

Premarital conceptions in Romania and the subsequent behaviour: extramarital births or shotgun marriages

- Extended abstract -

After the fall of the socialist regime in Romania in 1989, rapid demographic changes accompanied the general socio-economic transitions brought by the transition to the market economy. Fertility rates have strongly dropped, motherhood has lost its universality and it started to be postponed. A marked increase in extra-marital births could also be noticed, and the phenomenon is more challenging to explain as it coexists with a low level of cohabitation.

Authors that have studied the Eastern European countries (Philipov 2002) found several possible explanations for this combination of phenomena: one is connected with the inefficiency (or the total lack) of actual contraceptive behaviour, particularly among teenagers; the early start of sexual life spreads more rapidly during transition than the use of modern contraceptives; a second explanation is connected to a certain sub-population group - such as Roma-Gypsies - that traditionally have a high level of extramarital fertility which has been maintained during the transition period, with a relatively low decline in its fertility; and a third explanation is the fact that conception can precede marriage, and the couple can have legal marriage after the birth of the first child.

The high level of extramarital births, with its maximum of 29.4% in 2004 and a level of 26.7% in 2007, opens a series of discussions about the reproductive behaviour of Romanian women, the main issue debated being the spread of alternative living arrangements and whether extramarital conception and extramarital births are planned behaviours. Various analyses, made also by the author, suggest different interpretations, and discuss whether Romanian women follow a similar demographic behaviour as western or northern European women (a second demographic transition type of behaviour).

Some authors challenge the similarity between the behaviour of Romanian and western European women. Rotariu (2009), using official data about all live-births in 2007, shows that the extramarital births occur at a much lower age than the legitimate births, whether we refer to the total number of births or to the first births. Moreover, below age 20, there are more births out of wedlock than in wedlock. Extramarital births are much more frequent among low educated women and among inactive persons. These data made him argue that extramarital childbearing and childbirth is a different behaviour, compared with the western societies. In our country, childbirth outside marriage is not a matter of going beyond the institution of marriage (by replacing it with cohabitation or not), but of a pre-modern behaviour of persons living at the margins of the socially regulated area. My own previous results based on survey data (Oanes & Haragus 2008, 2009) sustain this view on extramarital childbirth behaviour in Romania, being argued that these births are not consciously assumed and planned, but are rather the result of inefficient and insufficient use of modern contraceptives.

There are also voices that argue that reproductive behaviour of Romanian women follow the path of the western countries and that cohabitation and extramarital births are forms of post-modern behaviour that is developing in our country, too (Muresan 2007).

The rich data of *Generations and Gender Survey* conducted in Romania in 2005 allow a deeper insight on the issue of extramarital childbearing.

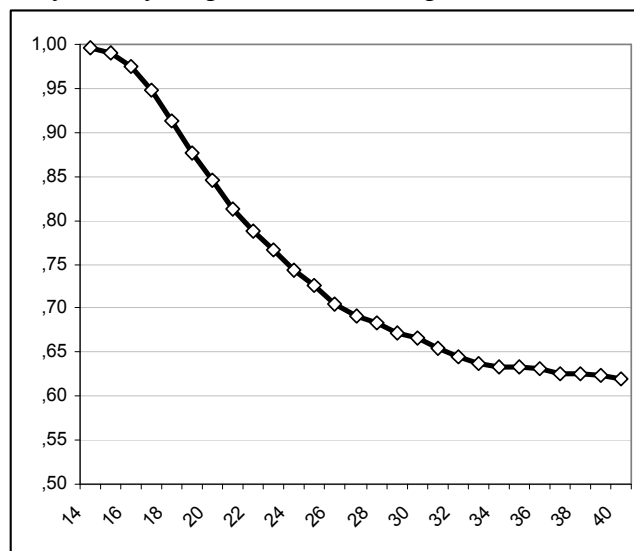
In this paper I focus on premarital conception and the subsequent behaviour, which can be a shotgun marriage or an extramarital birth, and I investigate what factors and personal characteristics have an influence on these behaviours, for the first three births. Analysis will be done by means of event history analysis (piecewise constant exponential models for premarital conception risk) and logistic regression (for the subsequent behaviour). The sample

contains 6004 women aged 18 to 79 years, of which 4908 had at least one child. There are 1400 first premarital conceptions (events), of which 701 births will be inside (a shotgun) marriage and 699 births will remain extramarital.

In what follows, there are some preliminary descriptive results for the risk of first premarital conception and for the subsequent behaviour.

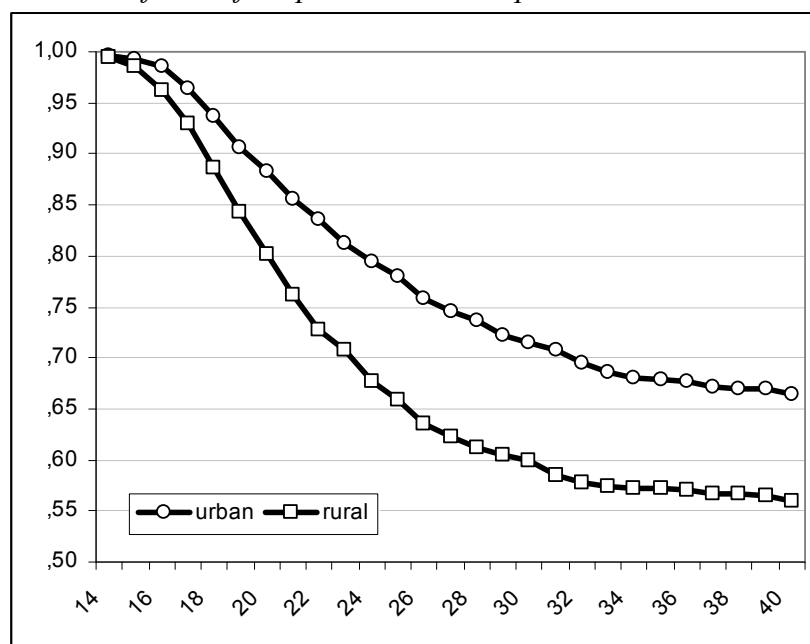
Figure 1 show that more than 35% of women had an extramarital conception until the age of 40, and this happens at a more rapid pace for the younger ages (below 20).

Figure 1. Survival curves for the first premarital conception



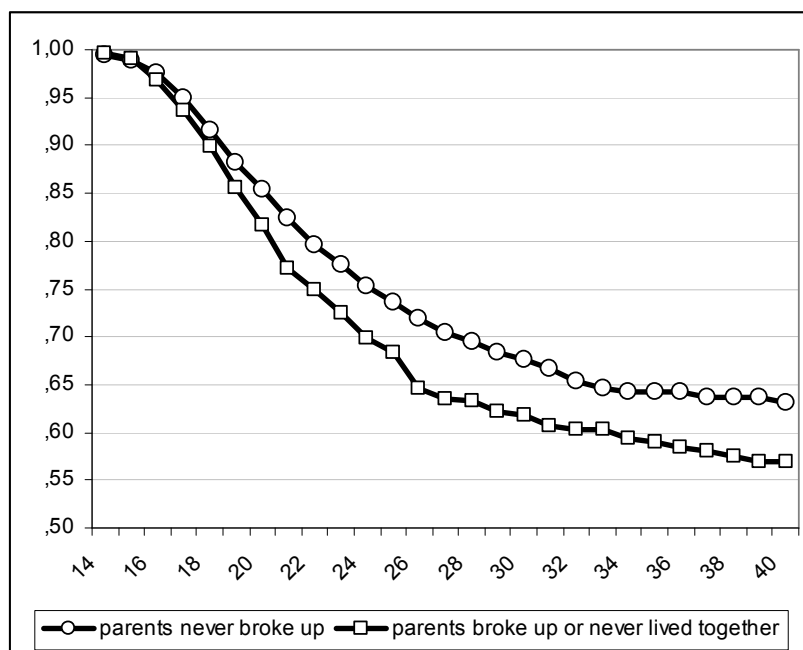
One can see in Figure 2 that larger proportion of rural than urban women experience a premarital conception until the age of 40 (44% in rural, compared with 33% in urban), at a more rapid pace in rural areas. Based on these first descriptive results, we have support to believe that premarital conceptions are rather the effect of insufficient contraceptive use than the result of a conscious planning of the child.

Figure 2. Survival curves for the first premarital conception, urban and rural areas



Survival curves by the marital status of woman's parents suggest that the non-traditional family model is transmitted in the family: higher proportion of women whose parents had broke up or never lived together experienced a premarital conception than women whose parents never broke up (43%, compared with 37%).

Figure 3. Survival curves for the first premarital conception, by marital situation of the parents



The time constant covariates to be used for the premarital conception risk are type of settlement, parents' marital situation (at age 15), parents' activity status (at age 15), religiosity etc. Among time varying covariates are the partnership status (in cohabitation or outside a co-residential union), educational attainment, whether they left parental home.

Regarding the women's behaviour following a premarital conception, here are some descriptive results, which show that higher proportions of rural women end in extramarital childbirth, a clear indication that this behaviour is not a post-modern one, but other socio-economic conditions intervene. As it is expected, higher proportions of women whose parents broke up or never lived together give out of wedlock births than women whose parents never broke up. An interesting result is that almost 2/3 of women who conceived the child in cohabitation give birth outside marriage, while more than half of women who conceived the child outside a co-residential union marry before the birth of the child.

Table 1. The subsequent behaviour of women who experienced premarital conception, by different characteristics

	Shotgun marriage	Extramarital birth	Total
Urban areas	55,2%	44,8%	100%
Rural areas	45,7%	54,3%	100%
Parents never broke up	51,0%	49,0%	100%
Parents broke up or never lived together	47,0%	53,0%	100%
Conception in cohabitation	37,6%	62,4%	100%
Conception outside a (co-residential) union	55,0%	45,0%	100%
Total	50,1%	49,9%	100%

The existing research (Rotariu 2009, Oanes & Haragus 2008, 2009) arguing that extramarital childbearing in Romania is a different behaviour compared with western European societies is based only on macro-level or cross-sectional data. The GGS data allow us to study premarital conceptions and extramarital births from the life course perspective, having in this way a better insight on the determinants of the phenomena and on their specificity.

References

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