

The probability of divorce and the marriage age. Slovakian experience.

(Abstract of a poster)

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Despite of the declining number of new marriages since 1990, the number of divorces in Slovakia has continuously grown, both in absolute and relative figures. Since many people in Eastern Europe in the past got married at very young age, many experts had expected that postponing the wedding on later (to higher age) would result to a greater stability of marriage. However, the opposite has become true. The presented investigations are inspired by the mentioned paradox. The probability of divorcing the marriage (e.g. within next 10 years) is studied here in the dependency on the age of bride and groom.

The study is based on Slovakian data collected by the Statistical office. Because several data are available only in an aggregated form, they had to be re-sorted into a more proper annualized form by means of Sprague multipliers. While until 1990 the marriage patterns in Slovakia were practically stable, from 1990 they started to change themselves. Thus, the probability of divorcing the marriage could be influenced by other factors, too. Further, especially for older brides and grooms, the probability of divorce may be distorted by the relatively high probability of one partner death. Finally, the resulting estimations have to be adjusted by some proper smoothing algorithm.

The investigations confirmed that the probability of divorce is extremely high for very young newly married couples, but it quickly falls with the increasing marriage age. (In Slovakia, the civil law allows to get married from the age of 18, but exceptionally, with a special permission of the court, already from 16.) For the marriage cohort 1980, this probability has the minimum between ages 18 and 21 for brides and between 21 and 25 for grooms. For the marriage cohorts from the middle of 1990's this minimum is flatter and shifted between ages 24 and 29 for grooms, and three years less for brides. After this minimum the probability of divorce slowly grows to approximately marriage age 40. Then it declines again because for the older brides and grooms the probability of one partner death is getting significant.

The study shown that one cannot expect that the increase of marriage age would lead to the decrease in incidence of divorces. The explanation of this paradox should be probably let on psychologists. Further, the probability of divorce by marriage age x is not constant but, as a consequence of postmodern tendencies, growths, in particular for lower marriage ages. At the some time, the age with minimal probability of divorce is also the most frequent age at marriage.

In the paper the optimal age difference of newly married couple is studied, too. It was shown that if the difference is not too great, it does not influence the probability of divorce.