

Extra-Marital Conceptions in Contemporary Russia's Fertility*

Mark Tolts,¹ Olga Antonova,² and Evgueni Andreev³

Research issue addressed:

Extra-marital conceptions have played a growing role in the fertility of contemporary Russia. Since 1990 the share of births out of wedlock has doubled, reaching about 30 percent of all births in the country (Table 1). That is, now Russia's level is similar to the European Union's average (in 2002, 30.6 percent for EU15 and 29.2 percent for EU25; see: Eurostat). According to the 2002 Russian census, approximately 10 percent of males and females recorded as currently married stated that their union is not registered. Furthermore, many of the babies born in the framework of registered marriage, especially first births, resulted from pre-marital conceptions. However, the role of extra-marital conceptions as a whole in the fertility of Russia has never been studied. In our study we shall for the first time explore the combined incidence of extra-marital conceptions of all groups in contemporary Russia's fertility.

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¹ The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel (mtolts@mssc.huji.ac.il).

² Federal State Statistics Service, Russian Federation (antonova_o@gks.ru).

³ Max Plank Institute for Demographic Research, Germany (andreev@demogr.mpg.de).

Methodology and data:

In order to retrieve the necessary information a special processing of all the birth certificates from Russia in 2002 was undertaken (for its methodological aspects, see: Tolts, Antonova and Andreev, 2005) yielding the detailed data on three groups of births which resulted from extra-marital conceptions:

- births less than nine months after registration of marriage (pre-marital conceptions);
- births out of wedlock registered by both parents;
- births out of wedlock registered by unmarried mother alone.

The incidence of extra-marital conceptions was computed by age for each designated group. Information was calculated for the total, urban and rural populations. General indicators of the incidence of extra-marital conceptions were computed for the designated groups in each of the 80 principal regions of the country. The same indicators were calculated separately for the Jewish population. In a case study of dynamics, data on the city of Perm from 1966 (Tolts, 1975) were utilized.

Main findings:

From the results of special processing of the birth certificates of 2002 we found that extra-marital conceptions constitute 54 percent of total births in Russia, and this percentage was the same for both the urban and rural populations (Table 2). Of all births in Russia pre-marital conceptions, i.e. births that occurred less than nine months after registration of marriage, constituted 25 percent. (Their share among all marital births was 35 percent.) Births out of wedlock comprised 29 percent, of which 14 percent were

registered by parents who were not formally married and 15 percent were registered by the unmarried mother alone. The percentage of births registered by both parents was the same for the urban and rural populations. At the same time, the share of births registered by the unmarried mother alone was higher for the rural (18 percent) than for urban population (14 percent). On the other hand, the share of pre-marital conceptions was higher among urban than among rural women (26 percent and 22 percent, respectively).

Below the age of 20, the great majority of births were the result of extra-marital conception, and even for all mothers aged between 20 and 24, the share of such births was 60 percent (Table 3). Among all births in older ages this share ranges between 38 and 43 percent. Only under age 16 was the majority of births registered by the unmarried mother alone. Among all extra-marital conceptions the share of births less than nine months after registration of marriage was highest for mothers aged between 18 and 24.

According to the data for 41 of the 80 principal regions in the Russian Federation for which information on parity was collected by governmental statistics in 2002, extra-marital conceptions constituted 68 percent of the first births in Russia. (Their share among all marital births was slightly more than half – 53 percent.) First births out of wedlock comprised 32 percent, of which 14 percent were registered by parents who were not formally married and 18 percent, by the unmarried mother alone (Table 4). First births that occurred less than nine months after registration of marriage were most numerous for mothers aged between 17 and 19.

Sizable differentiations were found by region. The extreme levels for each of the three groups of births discussed here resulting from extra-marital conceptions were found mostly in regions with a specific religion/ethnicity and/or legacy (Table 5). For example,

in 2002 in Tuva republic where the population is mostly Buddhist and Animist (Shamanist), the share of births out of wedlock registered by the unmarried mother alone was highest (39 percent) and correspondingly the share of births less than nine months after registration of marriage was the lowest (10 percent) in this republic. At the same time, in Muslim Ingushetia in North Caucasus the percentage of births registered by the unmarried mother alone was almost nil. The share of births registered by parents who were not formally married was the smallest in the Christian North Caucasian republic – North Ossetia (4 percent). This indicator was highest in Perm region (26 percent). It should be noted that more than one hundred years ago this region (in larger borders) had almost the highest level of illegitimate fertility among the provinces of European Russia as listed in Coale's index (Coale, Anderson and Härm, 1979, pp. 252-253).

Results of our special processing of birth certificates also showed that the percentage of pre-marital conceptions among all births to Jewish mothers (13 percent) was half that in the total urban population (26 percent). Clearly, this difference coincides with a different level of contraception. A case study based on data for the million inhabitants of the Ural city of Perm shows approximately a two-fold increase in the incidence of extra-marital conceptions from 1966 to 2002. For the Russian Federation we have no other possibility to trace such dynamics as this study is the first on a national level.

Concluding remarks:

Our study shows that extra-marital conceptions constitute slightly more than half of all births, and about two-thirds of the first births in Russia. We found very considerable

regional differentiations in its incidence. Moreover, in 2002 in the case of Tuva republic the total share of births out of wedlock was as high as the most extreme European indicator (Iceland: 62 percent; cf. Eurostat). Even among ethnically Russian regions analyzed data show very high variation. For example, of all births in Kostroma region pre-marital conceptions, i.e. births that occurred less than nine months after registration of marriage, reached the extremely high level of 32 percent, and concurrently the total share of births out of wedlock was only 20 percent there. On the other hand, in Perm region the high total share of births out of wedlock (46 percent) corresponded to the rather moderate (19 percent) share of pre-marital conceptions among all births. Thus, we can conclude that the incidence of extra-marital conceptions of all three groups in contemporary Russia's fertility is interrelated.

Sources:

Coale, A.J., Anderson, B.A. and Härm, E. *Human Fertility in Russia Since the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979.

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Tolts, M. "A Description of Some Components of the Birthrate in a Large City," *Soviet Sociology* (New York), 1975, No. 2, pp. 51-62.

Tolts, M., Antonova, O. and Andreev, E. "Rozhdaemost i transformatsiia instituta sem'i v sovremennoi Rossii" [Fertility and Transformation of the Institution of the Family in Contemporary Russia], *Voprosy statistiki* (Moscow), 2005, No. 7, pp. 51-60.

Table 1. Percentage of Births Out of Wedlock Among All Births
in the Russian Federation, by Category of Registration, 1970-2004

| Year | Total | Of these registered by: | |
|------|-------|-------------------------|--------------|
| | | Both parents | Mother alone |
| 1970 | 10.6 | 4.3 | 6.3 |
| 1975 | 10.7 | 5.0 | 5.7 |
| 1980 | 10.8 | 4.1 | 6.7 |
| 1985 | 12.0 | ... | ... |
| 1990 | 14.6 | 6.2 | 8.4 |
| 1995 | 21.1 | 9.1 | 12.0 |
| 1998 | 27.0 | 11.7 | 15.3 |
| 1999 | 27.9 | 12.5 | 15.4 |
| 2000 | 28.0 | 13.2 | 14.8 |
| 2001 | 28.8 | 13.7 | 15.1 |
| 2002 | 29.5 | 14.0 | 15.5 |
| 2003 | 29.7 | 14.4 | 15.3 |
| 2004 | 29.8 | 14.3 | 15.5 |

Source: Russian governmental vital statistics data.

Table 2. All Children Born in the Russian Federation,
by Marital Status of Mother, 2002, Percent

| Group of females | Total | Marital births | Of these: Pre-marital conceptions* | Births out of wedlock | Of these registered by: | | Extra-marital conceptions |
|------------------|-------|----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | Both parents | Mother alone | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7)= (3)+(4) |
| Total | 100 | 71 | 25 | 29 | 14 | 15 | 54 |
| Urban | 100 | 72 | 26 | 28 | 14 | 14 | 54 |
| Rural | 100 | 68 | 22 | 32 | 14 | 18 | 54 |

* Births less than nine months after registration of marriage.

Source: Special processing of birth certificates.

Table 3. All Births in the Russian Federation, by Age and Marital Status of Mother, 2002, Percent

| Age of mothers | Total | Marital births | Of these: Pre-marital conceptions* | Births out of wedlock | Of these registered by: | | Extra-marital conceptions |
|----------------|-------|----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | Both parents | Mother alone | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7)= (3)+(4) |
| Total | 100 | 71 | 25 | 29 | 14 | 15 | 54 |
| Under 16 | 100 | 9 | 8 | 91 | 34 | 57 | 99 |
| 16 | 100 | 31 | 30 | 69 | 24 | 45 | 99 |
| 17 | 100 | 42 | 39 | 58 | 22 | 36 | 97 |
| 18 | 100 | 56 | 48 | 44 | 16 | 28 | 92 |
| 19 | 100 | 64 | 46 | 36 | 14 | 22 | 82 |
| 20-24 | 100 | 72 | 32 | 28 | 13 | 15 | 60 |
| 25-29 | 100 | 74 | 17 | 26 | 14 | 12 | 43 |
| 30-34 | 100 | 73 | 11 | 27 | 15 | 12 | 38 |
| 35-39 | 100 | 69 | 10 | 31 | 17 | 14 | 41 |
| 40+ | 100 | 66 | 9 | 34 | 18 | 16 | 43 |

* Births less than nine months after registration of marriage.

Source: Special processing of birth certificates.

Table 4. First Births in the Russian Federation,
by Age and Marital Status of Mother, 2002, Percent*

| Age of mothers | Total | Marital births | Of these: Pre-marital conceptions** | Births out of wedlock | Of these registered by: | | Extra-marital conceptions |
|----------------|-------|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | Both parents | Mother alone | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7)= (3)+(4) |
| Total | 100 | 68 | 36 | 32 | 14 | 18 | 68 |
| Under 16 | 100 | 8 | 7 | 92 | 33 | 59 | 99 |
| 16 | 100 | 31 | 30 | 69 | 24 | 45 | 99 |
| 17 | 100 | 43 | 40 | 57 | 22 | 35 | 97 |
| 18 | 100 | 57 | 51 | 43 | 16 | 27 | 94 |
| 19 | 100 | 65 | 49 | 35 | 14 | 21 | 84 |
| 20-24 | 100 | 73 | 39 | 27 | 12 | 15 | 66 |
| 25-29 | 100 | 70 | 26 | 30 | 15 | 15 | 56 |
| 30-34 | 100 | 58 | 20 | 42 | 20 | 22 | 62 |
| 35-39 | 100 | 54 | 16 | 46 | 20 | 26 | 62 |
| 40 + | 100 | 53 | 14 | 47 | 21 | 26 | 61 |

* According to data on 41 of the 80 principal regions with 54 percent of all births for which information on parity was collected by governmental statistics.

** Births less than nine months after registration of marriage.

Source: Special processing of birth certificates.

Table 5. All Children Born in Selected Regions of the Russian Federation,
by Marital Status of Mother, 2002, Percent

| Region (with pertinent charac- teristic)* | Total | Marital births | Of these: Pre- marital concep- tions** | Births out of wedlock | Of these registered by: | | Extra- marital concep- tions |
|--|-------|-------------------|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | | | Both parents | Mother alone | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7)= (3)+(4) |
| Tuva (Buddhist & Animist [Shamanist]) | 100 | <u>38</u> | <u>10</u> | <u>62</u> | 23 | <u>39</u> | <u>72</u> |
| Perm (Russian Ural region) | 100 | 54 | 19 | 46 | <u>26</u> | 20 | 65 |
| North Ossetia (Christian North Caucasian) | 100 | 64 | 20 | 36 | <u>4</u> | 32 | 56 |
| St. Petersburg (Russian second city) | 100 | 71 | 27 | 29 | 16 | 13 | 56 |
| Kostroma (Russian region on Volga) | 100 | 80 | <u>32</u> | 20 | 7 | 13 | 52 |
| Moscow (Russian capital) | 100 | 73 | 23 | 27 | 18 | 9 | 50 |
| Ingushetia (Muslim North Caucasian) | 100 | 84 | 25 | 16 | 15 | <u>1</u> | 41 |
| Kabardino- Balkaria (Muslim North Caucasian) | 100 | <u>85</u> | 20 | <u>15</u> | 5 | 10 | <u>35</u> |

* Regions are listed in descending order of percentage of extra-marital conceptions among all births; extreme levels of each indicator are underlined.

** Births less than nine months after registration of marriage.

Source: Special processing of birth certificates.