceived as a testing period preceding marriage
3. Couples remain in non-marital unions longer. Cohabitation becomes acceptable for parenthood and an acceptable alternative to marriage
4. Cohabitation becomes equivalent to marriage

## Cohabitation in Poland

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### Evidence from cross-sectional data:

#### Population Census:

1988: 1.3% of unions

1995: 1.7% of unions

2002: 2.1% of unions (1.2% of all individuals aged 15+)

2012: approx. 4.2% of unions (2.4% of all individuals aged 15+)

ESS2006: 4.5% of unions

- ▶ According to Population Census of 2002 and previous studies on the topic (Fihel 2005, Slany 2002), cohabitants are mainly **low-educated** and **low income** persons, often **unemployed** or **inactive**.
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## The starting point... (previous studies)

(Matysiak 2009, Mynarska & Bernardi 2007, Mynarska & Matysiak 2010)

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- ▶ **Combination of retrospective quantitative and qualitative methods to establish at what stage of cohabitation diffusion Poland is:**
  - ▶ From 1989 to 2006 incidence of cohabitation was increasing and spreading to various (better educated) social groups
  - ▶ Cohabitation was increasingly perceived positively as a testing period before marriage, but definitely it was not an appropriate union for childbearing
  - ▶ Poland reached **the second stage** of the cohabitation diffusion process, as defined by Kiernan (2002).
- ▶ **According to the theoretical model, next years should bring an increasing acceptance for childbearing within cohabitation**.....

## Research aims

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- ▶ To advance our understanding of cohabitation diffusion in Poland by addressing the issue of childbearing in consensual unions.
  - ▶ Are there any situations when cohabitation provides satisfactory conditions for childbearing (can be treated as an **alternative to marriage**)?
  - ▶ Qualitative study: to generate hypotheses about who remains in cohabitation after entering parenthood
  - ▶ Quantitative study: to test these hypotheses on the representative sample
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## Qualitative study

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- ▶ FAMWELL – Family Change and Subjective Well-Being  
80 semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducted in 2011 with women living in non-standard family arrangements.
  - ▶ Selected a sub-sample of 26 never married women aged 25-42, **living in cohabitation**, childless (n=12) or mothers (n=14).
  - ▶ Heterogeneous sample to capture a variety of life situations
    - ▶ Three regions / nine different localizations
    - ▶ Big cities and small towns
    - ▶ Different educational levels
    - ▶ Various duration of cohabitation
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## Qualitative study – the sample

Variable		Childless (n=12)	Mothers (n=14)
Age	25-30	8	4
	30-35	1	5
	35+	3	5
Size of the municipality	Over 500 000	4	2
	100 000 – 500 000	3	5
	50 000 – 99 000	2	3
	Under 50 000	3	4
Educational level	Post-secondary or university	6	5
	Secondary general	2	2
	Secondary vocational	4	7
How long in cohabitation?	Under 2 years	5	4
	2-5 years	3	4
	6-10 years	2	2
	Over 10 years	2	4

## Childless women versus mothers

### Childless women

- ▶ They have not reached the stage to marry **yet**, but they treat marriage as a natural 'the next step'

### Mothers

- ▶ They have 'missed' the moment to marry (at least the child's father) or they do not expect it to ever come
- ▶ Reasons – three emerging, interrelated patterns:
  - ▶ quality of the relationship
  - ▶ formal obstacles
  - ▶ subjective obstacles

## (1) Quality of the relationship

- ▶ **Current:** A woman experiences problems with her partner, sees 'no future' for the relationship

*This relationship is not ideal. It has never been and it never will be. This is also a reason, why we are not married. But he's a father.*  
(Magda, 37, cohabiting for 11 years)

- ▶ **Previous:** A woman was abandoned by her child's father or the relationship ended because of alcohol / drugs / abuse. Or her current partner is divorced and doesn't want to marry again.
- ▶ **Witnessed:** A woman has witnessed a bad marriage of her parents, a parental divorce and consequently fears marriage.

*I was three years old when my father left us, so all the time, I assume that if there is a wedding, there is a divorce later.*  
(Edyta, 28, cohabiting for 5 years)

## (2) Formal obstacles

Initially some formal (legal) obstacles existed that prevented marriage. The couple „got used to” cohabitation then.

The obstacles included:

- ▶ A lack of partner's divorce

*When we met, he was in separation. The whole process of getting divorce lasted for a really long time. He finally got divorced only 7 years ago. I used to want to formalize our relationship a lot ... but when I finally could get married – I didn't want to anymore. It's fine this way. I don't need to formalize it anymore.*

(Agata, 36, cohabiting for 9 years)

- ▶ Teenage pregnancy – needed the court permission to get married

*In general, back then, it used to be difficult to formalize the relationship if one was a minor...*

(Zuzanna, 32, cohabiting for 15 years)

### (3) Subjective obstacles

There are no formal obstacles, but for some external reasons, the women are not able to get married *the way they want it*.

- ▶ A lack of financial means to have a proper wedding party, other financial priorities, spending money, time and energy on organizing a place to live, etc.

*There are huge expenses that come with the wedding. After all, when one wants to get married, one wants to have a real wedding, not a small dinner-party at home.*

*(Anna, 25, cohabiting for 1 year)*

- ▶ Not able to have a Church wedding (a partner is a divorcee), and state marriage has no real meaning, it is just „a paper”.

### Qualitative study – conclusions

- ▶ The history of previous relationships – of the woman or of her partner – appeared crucial.
- ▶ Some cohabiting mothers recall that marriage used to be important for them, but once it got postponed (for formal or subjective reasons) – they've lost interest in it.
- ▶ Only one cohabiting mother says she had never had any strong desire for getting married.
- ▶ Cohabiting with children does not seem to be a woman's free choice, but rather an effect of external obstacles or negative experiences of various type.

- ▶ **Childbearing in cohabitation: Pattern of disadvantage?**

(Perelli-Harris et al., 2010)

## Quantitative study

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- ▶ To investigate whether the picture depicted in the qualitative study holds at the population level
  - ▶ We analyzed unions and fertility histories collected in the **Polish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-PL)**, conducted in 2011 on the representative sample of 20.000 respondents.
  - ▶ Analytic sample consisted of 1247 women, born 1970-1993, who have ever cohabited.
  - ▶ We considered all cohabitations (not limiting our sample to the first unions), as qualitative study has shown an importance of previous partnerships. Altogether, we analysed 1383 cohabitations.
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## Quantitative analyses – part 1

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- ▶ How pregnancy and birth impact unions of cohabiting women?
- ▶ A continuous-time competing hazard model to model the entry to marriage or separation for women in cohabitation.
- ▶ Each woman was observed since the entry to cohabitation till she experienced the event or till the date of the interview, whatever came first.
- ▶ Key independent variable: pregnancy / parity status
- ▶ Other variables, suggested in the qualitative study and literature:
  - ▶ R's parents' divorce, R' divorce, children from previous relationships
  - ▶ Level of education

Controlling for age, cohort, duration of cohabitation, religiosity in the parental home.

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## Quantitative analyses – part 1

Relative risks of marriage or separation during cohabitation.  
Joint competing risks model.

	Marriage	Separation
Childless	1	1
Pregnancy	<b>3,328**</b>	<b>0,439**</b>
Child 0-6 months	1,417*	0,893
Child 6 – 12 months	0,822	0,741
Child 1-2 years	0,809	0,735
Child 2+	0,811	0,784
In education	<b>0,613**</b>	<b>1,809**</b>
Primary education	<b>0,436**</b>	1,659
Vocational education	<b>0,567**</b>	1,014
Secondary education	<b>0,737**</b>	1,541*
Tertiary education	1	1
R's parents divorced (Ref.: no parents' divorce)	<b>0,799**</b>	<b>1,316**</b>
R divorced (Ref.: R never divorced)	<b>0,532**</b>	<b>0,696**</b>
R has children from previous unions (Ref.: none)	<b>0,672**</b>	1,012
R's partner has children from previous unions (Ref.: none)	<b>0,585**</b>	<b>4,415**</b>

\*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1

## Quantitative analyses – part 2

- ▶ To investigate who remains in cohabitation after having a child (does not get married during the pregnancy or soon after a child is born) we extend the previous model.
- ▶ We estimate a continuous-time competing hazard model in which a cohabiting woman may experience one of the four events:
  - (1) Gets pregnant and stays in cohabitation at least until a child is 6 months old (continue cohabitation & birth);
  - (2) Gets pregnant and marries during the pregnancy or before a child is 6 months old (marriage & birth);
  - (3) Does not get pregnant and gets married (marriage, no birth)
  - (4) Separates (separation).

Controlling for age, cohort and duration of cohabitation.



## Quantitative analyses – part 2

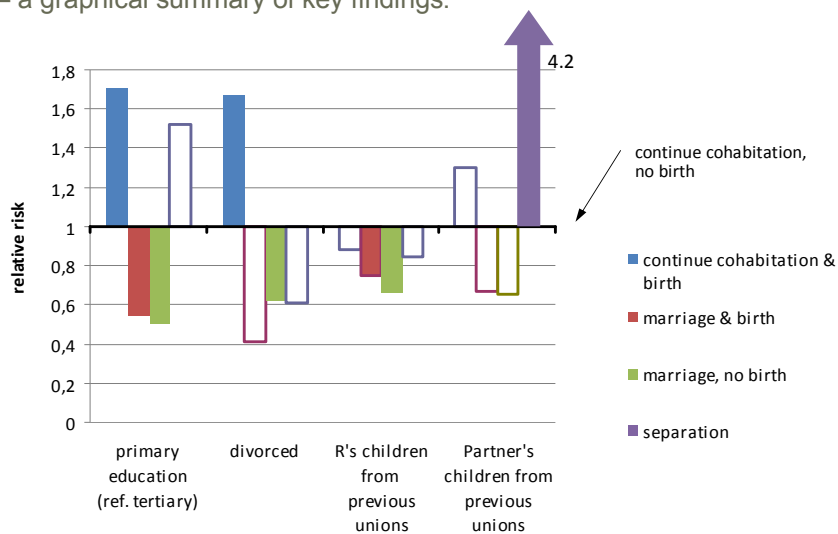
Parameter estimates from continuous-time competing hazard model of first life-event in cohabitation.

	Continue cohab + birth	Marriage + birth	Marriage No birth	Separation
In education	0,758	0,663*	<b>0,637**</b>	<b>1,810**</b>
Primary education	<b>1,701**</b>	0,543*	<b>0,507**</b>	1,523
Vocational education	<b>1,715**</b>	0,886	<b>0,659**</b>	1,046
Secondary education	1,201	1,011	0,84	1,489
Tertiary education	1	1	1	1
R's parents divorced (Ref.: not divorced)	1,04	1,093	<b>0,688**</b>	<b>1,469**</b>
R divorced (Ref.: R never divorced)	<b>1,669*</b>	0,409	0,625*	0,613
R has children from previous unions (Ref.: none)	0,883	<b>0,747**</b>	<b>0,664**</b>	0,848
R's partner has children from previous unions (Ref.: none)	1,299	0,666	0,656	<b>4,238**</b>

\*\*p<0.05 \*p<0.1

## Quantitative analyses – part 2

Continuous-time competing hazard model of first life-event in cohabitation – a graphical summary of key findings.



## Summary and Conclusions

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- ▶ Pregnancy and giving birth continue to be strong incentives to marry
- ▶ Based on our qualitative study we hypothesized that childbearing in cohabitation is rather a pattern of disadvantage than woman's free choice. It is associated with low quality of the relationship or with negative experiences in previous unions. These previous experiences may have produced formal but also mental barriers to marriage
- ▶ We found support for this hypothesis in our quantitative study Cohabitation cannot be seen as a real alternative to marriage in the Polish context. Its relation to childbearing is too weak and has negative associations.
- ▶ Similar findings were obtained for many countries, where cohabitation is more widespread: Norway, Russia, and the Netherlands (Perelli-Harris et al., 2010), UK (Berrington 2001, Steele et al., 2006) and also for US (Brown and Booth, 1996)

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**Thank you for your attention!**  
**Comments, questions:**

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