for the Handbook of World Families:

once we are moving more and more toward a global village, this ambitious book provides a comprehensive overview of world-wide trends in families and family relations. It also illustrates the resilience of local cultures in the face of globalization. This is a very useful guide for obtaining the kind of baseline information that is essential to comparative work. As well, a number of the chapters contribute to our understanding of the complexities and politics of family life, and provide insights into the processes of family change.

—Ingrid Amor Conditis, University of Western Ontario

...Handbook of World Families, Bert Adams and Jan Trost, two of the leading scholars in the field of cross-cultural family studies, have masterfully edited a book that comparatively examines 173 families located around the world. The chapters cover a wide range of family structures and provide a comprehensive overview of family life in different cultures.

—Mark Hunter, Rowan University

defines a family! The term family is very complex with a wide range of meanings. It can refer to a married couple with children, a single parent and child, a married couple with no children, or even a group of close friends who consider themselves a family. The variety is vast, and this family diversity is present not just in the United States but around the world.

 Handbook of World Families provides a cross-cultural perspective on the family, including family life in 25 countries worldwide. The countries included in this volume are divided into regions, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, offering a comprehensive examination of the diversity of family structures available. Edited by Bert N. Adams and Jan Trost, along with contributions from top family scholars, the book offers a unique and cutting-edge perspective on family life.

other books may provide a cross-cultural perspective on the family, but this book offers a unique comparative view. In doing so, the chapters of the Handbook are organized in a parallel format: beginning with an introduction to the region, followed by coverage of more specific topics such as family life, gender roles, marriage, divorce, and remarriage, kinship, aging, and family and other institutions, and special issues specific to the region.

Handbook of World Families is an excellent resource for any academic library and an important reference for scholars and academics in the fields of family studies, sociology, and anthropology. The book can also be used in undergraduate courses on the family in cross-cultural perspective, comparative family organization, and world families.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic is a small European nation of about 10 million people with a long history of statehood. The natural demarcation of the state's borders by a line of mountains explains why it is among the states with the historically oldest borders on the continent. Because of its central geographical position, the basin of the Czech Kingdom was the battleground for many European wars, including religious conflicts during the disintegration of medieval Europe. Imperial alliances never moved the borders of the Czech Kingdom, but eventually annexed the state as a whole; the Czech state was much too small to be partitioned like Poland.

History and Development of the Czech Family

The Catholicization of the Czech Family

Two foreign annexations were especially important for the development of the Czech family into its present form. The first significant annexation occurred after the Westphalian Treaty (1648), when the predominantly Protestant populace of the Czech Kingdom was annexed by the Catholic Habsburg monarchy. The property of the Protestant nobility was expropriated and they were forced to emigrate, and the country was forcibly re-Catholicized. For the next three centuries the Czech family was governed by canon law. Its basic cultural layout was that of a Catholic family.

Since the beginning of modern history, the Czech family has exhibited all the characteristics of the Western European family type: a high degree of autonomy of the nuclear family in relation to the network of relatives, entry of both men and women into their first marriage fairly late in life, and the virtual impossibility of dissolving a marriage. Other applicable customs included those of primogeniture and the subsequent neolocality of the families of younger siblings. Men had to gain economic independence and women a dowry before they could marry, hence the high percentage of people who never married. Due to its geographical location, which caused early
and dense urbanization, property ownership patterns in the Czech lands never included communal alienation of land. Great importance was placed on trade and crafts. Both of these factors enhanced the individualism of the European tradition, which also influenced family patterns.

In the late 18th century, the enlightened Emperor Joseph II issued an edict of religious tolerance (1781), allowing people to declare adherence to faiths other than the state-promoted Catholics. He also enacted a new marriage act (1793) that allowed mixed marriages and gave Protestants and Jews the right to end their marriages by divorce. For Catholics, this is, the majority of the populace, the dissolution of marriage continued to be practically impossible.

Socialization

Developments leading to the loosening of family ties and secularization were enhanced in the 19th century by relatively early and rapid industrialization of the Czech lands, and the development of a strong industrial proletariat. As a result, the same problems appeared in the Czech lands as those that can be found in the historical sociology of the family in the Industrial Revolution.

After World War I, the Czech Kingdom ceased to exist by incorporating itself from the disintegrating Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and the Czechs and the Slovaks (and large German and Hungarian minorities) established a new democratic state together, the Czechoslovak Republic (1918). One of the fine pieces of legislation discussed in the parliament of the newly created state was the family act. It allowed civil marriages, and thus gave Catholics the right to divorce. Furthermore, by recognizing civil marriages, a new family was established. During the long absence of men from home during the war, their wives gave birth to children fathered by other men. Their biological fathers had not been allowed to marry the mothers of their children, even though they admitted paternity. At that time, about 100,000 couples were waiting for the opportunity to divorce (Klabouch, 1962). After the postwar situation stabilized, the divorce rate during the interwar period remained stable at a relatively low level. About 10% of marriages ended in divorce. A second demographic revolution had taken place, and the total number of children per family became two.

The Communist Coup and Its Consequences

The annexation of Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Empire, which expanded into Europe after World War II, lasted almost the entire second half of the 20th century and had a profound influence on the Czech family. In the beginning, the Communist revolution (1948) regarded the institution of the family with disfavor; the Communist party, with its monopoly on power, considered it a competing loyalty. It waged an intensive propaganda campaign against the "effeminacy of the bourgeois family," and concerned the family historically outdated. It broke the power of the family economically by expropriating family property. The patriarchal state took some of the family's traditional responsibilities: It tended to state-built hospitals to all young families, built a network of nurseries and kindergartens where children could be left for the day from the age of 3 months and could be boarded during the week from 6 months. The state mobilized women into full-time employment in nationalized firms, built a network of workplace canteens in public sector companies where employees were served subsidized meals, and also supported collective leisure activities in a network of company lounges and recreational facilities.

Changes in the structure of ownership soon moved the Czech family closer to the East European family model in some respects. It became more apparent with the decreasing age at first marriage and birth of first child. The traditionally high marriage rates became even higher (unmarried persons had no chance to obtain a flat), people entered into marriage very early in life, and women became mothers at an earlier age. In the 1950s, the modal age at primiparity dropped to 22 years, and remained there until after the fall of the Communist regime in the late 1980s. The illusion of "cultural youth" that state paternalism offered to young couples by taking over some of their responsibilities was very attractive.

The offer of the "socialist way of life," however, soon proved deceptive; the paternalistic state was unable to keep its promises to the family in some fundamental respects. This was particularly true with regard to the notion of an inexpensive council flat for every family. The post-war housing shortage showed no signs of abatement, and in spite of large-scale construction of satellite housing estates, it became more and more difficult for young families to obtain a flat of their own. The allocation of flats became influenced by political and economic corruption and personal connections. With both spouses gainfully employed, the failing recall system was a major problem. It was necessary to stand in long queues even for staple foods such as meat and vegetables. Modern household appliances (refrigerators, washing machines, television) were only available through corruption and personal connections. The nurseries proved economically unsustainable because their rapidly spreading infections and high sickness rates caused mothers to spend a substantial amount of time away from work caring for sick children. Thus, the state had to bear the losses caused by both mothers' absence from work and keeping sick children's places in nurseries available. For that reason, practically all yearly boarding nurseries were discontinued, and starting from the 1960s onward, the number of places for children up to 3 years of age in day nurseries began to be significantly reduced.

The Crisis of State Paternalism

The crisis in the continuing functions of state paternalism robbed families of all illusions, and made them mobilize their own reserves. With the absence of the traditional structures of economic capital in the Western model, the value of social capital networks came to the forefront. In times of trouble, the family proved to be the best survival kit. The unsuccessful attempt at an at least partial escape from the Soviet Empire in 1968 was rapidly suppressed by the Warsaw Pact invasion. The blatant puppet government, which was installed following the invasion, no longer needed to, nor was able to, cover up the gap between Communist ideology and reality. What the Czechs and Slovaks lived under in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in the 1970s and 1980s was officially called "real existing socialism." The regime's attitude toward the family had changed. The family was now supported, because family values carried with them a retreat from the inadequate public political space to the private sphere. An emphasis on collective activities was replaced with an extension of the maternity leave period and relatively generous child benefits. In the politically frustrated population, these benefits stimulated a significant increase in the birth rate in the 1970s, with which Czech society countered trends in Western European countries.

The Communist rhetoric was consistently collectivistic. Its collectivity was not, however, experienced in the same manner as that of the collectivity of the family. It was the collectivity of the system, of socialist society, of the party, of work co-ops and youth groups. In reality, the political system was individualistic; "false collectivism" was fabricated in the media and in all that was uttered in public.
The Czech Family

Decrease in Marriage Rates and Unmarried Cohabitation

Czech society in the entire second half of the 20th century was characterized by very high marriage rates. The 2001 census found that among 15 to 60-year-olds, only 5.1% of men and 2.8% of women had never married. Girls married around the age of 20, and men only 2 or 3 years later. After the change of political regime, however, there was a sharp drop in the rate of first marriages. While in 1990 the marriage rate among men was 91.1%, in 2001 it was only 65.4%; the marriage rate among women fell from 96.2% to 73.2% during the same period.

The decrease was mainly the result of a marked drop in marriage rates among the youngest age groups; the probability of marriage among people less than 25 years of age dropped by more than 50% in the first decade after the change of political regime. Marriages among teenagers, which had been quite common in 1990 almost 30% of brides and 10% of bridegrooms were under the age of 20, have all but disappeared. Nowadays only 1% of bridegrooms and less than 6% of brides are not yet 20 years old at the time of their marriage. The marriage rate among older age groups did not increase even in the late 1990s; therefore, if the 2001 marriage rate remains constant, in the future 35% of men and 28% of women at the age of 50 will have never married (Palonszkyová, 2003).

The aforementioned statistical extrapolations should be read with caution, as it contains hidden contradictions. On one hand, one should bear in mind that it was calculated at the time of a rapid increase in age at first marriage. Very young brides from the early 1990s are already married and thus do not increase the first marriage rates, while slightly older women are postponing marriage. If those postponed marriages take place before the end of the first decade of the 21st century, it can be expected that marriage rates will increase somewhat. Thus a slight increase in marriage rates in the 25 to 30 age range since 2001 can be predicted.

Marriage Continues to Enjoy High Status for Czechs

Research into attitudes among representative samples of the population has repeatedly shown that a considerable majority of the younger generation considers marriage the most suitable type of family. About 80% of young men and women from the cohort of adults under the age of 30 agree with the statement that "people who want to have children should get married" (Slamplová & Pilařkova, 2002). Although we cannot assume that marriages postponed in the 1990s until later in life would bring about a return to an extremely high marriage rate, a significant number of men and women from that generation will enter into at least one marriage.

This trend will clash with the other growing trend toward unmarried cohabitation and gradual change in its character. In the 1980s, the setting up of a family proceeded in the following sequence: (1) pairing up, (2) sexual intercourse, (3) if it were a long-term relationship, a sporadic and gradually decreasing use of contraception, (4) unmarried cohabitation if the housing shortage allowed, (5) conception of a child, and (6) when the woman found that she was expecting, the wedding would follow. The traditional notion that a pregnancy can be legitimized by marriage was still very strong. Nine out of 10 children were born to parents within wedlock, but one half of first children were born within 8 months after the wedding, that is, were conceived before the wedding day. As evidenced by the high marriage rate, unmarried cohabitation was generally considered a "test marriage." In the early 1980s, about one-third of engaged couples lived together before getting married, and the average premarriage cohabitation period lasted

Return to the Western Family Model

The opportunity to capitalize on the results of economic activity was returned to the Czech family by the political coopt and economic transformation of the 1990s. Small businesses in the retail and service sectors were privatized; some were given back to the descendents of the original owners. Real estate was also reasigned. It was again possible to start, or engage in, private business. In 1992, the peaceful division of the Czechoslovak Republic into two democratic states—the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic—took place. The Czechs thus returned to the historical boundaries of the Czech Kingdom. With the return of a market economy and the restitution of private property, the Czech family quickly returned to the Western family model. However, it still exhibits the characteristics of the institutional dependence caused by a half-century with little private ownership of the means of production and a command rather than a market economy.
The Czech Family

3. FERTILITY: CHANGES IN REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR AND VALUES

The Czech population, along with populations in other East and Central European societies, underwent a second demographic transition about one generation later than their Western counterparts. In Western countries, modified family behavior patterns began to appear in women born in 1950 and later; in Eastern Europe, those modified family behavior patterns began to emerge in women born in 1970 and later.

While in Western countries new values, norms, and attitudes were developed during periods of social stability, in post-Communist countries these occurred during periods of profound economic and social transformations. It is not clear whether groups exhibiting the same formal demographic parameters are alike in their value orientations; they may represent different cognitive processes and responses to different variables. It may not be possible to make more certain interpretations for several more years (Rychtaríková, 2002, p. 135).

Research on the younger generation's values and priorities has shown that a marked traditional orientation in their pairing-up patterns. For both men and women, the most desired characteristic in their ideal life partner is a good attitude to children, followed by "sense of family life," "responsibility and honesty," "a good upbringing," and "tolerance." The same values were ranked highest by both men and women. Individualism and competitiveness in particular appear near the bottom half of the list, and are traditionally gender differentiated: Women more often reported that they expect docility from men with regard to career success, ambition, and good financial and material conditions, while men more often expected that they expect women to be good-looking (Kuchciová et al., 1999; Hamplová & Pikáčková, 2002).

Postponing Parenthood, Decreasing Birthrates, and the Rise in Illegitimate Births

Trends in the birthrate indicate a possible change in attitudes and expectations. In the 1970s, when the birthrates plummeted in most European countries, the Czech Republic experienced a major baby boom. The Czech family, shaken by the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion by six Warsaw Pact nations and the subsequent occupation of the country, was paradoxically strengthened. People retreated into the privacy of their own homes and lived alone. The large cohort of women, born during the post-World War II baby boom, were at an age when they were deciding whether to have their second or third baby. This contributed to the marked increase in births. The patriarchal measures, introduced by the repressive government of "socialism with a human face" in the late 1960s, also played a role. Experts estimate that about 500,000 more children than usual were born in about an 8-year period of increased fertility—an increase from the usual 140,000 births born annually to over 190,000.
The strong profamily climate in the 1970s can also be documented by the low ratio of children born outside of wedlock. When the birthrate peaked between 1974 and 1975, only 4.4% of babies were born to unmarried women. It was probably the historically lowest level of illegitimacy ever in the Czech lands—Bohemia and Moravia. There are no indications that this might be repeated in the foreseeable future.

Change in Reproductive Strategies Brought About Change in the Political Regime

The generation that began establishing families after the turn of the century was very large. In the early 1990s, families having three or more children became scarce, and Czech families have been having fewer and fewer children ever since. However, it was expected that the total numbers of births would increase, even against a declining birth rate, when girls from the large generation born in the mid-1970s reached childbearing age. That did not occur.

After the change of regime, the birthrate in the Czech Republic first dropped sharply, but in the mid-1990s it stabilized at about 90,000 births annually (instead of the usual 120,000). The most dramatic decrease—about three-quarters—was recorded among teenage mothers. The number of mothers in their 20s, who until then were responsible for about 80% of births, also dropped significantly. Additionally, the proportion of 30-year-olds who have not had a child tripled in the 1990s (from 2% to 6%), and it is still growing.

The political changes in 1989 brought about a change in life strategies. This change has also significantly affected reproductive strategies. Two changes have been documented, and a third is surmised. First and foremost, Czech families, just like their Western European counterparts a generation earlier, generally have one rather than two children, and the number of large families is dwindling. Second, Czech men and women set up a family much later now than they did under the previous political regime. The period of political “normalization” following the Soviet invasion, when Czech women gave birth to their firstborns most frequently at 21, has ended. In that period Czechs had the second youngest primiparas in Europe, preceded only by Turkish women. In the early 1990s, the Czechs began to postpone the birth of their firstborn, and the average age of primiparas grew in the first decade after the revolution by 2.5 years, reaching 24.9 in the year 2000.

In comparison with other European countries, Czech women still become mothers at a very young age. However, a large proportion of the generation born around 1975, who will turn 30 around the year 2005, have yet to give birth to their first child. As has been demonstrated with regard to marriage rates, postponed births, just like postponed marriages, may still be realizable in the second half of the first decade of this century.

It would not be safe to link the expected projections on birthrates to marriage rates. An increasing number of young couples, or young women, do not equate parenthood with marriage. Thus, a marked change is a steep increase in the percentage of children born out of wedlock. Between 1989 and 2003, the proportion of children born out of wedlock tripled; since 1975 it has increased fivefold. In the year 2002, 25% of children were born to unmarried mothers (see Figure 11.1).

Social Stratification of Proportion of Children Born out of Wedlock

The distribution of children born out of wedlock is not uniform across all age groups. The highest incidence is among teenage mothers. While about two-thirds of children born to mothers under 20 are born out of wedlock, less than one-seventh of children born to mothers between 25 and 30 are illegitimate. But because of the marked drop in the birthrate among teenagers, the total number of illegitimate children born to women from that age-group is actually smaller than those born to mothers over the age of 30. Children born out of wedlock are not only those born to women who have never been married. One-fourth of the births are to women who had previously been married and are now divorced. As a result, 40% of children born out of wedlock in the Czech Republic are not first children.

This trend has been gathering strength. In the 1990s the number of third or later children born in wedlock has dropped by 45%, while the number of third and subsequent children born out of wedlock has increased by 32%. Almost one-fifth of illegitimate children are now their mothers' third or fourth child.

The explanation for this age stratification is social rather than demographic. The ratio of children born to unmarried mothers largely depends on their education, and that trend became increasingly prominent during the 1990s. In the Czech Republic, 70% of children born to mothers with elementary education only are born out of wedlock. The ratio of illegitimate children decreases with each subsequent level of formal education obtained, and only 11% of children born to mothers with a university degree are illegitimate (see Figure 11.2).

In the Czech Republic, having children out of wedlock is not an expression of a liberal spirit. If it were, it would be positively correlated with increasing education, and not the opposite. Instead, it is linked to lower socioeconomic status and lower cultural capital. This seems to be corroborated by the fact that the highest ratios of unmarried mothers are not found in university centers and large cities but in economically backward regions with a high proportion of unskilled jobs in the local economy, as well as a high level of unemployment, racial crimes, and suicides, in addition to other evidence of social disorder.

The right to unmarried motherhood is one of the important values in liberal discourse in the Czech Republic. Birth statistics, however,
The last five Czech national censuses have shown a continuous decrease in the number of family households (i.e., households comprising a couple, with or without children). Such households represented three-quarters of all Czech households in the mid-20th century, but now represent only 55%. On the other hand, there has been a dynamic growth in the number of one-member households, which increased from 16% to 30% over the same period. The number of single-parent households (a single parent living with at least one child) has risen from 8% to 14% (see Figure 11.3).

A further inspection of the age and gender structure of one-member households shows it as an important new trend in family behavior. In the Czech Republic, one-member households were traditionally predominately those of widows. Although life expectancy has increased significantly (particularly in the past 10 years, and particularly for women), the number of widows has remained constant. The increase in the number of one-member households is due to the growing cohort of young people living alone. Their contribution to the total number of one-member households has tripled over the period monitored, and the raw number has increased sevenfold. This group is primarily composed of young men, either bachelors or divorcees. Only 16% of women who live alone are under the age of 35, compared with 31% for men. Forty-three percent of women who live alone are aged 70 or older, compared with only 13% of men.

Because young women living on their own very often have a child (or children), they are not one-member households; households consisting of a child (or children) and one parent are included in Czech statistics as single-parent families or households. Over the past decade, this has been one of the fastest-growing types of household. Currently about 15% of the population of the Czech Republic are members of single-parent families. Eighty-five percent of such families are headed by a woman, most frequently a divorcée. More single-parent families than any other type of family live in a flat with another family, usually with grandparents. Mothers provide assistance to their daughters who have become single parents, and who are encountering financial and housing problems, by sharing their home and income with them. Sometimes the grandparents themselves are also divorced, thus creating a marginal but growing subculture of families managed by women for several generations. Women who have grown up
and been socialized in such families often tended to set up the same kind of families themselves. The younger women living in such households often have a partner who does not live with them in the same household.

This pattern of family relationships is the second most frequent Czech version of the living apart together (LAT) relationship, which is not due to personal choice, but rather to the housing shortage. It is particularly characteristic for young and middle-age people. Surveys indicate that the number of these families is on the increase.

The greatest proportion of Czech LAT relationships is still made up of elderly couples and pensioners. In these cases, the two partners live in their own homes, which they want to maintain, so that in the event that the relationship breaks up, they would have a place to live.

In spite of its growing frequency, the single-parent family is still viewed as a less than ideal solution. Although it may enhance the variety of Czech family life, it remains a marginal and often temporary solution for the majority of the population. The situation is rather different for Roma families.

Czech Roma Families

The history of the 20th century is responsible for the fact that the Czech state—distinctly multinational and multicultural in character at the time when the Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918—became quite a homogeneous nation with regard to ethnicity, culture, and nationality. First the Germans living along the border with Germany waged a successful campaign for the unification of these territories with Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich in 1938. The remaining Czech territory was occupied by Hitler’s troops in 1939, and subsequently became a protectorate of the Reich. Slovakia set itself up as an independent state, and lost its territories settled by the Hungarians. Finally, the large Jewish minority in the Czech lands and in Slovakia was exterminated by the Germans. After the collapse of Nazi rule, the Czechs, whose state had been reestablished within its original borders, expelled the German minority with the assistance of the victorious Allies (1945–1946). After the fall of the Communist regime, the Czechs peacefully parted ways with the Slovaks (1992).

Virtually all the families that remained in the territory of the Czech Republic were Czech families.

The only significant exception was Roma families. The size of the Roma community in the Czech Republic is not large. Experts estimate that there are about 250,000 Roma in the country (2.5% of the total population). This is several times less than in neighboring Slovakia, Hungary, or Romania. However, even the Roma community has not been in the Czech Republic very long. Before World War II, there were only about 6,000 to 9,000, usually traveling, Roma in the Czech Republic. Most of them, however, were killed in the Holocaust. Thus, the present Roma are mostly second- or third-generation immigrants.

Roma families differ markedly from the Czech majority, although they are beginning to approximate the majority. Whereas the Czechs have already undergone their second demographic transition, the Roma are still undergoing their first. Extensive networks of relatives, and a strong influence of patriarchs and matriarchs, are still very much alive in Czech Roma families today. The cultural pattern for setting up a family tolerate, and even presupposes, the beginning of the sexual life 2 or 3 years before it is common among the majority population. For the Roma, sexual intercourse before the age of consent (15 years) is not culturally illegitimate—but it is neither reported nor prosecuted.

The use of contraceptives is much more limited than among the majority Czech population, and Roma women are therefore markedly younger. Compared with other Central and Eastern European countries with major Roma populations (Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia), the number of Roma families with only two or fewer children in the Czech Republic is relatively high (almost one-half of all households), and there are almost twice as many children Roma families as in the other countries.

On one hand, this is the result of higher life expectancy, and hence a greater relative number of older Roma in the Czech Republic, and a higher share of young households that have assumed the same reproductive strategies as the majority population. The lower birthrate is also due to substantially lower numbers of married teenage Roma (about 15% in the Czech Republic compared with 40% to 50% in other countries).

However, that is a relatively recent development:

(1996) The Romanian women with children had an average of five children by the end of their reproductive age (the 45 to 49 age group), while the corresponding figure for the Czech women was only 2.17 children. In poorer Roma settlements in Slovakia (which was part of common state of Czechoslovakia for the decisive part of their reproductive years) the number of children per family reached 7.8. (The Roma, 2002, p. 23)

Younger Czech Roma exhibit the majority trend toward unauthorized partnerships. They are voluntarily childless less often than the majority Czech population. In the Czech Republic 80% of first children born to mothers with basic education are illegitimate. These mothers are largely Roma women.

The large number of Roma women with only basic education is due to the traditionally low value attached to formal education for children (and girls in particular) in traditionally oral Roma culture, but also due to mistakes in educational policies, and the prejudices of the majority population in the Czech Republic. According to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Czech government reports that “approximately three-fourths of Roma children attend special schools for children with minor mental defects, and more than 50% [some estimates are closer to three-fourths] of all pupils attending special schools are Roma children” (Report, 2002, p. 77).

The high ratio of Roma children in schools that provide only basic education is attributable both to prejudices of Czech teachers who diagnose cultural differences as mental defects, and to Roma mothers’ belief that a school with lower demands and a larger number of Roma children is better for their offspring. This belief is further strengthened by prejudices of the majority population that the Roma fail vis-á-vis more sophisticated career aspirations, not because they are ill-prepared to cope with them, but because they are Roma.

These young basic school leavers exhibit high drop-out rates in further vocational education, and up to 8% of them are long-term unemployed. They form street gangs as teenagers and live on petty crime, and, more recently, have also been active in the drug culture and prostitution. Girls often become pregnant early in life and are uncertain about the father of their child; thus, the cycle of social disorganization repeats itself. This cycle, which is found most among new immigrants from the East, greatly affects and disrupts the social patterns of the Roma who have been settled in the Czech Republic for several generations and built up a way of life compatible with the majority population. In spite of major efforts on the part of the authorities and social workers supported by international organizations, the Roma’s progress has been both slow and uncertain. If given intensive social assistance, they often fall into the trap of dependency.

Compared with the Roma from comparable post-Communist countries, the Czech
Roma enjoy the highest standard of living and longest life expectancy. They have their own political representation and publish their own magazine written partly in Romany (far from all Roma can speak their language). In the Czech Republic there are no usual squatted Roma settlements, most of the Roma are more or less dispersed in urban areas, where they form only relatively small neighborhoods. Compared with the majority population, however, they have a markedly lower standard of living, the highest unemployment, the lowest formal education, the highest rate of incarceration, and the shortest life expectancy. As present they represent the greatest social problem for society.

4.5. GENDER ROLES, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY, AND THE ECONOMY

The Universal Employment of Women

The ground plan of the Czech family's social habits is defined by the fact that for more than three generations nearly all Czech women have been employed, mostly on a full-time basis. Since the mid-20th century, almost one-half of the Czech economy has been dependent on the female labor force. This fact has generally be lost for granted, and has influenced Czech stereotypes for decades.

The roots of the present situation go back to the 1950s when women were mobilized to join the workforce through massive political bullying. When the Communist party seized power in 1948, it set the universal employment of women as an important party doctrine. This policy was not only based on the ideology that a person's dignity rests on being employed, but also on the wish to mobilize the economic resources of the Communist bloc in Stalin's preparation for a possible third world war. Last but not least, it was part of the effort to weaken the social importance of the family, which was viewed as a competing loyalty to the party. The result of the intensive political pressures was that very soon up to 97% of women were employed for almost the entire period of their adult economic life. Many women responded to the radical opening of the labor market with enthusiasm because it presented the opportunity to gain higher qualifications, to expand social contacts, and to earn the feeling of autonomy and self-confidence.

At that time, the majority of women entered employment without professional training, which was reflected in the types of jobs they took. However, they soon acquired the necessary skills and some developed careers.

The vast majority, however, stayed in simple and poorly paid jobs. At the same time, new acute problems emerged in their homes. Few husbands were ready to shoulder a significant proportion of the housework and to move away from existing patriarchal roles. As a result, quite a few gainfully employed women and mothers began to consider themselves victims of fraud: Their jobs, instead of liberating them, created a double burden for them. They found it nearly impossible to reconcile their responsibilities at home and in the workplace. This overburdening, combined with their disgust at ideological bullying and the fact that it was impossible to open a public discussion about their problems, often led them to romantic daydreaming about the stress-free lives of housewives in the "good old days." (Sobekarová & Helou, 2002).

Women of that generation are still alive and, through their daughters and granddaughters, exert a lot of influence over contemporary Czech society. Studies conducted after the 1989 revolution and change of regime confirmed the existence of the residual effects of that process among women of all generations. In practice, however, Czech women have refused to give up the autonomy gained through employment, even though they no longer forced to enter employment by ideological pressures. The generations of women that have entered society from the 1960s onward have gradually been better qualified, and, starting from the 1970s, equally represented at universities. From the 1960s onward, women made up more than 50% of graduates from medical and law schools, and far outnumbered men at teacher-training colleges. They remained a minority at technological universities, which attracted significantly fewer women than men.

Unemployment did not emerge as a social phenomenon in the Czech Republic until the mid-1990s. Because it had not exceeded 3% for half a century, and was not even reported during the communist government, the economically active population had no prior experience with this phenomenon. In the second half of the 1990s, unemployment in the Czech Republic gradually grew until it leveled off at 10%. The proportion of women in the unemployment figures fluctuates around 55%. Older women, who are largely unskilled, women returning from maternity leave, and women from rural areas where it is difficult to find work near home, contribute to the anomaly, large share of the unemployed. In such circumstances it makes more financial sense to collect unemployment benefits and look after young children than to continue to work (Strovolos, 1997).

Working Mothers

The situation in Czech families is characterized by the fact that Czech women are held full-time jobs for three generations, even white they were caring for small children. Maternity leave is guaranteed by legislation in the Czech Republic. It is one of the longest maternity leaves in Europe, having been repeatedly extended since the mid-1970s. Since 1993, every woman with a child is entitled to a family allowance of 6% of her salary for the first 6 months after childbirth, and 1.1 times the official minimum for subsistence in the form of maternity social benefits for another 1.5 years. Furthermore, her employer is obliged to allow her to return to her previous position at any time during the first 3 years.

Surveys of young women show that most of them plan to stay home with their children until they are 6 years old (Kučhalová et al., 1999). However, a substantial number do not even make use of the fully legally guaranteed maternity leave, but return to employment before their youngest child reaches the age of 4. Two years after a birth, one-third of mothers have returned to employment. Only one-fourth of mothers take advantage of the full 4 years legal maternity leave (Přinačová, 2002). Mothers usually return to work full time because there are not enough part-time jobs on the labor market. Furthermore, their original employers are not required to consent to shorter working hours when mothers return to the positions removed for them. Returning to work, whether full time or part time, entails an immediate end to maternity and social benefits. Over 50% of economically active women in the Czech Republic work full time, that is, the legal standard of 42.5 hours a week, and 3% hold a second job. In comparison with many member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), part-time employment is exceptional in the Czech Republic (only 67% of women in the United States, 20% in Germany, and 10% in Denmark work more than 40 hours a week). Only 1% of women of an economically active age are housewives in the classical sense on a permanent basis. About 8% of the female workforce is in the home on a temporary basis (Přinačová, 2002).

Surveys have repeatedly shown that being "just a housewife" is rejected in the Czech Republic as counter to the need for independence. At the same time, however, Czech
Women declare that looking after children is a higher priority for them than a professional career. That may also be the reason why they largely accept that men hold higher positions in the workplace and also receive better salaries. They are not, however, willing to forgo taking a job for the benefit of their husbands' careers (Stinbaut and Helis, 2002).

Pay Discrimination Against Women

The Czech Republic applies all laws passed in the EU to protect women against discrimination in the workplace. In areas where local legislation is given precedence, Czech laws generally tend to be stricter than most European laws.

Real income analyses nevertheless indicate that women are clearly undervalued in the workforce. The extent of this undervaluing in the Czech Republic is similar to that in other EU countries. The coefficients for the macroeconomic difference in pay is 86.2 (the ratio of women's earnings to the ratio of salaries drawn by women to the census). This would have ranked the Czech Republic the fifth best among the fifteen EU countries in the second half of the 1990s.

Throughout the 1990s, women's average salaries were between 77% and 73% of the average for men, and changes in the extent of the pay differential mirrored fluctuations in economic prosperity. In the Czech Republic, income inequality is to a large extent the heritage of the calculated control of salaries and employment rates during the period of central planning. Very low salaries were set in sectors that could easily employ women, or that were considered economically inferior (light industry, education, healthcare, and even agriculture, banking, and the court system). This was intended to discourage the entry of men, who were needed in sectors where it would be more difficult for them to be substituted for by women. The conservative communist regime was able to accept a female worker, but not a female engineer. Students at law schools were mostly women because the regime did not hold law in high esteem. The demand for legal services in the new open society soon rectified lawyers' fees and salaries; however, the work of teachers and physicians in hospitals, which remains in the public sector, continues to be undervalued relative to other countries.

In the national economy as a whole, the greatest pay gap is at the expense of women from the middle generation, and the smallest pay gap is among the youngest working generation. Higher education pays off for men more than for women. The average income of a male university graduate in 2000 was 2.43 times that of a worker with elementary education only, the same ratio for women was 1 to 2.08. A female university graduate's average salary before tax was only 65% of that of her male counterpart. This is to a large extent due to the continuing high numbers of female graduates in education and healthcare, and also to the huge differences in salaries between men and women in upper and top management.

Some factors also indicate that higher average salaries paid to men reflect the higher value of the work they do. These factors primarily include the higher percentage of men in more demanding and highly skilled professions, and the fact that men work overtime more frequently and generally for more working hours, women's career breaks and absences from work due to childcare (maternity leave, caring for their children when ill, paid and unpaid leave), and women's higher share in family and household duties as compared with men. The consequence of this, in the Czech Republic and elsewhere, is a lower accumulation of expertise and less stable professional careers among women (Fischlová, 2002). However, Czech women, like women in other OECD countries, are continually moving closer to the male model of economic activity.

When changes in the economic and political systems in the early 1990s brought about opportunities to start private businesses, Czech women, long accustomed to economic autonomy, quickly grasped them. The ratio of female to male entrepreneurs shows a predominance of the latter (the ratio of self-employed women to men is 1 to 6:2%, of women are self-employed, as compared with 13% of men, and 2.2% of female business owners employ other people, as compared with 5.8% of male business owners (Polubrné statistiky, 1992-2001)). The figures for men and women are, however, not more disparate than in other EU countries, which have a long uninterrupted tradition of free enterprise, and the gap is narrowing.

Gender-Based Division of Housework and Childcare

Although no one in the Czech Republic remembers anything other than the dual-income family model and universal employment of women, the comprehensive model of male and female roles has remained intact, and about two-thirds of the population subscribed. It is not, however, the only model. Images of family models have gradually diversified over the last 50 years, but it was only possible to articulate different models and engage in public discourse on them since last decade's reorientation of an open society. In particular, women with higher education, for whom the male model of economic activity is a matter of course, seek family models that entail an equal distribution of childcare and household between both spouses.

Within mainstream social consciousness, Czech men do consider female aspirations to professional fulfillment and social engagement as fully legitimate. Men admit that women have the capability, aptitude, and skills to be successful in their professional and public lives. At the same time, however, Czech men do not depart much from expectations of women as traditional housewives and mothers. On the other hand, despite being quite vocal in expressing their interest in being liberated from the bonds of family responsibilities, women defend their irreplaceable position in the family. Over one-half of women respondents in demographical surveys say that looking after the family is the woman's job; the number of men holding the same opinion is not substantially higher. Over three-quarters of women believe that women care more about their family and children than do men, and two-thirds of men agree with them.

Sociological research into the real division of housework and childcare show that in the majority of Czech households, routine chores are done by women. Such chores are primarily the men's domain only in exceptional cases. In this respect, the Czech Republic resembles countries such as Germany and England. The proportion of Czech households where housework and childcare are equally shared is slightly higher than in other post-Communist countries, but substantially lower than in countries such as the Netherlands (KRÚD, 1999). On the other hand, in Czech families in which the family budget is not managed by both spouses (about a third of households), it is the woman who controls the finances. It is exceptional that this is the man's role. In a third of Czech households, it is also the woman who completes the income tax returns (in another third they are completed by the man, and in the remaining third they are completed either by both spouses or neither) (Fischlová, 2002).

6. STRESSES, VIOLENCE, AND CONFLICT IN THE FAMILY

As in all developed societies, no form of violence within the family is legitimate in Czech society. However, as everyone knows,
it does occur. As distinct from many other Western societies, the existence of the phenomenon was barred from public discourse for many decades. Communist propaganda tried to present a positive picture of a happy society, and thus, in a paranoid manner, suppressed information about the existence of social problems and manifestations of social pathology. No negative manifestations were acceptable for public discourse, even with regard to private and individual characteristics, such as violence in the family.

The Communist party's loss of monopoly in public discussion brought about the opportunity for public discussion of violence in the family. Despite the efforts of feminist authors, it is still treated as a marginal observation in the media. The topic is poorly covered, even in research. Representative democronic surveys show that about one-half of the population acknowledge that they are aware of incidents of domestic violence. However, every seventh woman (and every eighth man) admits that their partner occasionally behaves toward them in a way that could be defined as violent. The slight difference between violent behavior by women and men would certainly require a more thorough research effort in which the extent of violence and related incidents and differences in the definition of violence would be monitored. In respect to the long history of the economic emancipation of Czech women, a lower rate of passivity among women in violent conflicts can be expected than in a society without such a history. Violence in Czech society, domestic violence is generally considered to be a private matter. Roughly one-fifth of women and one-third of men consider it appropriate to ignore domestic violence in their surroundings, because they consider it to be a private problem (Kuchta & Zamykalová, 1996, p. 66).

Sexual harassment is also a relatively new topic for public discussion and research in the social sciences. Recent research has reported that 29% of women and 8% of men in the Czech Republic have experienced sexual harassment (Kuchta & Zamykalová, 1996). Over one-half of the population is tolerant toward most expressions of sexual harassment, with the exception of sexual blackmail of women employees by their superiors. In the current social climate, sexual harassment is often addressed by avoidance strategies; there is fear of an unfavorable reaction and secondary victimization.

**Political Representation of Women**

Devastated by the absence of a civic society for a half-century, political culture is difficult to rebuild. This also applies to the political representation of women. The Communists maintained a set level of 30% women deputies in their puppet parliaments. That was part of the external presentation of the system as a "people's democracy." It had no practical implications. The elections were rigged and manipulated, and the parliament had no real political powers. When it regained its authority in 1989, political pluralism was reestablished and the first free elections took place. The proportion of women in the parliament fell to 13%, a common level throughout Europe, and has remained so.

The number of female members of parliament is low, and more of them work in less important committees, generally connected with humanitarian issues such as social policy, health care, education, and culture. The unconvincing track record in equal opportunities policy and the marginalization of the so-called feminine agenda are usually attributed to the fact that men hold an absolute majority of the key positions in public life. Nonetheless, female Czech politicians have not found an approach to that agenda, and they "behave like men" in political life. Thus, the areas where women play an important or specific role (family, schools, healthcare) are politically administered from a male point of view, although the proportion of women among administrators is high. The cautious attitude of female deputies toward female issues and equal opportunities policies stems from the fact that the man is viewed as the norm in politics, even by women, and political behavior is not linked with gender. Women politicians want to be seen, first and foremost, as politicians, and not as women in politics.

The representation of women in the Czech executive branch also remains very low; there are only one or at most two female ministers in the 15-member cabinet. At regional and local levels, however, the number of women in politics is higher. The number of female mayors, particularly in smaller towns, is relatively large, and the Association of Female Mayors in the Czech Republic supports their identity and makes them a political power to be reckoned with. It also indicates the practical focus of women in politics: Politics at the local administrative level is more concerned with resolving the day-to-day problems of the electorate than with playing the power game.

Growing frustration with politics among Czechs is in part due to political intrigue and lack of accountability to voters. The 97% turnout in the first elections after the 1989 revolution dropped to 58% in 2002. The parliament is the least trusted of all public institutions in the eyes of the population. Still, Czechs have maintained trust in the free press. Analysis of the mass media discourse in the Czech Republic has shown (Havelková, 1999) that the public's dissatisfaction with the domestic political scene is acquiring a gender dimension, the specific content of which can be summarized as follows: Men are immune and greedy for power, and women are potentially more sensible but lacking self-confidence and interest in power. In the context of calls for more women in politics, the traditional image of women has therefore been expanding and changing in a remarkable way. Not only are the professional capacities of women more or less taken for granted, but there are expectations that women could bring to politics attributes traditionally ascribed to mature masculinity, such as rationality, courage, and determination. At the same time, however, women in high political positions are required to project traditional feminine qualities and aspirations. These very high expectations and demands on women politicians are associated with the primary orientation of discussion toward the benefits women might bring to politics (education and refinement), and neglect of the issue of the benefits politics might bring to women. As yet, discussion has not shifted from the purely cultural level to the level of the theory of democracy or active citizenship, let alone the context of social policy.

7. **DIVORCES AND REMARRIAGES**

The Czech Republic is among countries with the highest divorce rates. Over the past 10 years, the divorce rate has continually increased (see Figure 11.4). In the Czech Republic today, as in Denmark, Norway, Great Britain, and Austria, four out of 10 marriages end in divorce. In larger cities, the ratio is five out of 10, and in towns and villages, it is three out of 10 (Populární sociologie, 2002).

The continual growth in the divorce rate from the 1950s to 1999, when there was a sharp temporary decrease (see Figure 11.4), was primarily due to the simplicity of the divorce process. Divorce law in Czechoslovakia prior to 1989 was both extremely liberal and not further complicated by the judicial process. Divorce was not difficult, because marriage was defined as a secular affair, not legitimized by anything more than the wishes of the two partners.
Divorce was thus defined as a natural part of a marriage conceived on this basis, and many marriages ended in it, even if there may have been other possible solutions to problems between spouses. Considerations of jointly owned property did not influence the decision to divorce, because the Communist system did not allow families to accumulate property. Furthermore, the universal employment of women meant that divorces were not dependent on alimony. However, child custody battles were often long and bitter because childcare and custody agreements were not essential preconditions for the granting of a divorce. Disputes over custody and guardianship were more frequent than disputes over property.

Czech divorce law was rewritten in 1998, after more than 30 years. (The last divorce laws were enacted in 1964.) The new laws made divorces easier on one hand, but were stricter on the other. They introduced divorces based on mutual agreement between spouses. If a married couple have settled child custody issues, divided joint property, and have not lived together for at least 6 months, they can ask the court for a no-fault divorce without indicating the reason for the break-up of the relationship. The law has also enabled divorce in the case of "dead marriages" (in which the couple have not lived together for more than 3 years), even without the consent of one spouse. On the other hand, the new legislation has banned divorces within the first year of marriage, and those that would be counter to the interests of minor children. After the interests of children have been considered, the divorce process may be started. The only case for divorce in Czech marriage law is a qualified breakdown of the relationship between partners. The new legislation came into force in 1999, and the divorce rate fell by 10%. It was only a temporary decrease; in 2000 the divorce rate essentially returned to pre-1999 levels, and indicators show that since 2001 it has been on the increase again (see Figure 11.1).

**Highest Divorce Rate: First Years of Marriage**

Most divorces in the Czech Republic take place during the first 5 years of marriage, and then the rate falls for each further year of marriage. The longer the marriage, the lesser the likelihood of divorce. Along with the decrease in marriages among very young persons came a decrease in the number of divorces in the first 3 years of marriage, particularly in cases where the marriage had not been adequately considered in advance, as was often the case for pregnant teenage brides. In 1990 most divorces took place in the third and fourth years of marriage, but in 2000 they had shifted to the fourth and fifth years. There was a corresponding increase in the age of spouses at the time of divorce. In 1991 the average age at divorce was 33 for women and 36 for men. In 2000 the figures were 36 for women and 38 for men (Petušův svět, 2002).

**Lowest Age at Marriage:**

**High Divorce Rates**

The earlier Czech men and women enter into marriage, the more likely they are to end the marriage in the divorce courts. Two-thirds of women who marry before age 20 get divorced; however, the figure is only one-third for women who get married around age 25, and just one-fifth for those who get married after age 30 (Petušův svět, 2001).

This relationship is to a certain extent influenced by level of education. In Czech society, young people who leave school immediately after high school enter into employment around age 18. Those who carry on to study at university enter the work world at around age 23 or 24. With the end of the caretaker status, marriages among couples who are not economically independent have fallen sharply, and marriages among students have all but disappeared. Those who trade a high school education who entered directly into employment, have a greater probability of entering into marriage sooner than those with a university education. Thus, they also have a higher probability of their marriages ending in divorce.

**Divorce Rates Among Those With Less Education**

In the Czech Republic, the divorce rate is strongly influenced by the level of education of spouses. Traditionally this has only been true for women. In older cohorts, we find more divorced women than men. It was the case only for women that the higher the level of education, the greater the likelihood of divorce. There was no differentiation in the level of divorce rate among men with respect to this variable, but the situation changed for the cohort born between 1940 and 1950. The relationship between the divorce rate and education among women reversed; the higher the level of education, the less the likelihood of divorce. Among men the reverse happened, and a strong differentiation according to education appeared. The higher the level of education obtained, the greater the number of divorces (see Figure 11.3).

**High Divorce Rate for Marriages With Young Children**

At the end of the 1990s, nearly two-thirds of all divorces in the Czech Republic were among marriages where there were minor children. The most divorces were among families with one child (about two-fifths), and the divorce rate decreased as the number of children increased (Petušův svět, 2002).

In terms of the number of years of marriage that elapse before a divorce, divorces among families with minor children occur later than among those without. The highest divorce rate among couples with children occurs 5 to 8 years after marriage, but after 2 to 3 years among those without children (Petušův svět, 2002).
Emphasis on Personality Conflicts as a Reason for Divorce

Women file for divorce for more often than men in Czech society. At the end of the 1990s, 68 women filed for divorce for every 32 men who filed (Populační úřady, 2003). Women, however, are often only legalizing reality, in which men have already left the family. If they are not divorced, they cannot expect child support or alimony, which are set and enforced by the divorce courts. The law provides for the possibility of suing one’s own (current) spouse for alimony in the event that he or she does not distribute income equally within the family. However, such cases are rare, and the defendant usually responds by filing for divorce. Of the 10 possible grounds for divorce that are recognized by the courts, both women and men cite personality conflicts most frequently. This ground has gradually become more popular for both sexes since the 1970s, even though, during the 1980s, alcoholism and infidelity competed on the men’s side, and other grounds (officially listed as “other reasons”) on the women’s side. Since 1989 character differences, as grounds for divorce, have continued to grow. In 2001 more than one-half of divorce cases involved this stated as the grounds (Polzyh obyvatelstva, 2001). Even though we know that this is only one of 10 acceptable grounds for divorce, we can assume that causes for divorce do not much differ from those that are perceived as legitimate. It can also be seen that the number of men and women who find it impossible to stay in a marriage due to character differences has increased since the changes in Czech society after 1989, and the move from collective rhetoric to individualistic rhetoric.

Expected Trends in Divorce

In the future we can expect two phenomena in divorces in the Czech Republic: an increase in divorces among older partners and a general decrease in the divorce rate as a whole. The shift in peak frequency of divorce to an older age-group can be expected due to the increasing age at marriage. Data from the end of the 1990s, when compared with data from the end of the 1980s, already indicate this trend. The decrease in the divorce rate should follow the increase in the marriage rate, which has been taking place since the beginning of the 1990s. However, this expectation has not been fulfilled. Cohorts with low marriage rates are already reaching the age at which a high divorce rate would be expected, but, as shown in Figure 11.4, the divorce rate in the Czech Republic returned to its previous high rate after 1999, and has even begun to grow again since 2001. 8.

INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND RELATIONSHIPS, AND PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE FAMILY AMONG GENERATIONS

A relatively high level of intergenerational solidarity and assistance are traditional elements of the Czech family. This is, to a certain extent, a direct result of the stabilization of society before 1989, which continues in a different form today.

Intergenerational Dependency Before 1989

The so-called generational sandwich effect—potential conflicts in caretaking role expectations between parents and children on the one hand, and between parents and grandparents on the other—had a specific form in the pre-November (pre-revolution) society. There was social pressure for a small age difference between generations, the result of which was the prevailing low age at becoming a parent. Mothers did not disapprove their daughters from early parenthood. Rather, they encouraged them to get married as soon as possible after reaching the legal age (18 years). If this happened, and the daughter gave birth around age 21 or 22, the mother would become a grandmother in her mid-40s, while still at the peak of her economic and social capacity—when she could help her daughter a great deal. Because it worked, the modal age at primiparas was 21 to 22 for two generations in the Czech Republic.
During the period when the "economics of scarcity" prevailed, assistance and aid within the family, from the mother to the daughter's family, was very significant. Parents supported their children's families financially, provided them with material goods, and helped them with services that, in the centrally planned economy, were otherwise unobtainable, and generally helped them with the running of a young household. They primarily assisted with caring for children, because mothers of young children were generally in full-time employment.

This need decreased as the children became independent. If they were born early, this happened when their mothers' mothers were in their 50s, healthy, and in full physical and economic strength. The period of motherhood for their daughters came to an end in time for them to help their own mothers, who had meanwhile reached a geriatric age and had begun to be dependent on them. The middle generation, therefore, avoided the difficulties of simultaneously caring for the young (their daughter's and son's families with small children) and the old (their parents).

The instinctive strategy for managing the "sandwich effect" was not only a fundamental element of intergenerational solidarity prior to 1989, but it was also, to a certain extent, the backbone of the whole of the pre-November Czech society. It occurred as a reaction to the political machinery and state institutions, which could not be sufficiently relied on during the course of one's life (Molnář, 1991).

Weakening of Intergenerational Dependence After 1989

During the course of the 1990s, the web of connections between the family of origin, one's own nuclear family, and older relatives ceased to be essential in Czech society. Young people experience less of a need to rely on their parents' social connections for property and services, as compared with the pre-1989 period. Women are now becoming mothers on average between the ages of 22 and 27, which is less than ideal with regard to the fact that their parents are becoming grandparents around the age of 55, at a time when they are faced with the need to help their own parents in old age.

Intergenerational Solidarity After 1989

The current weakening of dependence among the generations in the Czech Republic certainly does not mean that intergenerational solidarity has died. However, the change in regime has brought about changes in its form.

Recent research has shown that current generations do not prefer that young newlyweds live in the same household as their parents. However, the vast majority live in close vicinity to their parents and grandparents. Czechs move infrequently, and when they do, they generally move only small distances. Only one-fifth of newlyweds lived in a multigenerational household with their parents at the start of this century; however, over one-half lived in the same city or town, on average, less than 30 minutes from their parents (Palencová, 2003). Thus, the relationships between families can function similarly to those as if they were living together, but present less reasons for intergenerational conflicts, which are frequent problems in multigenerational households.

In Czech society, the predominant form of intergenerational solidarity is emotional. This presents itself in the form of frequent contacts, primarily among daughters, mothers, and granddaughters. The father plays a relatively small role in intergenerational relationships. Emotional solidarity most often comes in the form of moral and psychological support: advice, consolation, reassurance, and pep talks. In general terms, emotional solidarity amounts to the passing on of personal experiences with a relative or relatives. Besides this, such support is also related to help with the household, or more concretely, older generations help younger generations with their children and the younger generation helps the older generation in times of illness. Material support is provided only sporadically, if at all, and usually starts from the older generation to the younger (Molnář, Přídlavová, and Bínačková, 2003; Palencová, 2003).

9. THE AGING CZECH POPULATION AND FAMILY LIFE

Czech society, like all European societies, is aging. The proportion of older people in the population is increasing. Older people have specific lifestyles, specific values and expectations, and special demands and needs with regard to social and economic security. Even the family life of older people has its own characteristics. During the Communist regime, no research was conducted into these trends, and the situation has not improved significantly over the past decade.

The global measure of a threshold of 8% of a population over the age of 65 as the sign of an aging population. This threshold was already crossed in the Czech Republic in the middle of the last century. By the middle of the 1990s, the proportion of elderly people in the Czech population increased further. This was a relative aging the average life expectancy was lengthened by a decrease in child and infant mortality. Mortality in older age-groups remained high, particularly among men. The mortality rate for Czech men in the 55 to 59 age range in the 1990s was one of the highest in Europe. The high mortality rate among men in this age-group characterized all Communist states. It was related to lifestyle factors in the command economy, the poorly functioning health system, and the abuse of alcohol and nicotine.

The demographic crisis, next to the economic and political crises, revealed that the system could not be maintained, and the old political elite did not have a solution for these problems— if they were even conscious of them.

Since 1989 the quality of healthcare has improved and the lifestyle of the population has changed. As a result, the mortality rate has fallen, and life expectancy has increased. At the beginning of the 1990s, the average life expectancy in the Czech Republic was 68 years for men and 75 for women. By 2011, life expectancy for men had increased by 4 years, to 72, and by 3 years for women, to 78 (Populace, 2012). With this trend, the Czech population has separated itself from other post-Communist countries, where there has been a stagnation or even a worsening in mortality.

11. SPECIAL TOPIC: GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN CONCEPTIONS OF COHABITATION AND FAMILY LIFE

Views of family life in Czech society vary with generation. The older the generation, the greater the emphasis placed on family values and family life. In contrast, the younger generation places more emphasis on individuality, personal success, and the right to make individual decisions. Of all the living generations, personal differences from the family of origin are most acceptable to the younger generation; this is the way we mean enforcing one's own choices and emphasis on one's own life, which are not overly linked to ties with relatives and extended family. However, family and married life are, at the same time, highly valued by young Czechs. They view it as an opportunity to show that they do not just live for themselves, that they are not simply public persons, oriented toward personal gain and competition on the open market. In seeing the family as a source
of pleasure and as giving meaning to life, young people are similar to their parents and grandparents; however, they differ in their interpretations and perceptions of the family.

The current family has a low number of children and is less focused on joint activities with extended family. It is more focused on joint activities, equal opportunities for both partners, and an equal distribution of housework between the genders.

They perceive as optimal a family model that is not in conflict with the outside world and the work world, positive coexistence, and satisfied partners. In contrast, they reject the model of the family in which only one partner is satisfied, and accept that a dissatisfied partner should be able to leave the family without excessive difficulty. Thus, the family is easily dissolved (Katrínková, 2002; Hamplrová, 2000).

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