

The outliers: Who has children in cohabitation in Poland and why?

Anna Matysiak
Warsaw School of Economics

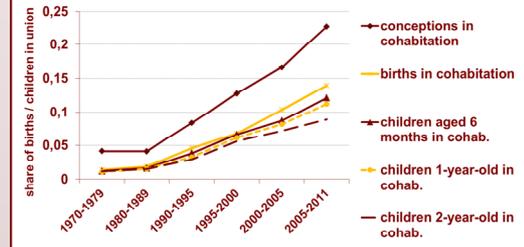
Monika Mynarska
Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

INTRODUCTION

- Cohabitation is still relatively little diffused in Poland. In 2011 only 4% of all couples cohabited.
- Cohabitation is usually a short-term, pre-marital living arrangement.
- Marriage constitutes the most appropriate context for childbearing.

Even though childbearing in cohabitation becomes more common – pregnancy remains a strong incentive to marry. Couples that bear children in informal unions are still „the outliers”.

Research aim: We investigate who are the cohabitants who break the strong social norm and remain unmarried despite an arrival of a child and what are the reasons behind their behaviour?
Are they forerunners of a new life-style?
Or are their choices constrained by external circumstances? ('pattern of disadvantage', Perelli-Harris et al. 2010)



SAMPLE & METHOD

Mixed-methods approach: Qualitative study to explore reasons for bearing children in cohabitation + Quantitative study to verify their role at the population level

QUALITATIVE

- Semi-structured interviews with 26 cohabiting women (mothers and childless women as contrasting cases)
- Women aged 25-40, heterogeneous in respect to a place of residence and duration of cohabitation
- Education: tertiary, secondary general and secondary vocational
- Interview guideline covered questions on relationship and childbearing histories / intentions
- Bottom-up coding to identify key reasons for which women have children in cohabitation

QUANTITATIVE

- Data: GGS-PL (2010/2011)
- Sample: cohabiting women born in 1970-1993 (aged 18-43 at survey). 1247 women and 183 cohabitation episodes
- Method: Competing risk model. Events:
 - Birth in cohabitation
 - Entry to marriage during pregnancy
 - Entry to marriage, not preceded by a conception
 - Separation

RESULTS

QUALITATIVE

Women who gave birth in cohabitation – compared to their childless counterparts – seem to have missed the moment to marry (at least their child's father). There are three key reasons for that:

(1) Quality of a (current / previous / parents') relationship

- **Current:** Problems in the relationship, 'no future' for it

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 [so we are together]. (Magda, 37)

- **Previous:** A child's father left or the relationship ended because of alcohol / drugs / abuse or the current partner is divorced and doesn't want to marry again

- **Parents':** A woman has witnessed her parents' divorce and thus 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)

(2) Formal obstacles

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

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. (Agata, 36)

(3) Subjective obstacles

No formal obstacles, but for some external reasons a desired wedding is not possible:
• A lack of financial means to have a proper wedding party, other financial priorities

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)

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

QUANTITATIVE

To test the role of factors, important for bearing children within cohabitation that were distinguished in the qualitative study, we introduced the following explanatory covariates into our model:

(1) Quality of a (current / previous / parents') relationship:

- Experience of divorce by respondent's parents
- Experience of divorce by the respondent
- Having children from previous unions by the respondent
- Having children from previous union by respondent's partner

(2) Formal obstacles:

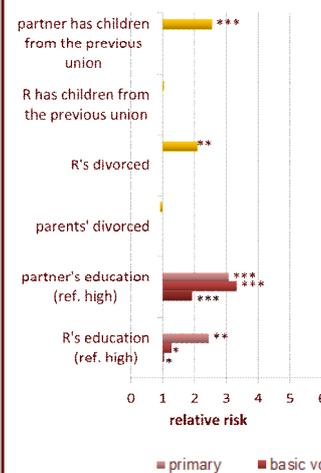
- Not possible to test as persons in marriage are not under the risk of marrying

(3) Subjective obstacles:

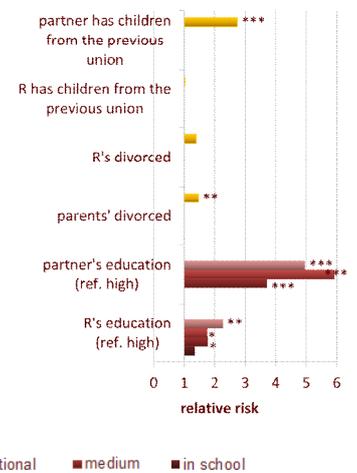
- Educational attainment of partners as a proxy of a material status of the couple

Additionally we controlled for respondent's age and calendar period.

Relative risk of a birth within cohabitation compared to entering marriage during pregnancy



Relative risk of a birth within cohabitation compared to entering marriage, not preceded by a conception



CONCLUSIONS

- Cohabitants who break the social norm to have children in marriage do so as they are constrained in their choices by external circumstances (pattern of disadvantage rather than a need to manifest a new life style). They are largely low educated and were already involved in serious but unsatisfactory relationships in the past

- Cohabitants who become parents in Poland usually have children from previous relationships, too – patchwork families. Regulations are needed to protect the rights of children, partners and ex-partners

Contact details:

Anna Matysiak • amatys@sggwaw.pl
Monika Mynarska • m.mynarska@uksw.edu.pl

Acknowledgements:

The study was conducted within the research project "Family Change and Subjective Well-Being" (FAMWELL) financed by the National Centre for Research and Development, under the Program Lider.

