

Development of abortion rate in the Czech Republic from the end of the eighties to present time

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From the end of the Second World War until the beginning of the nineties planned parenthood in the Czech Republic was reduced to termination of pregnancy, that is, to contraception ex post. In the time of highest abortion rate – the second half of the eighties - almost one half of pregnancies ended by induced (unnaturally awakened) abortion. In this almost fifty-year long period there was an inverted relation between fertility and abortion: if the number of abortions increased, the rate of fertility decreased and vice versa (increase and decrease of induced abortion was caused predominantly by changes in the abortion legislation). From the beginning of the nineties the values of both fertility and abortion indicators started to decrease sharply. Awareness of modern contraception and its increasing usage are stated as the main causes of the change in reproductive behaviour. This raises the following question: Have younger generations changed their view on induced abortion as well? Many researches ask a more general question, in which the circumstances of induced abortion should be legal, acceptable, etc. (see for example Leontiyeva). This gives us evidence of certain tolerance of the society, but it doesn't prove the individual's willingness to undergo such an operation. We have therefore decided to pose a more specific question: How would the respondents themselves solve the potential unplanned pregnancy? The aim was to find out how many people would solve this situation by abortion and what groups of people would prefer such a solution. High abortion rate was not the only characteristic of the Czech society. Another particularity was that abortion was preferred by older married women, usually with two children. Because some changes occurred in this respect as well, we will concentrate in the first part on specific data and on the shift of certain indicators in the nineties. In the second part we will analyse the survey results.

Development of induced abortion indicators in the nineties

We have decided to compare the current situation (strictly speaking with the year 2002) with the year 1988, when the indicators of induced abortion rate reached their maximum level and also with the year 1995. Information about abortion rate in the Czech Republic can be obtained from two sources. The first one is a publication called Population migration (Pohyb obyvatelstva), published annually by Czech Statistical Office (Český statistický úřad). These data are collected for all inhabitants with permanent residence in the Czech Republic. Yearbooks of the Institute for Medical Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic (Ústav zdravotnických informací a statistiky ČR) serve as a second source of data. In this case, information about women with Czech citizenship and about women with foreign citizenship is classified separately. In our report we use only the data from Czech Statistical Office and we deal only with the information about induced abortions. Since the induced abortion was freely accessible at a request during the whole period under survey, it is improbable that a significant part of miscarriages would in reality be induced abortions. For this reason, we haven't included miscarriages in our data. We also didn't include ectopic pregnancies, because neither of these themes is directly connected with the theme of our article.

In the Czech Republic, abortion was legalised by Act no. 68/1957 Col.. Since then, conditions for undergoing abortion have been either liberated or restricted. However, complete prohibition did not occur in the period under survey. Since 1986 abortion committees were abolished and abortion became accessible at a woman's request. In this time, abortion rate in the Czech society reached its maximum. The original intention to authorise induced abortions was to solve extreme situations, especially in case of young unmarried

girls. Since the beginning, however, the abortion became a commonly widespread method of planning parenthood, especially among married couples.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, abortions have been decreasing rapidly since the nineties. In 1988 almost half of all registered pregnancies ended by induced abortion. In the middle of the last decade of the twentieth century it was one third of pregnancies. Nowadays, only every fifth pregnancy ends by induced abortion. For 100 born children there are 47 abortions nowadays as compared to 97 abortions in the end of the eighties. During this period, total induced abortion rate decreased from 1,6 to 0,42 abortion per one woman. Significant decrease of total abortion rate occurred already in the first half of the nineties. During the first seven years there was a decrease almost by one induced abortion per one woman (to 0,7).

Together with the rapid decrease of abortion rate the structure of women undergoing induced abortion was changing as well. The first significant change occurred in the age structure of these women. The average age did not change significantly, increasing from the age of 28,6 to almost 30 years. However, the age in which the abortion rate reaches its maximum shifted significantly. Whereas in the end of the eighties most abortions per 1000 women happened between the age of 23 and 26 years, in 2002 most women undergoing abortion were roughly five years older when they underwent this operation (maximums at the age of 28 to 32 years). At the same time, older women have a significantly higher probability nowadays, that their pregnancy will end by birth rather than by abortion. In 2002 there were 25 induced abortions per 100 children born to thirty-year-old mothers. Already in the middle of the nineties more pregnancies of thirty year olds ended by birth than by an abortion (66 abortions per 100 born). At the end of the past regime, however, there were 1,3 abortions for one child born to a thirty year old woman. As the age increases, the probability that a woman will decide to give birth naturally decreases, for example because of the increasing medical risks for both the mother and the child. Unfortunately, it can be very misleading to research abortions on the basis of medical reasons. In 1993 charges for this medical intervention were introduced. Women are freed from these charges, if their main reason for abortion is health hazard. Between 1992 and 1993 number of abortions due to health hazard thus increased from 11 to 23 % (Demographic development of the Czech Republic 2002 / Populační vývoj České republiky 2002). In 2002, abortions prevailed over born children only among forty-year-old women. In 1988 women ended their pregnancy by abortion seven times more frequently than by birth. The lowest number of abortions was among girls between the age of 19 and 21. This has also changed during the fourteen years under survey. Nowadays women between the age of twenty-five and twenty-seven are the least probable to end their pregnancy by induced abortion.

We can also trace significant differences with regard to the family status of women undergoing abortions. In the end of the eighties there were roughly 270 abortions per 100 children born to unmarried women. From the beginning of the nineties, significant part of others started to give birth without getting married beforehand. Pregnancy of unmarried women therefore ends by abortion less frequently than before. Nowadays, there are almost 7 abortions per ten children born to unmarried mothers. Unfortunately, the data about births according to family status from the eighties are not commonly accessible. For this reason, we couldn't carry out more specific comparison. In 1995 as well as in 2002 the highest number of induced abortions per 100 born children was among women, who had already experienced marriage (divorced or widowed).

We can make a further comparison with regard to the number of children born to a woman before abortion. According to the most recent data, one quarter of all women undergoing induced abortions are women with no children. This is a significant increase as opposed to the end of the eighties, when women, who were not mothers yet, participated on the total induced abortion rate only by 14 %. The largest number of women undergoing the operation was women with two children – in 1988 it was almost one half of the cases. In case of women,

who were married at the time of undergoing induced abortion, there haven't been major changes in the last 14 years. Majority of them are also mothers with two children. The proportion of married women with no children who prefer abortion is slightly increasing. The structure according to the number of children gradually changes among unmarried women. The number of those, who had abortion when they already had one child, is increasing. However, almost half of induced abortions among unmarried women falls on childless women.

Another possible indicator is abortion index according to the number of children born before abortion. It presents the number of induced abortions per 100 born children of a certain order according to the number of children born before the abortion (e.g. abortion of a childless woman for 100 children of first order, abortion of women with one child for 100 children of second order, etc.). In case of childless women there was only a slight decrease. Nowadays, there are roughly 2 abortions for 10 newborn babies. During the whole period under survey this index reached its highest figures in case of women with two children. Families with more than two children are not very common in the Czech society and they are more common among certain groups, for example among religious people etc. In their case an abortion may not be accepted at all. For this reason, more pregnancies of higher order end by birth of a child. In this aspect it is interesting to compare married and unmarried women. In 2002 there were 88 induced abortions per 100 children born in the third order to unmarried mothers of two children but there were 101 abortions of third order per 100 children born to married mothers. The situation was similar in the eighties.

We can observe major differences in the proportion of born children and induced abortions with regard to education of women. In the period under survey the highest number of abortions per 100 born children is among women with lowest education. In the eighties, there were no fewer than 1,6 induced abortions per every child born to a mother with basic education. On the contrary, the lowest number of abortions was among university educated women. The number of abortions was not significantly different among women who ended high school with A levels and among those who didn't. Nowadays, the number of induced abortions per 100 born children is lower among women with A levels.

Almost half of induced abortions concern women, who already experienced this operation in the past. The structure doesn't change too much with time. Among unmarried women, there were approximately ten percent more to experience abortion for the first time than among married women.

Results of the selective survey

The CVVM survey carried out in April asked respondents how they would react in case of pregnancy. We asked male respondents what they would recommend their partner to do in such a case. They had several possible answers to choose from (see Table 8). In connection with our theme of abortions we were interested predominantly in the situation of unwanted conception. In the following analyses we will therefore take into account only the first and the second variation of answers. Giving birth to the child and fostering it out to someone else is a way of solving the unwanted pregnancy but the number of respondents choosing this answer was too small and therefore insufficient for further analysis. In the following text we also ignore respondents, who were undecided or who stated, that these problems didn't concern them.

From 210 men, who were unprepared for their partner's pregnancy, almost 45% would decide for induced abortion. Majority, that is 55 % of men, would vote for the birth of the unplanned child. Among 194 women, who didn't plan to have a child yet, majority of them (61%) would choose to keep it. Abortion would solve the situation for 39 % of the questioned. The answers differed significantly according to age of the questioned. Women between the age of 20 and

29 and men between the age of 20 and 44 would keep the baby more frequently in comparison with other age categories. Men over 45 years of age would recommend induced abortion to their partner most frequently. It is interesting that this was the only socio-demographic character that differentiated the respondents' answers.

Even though we can find out from the data of the Czech Statistical Office, which women solve their situation by induced abortion most frequently, sociological data of this survey doesn't prove any connection with the number of children born before the abortion, education or other socio-demographic characteristics. The situation, when respondents are presented with a hypothetical problem and to identify with it and give their opinion about it is obviously quite different from the actual decision-making. Brief sociological survey cannot contain all constituents that affect such a serious decision in a real situation.

Table 1: Average age of a mother at induced abortion, on the whole and separately, according to family status

	1988	1995	2002
Average age	28,6	29,2	29,7
Average age of single mother	21,8	22,3	23,3
Average age of married mother	29,7	30,9	32,7
Average age of divorced mother	32,2	32,3	34,2

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 2: Number of induced abortions per 100 born children according to selected ages of mothers

	1988	1995	2002
Age 20 years, abortion for 100 born children	39	30	43
Age 25 years, abortion for 100 born children	60	33	18
Age 30 years, abortion for 100 born	128	66	25
Age 35 years, abortion for 100 born	303	141	62
Age 40 years, abortion for 100 born	708	411	172
Minimum of abortions for 100 born	19-21 years	21-23 years	25-27 years

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 3: Number of induced abortions per 100 born children according to mother's family status

	1988	1995	2002
Married	70	39	23
Single	x	110	61
Divorced + widowed	x	142	78
Unmarried	267	119	66

Note: In 1988 data about number of born children according to family status was not available

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 4: Number of induced abortions according to number of children born before the induced abortion, on the whole and separately for married and unmarried women (in %)

	1988	1995	2002
No child	14,2	19,6	25,7
1 child	21,2	24,3	25,6
2 children	47,9	41,7	36,1
3 children	13,8	11,4	9,6
4+ children	3,0	2,9	3,0
No child of married woman	1,7	2,3	4,8
1 child of married woman	21,5	24,6	25,2
2 children of married woman	57,2	54,9	52,9
3 children of married	16,2	14,6	13,4
4+ children of married	3,3	3,5	3,7
No child of unmarried woman	51,8	50,3	47,1
1 child of unmarried woman	20,4	23,8	26,0
2 children of unmarried woman	19,5	18,3	19,0
3 children of unmarried woman	6,3	5,6	5,8
4+ children of unmarried woman	2,0	1,9	2,2

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 5: Number of induced abortion per 100 born children according to number of children born before the abortion, on the whole and separately for married and unmarried women

	1988	1995	2002
Abortion index of childless woman	26	22	18
Abortion index of woman with 1 child	48	33	23
Abortion index of woman with 2 children	350	206	118
Abortion index of woman with 3 and more children	345	157	96
Abortion index of childless married woman	3	2	2
Abortion index of married woman with 1 child	38	23	14
Abortion index of married woman with 2 children	347	209	117
Abortion index of married woman with 3 and more children	370	172	101
Abortion index of childless unmarried woman	238	104	53
Abortion index of unmarried woman with 1 child	286	124	69
Abortion index of unmarried woman with 2 children	383	192	122
Abortion index of unmarried woman with 3 and more children	232	114	88

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 6: Number of induced abortion per 100 born children according women's education

	1988	1995	2002
Basic education	163	86	64
High school without A levels	70	45	34
High school with A levels	77	50	27
University	57	34	17

Source: Czech Statistical Office

Table 7: Number of induced abortions according to order of children (in %)

	1988	1995	2002
Induced abortion 1st in order	53,3	51,5	56,4
Induced abortion 2nd in order	29,3	27,4	25,6
Induced abortion 3rd in order	11,9	13,0	11,0
Induced abortion 4th in order	3,8	5,2	4,1
Induced abortion 5th and more in order	1,7	3,0	2,9

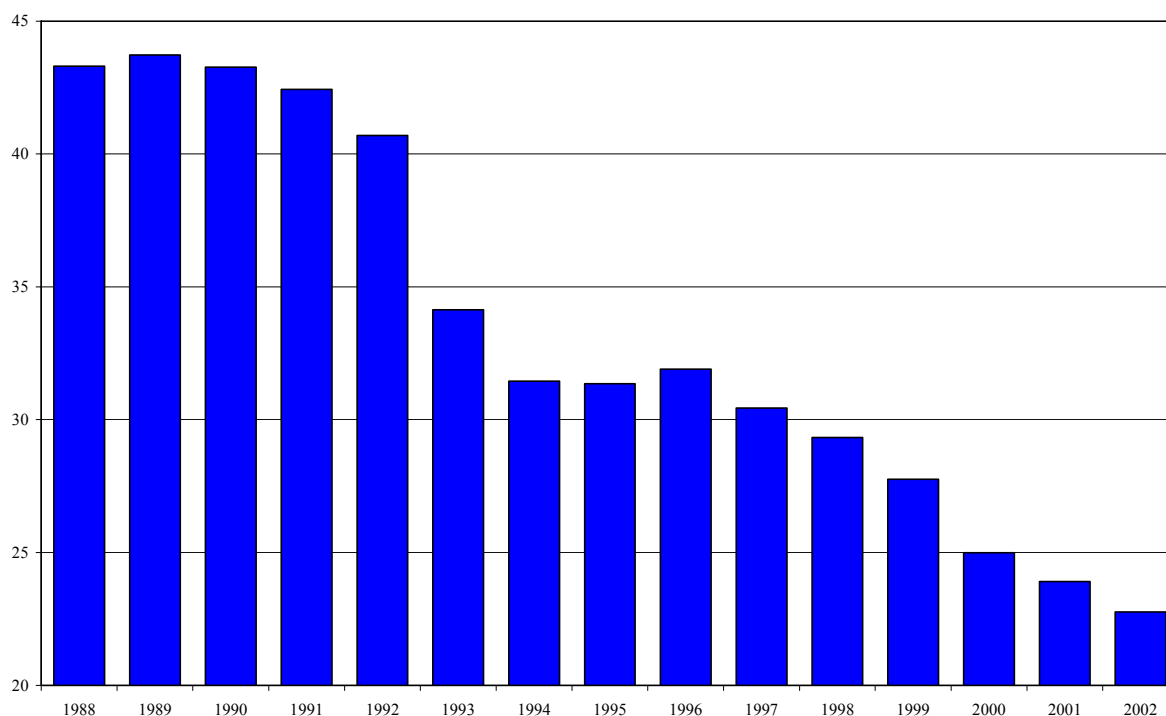
Source: Czech statistical office

Table 8: Preferred solution in case of conception (in %)

	Man	Woman
Birth, although I haven't planned to have a child right now	33,9	41,5
Induced termination of pregnancy	27,5	26,8
Birth, I want the child	10,2	10,2
Birth, but I want to give the child to the charge of relatives	0,6	1,4
Birth, but I want to give the child to the charge of someone else (not a relative)	0	0
It doesn't concern me	14,9	8,1
I do not know	12,9	12,0

Source: CVVM, Our Society survey (Naše společnost 2004), examination 04-04

Diagram 1: Proportion of induced abortion to all pregnancies, 1988 -2002



Source: Czech Statistical Office (Český statistický úřad)

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