

"If we talk about real love, we talk about marriage"
What makes marriage so different from non-marital cohabitation?

Monika Mynarska

Institute of Psychology
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw



Anna Matysiak

Institute of Statistics and Demography
Warsaw School of Economics



Background

- ▶ Share of non-marital cohabitation: 1.3% to 4.5% of all unions between 1988 and 2006
(Central Statistical Office, European Social Survey)
- ▶ Cross-sectional data = underestimation
- ▶ 1990 – 1994 cohabitation constituted 12% of all unions formed and this percentage has tripled by the years 2004-2006
(Matysiak 2009)
- ▶ Still, non-marital cohabitation is a temporary living arrangement (median duration = 3 years) likely to convert into marriage

Question

Why don't young people remain in cohabitation but choose to get married instead?

Mynarska, M., Matysiak, A. „If we talk about real love, we talk about marriage”

Qualitative data

- ▶ Semi-structured in-depth interviews with young men and women:
 - ▶ 19 childless women, age 20-29 and (in most cases) their partners
 - ▶ 7 women with one child, age 26-30 and their partners

 - ▶ Total 48 interviews
 - ▶ 11 cohabiting
 - ▶ 26 married (10 – married directly, 16 – married after cohabitation)
 - ▶ 11 dating or no partner

 - ▶ In most cases: secondary or tertiary education

 - ▶ Conducted: September 2004 – May 2005 in Warsaw
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Cohabitation vs. Marriage

- ▶ Meanings of cohabitation:
 - ▶ Testing period
 - ▶ Next step in a relationship development
 - ▶ **Four main points of reference** in comparing marriage and cohabitation:
 - ▶ Commitment
 - ▶ Religion
 - ▶ Social perception / recognition
 - ▶ **Childbearing**
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(1) Commitment

- ▶ Cohabitation:
 - ▶ “Not stable”, “falls apart faster”
 - ▶ a couple has “no commitment and can separate easily”
- ▶ Marriage:
 - ▶ “Commitment”, “security”, “to make her feel certain”
 - ▶ “A final ring to hold everything together”

“This relationship, which is not sealed with this paper, is not stable. Because one of the parents could get the impression that he or she is free and not a member of the family. And if any problems arise, it would be easier to blow the relationship out.”

(Male, 24, married after cohabitation)

(2) Religion

▶ Cohabitation:

- ▶ “It is not approved by the Church, it is rather condemned”

▶ Marriage:

- ▶ **Marital vows** “in front of people, in front of God, in Church”, “more binding”
- ▶ Security, stability, commitment (!)

“When you enter only a state marriage and if something didn't spark there, something didn't match and we can't get along, then you just take a divorce, quick and easy. And the church wedding is a kind of commitment.”

(Male, 30, married directly)

(3) Social perception

▶ Cohabitation:

- ▶ Partners: “friends”, “acquaintances”
- ▶ Cohabiting = “concubinage”, “living at a cat's paw”, “living together with a cycling license”

▶ Marriage:

- ▶ “Sanctioning their relationship in front of the family”

“I could say that this is my husband, and this is important to me, and it changes the social situation somehow. Now, when I go to his grandma for Christmas or something, they call me his acquaintance. They don't even call it right. So it's so annoying.”

(Female, 22, dating)

Marriage – “a higher stage”

- ▶ Recurring aspect of commitment
- ▶ Marriage = real thing
 - ▶ *“Only after marriage can one talk about a real couple” – marriage constitutes the moment of “forming the real family.”*

“I know a couple that lived together for 6 years without marriage, they still don’t have it. He simply doesn’t respect a woman when he doesn’t commit – so to speak – to her. Because that’s the only thing a man can do, he can get married. (...) from a man’s side it’s still marriage that is the only sign of true and sincere love, of respect for this woman.”

(Female, 22, married after cohabitation)

Consequences for childbearing

“We knew that when we wanted to have a child, then we would have to arrange a wedding”

(Female, 25, married after cohabitation)

“[If] she didn’t get married and had a child – that could mean that something didn’t work out for her. And when they are married and they have a child, they are happy and all in all everything looks different.”

(Male, 21, dating)

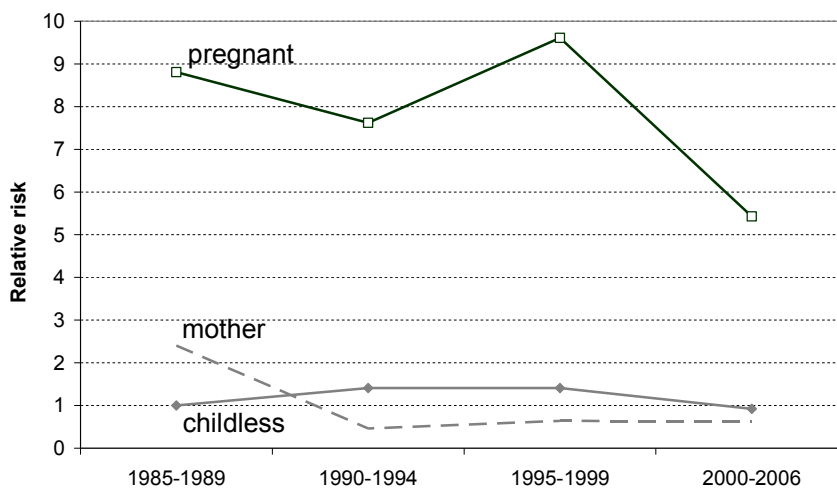
- ▶ Quantitative evidence
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Quantitative data

- ▶ Retrospective survey „Employment, Family and Education Survey (EFES)”
 - ▶ Monthly data on 3,000 life histories of women born 1966-1981 (25-40 at the time of the interview)
 - ▶ Conducted in 2006
- ▶ Event History Analysis
 - ▶ Analyzed transition: from cohabitation to marriage

Cohabitation & Childbearing

- ▶ Relative risks of transition from cohabitation to marriage, by parity- and-pregnancy status



Outlook

- ▶ Marriage is perceived as „a higher stage” of a relationship:
 - ▶ Characterized by a higher level of commitment and stability
 - ▶ Socially recognized
 - ▶ Approved by Church
 - ▶ Consequently – marriage provides good conditions for childbearing, while cohabitation does not

 - ▶ Cohabitation – a dead end

 - ▶ Are these meanings changing? What are attitudes towards extramarital childbearing?
 - ▶ Census 2011
 - ▶ FAMWELL project (www.sgh.waw.pl/famwell)
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Thank you!

m.mynarska@uksw.edu.pl
amatys@sgh.waw.pl
