

Non-marital fertility in Russia: Second Demographic Transition or Low Human Capital?

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Non-marital childbearing is often considered to be one of the primary characteristics of the Second Demographic Transition (McLanahan 2004, Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, Surkyn and Lesthaeghe 2004, Sobotka et al 2003). Yet the circumstances leading to and consequences of non-marital childbearing vary greatly depending on context. In Europe, particularly the Scandinavian countries, non-marital childbearing primarily occurs among stable, well-educated cohabiting couples (Kiernan 2001). In the U.S., on the other hand, non-marital childbearing is more often associated with low-income minority populations (Wu and Wolfe 2001, Qian, Lichter and Mellott 2005). Even when births occur within cohabitation in the U.S., the cohabiting relationships tend to be less stable than marital unions (Wu and Wolfe 2001). Thus, non-marital childbearing in Northern Europe signifies a rejection of institutions and an increase in independence and autonomy, while non-marital childbearing in the U.S. is associated with the inability to maintain healthy marriages and a descent into poverty.

This study investigates the circumstances surrounding non-marital childbearing in Russia, which has experienced a dramatic increase in non-marital childbearing since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Non-marital childbearing increased from 14.6% of all births in 1990 to 29.8% of all births in 2004 (Vishnevskii 2006). Although some of this proportional increase is due to decreasing marital fertility, few studies have investigated how the composition of non-marital childbearing – births to cohabiting couples versus single-mothers - has changed over time. Nor have studies examined the characteristics of Russian women who have had a non-marital birth or associations between non-marital childbearing and household conditions.

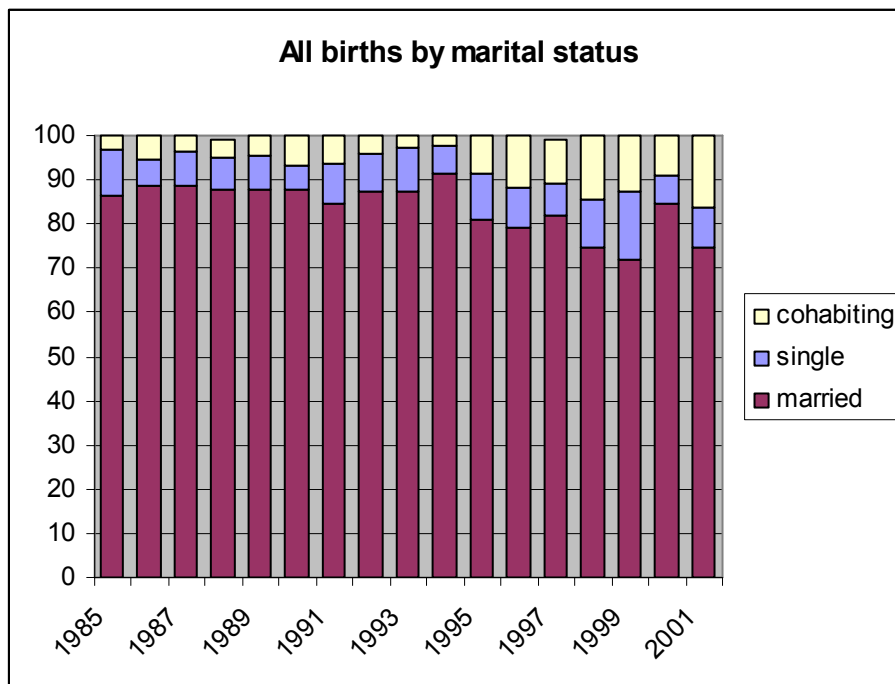
Some demographers point to the increase in non-marital childbearing in Russia as evidence of the Second Demographic Transition and assume that it is occurring concomitantly with changing values and attitudes (Zakharov and Ivanova 1996, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002, Zakharov 2007). However, given the instability of the economic situation following the transition to capitalism, the rise in non-marital childbearing could be associated with economic hardship and general life instability. Studies have shown that single-parent families in Russia disproportionately suffered during the transition to a new economy (Klugman and Motivans 2001). The goal of this paper is to determine whether non-marital childbearing in Russia is more closely associated with higher education and better household conditions or lower human capital and poverty – in short, whether non-marital fertility resembles that in Northern Europe or that of the disadvantaged populations in the United States.

DATA AND ANALYTIC STRATEGY

We analyze the growth of non-marital childbearing from 1985-2001 using the Survey on Stratification and Migration Dynamics in Russia. The SMDR was conducted on a multistage, stratified probability sample of 7176 Russian adults in three waves from September 2001 - January 2002. The second author designed special batteries of questions for the survey that elicit the respondent's entire fertility, marital, work, and residential histories from December 1984 through the month of the survey. The survey also records transitions into and out of cohabiting relationships.

The survey captures 1039 births that occurred between 1985-2001. 82% of births occurred within marital unions; 8% occurred within cohabitation; 7% occurred to never married women; and the remainder occurred to women who were separated or divorced or missing marital status information. Figure one shows how the composition of births to all women has changed over time. Since the late 1990s, the proportion of births to women in cohabiting relationships steadily increased to over 10% of all births. At the same time, however, the percent of births to single women also increased.

Figure 1



Source: The Survey on Stratification and Migration Dynamics in Russia

In our paper, we explore how non-marital childbearing changes over time. Our analytic strategy is as follows:

- 1) First, we analyze the basic conditions associated with non-marital childbearing, answering the following questions: How does the composition of marital and non-marital fertility change over time? What percent of women marry after giving

- birth out of wedlock? How does this differ by type of non-marital birth (cohabiting versus unmarried)? How long do cohabiting relationships last after a non-marital birth? How does non-marital childbirth vary by age of mother (father) and parity?
- 2) Second, we estimate event history models of individual-level births that incorporate time-varying covariates. Using retrospective data, we analyze the impact of education, employment, occupation and job quality on union status at the time of the birth and at conception. We also analyze how these effects differ by type of non-marital birth. We hypothesize that women in cohabiting relationships have higher levels of education and higher occupational status while single mothers have lower education and lower occupational status.
 - 3) Third, we aim to determine whether there is a correlation between non-marital childbearing and an individual's situation at the time of the survey. We have measures for household structure, subjective measures of the family's financial situation and social status, family income, and household possessions. These factors provide a picture of the respondent's family and household life after the birth. However, because our data do not include information on economic or household situation before the birth, it is impossible to tell whether the birth led to or exacerbated the current economic situation. Nevertheless, the associations provide an impression of how non-marital childbearing can be characterized in Russia.

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