

The emergence of cohabitation in transitional socio-economic context:
Evidence form Bulgarian and Russian GGS

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1. Introduction

In many eastern European nations there have been remarkable changes in the family model after the fall of the state socialist system. Rise in number and proportion of unmarried cohabitation and children born outside of marriage has been observed in all post-socialist societies. Thus the intensity of the changes varies from country to country.

a. Why family formation

Little is known about the recent Bulgarian and Russian family formation model and the emergence of non-marital relationships. Most of the studies on family development during the Socialist time have been concentrated on marriage and divorce in the countries as a whole and didn't take into account the individual characteristics of the population involved.

Even though the recent research on family structure and family formation in the countries of interest account for the "new phenomenon", there is no study on the emergence of cohabitation which focuses explicitly on its nature and development in the country specific context.

b. Why Bulgaria and Russia

Bulgaria and Russia are two countries, who share common cultural values determined by the Orthodox religion, Slavic culture, and similar language and alphabet. They both had common socialist past – economic structure, welfare states.

Thus our **aim** is to compare two countries with similar welfare state, political regimes and demographic development at the turning point (beginning of 1990s) and to reveal the essential factors for the recent family formation changes.

c. Country-specific background

For two decades after the beginning of Perestroika, transitional societies¹ have gone through intensive transformations - economical, political, cultural, etc. We will provide a sort overview of the main institutional changes in the process from a state socialism to democracy and market economy in order to make a portrait of the country specific transitional environments.

Macroeconomic development

Prior to the beginning of Perestroika ‘the employment right’ was a postulate of the socialist economic system therefore officially unemployment did not exist. Besides, the employees were covered by the extensive welfare system with many of the benefits linked to the place of employment. The population was used to security provided by the state – job tenure, pension benefits, housing, etc (Sachs at all, 1994). The structural reforms and the monetary management after the collapse of the Socialist economic regimes were slow, mistimed and inefficient which resulted in inflation process, sharp increase in unemployment drastic

¹ Bulgaria and Russia meant here

regression of living standards and vast impoverishment (Lokshin and Popkin, 1999; Prokofieva and Terskikh, 1998).

Family support policies

The state socialistic system was designed to provide social security and support to all citizens. A comprehensive range of macro and micro level social welfare programs were aimed at providing relatively adequate safety net for single and unmarried mothers and their children as well as at 'stimulating programs' for families with children (Lokshin at all, 2000). Maternity leave, childcare allowance, priority in getting house (apartment) from the state, wide net of nurseries and kindergartens (especially in the cities, but also in the rural areas) were only part of the big variety of social policy measures supporting families with children (also directed at stimulating families to have more children). Together with the stimulating programs there was also a range of restrictive measures meant to stimulate marriage and childbearing processes. The former Soviet Union was probably the only country (together with Mongolia) where a tax on childlessness existed (payable by childless people aged 18+ with an average rate of 6% of the earnings). The childlessness tax was introduced in 1941 and was in power until mid 1990s. Similar tax regulation existed also in Bulgaria where it was called 'bachelor tax' and it was applied to singles aged 21 and more and families without children two years after the marriage. In Bulgaria the tax was abolished in 1990.

All the mentioned above measures were ensued from the highly proclaimed in the former socialist countries women's labor and education rights² (nearly 90 percent of working-age women in both countries were in the paid labor force and

² For example, it was a part of the socialist ideology, which proclaimed the proud of Soviet high fertility levels and "high fertility as an evidence for the Soviet well-being, high healthcare standards and lack of unemployment" (Great Soviet Encyclopedia, v.36)

in Russia women's educational level was higher than those of men (Sanjian 1991)).

In the years after the collapse of the Socialist system the reorganization in the social security systems were inevitable. The transition to market economy didn't go smoothly therefore the economic crisis reflected in decrease of the money spent on social programs. Many of the childcare institutions were closed (especially in the villages and small towns); childcare allowances were not indexed with the level of inflation, thus with the time they became trifling; the available state housing stock was privatized (starting in 1992 in Russia and further delayed in Bulgaria), therefore the governments couldn't provide young families with housing (as it used to be in the previous years) and so on. As a result and additionally to the unemployment and decline in living standards, the family support policies didn't accomplish their aim anymore.

Demographic pattern of family formation in Russia and Bulgaria

Universality of the marriage was a product of the pronatalist family policy combined with a long standing traditional family values in both societies. Predisposed by the shifts in the norms and social acceptance, cohabitation has become an admissible partnership form, which has gained popularity in the last decade.

Nuptiality

Nuptiality pattern in Russia and Bulgaria (as in most of the countries from the former Socialist bloc) in the second half of 20th century was characterized with nearly universal first marriage, early start and continually decreasing age at first marriage (Scherbov and Vianen, 2004; Avdeev and Monnier, 2000; Philipov, 2002; Sobotka at all, 2003). Marital institution was particularly well accepted and marriage was a 'necessary step' after graduation from the school until the mid

1990s. Values of TFFMR are very close to 1 (witness for universality) in both countries (slightly higher in Russia) in 1980s while they decrease rapidly in the beginning of 1990s to get to a half in 2000s (0.51 in Bulgaria in 2003 and 0.6 in Russia in 1996). A peculiar to Russian nuptiality pattern is the elevated aptitude to divorce (Sanjian, 1991) and high remarriage rates which although fluctuating during the transitional period always kept at relatively high levels³.

Cohabitation

Official statistics provide partial and very recent data on the occurrence of cohabitation, nevertheless we can affirm that in Russia in 1994 (micro-census data), 4% of women aged 16 and more live in cohabitation with their partner. However, if the numbers are related to the women living in a couple, this share increases to 7%, whereas it goes to 14% if only the young women under age of 20 are considered. In Bulgaria, 13.1% of the population⁴ in reproductive age in 2001 was living in non-marital unions.

2. Research questions

With this study we focus on the development and the nature of cohabitation in two transitional societies. What is different in the profile of people who choose cohabitation vs. ones who marry directly? Is the cohabitation a long term commitment and if not, what is the next step after entering cohabitation?

The **main research questions** in our study are:

³ From about 40 divorces per 100 marriages in 1970s and 1980s, the divorce rate increased to 50% of all marriages in 1995. Recently the divorce rates are increasing again after a short period of decrease.

⁴ Fertility and Reproductive Behavior Survey conducted in parallel to census in 2001, women aged 15-49, men aged 15-59.

- ✓ What are the main changes in the family⁵ formation patterns in Bulgaria and Russia during the years of transition compared to those during the state socialist system?
- ✓ How did institutional settings influence family formation in the two periods – before and after the transition to a market economy in 1990s?
- ✓ Are the two countries experiencing similar changes in the family formation model or 15 years after the transition we can see some evidence of divergence of these processes in the two countries?”

3. Data and method

a. Generations and Gender Survey

The *data* from Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) conducted in 2004 in both countries will be employed in the analysis. Russian sample consists of 11203 interviews – 6987 women and 4216 men aged 18-79. In Bulgaria 12886 respondents were interviewed – 7024 women and 5862 men aged 18-85. For the analysis the sample is further restricted to women, born after 1955, Bulgarian and Russian (nationality) ethnicity only, with complete data on first union formation⁶ (3982 women under the risk of entering first union – direct marriage or cohabitation and 984 women under the risk of transforming cohabitation into a marriage in Bulgarian sample and 3603 women under the risk of entering first union – direct marriage or cohabitation and 955 women under the risk of transforming cohabitation into a marriage).

⁵ Family will be viewed according to the concept of **family nucleus** defined by UNECE as: “two or more persons within a private or institutional household who are related as husband and wife, as cohabiting partners, or as parent and child”. It is also stressed that couple should include both “married couples and couples who report that they are living in consensual unions.

⁶ Further we excluded from the analysis women who experienced first union prior to age of 14.

b. piece-wise intensity regression models

A piece-wise linear intensity *regression models* will be applied for studying the transition to first cohabitation vs. first marriage (as a competing risk events) and for transformation of cohabitation into marriage. For the first two models observation starts at the 14th birthday of the respondent. Studying entry into first cohabitation the cases where marriage appears will be censored at marriage formation (respectively for studying direct marriage observations are censored at forming cohabitation). Further more all cases will be censored after 20 years of observation if no union was formed. For the transition out of cohabitation observation starts with entering first cohabitation and its development is observed for five years. Time is measured in months.

4. Results

a. calendar time effect (BG and RU, before and after 1989)

We would first like to draw the attention to the changes in the first union formation model over the calendar time. The results plotted on figure 1 show the swift transition in the family formation pattern in both countries after 1989.

In Bulgaria the first marriage intensity had experienced a fall already for the period 1969-1985, followed by a short stabilization. Nevertheless, the slump experienced after the year of transition is much more rapid and powerful.

In Russia we witness increase in the direct marriage intensities for the period 1970 - 1989, followed by steep and continuous but less pronounced decline.

Simultaneously the intensity of entering cohabitation instead of marrying directly increases over time.

In Bulgaria the emergence of cohabitation as a first union formation is already visible in the late 1980s. A significant rise in the intensity of entering cohabitation

as a first union is observed in the following decade. However, the process seems to have slowed down in the first four years of the present decade.

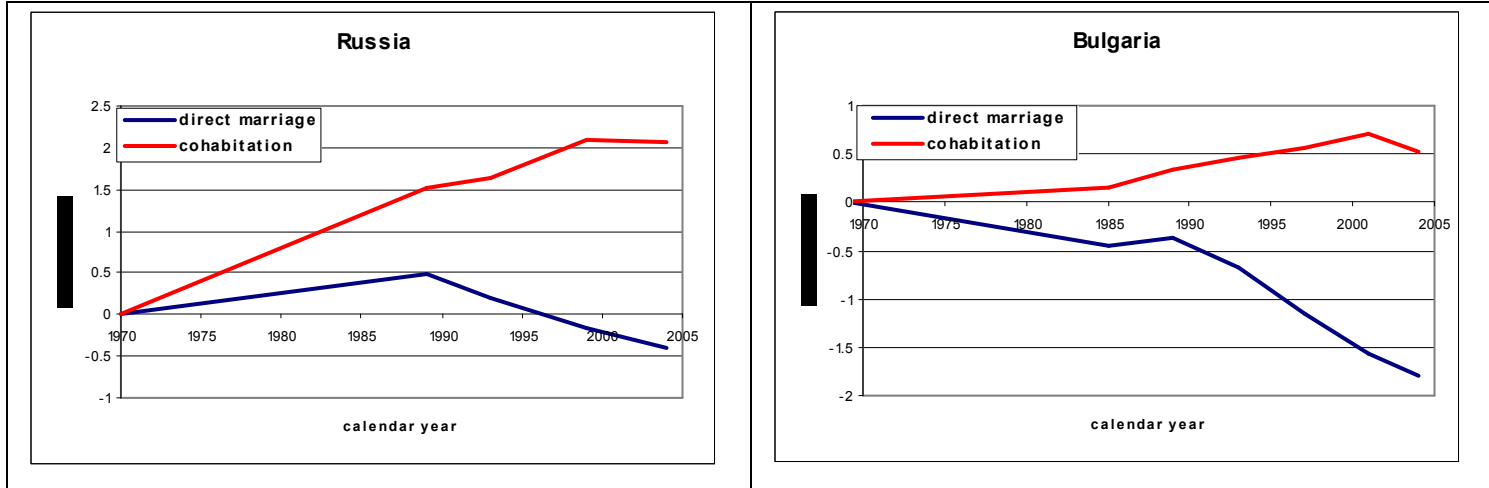


Figure 1

First union formation intensities by calendar year, standardized for region of residence, parents' education, parents lived together, # of siblings, education and parity

b. parental family effect

The first significant divergence between entering cohabitation and direct marriage that should be pointed here is the effect of the parental family. In Bulgaria, those of the respondents who experienced living with one of the biological parents only⁷ (or none of them) are significantly more prone to form a cohabitation and less prone to marry directly. Personal experience of living in an incomplete family can be simply transformed in a weaker attachment to the nuclear family itself and acceptance⁸ of other living arrangements.

In Russia parental family covariates do not affect significantly the intensities of entering first union (cohabitation or marriage). One possible explanation might

⁷ The question in the GGS questionnaire is formulated as follows "Have you lived with both biological parents most of the time before you completed 15?"

⁸ Acceptance here refers both to a personal acceptance as well as parents' acceptance

be the very high divorce rates in Russia, which leaves a lot of children to grow up in incomplete families. Thus the incomplete family is probably socially accepted and it is not sanctioned by the public opinion and the society.

Table 1

Relative risks of entering first union in Bulgaria and Russia⁹

parental family covariates	Bulgaria		Russia	
	Cohabitation	Marriage	Cohabitation	Marriage
mother's highest level of education				
low	1.15	1.18**	1.16*	0.92
middle	1	1	1	1
high	1.10	0.86	0.99	1.03
doesn't know	1.73***	1.26	1.61**	0.93
father's highest level of education				
low	<u>1.28**</u>	<u>0.89**</u>	1.08	1.06
middle	1	1	1	1
high	0.99	0.76***	0.90	1.01
doesn't know	0.84	0.69***	1.19	0.97
parents lived together				
yes	1	1	1	1
no	<u>1.55***</u>	<u>0.78**</u>	1.17	0.97
# of siblings				
0 or 1	1	1	1	1
2 and more	1.30***	0.90*	1.38***	1.05

Source: own calculations, based on GGS data (2004)
(Russian and Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity, Russian nationality)

c. effect of education

The level of education is clearly one of the most explicative and illustrative variables used in the family research. Completed tertiary education is typically associated with higher chances on the labor market, higher income and therefore better economical conditions. Women's higher income and well-being is negatively associated with the intention to create a traditional family.

⁹ Calendar year effect shown on figure 1, baseline intensity, not shown here.

In Russia the effect of education showed up in the expected direction – women with university degree are more prone to enter cohabitation as a first union, than those with secondary school or lower education.

Table 2

The effect of level of education on entering first union in Bulgaria and Russia¹⁰

	Bulgaria		Russia	
	Cohabitation	Marriage	Cohabitation	Marriage
education				
still in education	0.57***	0.49***	0.82**	0.70***
university and higher	0.89	1.44***	1.40***	0.91
secondary school	1	1	1	1
lower than secondary school (incl. no education)	1.68***	0.95	1.09	1.15*

Source: own calculations, based on GGS data (2004)
(Russian and Bulgarian women, Bulgarian ethnicity, Russian nationality)

In Bulgaria, in contrast, cohabitation is more spread among lower educated women. As an explanation in the literature cohabitation is viewed as less costly union, therefore lower educated women prefer the informal family formation instead of the expensive wedding ceremony.

5. Conclusions

Following the pro-natalist state policy, a significant increase in the direct marriage intensities is observed in Russia for the period 1970-1989, while in Bulgaria marital family was already losing its universality.

Parental family characteristics – parents’ education, size of the family and living with both biological parents are shown to be an important factor for spreading the cohabitation in Bulgaria. We didn’t find an evidence for the parental family

¹⁰ Calendar year effect shown on figure 1, baseline intensity, not shown here.

to be an important predictor of the individual family formation behavior in Russia.

Different educational profile of the people starting their family careers with cohabitation is observed in both countries. In Bulgaria low educated women have 70% higher risk to start their first union in cohabitation (compared to those with medium education), while in Russia cohabitation is 40% more spread among highly educated women.

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