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Partnership context of first births in Russia: the enduring significance of marriage

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Wittgenstein Centre Conference 2018 / 3rd HFD Symposium
“FERTILITY ACROSS TIME AND SPACE: DATA AND RESEARCH ADVANCES”

5-7 December 2018, Vienna

Background

Marriage was universal in Soviet Russia:

- conservative social norms
- permit for joint residence
- important economic and social benefits (e.g. eligibility to acquire an apartment).
- accidental first conceptions in most cases led to shotgun marriages

After the collapse of the USSR, cohabitation and non-marital childbearing become increasingly widespread and have been gaining social acceptance (Zakharov 2008; Philipov & Jasilioniene 2008; Puur *et al.* 2012)

Most of the advantages associated with marriage and having children within marriage have disappeared → **no normative or legal pressure to marry**

At the same time, the **share of premarital conceptions among first births has changed only slightly:**

- in **1981 46%** of first marital births were conceived before marriage
in **1998 – 48%** (Tolts *et al.*, 2006), and in **2011 – 49%** (Churilova and Chumarina, 2014).

Objectives

The study aims to extend the existing knowledge on non-marital conceptions in Russia and to contribute towards a better understanding of reasons for the persistence of marriage as the preferred partnership context at first birth.

Data and methods

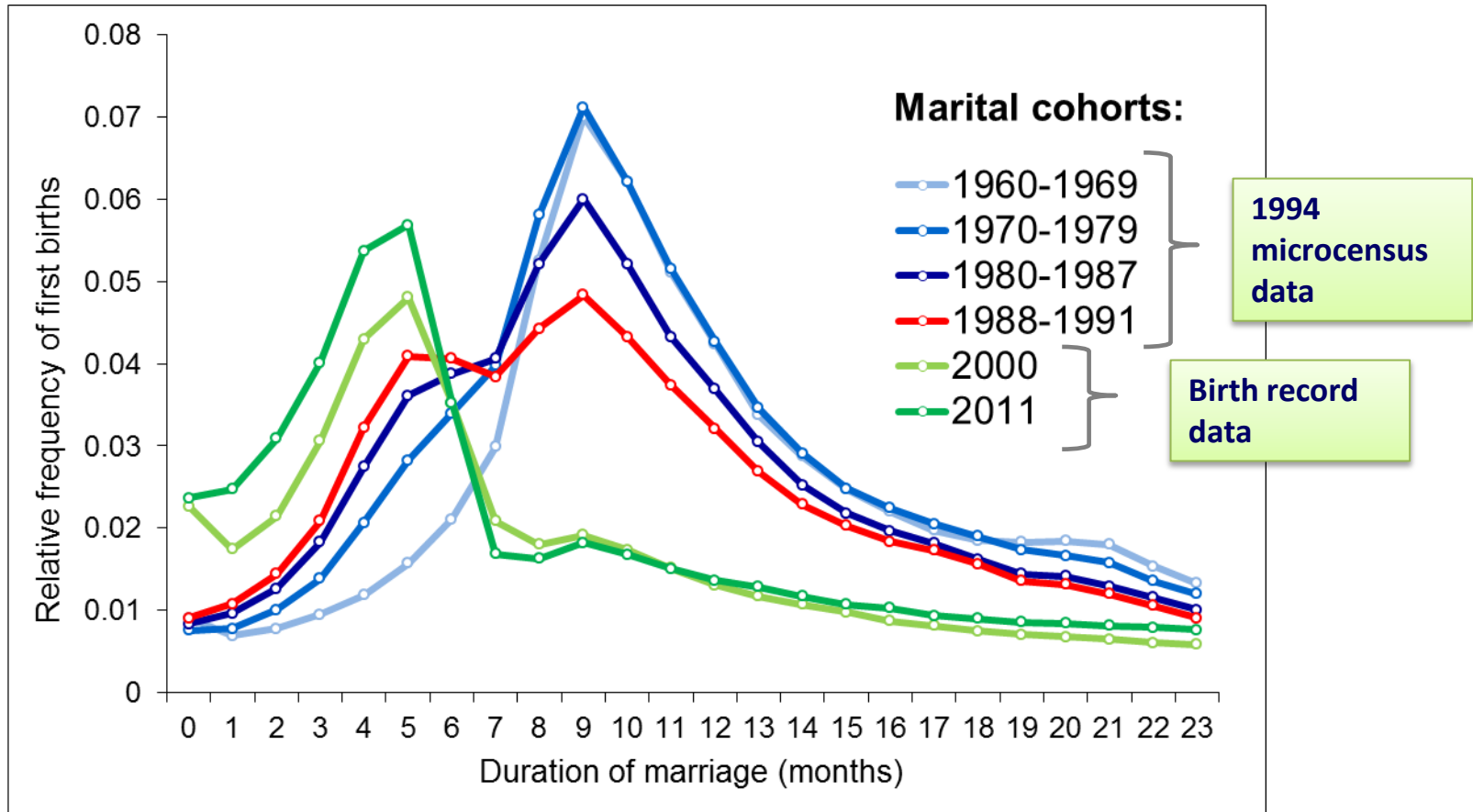
Data:

- **1994 microcensus** data (individual-level, 5% of total pop., excl. Chechen Rep.)
 - 1st and 2nd **marriages contracted in 1960-1991**: >1,6 mln. females (3rd+ marriages - 0.33% among all women, ages 18-79)
- **Civil registration records on births**
 - **2000 and 2011 marital cohorts** of women (no data on the order of marriage) → birth records from 2000-2002 (~464 thou. births) and 2011-2013 (~715 thou. births)
- **Additional data sources:**
 - Vital statistics, 2002 and 2010 censuses, 2015 microcensus, survey-based results

Analysis:

- Focus on women married at age 35 and younger
- Examine the distribution of 1st births by time elapsed after marriage using a two-year follow-up
- Investigate changes in relative frequency of births conceived prior to and after marriage

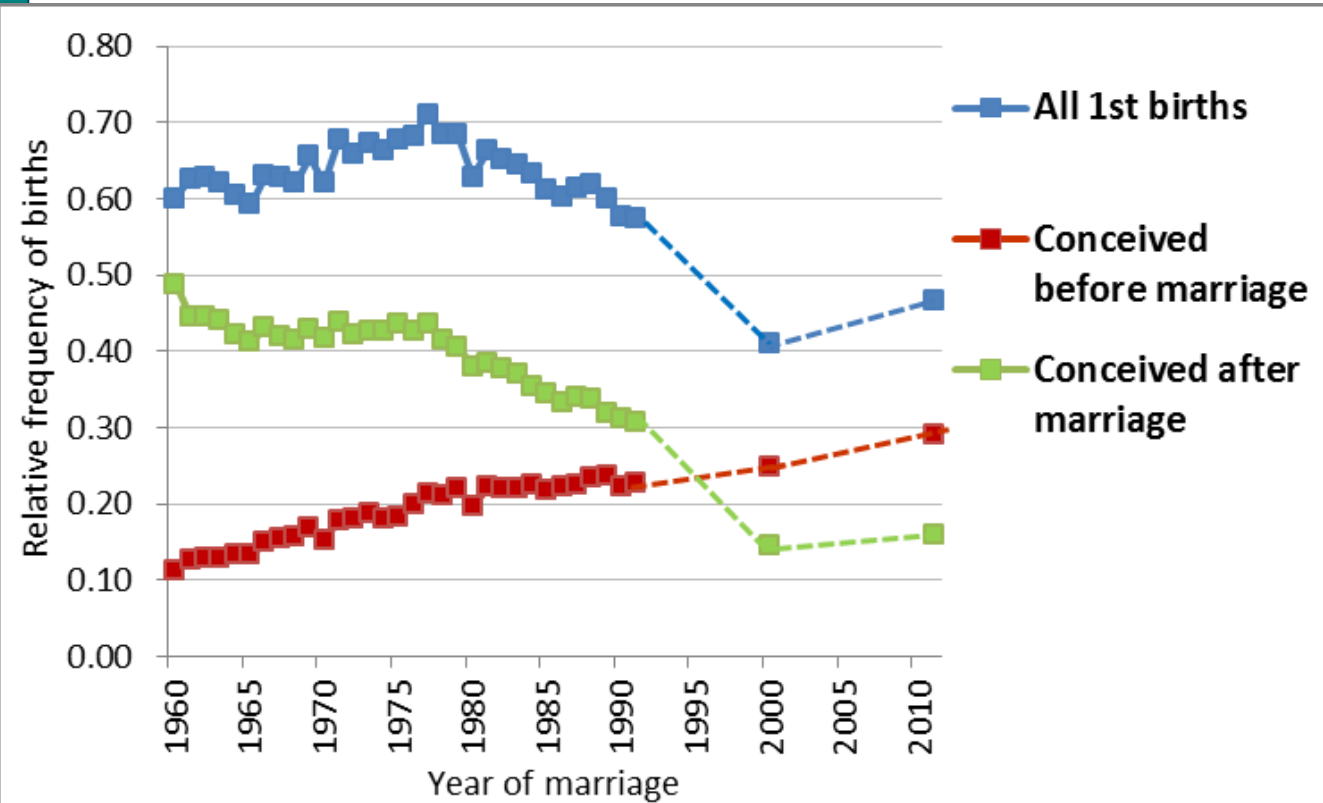
1st births by duration of marriage



- 1st births within 2 years after marriage
- To women married at 35 and younger

1st births: conceived before vs. after marriage

- 1st births within 2 years after marriage
- women married at 35 and younger



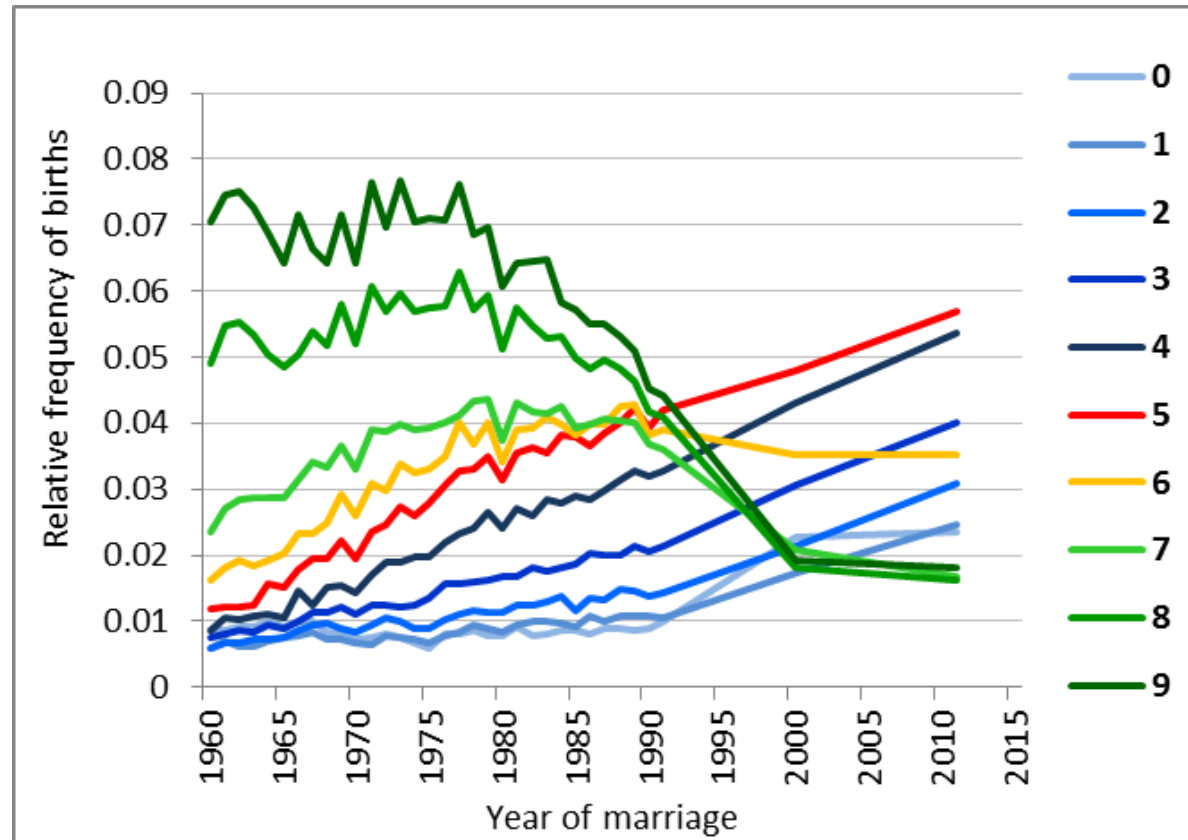
$\leq 7^{\text{th}}$ month
→ conceived before marriage

$\geq 9^{\text{th}}$ month
→ conceived within marriage

8th month
→ 50/50

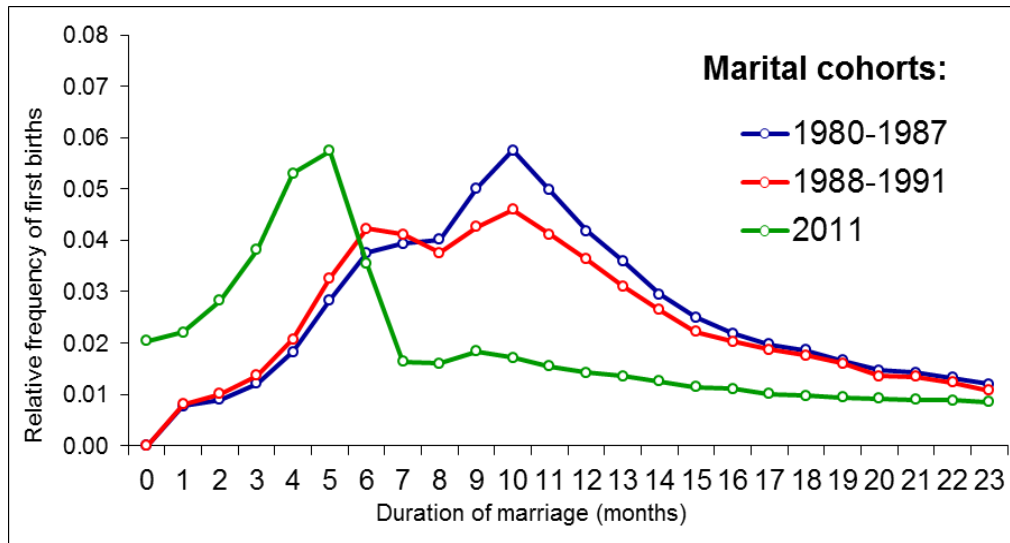
1st births by month after marriage

Women married at 35 and younger



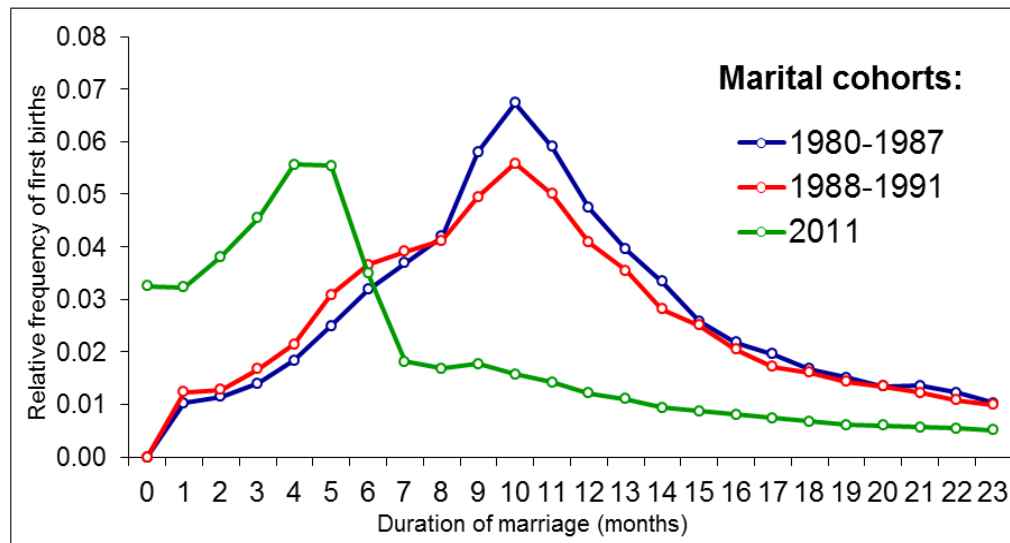
- 1960-2011: **average interval** betw. entry into marriage and 1s birth decreased **12.5 → 8.3 months**

1st births by duration of marriage, urban / rural



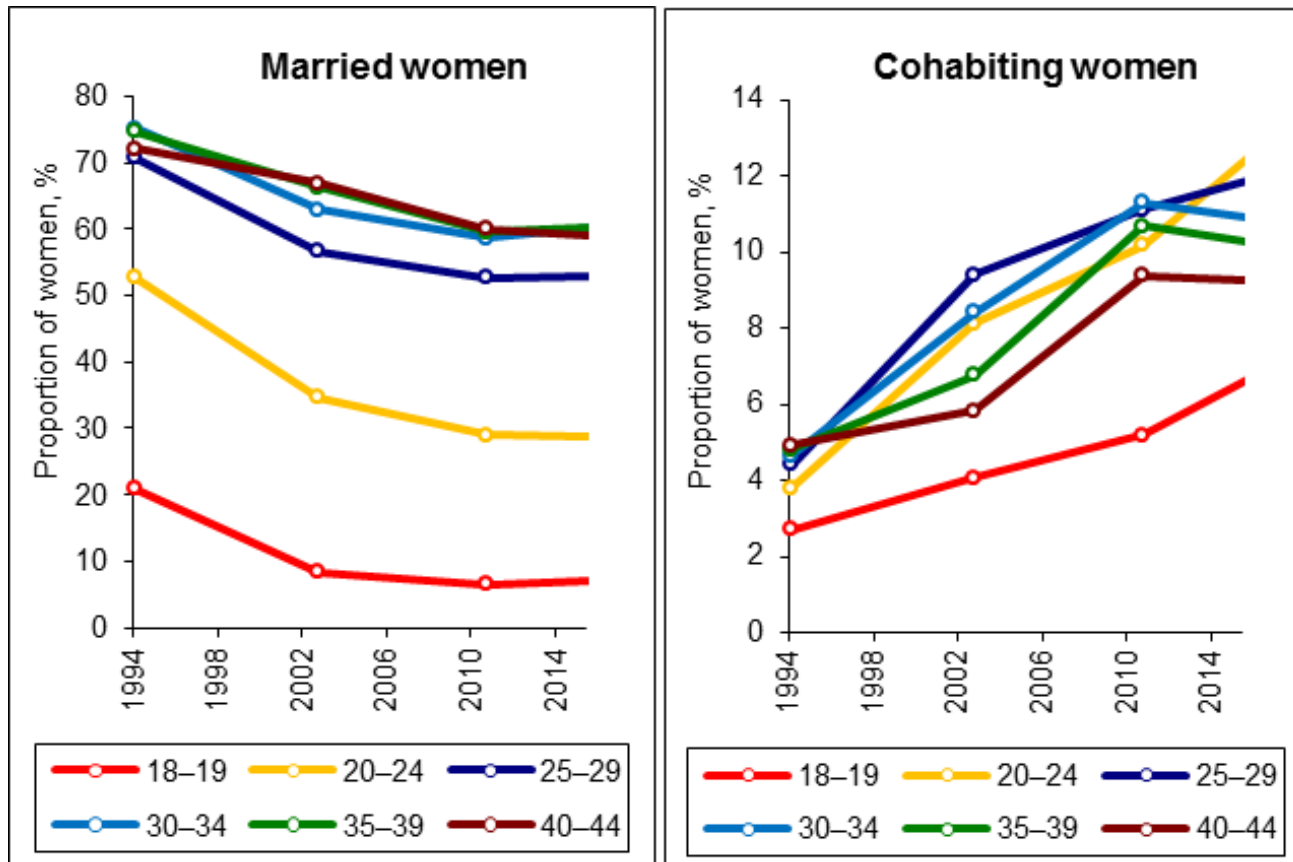
Urban population

- 1st births within 2 years after marriage
- Women married at 35 and younger



Rural population

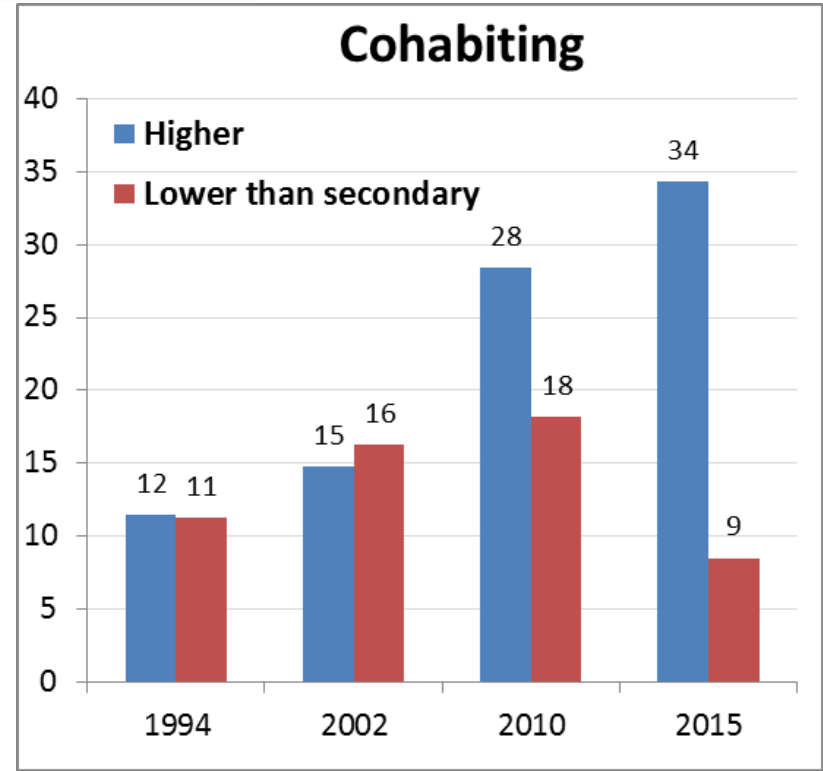
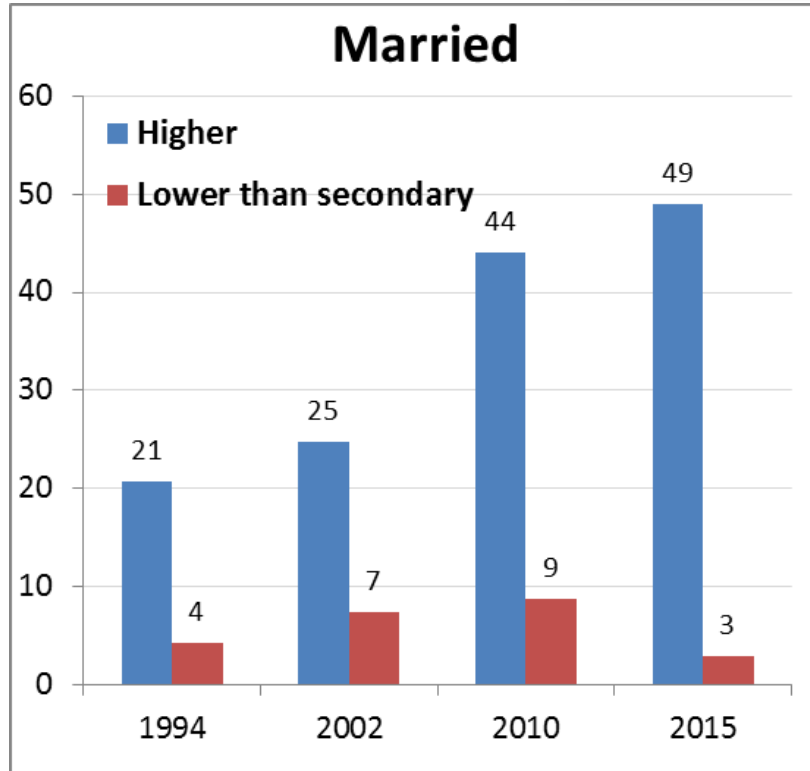
Married and cohabiting women, %



Data sources: 1994 and 2015 microcensuses, 2002 and 2010 census

Married and cohabiting women by education, %

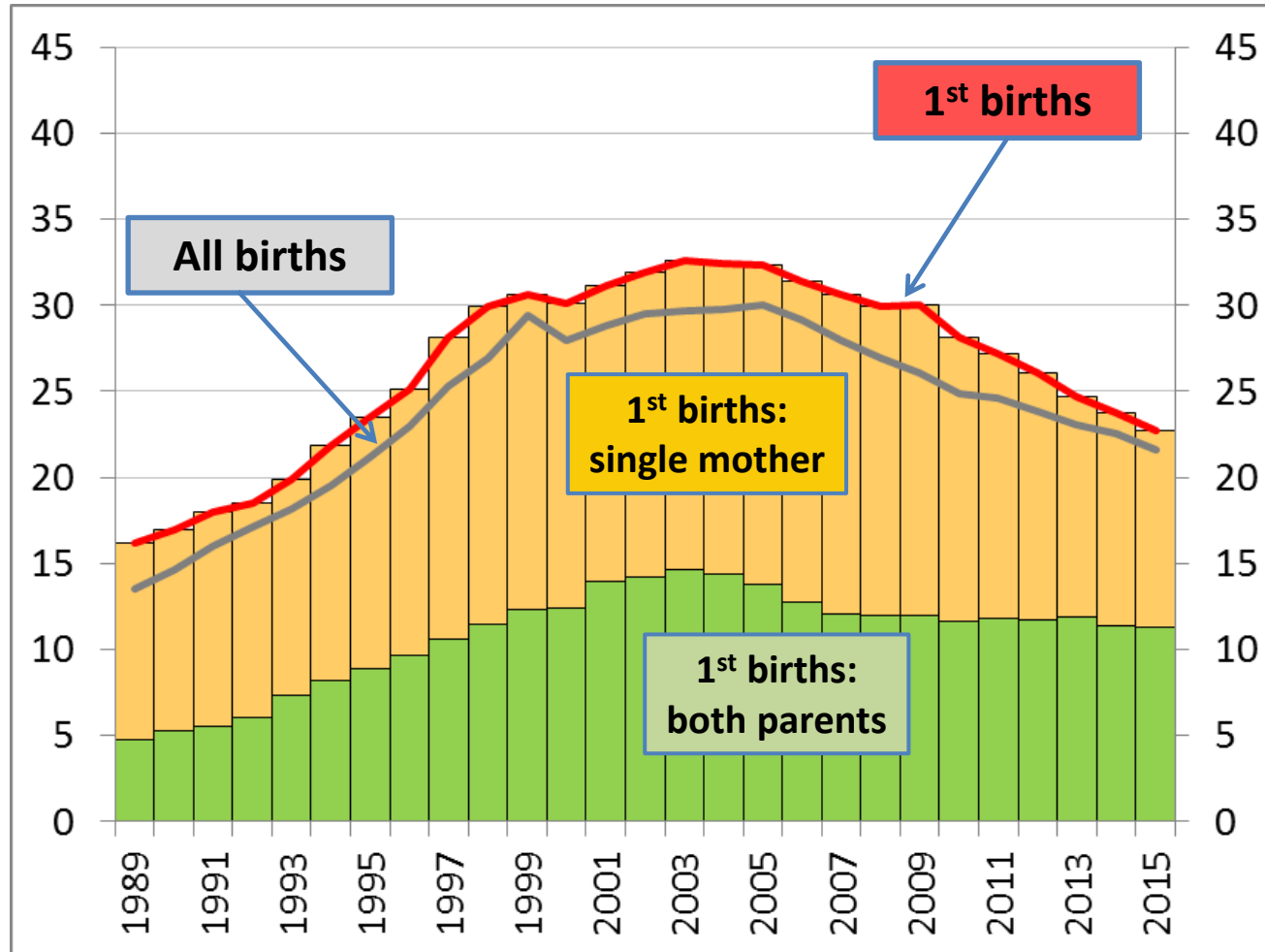
Women aged 25-34



Data sources: 1994 and 2015 microcensuses, 2002 and 2010 census

- The share of women with medium level of education (secondary, post-secondary vocational) is slightly higher among cohabiting women compared to married

Non-marital births, %



Data source: Rosstat

Conclusions

- ❑ The interval between the 1st conception and marriage has significantly increased → the previously strong connection between conception and marriage is weakening
- ❑ Cohabitation is still relatively low but growing → contributing to the increase of non-marital births.
- ❑ The increasing cohabitation and the changing composition of cohabiting women are driving the change in the distribution of births by duration since marriage.
- ❑ However, despite all the changes, the fact is that women prefer for the child to be born within marriage. This is supported also by survey results on this topic.
- ❑ Our data do not allow us to answer the question *why*. A more in-depth research is needed to explain this phenomena.
- ❑ One of the possible explanations that needs to be further explored → the absence of any legal framework defining the rights and responsibilities of cohabiting partners and ensuring security for both the partners and their children



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Thank you!