

## Chapter 10

# **EDUCATION AND ENTRY INTO MOTHERHOOD IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC DURING STATE-SOCIALISM AND THE TRANSITION PERIOD 1970-1997**

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, the economic and social environment in which Czechs lived was subject to dramatic transformations including the transition from a centrally planned to a market economy, the democratization of politics and changes to the welfare state. The total fertility rate in the 1980s was slightly over 1.9 children per woman, yet it dropped throughout the 1990s to fairly low levels, in particular between 1996 to 2001 (1.13 to 1.19 children per woman). The mean age of mothers at first birth rose from 22.5 in 1989 to 24.6 in 1999. This development is not unique in that most countries of Central and Eastern Europe have experienced a substantial decline in fertility since the onset of politic and economic transition in 1989 (Kučera et al. 2000).

The Czech experience of the 1990s provoked a discussion on the nature and underlying factors of recent demographic changes (e.g. Rychtaříková 1995, 2000, Rabušic 1996, Fialová and Kučera 1997). These investigations were based on macro-level associations between reproductive behavior and the economic and social development of the Czech Republic. In this discussion frequent reference was made to the “economic crisis thesis” and the “second demographic transition thesis”, which mostly were being considered as mutually incompatible hypotheses. The aim of this contribution is to look at the changes in the timing of entry into motherhood on the individual level and to look at the role of women’s education in two specific contextual situations – during state socialism in the 1970s and 80s, with a centrally planned economy, and during the profound societal and economic transition of the 1990s.

The education of women has generally been regarded as a very important determinant of first birth timing. Life course studies on first birth transition offer two explanations for differences in first birth timing among women with different

education levels (Hoem 1986, Blossfeld and Huinink 1991). First, being enrolled in education; second, education attainment. The major theoretical assumption in these studies is that the effect of education on first-birth risks needs to be viewed in a dynamic way; from a methodological view this means the inclusion of women's education as a time-varying variable that distinguishes between the periods in and out of education. In this way, the impact of being enrolled in education can be distinguished from the *net* impact of the education level on first-birth risks.

Empirical studies report opposing results as concerns the effect of women's education attainment on the timing of first birth. Some studies report that higher education attainment is associated with deferred childbearing (e.g. Bloemen and Kalwij 2001, Liefbroer and Corijn 1999). The authors argue that women with higher education are more inclined to pursue an employment career and postpone childbearing to a later stage. Others do not find any significant effect of education attainment on birth timing (e.g. Gustafsson et al. 2002, Blossfeld and Huinink 1991). Blossfeld and Huinink (1991) for example claim that delayed first births among better educated women are largely linked to continuing education activity, whereas a higher education level has no net inhibiting effect on first-birth risks.

The chapter is organized as follows: Next, we describe changes in the institutional context such as in the education system, the presence of women in the labor market, economic returns to education and family policies. The theoretical framework is based on the economic approach to the timing of births (e.g. Gustafsson 2001). Within this framework, we discuss childbearing decisions under state socialism and during the transition period, and highlight major differences between these periods that may be a reason for the postponement of first birth in the 1990s. In particular, we look at education differences in the timing of first birth. Our empirical analysis is based on data from the Czech Fertility and Family Survey of 1997. We apply an event-history analysis to the transition to first child. The analysis proceeds in two steps and in both we compare behavior under state socialism with behavior during the transition period. In the first step, we investigate the effect of education attainment on first-birth risks. In the second step, we study first-birth risks since completion of studies in order to provide a deeper insight into the relationship between education duration and the timing of entry into motherhood in the life course of women.

## 2. CHANGES IN THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

### *2.1 Education – Structures and Changes*

Many aspects of the state-socialist education system (the number and type of schools, the length of education, the number of students admitted every year to different kinds of schools, the admission requisites) were planned according to the needs of the economy. The purpose was to provide white-collar workers with technical education and especially manual workers with technical apprenticeship for industry. The education system did not experience any major changes or reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. The state-socialist regime strongly promoted an education path