

CHANGES IN MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATES SINCE THE NINETIES

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Abstract

In the last decade of the previous century, there were substantial changes not only in political, economic and social system, but also in demographic behavior of the population of the Czech Republic. Especially young people followed the pattern of demographic behavior of the population of Western Europe.

There were changes not only in mortality and fertility but also in marriage behavior. The age at first marriage rose for both males and females, many young people decided to remain single even if they had children. The proportion of children born outside marriage grew very rapidly.

The paper contains the analysis of development of sex and age specific marriage rates and other indicators of marriage behavior in the Czech Republic and divorce rates since 1993. The analysis is based on a special particular data provided by the Czech Statistical Office.

Key words: marriage rates, divorce rates, Czech Republic

JEL Code: J12, J11.

Introduction

In the second half of the previous century, there come many economic and social changes in the World and changing of demographic behavior called the second demographic transition reflecting changing economic, social, and ideational circumstances. The attitude of society to unmarried couples has changed. Women were more likely than men to think that both men and women can have satisfying lives without marriage, but they are also more likely to think that only women can have satisfying lives without marriage (Kaufman & Goldscheider 2007). Delaying marriage and in some cases a failure to marry at all was the new trend not only in Europe but also in the U.S.A. (e.g. Sweeney, 2002) and in some Pacific Asian countries (Jones, 2007). European countries differed considerably in their marriage patterns. Kalmijn

(2007) find evidence for the role of historical continuity and societal disintegration in understanding cross-national differences.

The transition to democratic society and market economy after 1989 in the Czech Republic resulted also in relatively radical changes in marriage behavior. Especially young generations decided not to repeat demographic behavior of their parents but to follow the pattern of young people in other democratic countries, especially of Western or North Europe.

While in the former era, pregnancy had been a relatively frequent reason for marrying so that the child would be born in wedlock, after 1990 there was a relatively fast-growing proportion of births of single women (e.g. Burcin et al., 2010). It was probably influenced also by economic reasons. The interest-free loans, special housing possibilities and other benefits for young married couples offered in the past by the state have been very soon after 1989 reduced or even abolished. Many young people deferred marriage to a higher age and the marriage rate reduced.

The paper contains a brief analysis of development of sex and age specific marriage rates and other indicators of marriage behavior in the Czech Republic and divorce rates since 1990. The analysis is based on published and also some special particular data provided by the Czech Statistical Office for research purposes.

1 Age specific rates of first marriage

The age specific rates of first marriage were computed (separately for males and females) as

$$mars_{t,x} = \frac{Mars_{t,x}}{\bar{S}_{t,x}}, \quad (1)$$

where $Mars_{t,x}$ denotes the number of first marriages in the year t of persons at the age x , $\bar{S}_{t,x}$ is the mid-year population in the year t of persons at the age x . The total rate of first marriage is

$$TRFM_t = \sum_{x=15}^{49} mars_{t,x}, \quad (2)$$

its value is a proportion of persons who would marry until the age of 50.

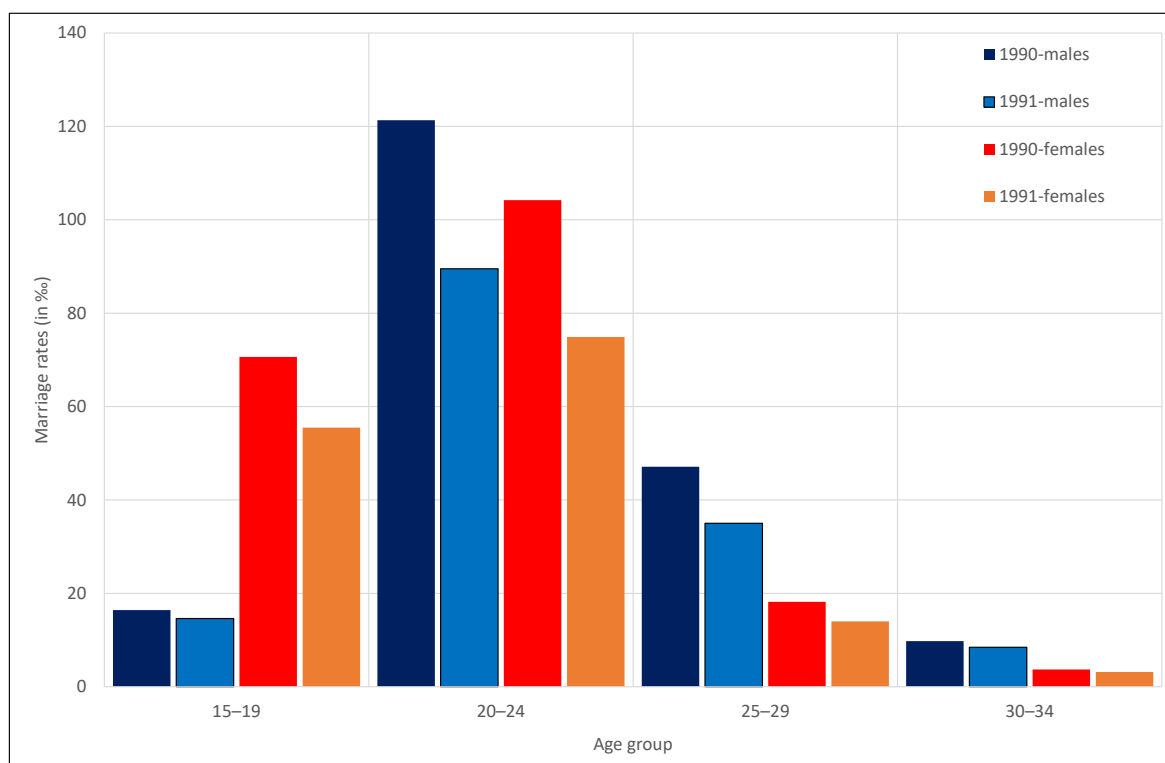
A very rapid drop in marriage rates is apparent between 1990 and 1991. The main reason would be probably abolishing of interest-free loans for young married couples since 1991. Some young pairs planning marriage later decided for this reason to marry already in

1990. Marriage rates of young males and females under 30 years of age decreased by 20–30%. See Fig. 1.

The drop in marriage rates accompanied by postponing marriages to higher age can be observed throughout the period more than 20 years. While in 1991 the most frequent age of first marriage was 21–22 years for males and 18–19 years for females, respectively, nine years later (in the year 2000) it was 24–26 years for males and 22–24 years for females. Since 2010 the values are about 28–30 and 26–28 years, respectively. (See Fig. 2–3.)

Postponing of marriages to higher ages results also in the increase of the age at first marriage for both males and females (See Fig. 4). The average age of groom grew since 1990 by more than 7 years; for grooms from 24.3 years to 31.5 years for brides from 21.6 to 28.7 years. At the same time the drop of marriage rates at younger ages was only partly compensated by a relatively slight increase of them at higher ages. While in 1990 the total rate of first marriage was almost 1 and in the following two years it reached almost 0.8, in the last 20 years its values are only about 0.5 or even lower. If this trend will continue, about half of the population (both males and females) will never marry and will remain single.

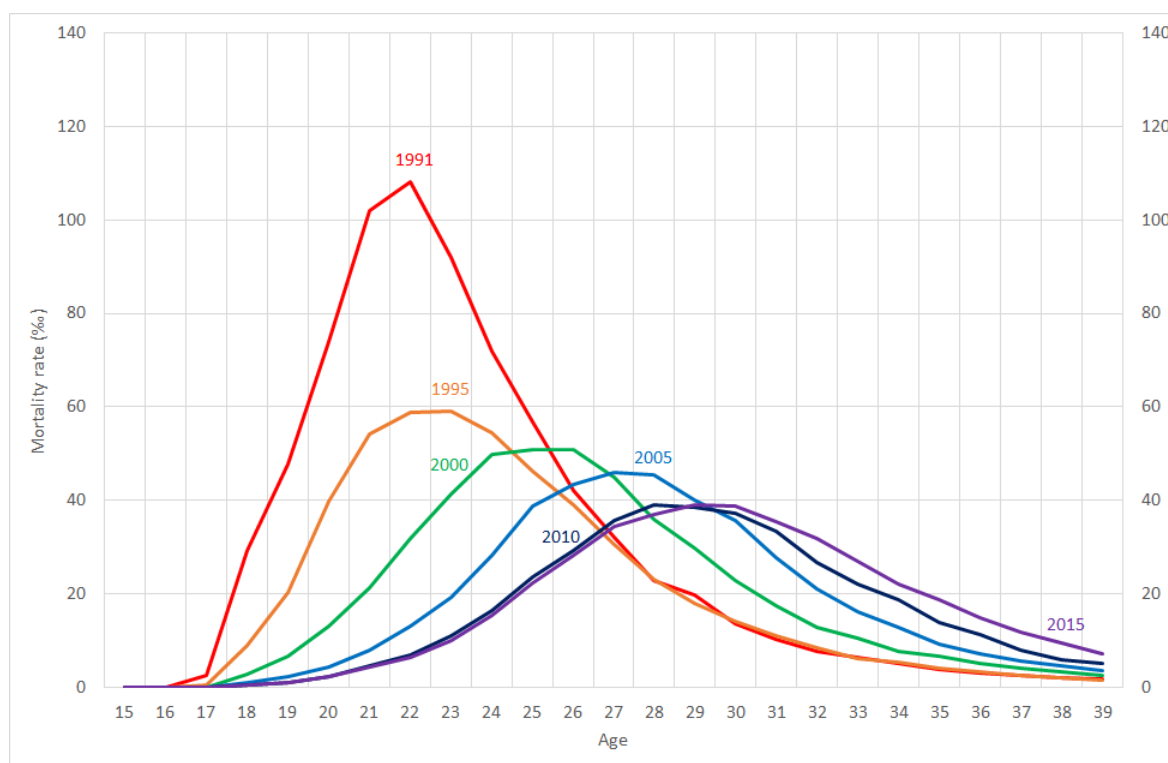
Fig. 1: Age specific first-marriage rates in 1990 and 1991



Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

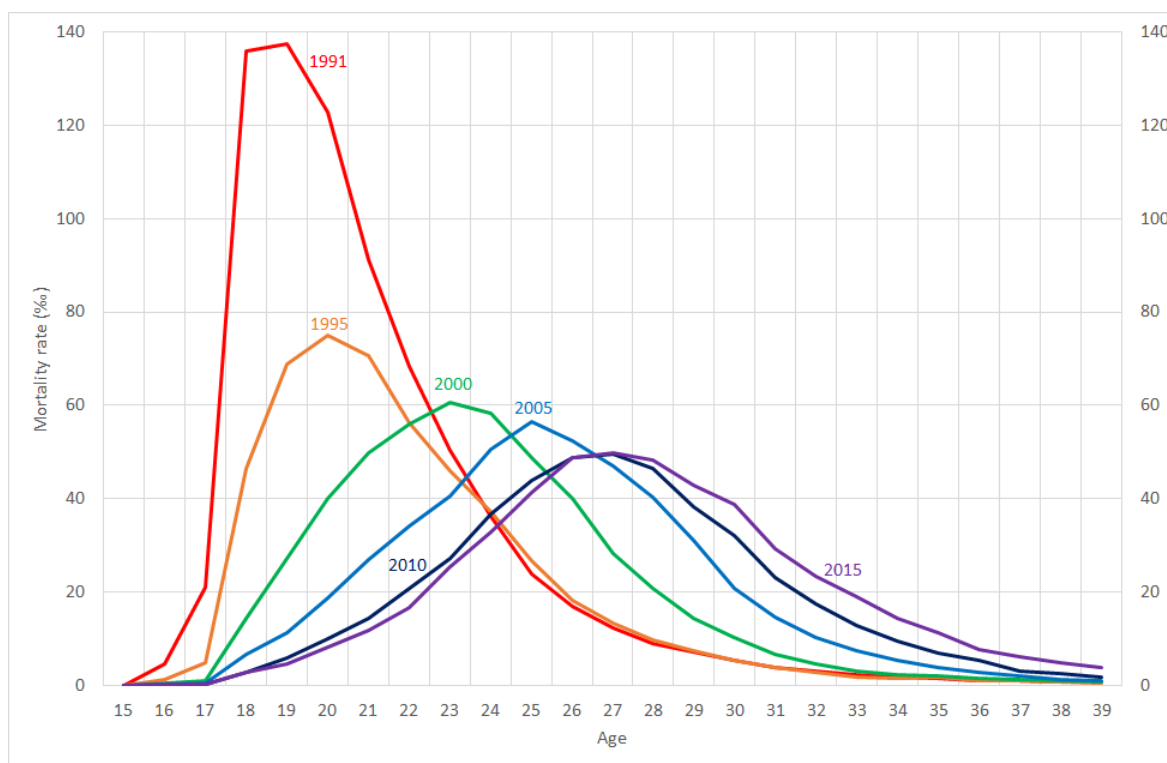
This trend is confirmed by the changes in the age structure of the Czech population by marital status. In early nineties about 10% of males and 40% of females at the age of 20 years were ever married (i.e. not single), at the age of 25 the proportions were 60% and 80%, respectively and at the age of 30 it was about 80% for males and 90% for females, respectively. At the age of 50 the proportion of single males was about 5% and for females about 3% only.

Fig. 2: Age specific first-marriage rates – selected years – males



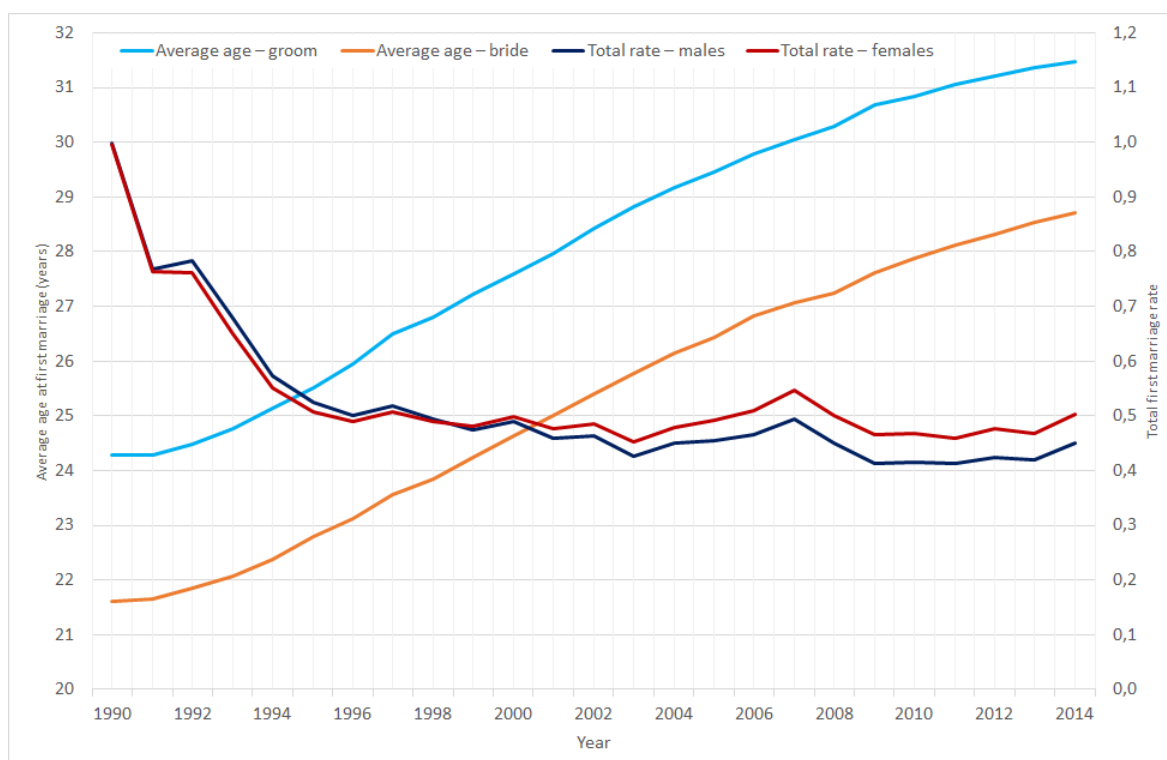
Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

Fig. 3: Age specific first-marriage rates – selected years – females



Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

Fig. 4: Age specific first-marriage rates – selected years



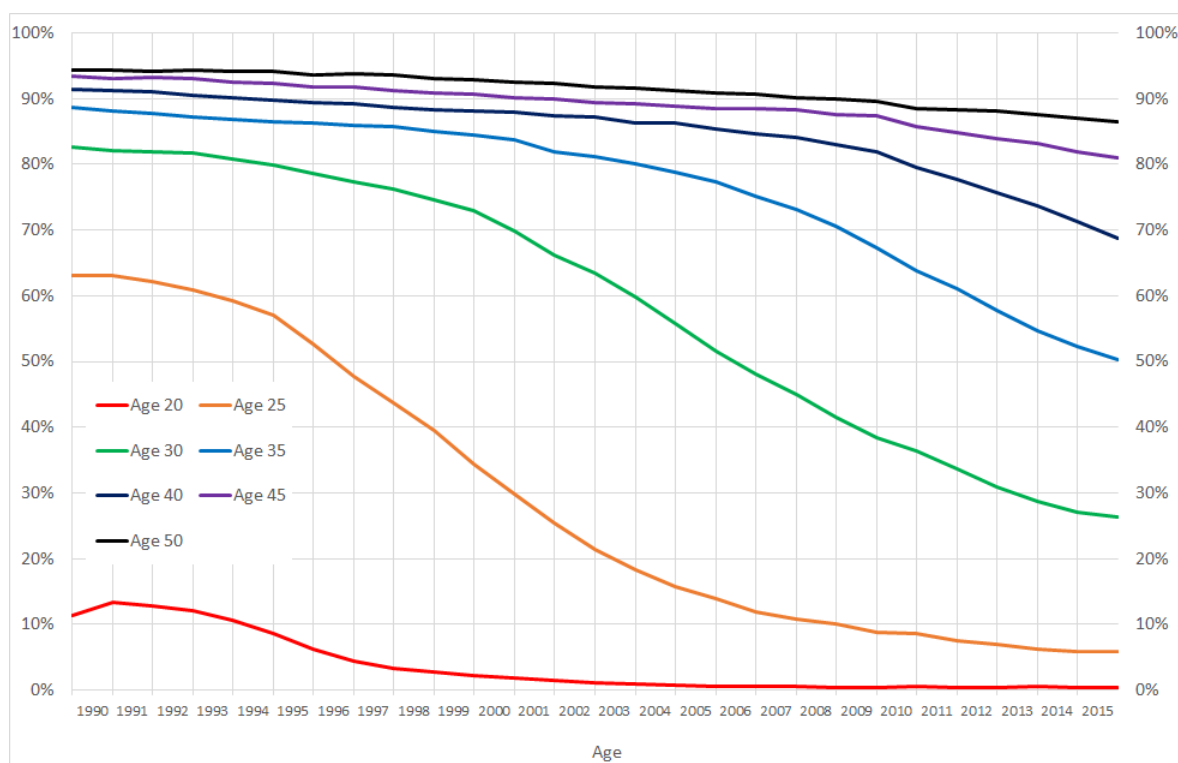
Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

Until present time the situation dramatically changed. The proportion of ever-married people at the age of 20 is negligible for both males and females. At the age of 25 only about 5% of males and 15% of females are ever-married, at the age of 30 the proportion of ever-married persons is about 26% among males and 44% among females. Even at the age of 35 about one half of males and one third of females are still single. See fig. 5–6.

Changes in marriage behavior are evident very noticeably from the generation point of view. In the generation of males born 1965 about one half males were ever-married until the age of about 24, and until 30 it was almost 80%. Half of the females from the same year of births were ever-married until 21, at the age of 30 it was more than 90%. On the contrary in the generation born 1980 there are until now (age 35 years) only about 50% of males ever-married and about 67% of females. And the marriage rates of younger generations are even a little bit lower (see Fig. 7–8).

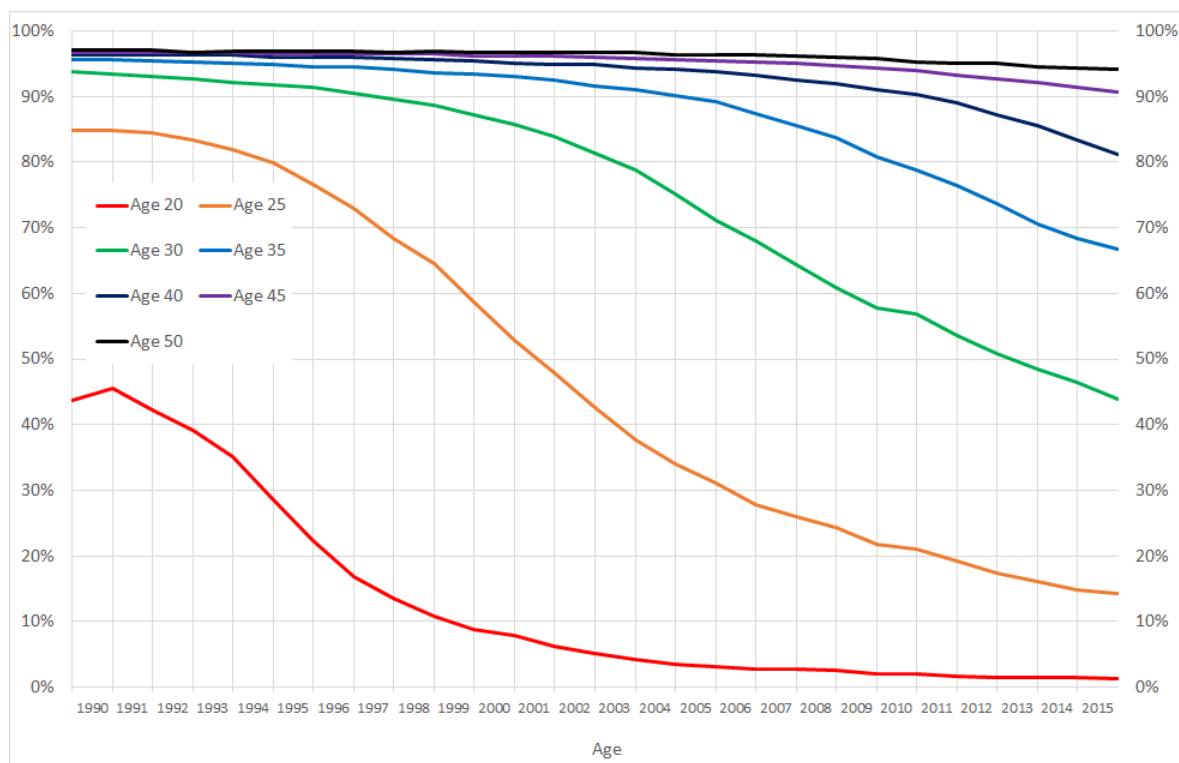
The marriage rates of Czech females are still a little bit higher than corresponding values for females of Sweden (See Olson-Wijk 2011, p. 186, Fig. 2). On the other hand while in Sweden we can see a marriage revival (females cohorts born after 1975 have marriage rates slightly higher than previous cohorts), in the Czech Republic continues the trend of marriage rates decrease.

Fig. 5: Proportion of ever-married – selected ages – males



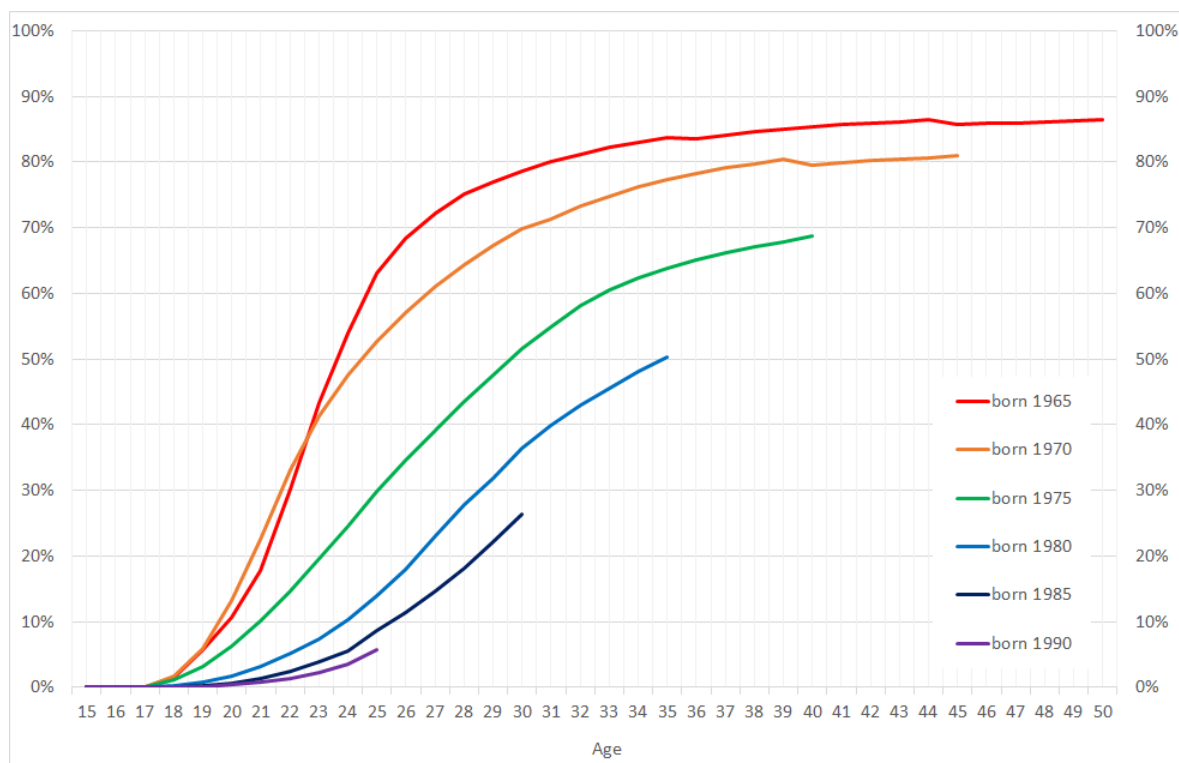
Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

Fig. 6: Proportion of ever-married – selected ages – females



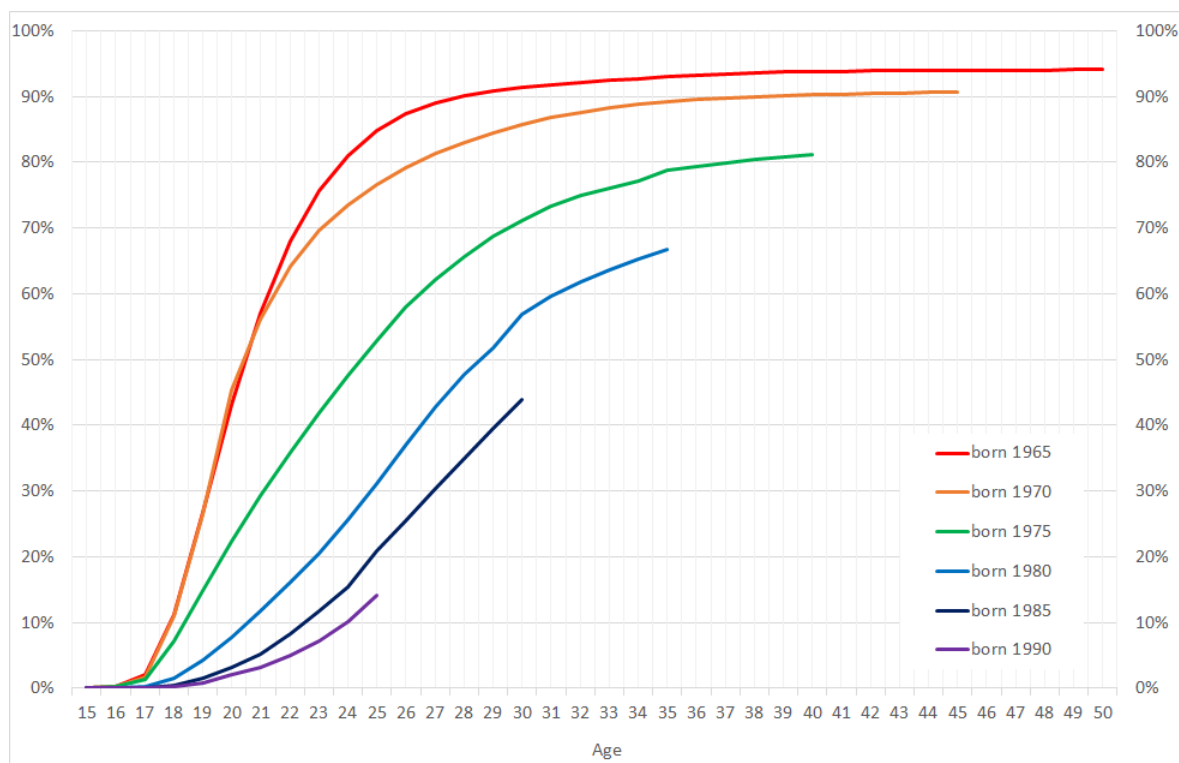
Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

Fig. 7: Proportion of ever-married – selected cohorts – males



Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

Fig. 8: Proportion of ever-married – selected cohorts – females

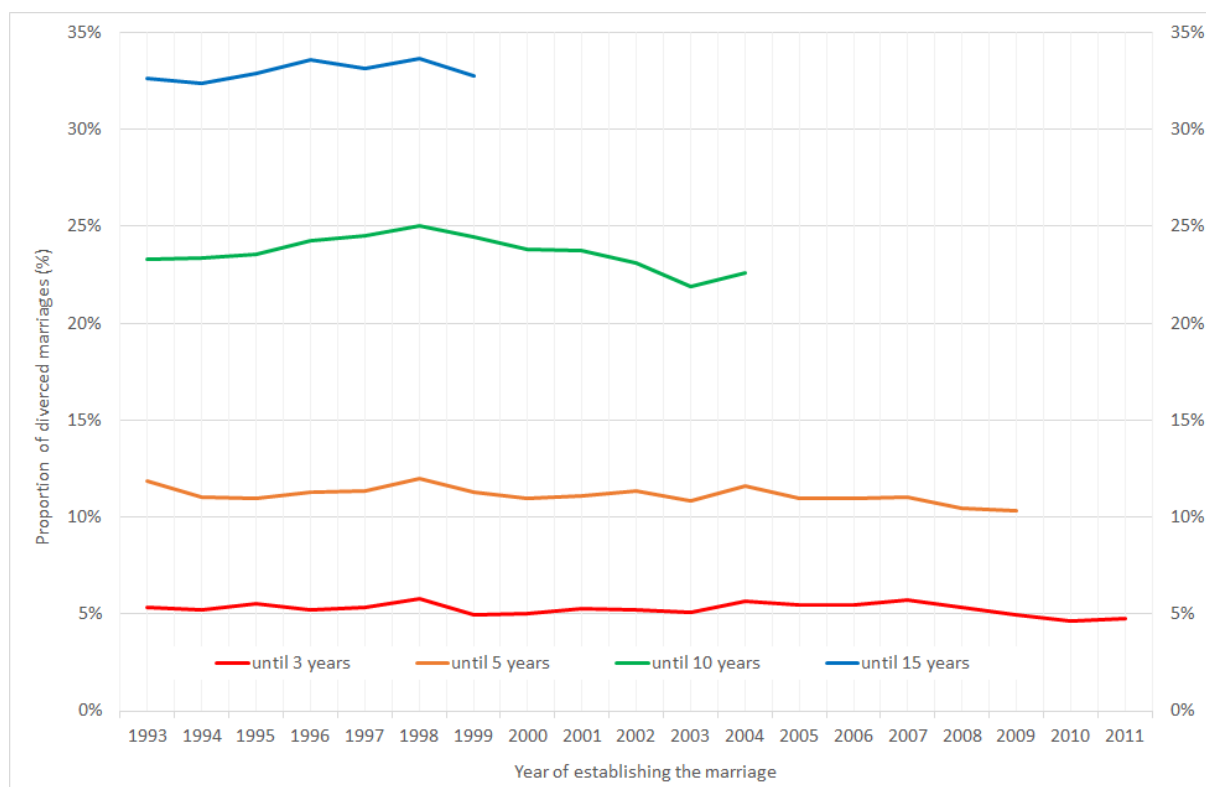


Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

2 Divorces

The decrease of number of marriages of course results in the number of divorces. In some countries the decrease in marriage rates was followed after several years by increasing stability of marriage (see, e.g. Martin, T. C., & Bumpass, L. L.. 1989). But in the Czech Republic the stability of marriages and its duration increases only negligibly. One hypothesis explaining this may be transmission of relatively high divorce rates between generations of previous generations nevertheless Wolfinger (2011) shows that for many populations this transmission substantially weakened.

Fig. 9: Proportion of divorced marriages



Source: CZSO data, author's computation and graph

The characteristic of the duration of marriage changed only a little bit. More than 5% of marriages divorce until 3 years, only for marriages concluded in 2009–2011 is a little bit below this value. Almost 12% of marriages from the marriage cohort 1993 were divorced until 5 years and for any other cohort the proportion is not below 10%. The proportion of marriages divorced until 10 years even grew from 23.3% (cohort 1993) to 25% (cohort 1998), for cohorts 2002–2003 is still about 22%. And after 15 years almost 1/3 of marriages is divorced. See Fig. 9. Proportion of divorced marriages were computed using annual data of divorces by the duration of marriage. For marriages established recently some values are of course not still known at present time.

Conclusion

Marriage rates in the Czech Republic drop very rapidly in the last decade of the previous century, the decline continued during this century with lower intensity until present times. Divorce rates decrease only a little bit in last years.

Changes in marriage behavior may have serious consequences in social sphere. Especially older single women are very often in danger of poverty (see, e.g. Bartošová, 2014).

Similar development of marriage rates can be observed in other East-European post-socialist countries. It would be interesting to compare the coincidences on one side and differences on the other side between these countries by an appropriate statistical method, e.g. cluster analysis. Some detail of using this method are mentioned e.g. in Löster (2014).

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