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**Recent change in family behavior in Poland: The emergence of cohabitation
before and after the transition of 1989**

With the transition of the 1990s in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe the demographic behavior of their populations has changed drastically. This paper examines the emergence of cohabitation as a first union in Poland. The focus lies on the characteristics of this very select group of individuals who, now and in the past, chose to cohabit. In this respect Poland differs from many other post-communist countries because of its strong Catholic tradition. Furthermore, it had already experienced political and economic turmoil before the transition of 1989. Therefore, non-traditional family forms like cohabitation do not spread as widely as expected even when economic, political and social circumstances are changing.

The question remains whether or how these changes contributed to the acceptance of cohabitation or whether the uncertainty of the transition period coupled with the views and values of a highly religious population inhibited a marked increase in cohabitation.

In addition to some descriptive statistics we apply event history analysis because this allows us to study the impact of various individual-level characteristics of those who choose to cohabit. The data used are the Polish Fertility and Family Survey 1991 (FFS 1991) and some more recent data from selected waves of the Polish General Social Survey. They allow us to trace changes in cohabitation over time focusing on the characteristics of the respondents. This approach will give us a clearer picture of those who are choosing cohabitation over other family forms. They are likely to differ by

age, place of residence or by level of education. Differences between women and men are also expected.

The following analysis is focussing on the cohabitation of young adults who have not been married previously. Therefore, cohabiting couples who are living with a new partner after the dissolution of a first or even second marriage, or while awaiting divorce will not be considered.

So far, most of the literature on non-traditional family forms deals with this topic in the context of Western industrialized countries with not much empirical research having been done on the formerly communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Further, the usual theoretical approaches of applying Becker's concept of "Home economics" (Becker, 1981)¹ or the notion of the "Second Demographic Transition" introduced by van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe (1986)² do not seem to suffice in explaining the current situation in the countries mentioned above. Also, Esping-Andersen's (1990)³ typology of the different kinds of welfare states, explicitly developed for Western industrialized countries, cannot really be taken as a point of departure for the Central and Eastern European environment. Hence, the need for a theoretical approach and further empirical research for these countries is obvious.

Some preliminary descriptive analysis shows a considerable increase in out-of-wedlock births, their percentage rising from 6% to 12% between 1989 and 2000, as shown in Graph 1 below. The development in out-of-wedlock births points to significant changes. However, one needs to be careful and distinguish between regular first births within marriage, "early births" within marriage where the conception took place before the wedding, births within cohabitation and finally the births to lone mothers. According to Kamras, who has analyzed the emergence of cohabitation in

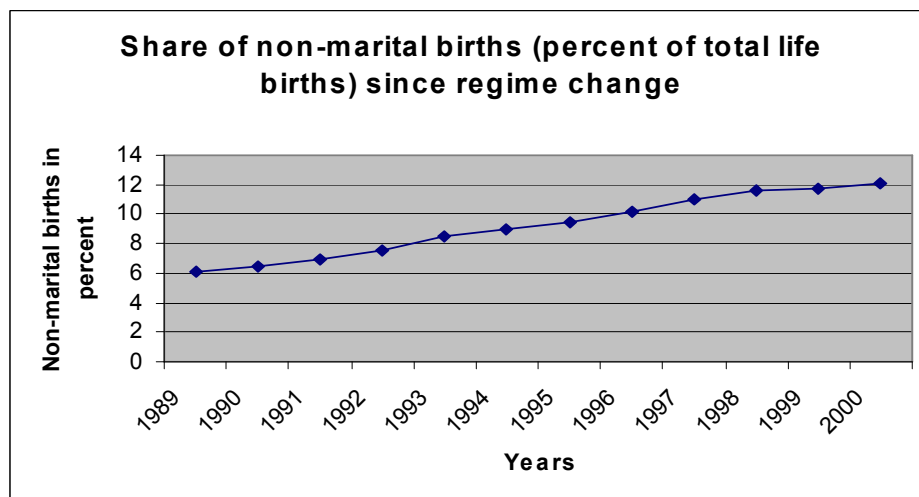
¹ Becker, G. S. (1981), *A Treatise on the Family*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

² Van de Kaa, D. J. and R. Lesthaeghe (1986), "Twee demografische transitities", in: *Bevolking: groei en krimp*, D. J. van de Kaa and R. Lesthaeghe (eds.), van Loghem Slaterus, Deventer.

³ Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Hungary “...changes in the number and proportion of children born outside marriage are indirect indicators of the spread of cohabitation.” (Kamras, 2003, p.12)⁴

Graph 1: Share of non-marital births (percent of total life births) since 1989



Source: TransMONEE 2002, Unicef

Some results of event history models already applied to the FFS 1991 data calculating the risk of forming a first union through cohabitation show significant differences according to age and to rural or urban residence. Further, religiousness is statistically significant only for men, as opposed to women. Those who have ever been employed exhibit a much greater risk to cohabit when compared to those who have never worked. Surprisingly, women and men do have very different risk pattern of cohabitation according to the period variable which divides the 1970s, 1980s and the short period of time after the fall of the Communist Regime.

During the Polish General Social Survey of 1994 and 1999 individuals were asked whether they agreed with living together without marriage. Over these five years the percentage of those who strongly agreed with it has increased markedly. This is true for women and men as well as for different age groups. Unfortunately the question was not asked during earlier waves of the survey.

⁴ Kamaras, F. (2003), Family formation and childbearing, in *Demografia: Special Edition for the 40th Anniversary of the Demographic Research Institute*, Klinger, A. (ed.), Vol. 46 2003, Zsolt Speder, Budapest.