

Weakening marital ties in Poland?¹

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Short abstract

This paper examines the correlates of first marriages disruption in Poland on the data coming for the retrospective survey ‘Employment, Family and Education Survey’ (EFES) of 2006. The EFES data cover the period since middle 1980s but relevant analyses are possible since 1990s. The event history model formulated includes several covariates which refer to: a period, a type of union (three binary variables showing whether marriage has been preceded by cohabitation or premarital birth, or whether it was a shot-gun marriage), a place of residence at age of 15, education attainment (time-varying) and a variable describing parity and pregnancy status combined with the age of the youngest child. Estimates reveal dependencies similar to those found for other countries about impacts of traditionalism of the upbringing environment, meaning of a shot-gun marriage and a premarital child, importance of children and pregnancy, a stronger impact of younger children. Diverging results concern an influence of premarital cohabitation which does not increase the risk of marriage dissolution. Compared to previous studies on Poland by Härkönen and Dronkers (2006) the change of educational gradient is noticed – from positive to negative.

Aside from several expected correlations the model reveals that marriage is still an important institution in Poland even a couple decides for premarital cohabitation. However, after 2000 the readiness to terminate an unsatisfactory marriage has increased what can be interpreted as being in line with the second demographic transition concept.

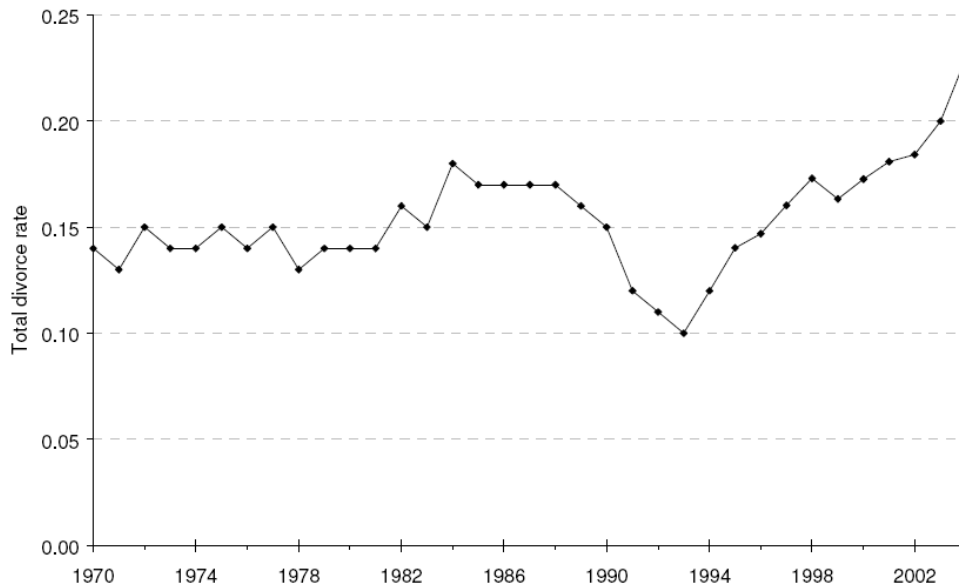
¹ The analysis was carried out for the MPI course ‘Applied event history analysis’ in the winter semester 2008/2009.

Extended abstract

Introduction

Poland is a country of a relatively low level of divorce. Since the 1970s until beginning of the 1990s the total divorce rate (TDR) was low. After a temporal decline at the beginning of the 1990s the TDR started to increase since 1994. Starting from 2000 TDR was well above the values from the 1970s and the 1980s. The upward trend after 2000 has been continuing even though the possibility of legal separation has been introduced in 1999 (Wieczorek 1999).

Figure 1. Total divorce rate, Poland 1970-2004.



Source: Council of Europe data (from Kotowska et al. 2008, p. 820).

High female labour market participation under the centrally planned economy might have favoured divorce by enabling women to earn for their lives when they want to separate. In addition, the socialist welfare state was bearing some of the cost induced by children and lonely mothers were supported relatively generously. But the family stability was of political and economic value for the system, so the divorce law was strained every time when increase in divorce numbers was observed (Łobodzińska 1983).

Transformation of the Polish economy and the political system initiated in 1989 led to profound societal change which included also changes in demographic behaviour. Postponement and reduction of fertility and entry into first marriage follow the pattern drawn by West and North European societies and have been conceptualised as the second demographic transition. One of the key changes within this concept is weakening meaning of marriage as a form of family life manifesting itself in a later entry into a marital union, a higher proportion of people never married, a greater share of out-of-wedlock births and a greater instability of marriage. If Poland entered the path of second demographic transition one may also expect decrease in the union stability.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the correlates of union dissolution in order to see whether the increasing tendency to union disruption since 1994 is a result of lessening of some hampering factors or rather strengthening of people's inclination to split up.

Data and Methods

I have used the data from Employment, Family and Education Survey carried out in 2006. The data covers educational, family, employment, migration histories of 3000 women who were at age 25-40 at the time of interview.

The event under study is a disruption of the first marriage as reported by a respondent. The disruption includes divorce, legal and factual separation. In the sample 2317 females formed their first marriage. Marriages are observed until the event i.e. union disruption occurs. I use the piecewise constant model for estimating the hazard regression. The baseline hazard has been split at duration of 12, 36 and 72 months (separating 1st year of marriage, 2nd-3rd year of marriage, 4th-6th and 7th-15th)

Covariates used in the regression model reflect findings from literature on factors important for a risk of marriage disruption as well as the possibilities available in the data set. The main limitation for making use of the extensive life histories was the limited number of events observed in the population at risk. Explanatory variables used in estimation were as follows: a period, a type of union (three binary variables showing whether marriage has been preceded by cohabitation or premarital birth, or whether it was a shot-gun marriage), a place of residence at age of 15, education attainment (time-varying) and a variable describing parity and pregnancy status combined with the age of youngest child.

Firstly, the model with main effects was estimated in order to see whether the relations observed for different covariates are in line with conclusions from other studies. Secondly, three separate models with two-way interactions of (1) period and shot-gun marriage, (2) period and presence of children, (3) shot-gun marriage and presence of children have been estimated. For the time up to 1990 period has not been split by the value of interacted variable because of low numbers of occurrences before 1990s. For the same reason the offspring variable could not be used in the detailed specification implemented in the main effects model. In the interaction model a distinction is made only between a presence of a very young or expected child (aggregating category pregnancy and presence of child aged 0-2 years) and the absence of both pregnancy and very young children.

Results

Main-effects model

The risk of first marriage disruption is very low during the first year of the union duration. The result is not surprising. Due to a length of divorce procedure solving the union in a formal way is not very likely. Besides if a couple decides to marry they probably do not start to think about splitting up just after the wedding. It takes time to give up the idea of being together.

Table 1. Correlates of marriage dissolution risk in Poland.

	Covariate	Relative risk
Marriage duration (process time)	1. year	0.14 ***
	2.-3. year	1
	4.-6. year	0.84
	7.-15. year	0.68
Type of marriage	Direct marriage	1
	Preceded by non-marital cohabitation	0.68
Period	Up to 1990	1.13
	1991-1999	0.66 **
	2000-2006	1
Place of living at the age of 15	Urban big	1
	Urban small	0.66 **
	Rural	0.35 ***
Pregnancy and parity status	Not pregnant, no children	1
	Pregnant regardless of parity	0.45 **
	One child, under 3	0.50 ***
	2+ children, under 3	0.33 ***
	One child, 3-6 years	0.75
	2+ children, youngest 3-6	0.77
	Child(ren) older than 6	0.60 *

Education	In education	0.65
	Lower	1
	Secondary	1.05
	High	0.45 ***
Shot-gun marriage	No	1
	Yes	1.91 ***
Premarital child	No	1
	Yes	1.83 ***

Note: * - p-value <0.01, ** - p-value <0.05, * - p-value <0.1**

Source: own calculations.

There is no difference with respect to disruption risk among unions of different durations if the duration is greater than 1. However models with less detailed specification of offspring variable showed that the risk decreases since seventh year of marriage. Accounting for children, parity and pregnancy made the baseline hazard flatter.

Premarital cohabitation has no impact on the risk of first union disruption so there is no indication toward selectivity of those more prone to union disruption into cohabitation. This may be an indication that in Poland marriage is still an important institution even for the more liberal women who have decided for cohabitation before marriage.

The impact of two covariates: the period and the place of residence at age of 15 is consistent with the expectations. The period variable covers well the macro-trend in divorce. The place of residence at age of 15 shows that the more traditional the up-bringing environment, the smaller intensity of marriage dissolution.

Presence of children reduces the risk of dissolution. The impact is very strong if a couple has very young children (under 3 years old) or is expecting a child. Older children aged 3-6 years make no difference for the union disruption risk, however children older than 6 reduce it. These inconsistent results do not allow us to conclude about the increasing or decreasing hazard pattern of union disruption by the age of the youngest child. We may state, however, that very young children and pregnancy influence positively persistence of first marriage. Our estimates showed no difference between parity one and higher order parities.

There is no difference between women with low and secondary education considering the risk of union disruption. Also women in education do not differ from low and medium educated women but this is due to the low number of events in this group. Even in spite of low number of events women with a higher education level have a significantly lower risk of union disruption. This indicates on the negative educational gradient of the risk of divorce. Härkönen and Dronkers (2006) with the FFS 1991 found this gradient positive but according to them it changes in time from positive to less positive or even negative. Apparently within the time between life histories recorded in both surveys (FFS and EFES) the gradient has changed in the direction predicted by Härkönen and Dronkers.

If marriage is contracted because of conceiving a child it has almost twice as high risk of disruption compared to marriages contracted by women who are not pregnant. If there are children born before marriage the risk of marriage disruption is remarkably higher.

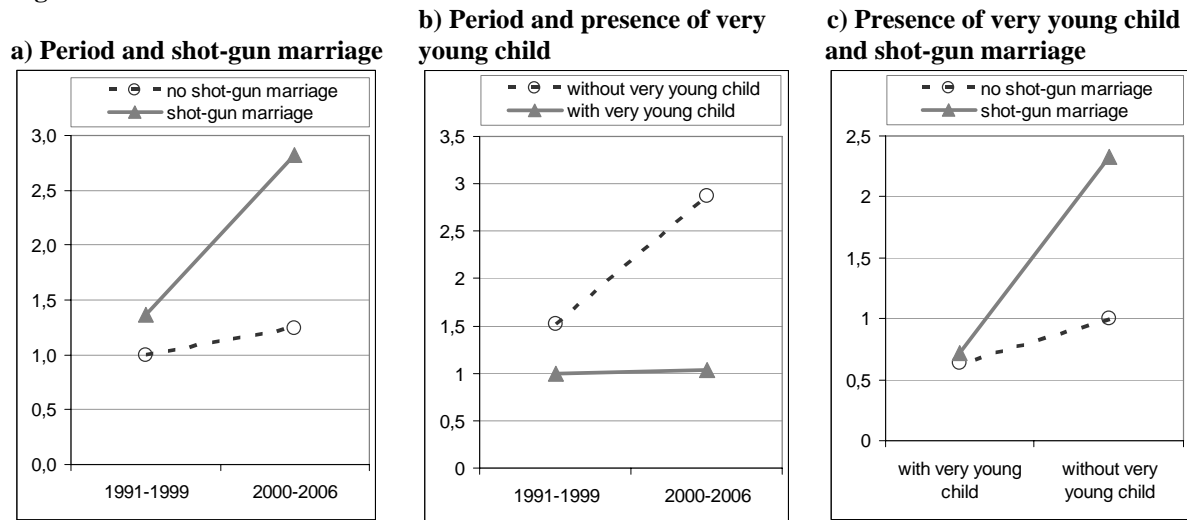
Models with interactions

Models with interactions have not changed considerably the coefficients of not-interacted variables. Thus the main point of interest is the interpretation of coefficients for interacted variables themselves (Figure 2).

Period up to and after 1999 differ with regard to impacts of shot-gun marriages and the presence of children. The general increase of the risk after 1999 can be seen for both shot-gun marriages and not-shot-gun marriages, but the scope of change differs significantly. While the risk for not-shot-gun marriages increases by 25%, the risk for shot gun marriages doubles.

Similarly the change of relative risks is uneven for the presence of children. For unions where very young children are present, there is no change in the hazard of disruption before and after 1999, whereas the risk for marriages without very young children almost doubles.

Figure 2. Models with interactions



Source: own calculations.

Shot-gun marriages can be considered as forced marriages. Expecting of a child makes the people to marry partners they wouldn't marry otherwise. In general, shot-gun marriages are fitted worse than other marriages and a tendency to dissolve them should be stronger. Whether the tendency takes place or not depends on how strong are the obstacles to union's disruption. Also the ideational changes may increase the discrepancy in risk of disruption between shot-gun and not-shot-gun marriages by lowering the threshold at which the decision of dissolving the unsatisfying relationship is taken.

The same reasoning applies to an influence of the interacted period and the presence of children. The presence of very young children (including expectance of child within next seven months) constitutes a very strong factor prohibiting from marriage dissolution. This factor keeps the hazard of dissolution constant even between the two observed periods. The presence of very young children may be working both through the legal system and societal norms. If there is no very young child (either no child at all or only a child older than three) the risk of disruption increases. That increase is overproportional after 1999 showing that either the willingness to dissolve marriages has increased or some other prohibiting factors have lessened their impact.

The third interaction shows us how the risk for shot-gun marriages changes depending on the presence of very young child. If there is very young child in the family both types of marriages have low risk of dissolution. The risk is higher if there are no very young children in the family. For not-shot-gun marriages the increase is by almost 60% whereas for shot-gun marriages by 220%. Almost every shot-gun marriage has at least a spell of presence of very young child. For them the result of increasing risk means that when the child is growing some prohibiting factors stop to operate and willingness to dissolve the unsatisfying relationship can be realised.

Summary

The estimated regression models for hazard of first marriage disruption revealed important dependencies. Most of them are expected and similar to findings for other countries: an influence of traditionalism of the upbringing environment, meaning of a shot-gun marriage and a premarital child, importance of children and pregnancy, a stronger impact of younger

children. Some other are, however, more peculiar and worth commenting either because of interesting correspondence to other findings or because of the importance of trends they show.

The most unexpected result is that the premarital cohabitation does not increase the risk of divorce. Unfortunately, the size of the sample does not allow to conclude from this result but it may be an important indication that in Poland marriage is still an important institution also for those who decide to start a non-marital union. The result can be a motivation for testing the hypothesis that premarital cohabitation in Poland has an information function as postulated by Becker et al. (1977) if the appropriate data are available.

The risk of first marriage disruption has a negative educational gradient at least for a high education level. The gradient has changed from positive to negative as a result of modernisation as foreseen by Härkönen and Dronkers (2006).

The risk of marriage disruption was low in the 1990s and much higher before and after this decade. This estimation reflects the tendency in the total divorce rate which was decreasing in the first half of the 1990s and increasing in the second half. The decrease after 1990 may be due to legal changes but we can't be sure whether they explain the whole scope of change. The EFES data allows to see changes which appeared since 2000 compared to the 1990s. The change consists of a profound increase in risk of divorce by almost 40%, diversified by types of unions. Forced marriages that should be on average of a worse quality were more prone to marital disruption than not-shot-gun marriages. Similarly marriages without very young children contributed more than those with very young children to the divorce risk. One can conclude that after 1999 people who were not satisfied with their unions became more prone to dissolve them.

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