

RECENT TRENDS IN NON-MARITAL BIRTHS – A COMPARISON BETWEEN SLOVAKIA AND OTHER INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES

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Abstract: Since the 1990s, non-marital childbearing has become a popular phenomenon in Slovakia. The recent rise in the percentage of non-marital births per 100 total births is defined by both the decrease in marital births and the increase in non-marital births. The former trend seems to be affected by value changes as well as recent economic situations. But the questionnaire survey by Comenius University shows that recent changes in personal socio-economic situations do not explain the differences in the perceptions of non-marital childbearing. The popularity of bridal pregnancy in the past might also be a factor relating to the present relative tolerance to non-marital childbearing in Slovakia.

Key words: non-marital birth, marital birth, value change, socio-economic change, bridal pregnancy

1. INTRODUCTION

Non-marital childbearing has become increasingly popular among Slovak women. According to the statistics of Infostat (2005), the percentage of non-marital births per 100 total births reached 21.6% in 2002. In 1990, this percentage was only 7.6%. The number of non-marital births also shows a remarkable change: it increased from 6,085 in 1990 to 11,047 in 2002. By the European standard, these latest figures of Slovakia are still relatively low, since the percentages of non-marital births in countries such as Sweden and Denmark have already surpassed 50% in the 1990s (Council of Europe 2003). However, in consideration of the relatively traditional character of Slovakia and the rapidity of the increase in non-marital births, these statistics certainly provides the evidence of the large-scale demographic transformations presently going on in this country.

Demographically speaking, the recent increase in non-marital births in industrialized countries would be defined as one distinct character of „the second demographic transition.“ The second demographic transition is a concept proposed by Ron Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa. Van de Kaa (1987), for example, examined demographic changes in

Europe in the 1960s and after, and proclaimed that value changes, such as rising individualism and secularization, formed the background for the demographic behaviors of young generations. In regard to non-marital births, value changes increased the incidence of cohabitation and eroded the relationship between marriage and childbearing, consequently playing a major role in the increase in non-marital childbirths. While started much later than in Northern and Western Europe, the present trend of non-marital births in Slovakia could be explained more or less by the above theory of value change. Like in Northern and Western Europe, an increasing number of youngsters in Slovakia now seem to move away from traditional norms and act „liberally“ in regard to marital and reproductive behaviors (Piscová 2002). Whether we call this change „westernization“ or not, the general value orientation among people has now more in common with that of Northern and Western countries.

In Central and Eastern Europe, however, various demographic changes have been affected not only by value changes but also by the economic hardship after the transformation. Especially, recent changes in nuptiality and fertility have been tremendously influenced by the post-1989 social circumstances. Factors such as high unemployment rates, the shortage of affordable housing and unfavorable changes in family-related policies have discouraged young people from becoming married and having children (Mládek 1999). In regard to non-marital births, the impact of these factors would not be straightforward. Nevertheless, as far as the percentage of non-marital births is mathematically related to the level of total (or marital) births – i.e. calculated by dividing the number of non-marital births by the number of total births, one may consider that recent socio-economic situations also play a role, either direct or indirect, in determining the relative level of non-marital births.

This paper tries to point out some aspects of non-marital childbearing in Slovakia, focusing on its relation to recent value changes and socio-economic situations. To highlight the characteristics of Slovak case, the following sections frequently refer to the situations in other European countries and Japan. In section 1, we briefly examine the statistical characteristics of the recent rise in the percentage of non-marital births in Slovakia. Section 2 shows some signs of value changes by documenting the results of some questionnaire surveys. Section 3 turns to the past trend in bridal pregnancy in Slovakia and compares it with that of Japan. While bridal pregnancy certainly differs from non-marital childbearing, they share in common some important demographic events (e.g. pre-marital sexual intercourse and pre-marital conception) as their prerequisites (Shorter et al. 1971), implying that the past trends in bridal pregnancy may have provided some probable background for the recent change in non-marital births. By comparing Slovakia with Japan – a country with one of the lowest percentages of non-marital births among industrialized states, we elucidate some characteristics of Slovak's family formation behaviors.

2. STATISTICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NON-MARITAL BIRTHS IN SLOVAKIA

The pace of rise in the percentage of non-marital births per 100 total births has been quite rapid in Slovakia (Fig. 1). This trend closely corresponds to the recent increase in cohabiting couples (Mládek and Širočková 2004). Some argue, however, that this rise

has been rather caused by a decrease in the total number of births, not by an increase in the number of non-marital births (Mareňčáková 2003). Certainly, the decrease in the total number of births seems much more prominent than the increase in non-marital births (Fig. 2). Here we try to figure out the contributions of the changes in marital and non-marital births to the change in the percentage of non-marital birth¹. The percentage of non-marital births (P) is defined as follows.

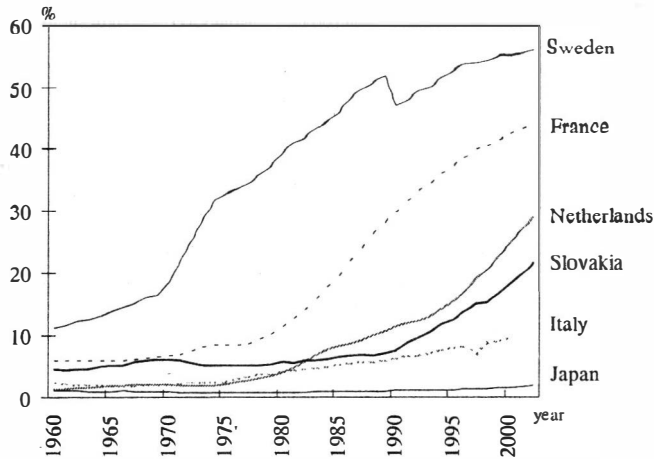


Figure 1 Percentages of non-marital births (/100 total births)

Sources: Council of Europe (2003), Infostat (2005), National Institute of Population and Social Security Research (2004)

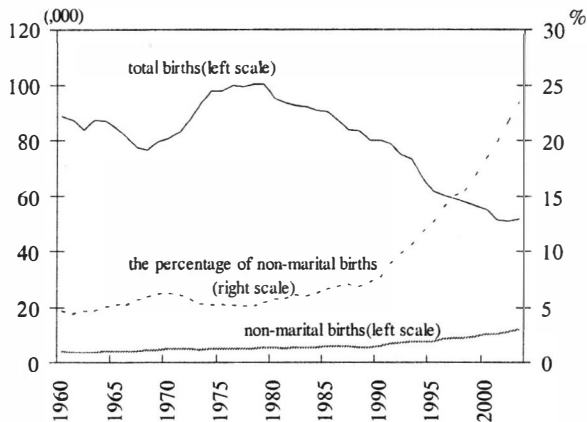


Figure 2 Trends of total births and non-marital births in Slovakia

Source: Infostat(2005)

¹ We use a very simplified method here, mainly because of the limitation of data. For a more detailed method, for example, see Smith and Cutright (1988).

$$P_i = \frac{N_i}{M_i + N_i},$$

where

P_i – the percentage of non-marital births per 100 total births at year i

M_i – the number of marital births at year i

N_i – the number of non-marital births at year i

Next, when we substitute N_j for N_i in this equation ($j > i$), we obtain the hypothetical percentage of non-marital births when N changes from year i to year j but M remains the same. We denote this percentage as P_j^N . Similarly, when we substitute M_j for M_i ($j > i$), we obtain the hypothetical percentage of non-marital births (P_j^M) when M changes from year i to year j but N remains the same. Since the difference between P_i and P_j^N is considered to be produced by the change in the number of non-marital births, the contribution of non-marital birth change to the actual change of P ($= P_j - P_i$), denoted as C_N , would be defined as follows:

$$C_N = \frac{P_j^N - P_i}{P_j - P_i} \times 100$$

The contribution of marital birth change (C_M) is defined accordingly. It is to note that C_N and C_M do not usually add up to 100 because of the interaction effect between N and M .

We use the above equation to calculate the contributions of non-marital birth change for Slovakia and some other European countries. Specifically, we explore the change from the year when the percentage of non-marital births first exceeded 10% to the year when the percentage first surpassed 20%. The exception is the case of Sweden, where the percentage already reached 11.3% in 1960, the first year of the data provided by the Council of Europe (2003). For Sweden, we use the values in 1960 as benchmarks. Table 1 shows the results. In Slovakia, the change in the percentage of non-marital births was brought about mostly by the decrease in marital births (51.1%), but the increase in non-marital births also explains about 35% of the change in percentage. The similar pattern is observed for the Czech Republic. On the other hand, the pattern in other countries is different: the increases in non-marital births explain almost all the changes of non-marital percentages in France, Sweden and Netherlands. The different patterns of contributions between Slovakia and these countries suggest that the percentage of Slovakia has been rising under the situation where the decrease in marital births and the increase in non-marital births have been simultaneously occurring. In contrast, Northern and Western European countries, at least those in Table 1, seem to have experienced acute rises in the percentages after they had encountered major declines in fertility (see also Macura, et al 2002).

In terms of demographic factors, recent trends in nuptiality and fertility relate to the changes in marital and non-marital births in Slovakia. The present crude marriage rate is much lower than in the early 1990s, so is the total fertility rate². It is surmised that in Slovakia, an increasing number of young females, who would have become married and given births in the past, now decide either to quit (or postpone) both marriages and

² According to Infostat (2005), the crude marriage rate seems to have started recuperating since 2001. In 2003, the TFR is also higher than in 2002.

childbearing (but they may cohabit with partners), or to get married but live without having children, or to give births without getting married (while cohabiting with their partners or staying single). The last pattern contributes to the increase in non-marital births. All behaviors listed above are considered to be affected by value changes. But at least two factors – decreases in marriages and marital births – also seem to be related closely to the post-1989 socio-economic downturn. In other words, the dramatic change in the economic system and consequent hardships, characteristics not observed in Northern and Western Europe, have possibly produced the coexistence of the decline in fertility and the rise in the percentage of non-marital births in Slovakia.

Table 1 Contributions to the change in the percentage of non-marital births (%)

	Percentage of non-marital births (%) (year)				Contribution (%)		
					Change in marital births	Change in non-marital births	
Slovakia	10.6	(1993)	→	21.7	(2002)	51,1	34.7
France	10.3	(1979)	→	21.9	(1986)	9,2	84.1
Netherlands	10.2	(1988)	→	20.8	(1998)	5,3	90.9
Sweden	11.3	(1960)	→	21.9	(1971)	1,3	97.8
Czech	10.7	(1992)	→	20.6	(1999)	48,3	38.4

Sources: Council of Europe (2003), Infostat (2005)

3. VALUE CHANGE

Some evidence of value changes related to marriage has been provided by various questionnaire surveys. One example is obtained from the European Values Study (see Ester, et al. 1994; Halman 2001). According to the third wave of this study (conducted in 1999 in Slovakia), 10.6% of Slovak respondents aged 18 and over agree to the statement „marriage is an outdated institution“, and 81.4% disagree (Tab. 2).³ The percentage of „agree“ increased by about 4% points from that of the 1991 survey. These data suggest that more people are now tolerant of a life without getting married, and that this psychological change would, at least to a degree, relate to the increase in births out of wedlock. In fact, the above change in the percentage of „agree“ corresponds relatively well to the increase in the number of non-marital births during the 1990s (6,085 in 1990 to 9,480 in 1999).

On the other hand, the dissolution of the traditional family value seems to be still at the moderate level in Slovakia. In France and Netherlands, for example, the percentages of „agree“ are over 20%. Especially, the percentage of France (32.9%) is more than three times higher than that of Slovakia. As for the other countries, the percentage of Sweden, a country with the highest level of non-marital births, is below 20%. This may be due to the fact that a number of cohabitating couples get married after they have children. Kiernan (1999), who examined the data of the Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS), found that for women who had first births in cohabiting unions, the percentage married by

³ Values of Table 2 are taken from the results of „World Values Survey“ provided by Dentsu Soken / Nihon Research Center eds. (2004). In 1999 – 2001, the surveys were carried out jointly by the European Values Study group and the World Values Survey group. See <http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/>.

5 years after the first births was over 50% for Sweden, but just over 30% for France. In the case of Japan, although the percentage of „do not know (DK)“ is extremely high, the ratio of „agree“ and „disagree“ (the rightmost column in Table 2) indicates more positive attitudes toward marriage than in Slovakia and other selected countries. Since the percentage of non-marital births in Japan is 1.9% in 2002, the low level of „agree“ is quite understandable.

Table 2 Responses to the statement: „marriage is an outdated institution“ (%)

	Agree	Disagree	Do not know	Agree disagree
Slovakia	10,6	81,4	8,0	0,13
France*	32,9	61,7	4,1	0,53
Netherlands	24,9	73,5	1,6	0,34
Sweden	18,9	74,6	6,5	0,25
Italy*	15,6	76,5	4,4	0,20
Japan	7,4	63,7	28,9	0,12

*no response 1.2% (France) 3.4% (Italy)
Source: Dentsu Soken / Nihon Research Center eds. (2004)

As we surmise the connection between value changes and the increase in non-marital births, the next question would be what factors have facilitated value changes. While the general socio-economic circumstances of the post-1989 period would definitely be the prime source of recent value changes, we illustrate a little more concrete aspects of them by referring to the result of an analysis on the relationship between the perceptions of non-marital childbearing and individual socio-economic circumstances (Shimizu 2004). The analysis is based on the data of a questionnaire survey which The Department of Human Geography and Demogeography, Comenius University conducted in May 2002 in two areas near Bratislava. Alongside various demographic data, the survey collected information on respondents' perceptions of non-marital childbearing. The actual wording of the question (in Slovak) is „In your opinion, is it important to be married before having children (=childbearing)?“ The analysis focuses on the records of 230 people born in 1970 and after, and analyzes the relationships between the tolerance of non-marital childbearing and various factors such as individual characteristics and personal socio-economic circumstances.⁴

Table 3 shows some results of the analysis. Among respondents born in 1970 and after, 41.7% answered „yes“ to the question, but 49.6% answered „no“. The percentage of „no“ is higher for males, those aged older, ever-married (especially divorced) and those with secondary (with graduate exam) or higher education. We also examine the relationships between the perception of non-marital childbearing, on the one hand, and the personal evaluation of the transition process („What is your judgment of the transformation process in the last 12 years?“) and individual socio-economic improvement during the last 5 years („How has your social and economic situation changed during the last 5 years?“), on the other. These factors, however, do not have statistically significant relationships with the perception of non-marital births, neither in a simple

⁴ It is to note that the survey was designed not as a specifically demographic survey but as a general geographic case study on adjacent areas surrounding Bratislava. Moreover, the survey could not implement the random sampling method. The geographic and demographic representativeness of the data is thus rather limited. For the basic information of the survey, see Shimizu (2004).

chi-square test (Tab. 3) nor in multivariable analyses (see Shimizu 2004). While these survey results may not necessarily be linked to the national trend, they imply that the level of tolerance to non-marital births seems much higher among young people than among the general population as exhibited in the European Values Study. Furthermore, if the effects of the differences in recent individual socio-economic changes are minimal on value changes, the level of non-marital births may be irreversible even when Slovak economy recovers from the present economic turmoil. Along with economic improvements, demographic changes such as fertility decline and marriage delay could be attenuated or even reversed (see footnote 2). The growing trend of non-marital births, however, might be more likely to remain in the future.

Table 3 Selected variables and the importance of marriage before childbearing (upper: person, lower: %)

	Yes*	No	Total	Significance
Sex				
male	39 (42,4)	53 (57,6)	92 (100)	Fisher's exact test p = 0.4060
female	57 (48,3)	61 (51,7)	118 (100)	
Year of birth				
1970 – 1974	22 (34,9)	41 (65,1)	63 (100)	chi square test p = 0.0558
1975 – 1979	34 (45,3)	41 (54,7)	75 (100)	
1980 –	40 (55,6)	32 (44,4)	72 (100)	
Marital status				
single	66 (48,9)	69 (51,1)	135 (100)	Fisher's exact test p = 0.0104
married	29 (44,6)	36 (55,4)	65 (100)	
divorced	0 (0,0)	9 (100,0)	9 (100)	
Educational background				
basic	7 (58,3)	5 (41,7)	12 (100)	chi square test p = 0.5999
secondary (without graduate exam)	36 (49,3)	37 (50,7)	73 (100)	
secondary (with graduate exam)	43 (41,7)	60 (58,3)	103 (100)	
higher education	9 (42,9)	12 (57,1)	21 (100)	
Use of contraception				
no	45 (52,9)	40 (47,1)	85 (100)	chi square test p = 0.1560
natural	13 (56,5)	10 (43,5)	23 (100)	
mechanic, IUD, hormonal	28 (36,8)	48 (63,2)	76 (100)	
other	5 (50,0)	5 (50,0)	10 (100)	

Table 3 – continue

	Yes*	No	Total	Significance
Evaluation of transformation process				
very positive/positive	28 (48,3)	30 (51,7)	58 (100)	chi square test p = 0.9456
positive as well as negative	47 (45,6)	56 (54,4)	103 (100)	
negative/very negative	18 (47,4)	20 (52,6)	38 (100)	
Recent personal socio-economic change				
improved substantially/slightly	38 (39,2)	59 (60,8)	97 (100)	chi square test p = 0.2575
not changed	40 (51,3)	38 (48,7)	78 (100)	
worsened slightly/substantially	15 (48,4)	16 (51,6)	31 (100)	

* answer to the question: „In your opinion, is it important to be married before having children (=childbearing)?“
Source: Shimizu (2004)

4. BRIDAL PREGNANCY IN SLOVAKIA AND JAPAN

As was mentioned earlier, bridal pregnancy and non-marital childbearing are somewhat similar in that they require pre-marital intercourse and non-marital conception. Since we could obtain the data of bridal pregnancies only from Slovakia and Japan, we compare their trends in the following.

According to Sobotka (2003), Central Europeans were tolerant of pre-marital sexual activities and consequent pregnancies already in the socialist era. „For instance in the Czech Republic only 0.4% of sexually experienced women reported they had first sex after marriage“ (ibid, p. 469). He also points out that „[f]irst sex occurred mostly without the use of any contraceptive method and pregnancy often followed soon after the onset of reproductive life. Since women pregnant for the first time usually did not opt for an abortion, marriage – commonly entered by a pregnant bride – and birth soon followed“ (ibid, p. 469).

While Sobotka (2003) does not refer to the past situation of Slovakia, we may consider it was fundamentally similar with that of Czech. Figure 3 shows the number of bridal pregnancies (= children born within 8 months after marriage) per 100 marriages. The number for Slovakia was around 20 in the 1950s, but it steadily rose in the 1960s and 1970s, and surpassed 40 in 1978. In comparison to the case of Czech (not shown, see Rychtaříková (1993)), the number for Slovakia was lower by about 10 points in the 1950s, but it reached almost the same level at the end of the 1970s. These statistics suggest that as in the Czech Republic, pre-marital sexual activities and consequent pregnancies were quite common among Slovaks in the past.

On the other hand, the situation seems quite different in Japan. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of non-marital births in Japan has been less than 2% for decades. Likewise, the level of bridal pregnancies has been much lower than in Slovakia. According to Figure 3, the number of bridal pregnancies was 12 per 100 marriages in 1980.⁵ The number recently rose and reached 21 in 2000. However, even the number in

⁵ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2002) defines a live birth as pre-maritally conceived when the duration of marriage is shorter than (gestation – 3 weeks). Gestation is usually counted from the first day of the last menstruation in Japan. For more detailed explanations, see Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2002).

2000 is lower than that for Slovakia about four decades ago. For Japan, comparable data before 1980 are not given by Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2002), but as far as we observe the trend in the experience of sexual intercourse among single women, bridal pregnancies seem to have been rarer at least in the 1970s.⁶

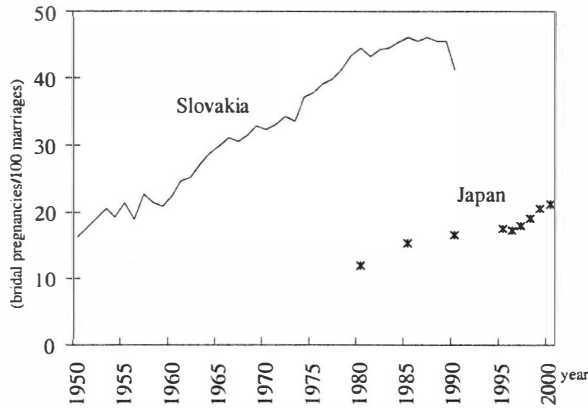


Figure 3 The number of bridal pregnancies (/100 marriages*)

Sources: Rychtariková (1993), Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2000, 2002)

* „Marriage“ for Japan includes first marriages and remarriages (only those performed and registered each year).

In his discussion of the determinants of the extremely low level of cohabitation and non-marital births in Japan, Atoh (2001) points out the following conditions;

1. The restricted choice of female-dominant, self-controllable contraception for females (e.g. low dose oral pills), which would possibly discourage single women from having pre-marital sex or entering cohabitation for fear of unwanted pregnancies.
2. Fixed gender roles among married couples, from which single females may have a negative impression that they have to play a traditional female role even when they cohabit.
3. Still strong family values and weak individuation among young people, which relate to weak motivations to become independent from parents and enter cohabitation eventually. The determinants of bridal pregnancy may be more or less different from those of non-marital births. However, factors such as the limited choice of contraception and strong familism seem to have functioned equally to suppress the incidence of pre-marital sexual intercourse and maintain the general intolerance of bridal pregnancy in the Japanese society, at least in the past.⁷

⁶ The surveys by Nihon Seikyoiku Kyokai (2001) show that in 1974, the percentages of those who had experienced sexual intercourse were 5.5% and 11.0% for female high-school students and female university (including junior college) students, respectively. In 1981, the percentages for these groups were 8.8% and 18.5%, respectively.

⁷ There are certainly other factors that relate to the level of pre-marital conceptions. One important factor is the accessibility to induced abortion especially among young population. Iwasawa (2004) estimated that in 1999, 66% of all conceptions for women aged 15 – 19 (those without children) lead to induced abortions, while 23% turned out to be births after marriage (bridal pregnancy). The percentage of conceptions by married women was 6%, and conceptions which resulted in non-marital births accounted for 5%. Unlike the past reproductive behaviors of Central Europeans described by Sobotka, the majority of conceptions before marriage lead not to marriages but to abortions in the present Japanese society.

Since non-marital conceptions can be legitimized by marriages, the level of non-marital conceptions does not necessarily have to do with the number of non-marital births. In terms of people's values and norms on family, however, a society with a large number of pregnant brides could be quite different from a society with less bridal pregnancies. It might be probable that the former society is more prone to become tolerant to the increase in non-marital births when the second demographic transition proceeds. Although Slovakia and Japan were both considered in the past as the countries of less non-marital births, the past demographic behaviors and consequent value formation could have served as one factor of the present large difference in the level of non-marital births.

5. CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of the 1990s, non-marital childbearing has become a popular phenomenon in Slovakia. In comparison to Northern and Western Europe, the percentage of non-marital births is still relatively low. It seems likely, however, that the trend of non-marital births in Slovakia would closely follow the path which Northern and Western Europe took in the past. One of the major causes for the recent change in non-marital births would be value changes among young people exemplified by rising liberalism and individualism after the transformation. At the same time, however, there exist some other indirect factors such as the overall decline in the total number of births prompted, at least partly, by the present economic situation, and the past pattern of reproductive behaviors, which may relate to the present general tolerance to non-marital births.

The present paper did not show the evidence on the direct relationships between the change in non-marital births and recent economic situations. It should be at least noted, however, that the economy of a country places strong impacts on the consequence of non-marital births, or the lives of non-maritally born children and their parents. While the recent increase in non-marital births is often said to be related to the increase in cohabitation, births from single mothers still account for a large part of non-marital births even in Western countries (Kiernan 1999). Single mother households are generally disadvantaged in terms of income and living standard. Their lives may be especially severe in Central Europe where the economy has been rather depressed. The increase in non-marital births under such economic circumstances would be a distinct characteristic for Slovakia and other Central European countries. Slovak experience of the change in non-marital births and its consequences may thus provide another aspect to the theory of the second demographic transition.

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Súčasný trendy v mimomanželskej pôrodnosti – porovnanie Slovenska s inými vyspelými štátmi

Resume

Počnúc 90. rokmi sa stalo narodenie dieťaťa mimo manželstva na Slovensku rozšíreným javom. Jednou z hlavných príčin tejto zmeny sa zdá byť zmena hodnôt mladých ľudí podporovaná rastom liberalizácie a individualizmu po transformácii. Zmena hodnôt sa prejavuje aj vo výskyte kohabitácií a mimomanželských pôrodov. Avšak percentuálne súčasný rast počtu detí narodených mimo manželstva na 100 celkovo narodených môže byť determinovaný tak poklesom narodených v manželstve ako aj zvyšovaním narodených mimo manželstva. Posledný menovaný trend bol ovplyvnený súčasnou ekonomickou situáciou ako aj zmenou hodnôt. Rozhodujúcim zdrojom činiteľov, spomínaných hodnotových zmien, sú celkové sociálno-ekonomické zmeny po roku 1989. Avšak anketový prieskum, uskutočnený na Univerzite Komenského, ukázal, že ani súčasné zmeny sociálno-ekonomickej situácie, ani dopad transformačných procesov dostatočne nevysvetľujú rozdiely v hodnotení mimomanželskej pôrodnosti respondentmi. Ako pravdepodobné pozadie súčasných zmien v mimomanželskej pôrodnosti v príspevku tiež skúmame trend tehotenstva nevydatých žien na Slovensku a v Japonsku v minulosti. Jeho hodnotenie naznačuje, že rozšírenie tehotenstiev nevydatých žien v minulosti môže zohrávať určitú úlohu v súčasnej všeobecnej tolerancii k mimomanželským pôrodom na Slovensku.

婚外出生の動向 — スロバキアと他の先進諸国との比較

清水 昌人

スロバキアでは1990年代から婚外出生が目立つようになった。その原因の一つとして、若者の価値観の変化があげられる。体制転換後の自由主義や個人主義の台頭により、同棲が増加し、婚外出生が顕著になったと考えられる。ただし、出生総数に対する婚外出生の割合に関しては、最近の上昇は、婚外出生の増加だけでなく、婚姻内出生の減少にも規定されている。後者の傾向には、価値観の変化だけでなく、現在のスロバキアの経済状況も影響していると考えられる。他方、価値観の変化は、基本的に1989年以降の体制転換およびその後の社会経済状況に規定されていると考えられるが、コメニウス大学が行ったアンケート調査の結果によれば、個々人の最近の社会経済状況の変化や、体制転換過程への評価は、婚外出生の是非の評価とあまり関係していない。本稿ではまた、婚外出生の増加に関連して、スロバキアの過去の花嫁妊娠 *bridal pregnancy* の動向を取り上げ、日本との比較を行った。スロバキアでは過去に花嫁妊娠が非常に盛んであったが、このことが、現在の婚外出生への寛容さに何らかの影響を及ぼした可能性もある。