

Population Development of the Jewish Population in Bohemia between the Years 1850 and 1939

- Name and affiliation of the author:

Jana Vobecká, Departement of Demography, Faculty of Sciences, Charles University in Prague, Albertov 6, Praha 2, 120 00, Czech Republic

Tel.: +420-777-155808, Email: janavobecka@yahoo.com

Due to the extent of researched time period and the scope of the problem, I will somewhat narrow the focus of my paper. I will, above all, analyze the fertility rate of Jewish women in Bohemia between the middle of 19th century and 1939. I have been led to this limitation by, besides other, the fact that the section in which this paper will be presented is dedicated to differential fertility in the past. Moreover, the fertility process may well serve to demonstrate a fast and fundamental change in demographic behavior of Bohemia's Jewish population in the researched period – both in comparison with majority population in Bohemia and the demographic development of Jewish populations in neighboring countries.

I dedicate the opening of my paper to delimitation of the population, definition of the researched time period and data resources. In the following part, I will outline reproduction conditions of Jews living in Bohemia in times when reliable data, or better, data not lacking in detail, are unavailable – i.e. in the period until 1895. The main part will then contain an analysis of changes in reproduction behavior of Jewish population in Bohemia since the end of 19th century in the context of changes in fertility of majority population and Jewish inhabitants in neighboring countries.

Delimitation of the population and period observed, data sources

The object of my analysis are the Jews in Bohemia, one of the historical parts of the Czech lands and the present Czech Republic (beside Moravia and Silesia) – see maps in the Appendix.

I define the Jewish population in accord with the period official statistics. I consider as a Jewish population all the individuals, who profess their Israeli faith by their own declaration or as members of Jewish religious communities. Therefore, on the basis of this definition, I can't cover Jewish converts and this paper, strictly speaking, contains the fertility analysis of the population with Israeli faith in Bohemia.

The period observed is limited by the data accessibility. In my analysis, I always try to come out from the primary data sources of the official statistics if available. Already from the

second half of the 18th century, we dispose by the absolute numbers of the Jewish population from the first conscriptions. For the period between 1832 and 1856¹ we dispose by the yearly time series of the total number of new born Jews, and between 1895 and 1913 by the almost complete time series of new born Jews by their sex, legitimacy and vitality from the Austrian Imperial Statistics² and between 1919 and 1937 from the Statistical Office of the Czechoslovakian Republic³. An important data source about fertility of Jewish women is available from the population census organized in Czechoslovakia in 1930 where the number of children born to women in their present marriage was collected⁴. This information allows us to see fertility from the generational point of view.

Since 1938, the data about population movement were published together for occupied territory of Bohemia and Moravia without „Sudetenland“ (border regions of the Czech lands separated from Czechoslovakia in 1938 and attached directly to Nazi Germany in autumn 1938). With the beginning of the World War II ends drastically and fatally the possibility of observation and analysis of development of the Jewish population in Bohemia, not only from the demographic perspective...

The data about fertility of the Jews in Bohemia we have at disposal in the first half of 19th century are quite unreliable, yet because the low intensity of fertility registered doesn't correspond to the speed of the total population growth. The hypothesis about the underestimation of the registered new born Jewish children could be supported by the historical facts, as well. Jews themselves had an interest on the under-registration of the real numbers of marriages and births, because before 1848 their freedom of migration, entering into marriage and natality was limited to the fixed number of tolerated Jewish families in Bohemia („*numerus clausus*“)⁵. Crude birth rate of the Jews between 1832 and 1859 comes around to 20 ‰, but in the total population, it is around 40 ‰. At the same time, the population growth of the total population in Bohemia was lower than among Jews.⁶ Extended Jewish migration in that period is improbable as well as significant underestimation of the registered number of the total Jewish population – when taking into account the fluent growth in numbers we dispose in the time series between 1785 and 1869. Therefore, the explanation

¹ Tafeln zur Statistik der Österreichischen Monarchie 1832-1856.

² Bewegung der Bevölkerung. Oesterreichische Statistik, 1895 – 1913.

³ Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1919-1932. Státní úřad statistický. Praha 1929-1932.

Pohyb obyvatelstva v Republice československé v letech 1933-1941. Státní úřad statistický. Praha 1936-1942.

⁴ Sčítání lidu v Republice československé ze dne 1. prosince 1930.

⁵ Since the year 1797 it was stated to 8 600 Jewish families in Bohemia.

⁶ In the year 1869 the total number of Jews in Bohemia came up to 2.13 multiple of their number in 1785 (85 539, against 42 129), although in the total population, it was no more than 1.89 multiple.

of the rapid total population growth can be found in the high Jewish fertility in that period, higher than had the majority population, possibly combined with the lower mortality rate.

Between the years 1859 and 1895 we don't have any primary data sources about Jewish fertility at our disposal. As we can see from the tendencies in the development of the number of Jews in this period, the population growth have slow down since the middle of the 19th century. In the year 1890, the total number of Jews in Bohemia raised to the highest absolute number in its history (94 479 people)⁷. Since then, their total number has been descending constantly. Above this falling tendency we may see mainly the negative net migration and the dropping intensity in fertility.

The crude birth rate has been always lower by the Jews than by the total population, since the year 1895, when the appropriate data are available.⁸

Table 1: Crude birth rate of the Jews and the total population in Bohemia, 1895-1930

Mean of the years	Jews in Bohemia	Total population in Bohemia
1895	22,0	37,2
1896-1900	20,9	36,1
1901-1905	17,6	34,0
1906-1910	14,2	30,6
1926-1930	8,2	18,7

Source: Censuses 1890-1930, author's calculations.

In 1895 was born 2060 children of the Israeli faith in Bohemia which meant 22 children per 1000 Jews. The number of Jewish children born in Bohemia was descending - with the exception of the compensational growth between 1920 and 1924 – and after the year 1930, it fell under 600 birth, which were approximately 8 new born per 1000 Jews.⁹ In the year 1895, the crude birth rate of the total population in Bohemia was 37 ‰ and it didn't drop to 22 ‰ until the year 1923, so approximately 30 years later than by the Jewish population.

Behind the relatively low levels of Jewish fertility in Bohemia observed here from the end of 19th century we can see a changing demographic behavior which has deepened in time.

⁷ Source: Die Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31.12. 1890 in dem im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern. ÖS XXXII. Wien 1892. The proportion of Jews from the total number of population in Bohemia was 1,6 %, but it wasn't the highest proportion historically.

⁸ Number of birth is taken from the Population movement publications and the total number of Jews is a linear interpolation of the two nearest census data.

⁹ Crude birth rate of the Jewish population in the period between the two World Wars is no more very suitable for the comparison with Czech or other populations due to the differences in the age structure.

The proofs of these changes are particularly visible in the data from the census of 1930¹⁰, when numbers of children born to women – divided into five-year groups – in their present marriages were surveyed. The data were classified both according to women's nationality and religion. Since values for women declaring themselves Jewish nationals were not much different for those declaring themselves adherents to Israeli faith, we will limit our present analysis to women of Jewish confession.

The data of the 1930 census betray a fundamental difference between the model of reproductive behavior of Jewish population of Bohemia and that of majority population. In the Jewish community, there was a higher proportion of childless marriages – by 5 % in average. Married Jewish women between 25 and 29 years of age were childless in 37 % of instances, whereas in the total population their proportion was only 23 %. Furthermore, Jewish women had, in contrast to women in majority population, more often only a single child or not more than two children. In the age group of 35-39 years, even more than a half (53 %) of married Jewish women had, in their present marriage, no child or a single child, in contrast to 37% of women in the total. However, the most significant differences were found for women with three and more children. Not more than 7 % of Jewish women in the age group of 30-34 years had three or more children, in contrast to almost ¼ of married women in total. In sum, women with three and more children represented less than 20 % of all married Jewish women under 59 years, whereas for the population in total this number was 35 % of married women. The conscious limitations placed on fertility are clearly discernable by this time, even from the data provided for older age groups.

Generational fertility of married women – which in fact is what the data of the 1930 census provide – shows that one married Jewish woman 45-49 years old, with practically concluded fertility, had only 1.8 children from the present marriage, one married woman in the age group of 50-59 years had 2.2 children, whereas the value of 3.2 children per a married woman was reached only in the age group of 60-69 years old married Jewish women. These were women coming from the generation born in 1860-1870, whose fertility had been fully realized before the World War I. Even then, their fertility in marriage reached only 71 % of fertility level of the same generation in majority population. In the generation of 45-49 years old Jewish women, final fertility level in marriage reached 56 % of the final fertility level in majority population of married Czech women.

¹⁰ The Population Census in the Czechoslovak Republic performed the 1st December, 1930.

Table 2: Fertility of married women based on the census of 1930, Jews, Bohemia

Women age	Total number of		Proportion of married women with a child born alive in their present marriage					
	married woman	their children	0	1	2	3	4+	Undetected
-19	37	7	78,4	18,9	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,7
20-24	742	321	57,7	32,7	4,9	0,3	0,0	4,4
25-29	1841	1480	36,7	42,2	16,0	1,5	0,4	3,2
30-34	2319	2747	23,5	39,4	28,9	4,8	1,6	1,8
35-39	2410	3365	19,8	32,7	33,4	9,4	2,4	2,2
40-44	2217	3504	19,0	26,4	33,9	12,0	5,7	3,0
45-49	2021	3624	18,8	21,5	31,6	14,6	10,4	3,0
50-59	3159	7057	17,8	15,6	25,5	18,6	19,9	2,6
60-69	1612	5143	13,2	9,7	16,6	16,9	40,7	2,9
70+	507	2042	12,2	7,1	11,0	13,6	52,5	3,6
Undetected	41	63	22,0	31,7	29,3	4,9	9,8	2,4
Total	16906	29353	22,5	26,3	25,7	11,0	11,8	2,7

Source: *The Population Census in the Czechoslovak Republic, performed the 1st December, 1930.*

Therefore, the trends initiated by the generations having children in the last decades of 19th century – as at least partially discernable from the census of 1890 and population mobility – only intensified in following decades. Moreover, it seems that the described way of reproduction behavior became widely spread among the Jews.

Table 3: Married women according to the number of children born alive in marriages; the Jews and the total population in 1930, selected lands

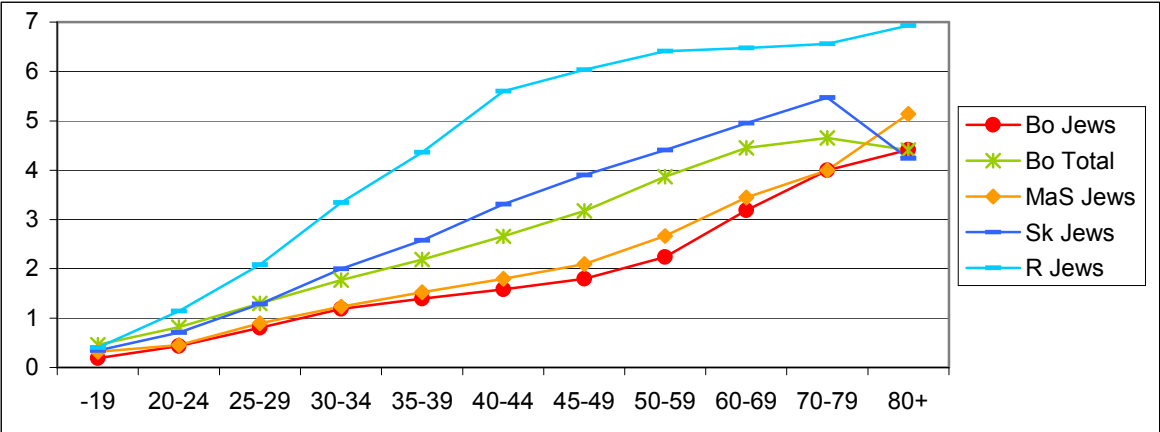
Land	Average number of children	Women who gave birth to ... children in their present marriage, in %					
		0	1	2	3	4 +	Undetected
Total population							
Bohemia	2,54	18	23	20	13	25	1
Jews							
Bohemia	1,74	22	26	26	11	12	3
Moravia & Silesia	1,97	21	23	25	13	15	2
Slovakia	3,00	18	17	18	12	33	2
Ruthenia	4,29	13	11	12	10	52	2

Source: *Census 1930, author's calculations.*

From the comparison of Jewish populations in four lands of the Czechoslovakia, three basic models of reproduction behavior arise. The first is the model of limited fertility concentrated into a comparatively short segment of female reproduction period, most often giving birth to one child or two children. This model corresponds to the behavior of Jewish women in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. A more striking difference in reproduction behavior of Jewish women in Bohemia and in Moravia and Silesia becomes apparent only in the category of three or more children, where the limited fertility is more distinct for Bohemian Jews than for the Moravian and Silesian ones.

Next is the model typical for the Jewish population in Slovakia. This population, whose reproductive behavior was captured in 1930, approximated most closely to the majority population in Bohemia. However, with a comparatively high proportion of married Jewish women having four or more children, it exceeded by far the Czech average ratio. It may be presumed that in 1930, Slovakia’s Jewish population was not very uniform in its reproduction behavior, and some, most likely rural Jews, still retained the traditional reproduction model of high fertility rate more evenly dispersed in the entire female reproduction period.

Figure 1: Average number of children born to women in their present marriage according to age, selected lands, 1930



Note: B Jews: Jews in Bohemia, MaS: in Moravia and Silesia, Sk: in Slovakia, R: in Ruthenia, Bo Total: total population in Bohemia
 Source: Census 1930, author’s calculations.

The reproduction situation of Jews in Ruthenia was in direct contrast to that of Jewish women in Bohemia. Here was the lowest ratio of childlessness, and women realized their fertility comparatively early and intensively. Therefore, in Ruthenia 47 % married Jewish women between 30 and 34 years had four or more children, whereas for Jewish women in Bohemia, as well as in Moravia, this proportion was not more than 2 %, and 17 % in the case of

Slovakia. As in all other lands listed, the Jews resident in Ruthenia had a lower fertility rate than majority population¹¹.

Illegitimate birth, children born death

For the Jews resident in Bohemia, the number of children born outside marriage was very low. Prior to the World War I, the number of children born outside marriage reached approximately 40 per year, which accounted for around 2 % of the total Jewish children born alive. Following the World War I, the proportion of children born outside marriage remained practically unchanged until mid-1930s, when their ratio increased to 4.6 % in the average of the period 1934-1937. In the total population the number of children born outside marriage was comparatively high and in the entire period from 1895 to 1937 it was reaching levels around 12 %.

Jewish infant mortality was, in comparison to majority population, unexpectedly high. In its oscillation in the period of 1895-1937, it does not betray any inclination towards decrease discernable in the total population. Registration of children born dead may be distorted by different criteria for their reporting in both faiths. If that was indeed the case, than this “overestimate“ of children born dead should be reflected in a due „underestimate“ in infant mortality.¹²

Table 4: Overview of ratios of children born outside marriage and born death Jews and the total population, Bohemia, 1895-1937

Mean of the years	Proportion of illegitimate N ^v /N ^v total, in %		Proportion of N ^d /N ^v total, in %	
	Jews	total	Jews	total
1895-1899	2,1	14,7	4,1	3,4
1900-1904	2,2	12,6	2,5	3,2
1919-1923	1,9	12,7	2,8	1,9
1924-1928	2,0	11,0	4,1	2,1
1929-1933	2,0	13,1	3,0	1,6
1934-1937	4,6	11,9	3,5	1,5

Note: N^v born alive, N^d born death

Source: Population movement 1895-1937

¹¹ In Ruthenia in 1930, gross fertility rate in Jewish population was 38,7 ‰, whereas in the total population this number was 48,0 ‰.

¹² Infant mortality in Jewish population of Bohemia since the end of 19th century, when data became available, was always significantly lower than in majority population. Different customs of evidence of children born dead or early deceased may thus have contributed to the disparity.

Conclusion

Despite the comparatively poor data base available for the period of 1850-1940, we may trace the basic tendencies in reproduction behavior of Jews in Bohemia. Following a rapid increase in numbers, caused most likely by the high fertility rate in the end of 18th century and the first half of 19th century, the second half of 19th century witnesses its stagnation. The reason, besides considerable impact of emigration, lies in the decrease of fertility intensity. Marriage rate is reduced, average age of newly-weds increases, as does the ratio of bachelors and spinsters. A conscious limitation placed on fertility in marriage was probably common in Jewish population in the second half of 19th century, and it caused a decrease in the number of children born in a higher rank, as well as concentration of natality into a more limited segment of female reproduction period. Great majority of Jewish children was born into marriages and practically the entire researched period did not witness any significant changes in this respect. The level of fertility in Jewish population between the world wars was moreover to considerable extent influenced by conversions of Jewish mothers and/or their children. It is likely that a proportion of children born to Jewish parents thus escapes evidence; it is however impossible to determine their number. Ratio of Jewish children born alive decreased in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, where 102 Jewish children were born in 1939, and only 63 in 1940. Such decrease undoubtedly reflected the lack of certainty of Jewish people in this troubled times, which did not favor begetting of children and, in case of their nascence, their stigmatization by Jewish religious identity.

Significant changes in demographic behavior of Jewish population in Bohemia, exceeding in intensity the changes in majority population as a whole, do not reflect only the general tendency to demographic revolution related to industrialization and globalization. In Jewish population, a progressing emancipation since the end of 18th century, and particularly since the half of 19th century, also played a role. Newly acquired political freedoms, traditional professional orientation, as well as traditional focus on education brought many Jews to a rapid social ascent. Therefore, in the scope of two to three generations, there occurred a change in family behavior and life strategies of Jews in Bohemia, which in non-Jewish population was taking place more slowly, and more importantly it was differentiated according to social groups. Daring as the following statement may be, I suggest that, in Bohemia, no social or other group experienced so fundamental transformation of objective conditions and demographic behavior in so short interval as the Jewish population did.

Data sources

Maps:

<http://www.zum.de/whkmla/histatlas/germany/haxczech.html> ČR

http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~pv/munich/map_german.html ČSR

Data sources:

Die Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31.12. 1890 in dem im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreichen und Ländern. ÖS XXXII. Wien 1892.

Tafeln zur Statistik der Österreichischen Monarchie 1832-1856.

Bewegung der Bevölkerung. Oesterreichische Statistik, 1895 – 1913.

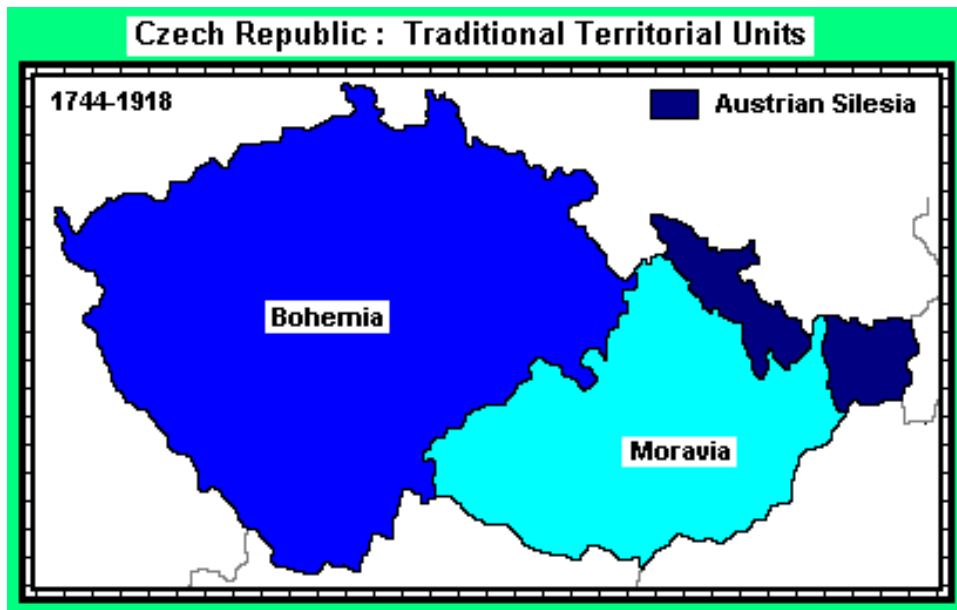
Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1919-1932. Státní úřad statistický. Praha 1929-1932. (*Population Movement in the Czechoslovakian Republic, 1919-1932*)

Pohyb obyvatelstva v Republice československé v letech 1933-1941. Státní úřad statistický. Praha 1936-1942 (*Population Movement in the Republic of Czechoslovakia, 1936-1942*).

Sčítání lidu v Republice československé ze dne 1. prosince 1930. (*The Population Census in the Czechoslovak Republic performed the 1st December, 1930.*)

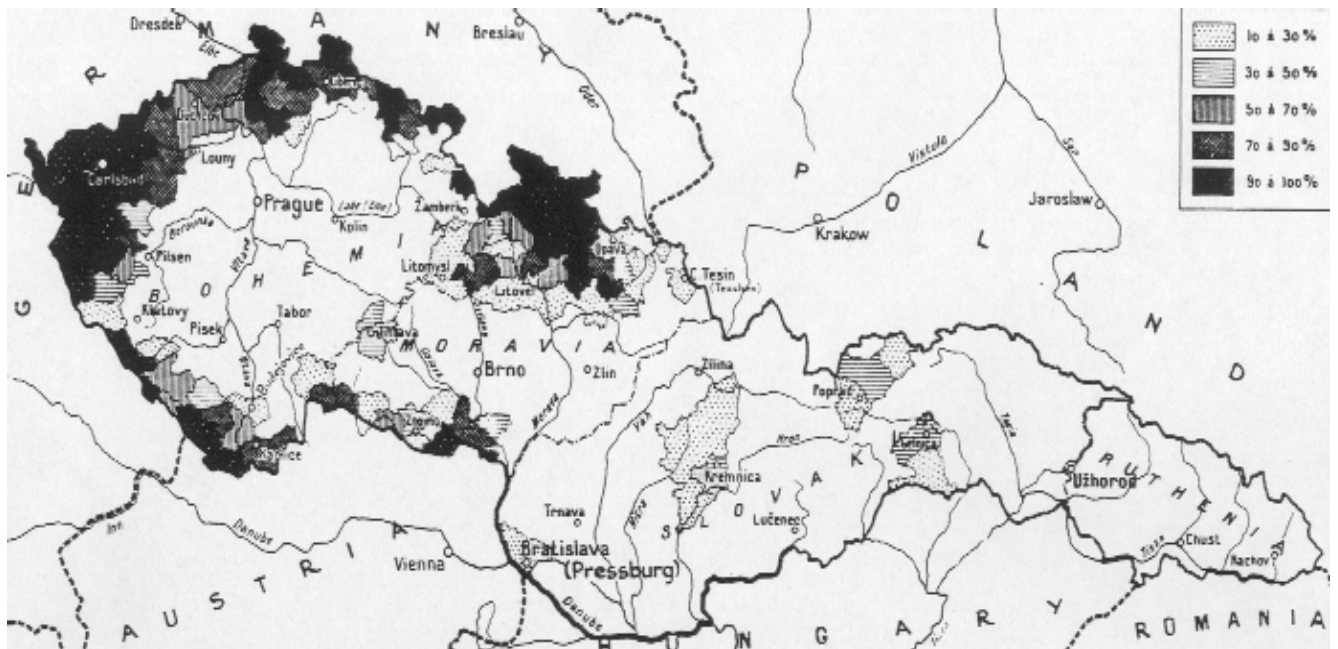
Appendix

Map 1: Historical parts of the Czech lands, situation between 1744 and 1918



Source: <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/histatlas/germany/haxczech.html> (28.4.2006)

Map 2: Czechoslovakian Republic, situation between 1918 and 1938



Note: Black and gray parts represent a proportion of population of German nationality.

Source : http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~pv/munich/map_german.html (28.4.2006)