

Getting Pregnant, Registering a Marriage: Still a Widespread Order of Life Events?

An Analysis of Individual Biographies Based on Birth Certificates Data in Russia



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INTRODUCTION

Shotgun weddings — marriages registered after and as a result of pregnancy — have always been popular in Russia with the heyday in the late Soviet period.

Why?

- Low age of first sex
- Limited availability of efficient contraception
- Complete lack of sexual education
- Legal disadvantages for children born out-of-wedlock
- High social pressure on unmarried mothers and their children

frequent conceptions
hasty marriage registration

How popular?

In the late 1960-s, up to 35% of births to urban women aged 20-24 resulted from premarital conceptions (Tolz 1974). This proportion has been steadily growing during the following 15 years (Tolz, Oberg 1983). However, almost all these births occurred within marital union.

In the early 2000-s extramarital conceptions in Russia accounted for about half of all births and about two-thirds of first births, and this proportion varied across regions (Tolz, Antonova, Andreev 2005; Tolz, Antonova, Andreev 2006).

What has changed since then?

Marital and family behaviors of Russians have changed significantly during post-Soviet period due to:

- Weakening legal incentives for the registration of marriage
- Fading social pressure on unmarried cohabiting partners

no motive for shotgun marriage registration

Still, recent estimates reveal high proportion of both premarital conceptions and shotgun weddings. In 2012, among all marital births approximately 30% resulted from premarital conceptions, while for first births same proportion mounted up to 49% (Churilova, Chumarina 2014).

Why?

Conscious behavior and rational choice or stereotypical behavior and traditionalism?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How common are shotgun weddings among current Russian population? How high is their prevalence? Do we observe any regional differences?

What we do: Estimate prevalence of shotgun weddings basing on the current birth statistics data

- What are the motives for such demographic behavior?

What we do: Identify couples disposed to shotgun weddings and study their characteristics in comparison to the parent sample

- Is the continuing high prevalence of shotgun marriages a conscious behavior of partners?

What we do: Analyze key differences between couples registering their marriage after a conception and all others and rate stability of the newly registered marriages basing on additional statistical information

DATA AND METHOD

Anonymous individual data of current birth statistics for 7 Russian regions made by local official registries during 2010.

Sample size and descriptive statistics

Overall 301.3 thousand records of births containing information on

- ✓ The date of child birth and mother's birth date
- ✓ Her marital status, the date of the marriage and father's birth date (where applicable)
- ✓ The ethnic group of the mother and the father (optional).

52.7% firstborns, 35.5% second births and 11.8% births of higher order in the sample. Focus on first births.

6 out of 7 regions have typical Russian model of population reproduction characterized by

- ✓ Low average number of children per woman
- ✓ High proportion of first-parity mothers
- ✓ Concentration of childbearing between ages of 25 and 30.

One region — Republic Tatarstan — has strong ethnic component resulting in earlier childbearing and higher proportion of second and subsequent births.

Method. Event analysis with relative time scale centered at the approximated conception date

Conception interval is widened to 1 month covering period from 8 to 9 full months before the exact date of the child birth (see the two zeroes on Fig. 1-2).

One event — marriage. One dummy indicator of marital status, in each moment the woman is either in a registered marriage (1) or she is not (0).

The observational countdown begins one year prior to conception and ends 9 months after conception. During this period we follow all women and estimate proportion of those unmarried in every moment.

RESULTS: PREVALENCE OF SHOTGUN WEDDINGS

- On average more than 60% of women in Russia conceive their first baby out of wedlock (Figure 1).
- 75% of these women end up registering a shotgun marriage. This means that overall 45% of all non-childless marriages are registered when the woman is pregnant.
- Approximately every sixth non-childless marriage is registered after the fifth month of the bride's pregnancy.
- On average 26.4% of women are unmarried at the time of giving birth.
- The proportion of married women 1 year before the conception of first child ranges from 16.2% to 27.1% (Figure 1).

Figure 1: By the third month of pregnancy the pace of transition to marriage starts growing rapidly and reaches maximum at the sixth month (among Tatar women at the seventh).

According to Russian legislation, marriage registration takes place 1 month after submitting an application to the registry office. Thus, the majority of shotgun weddings seen in current statistics are likely to have been planned after pregnancy.

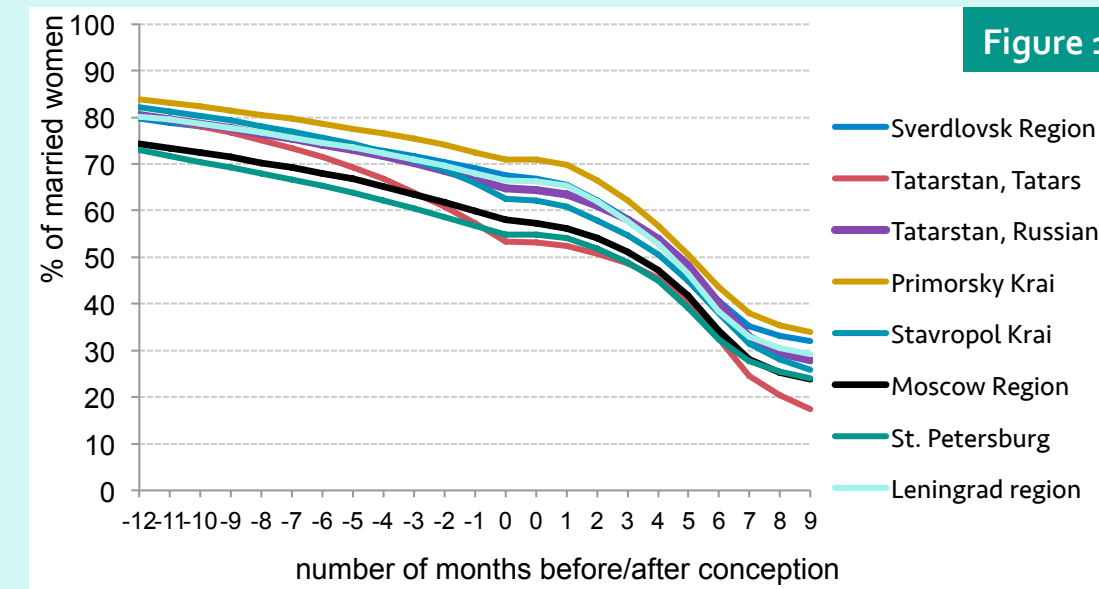


Figure 1. Percentage of unmarried women by time elapsed before/after conception by region

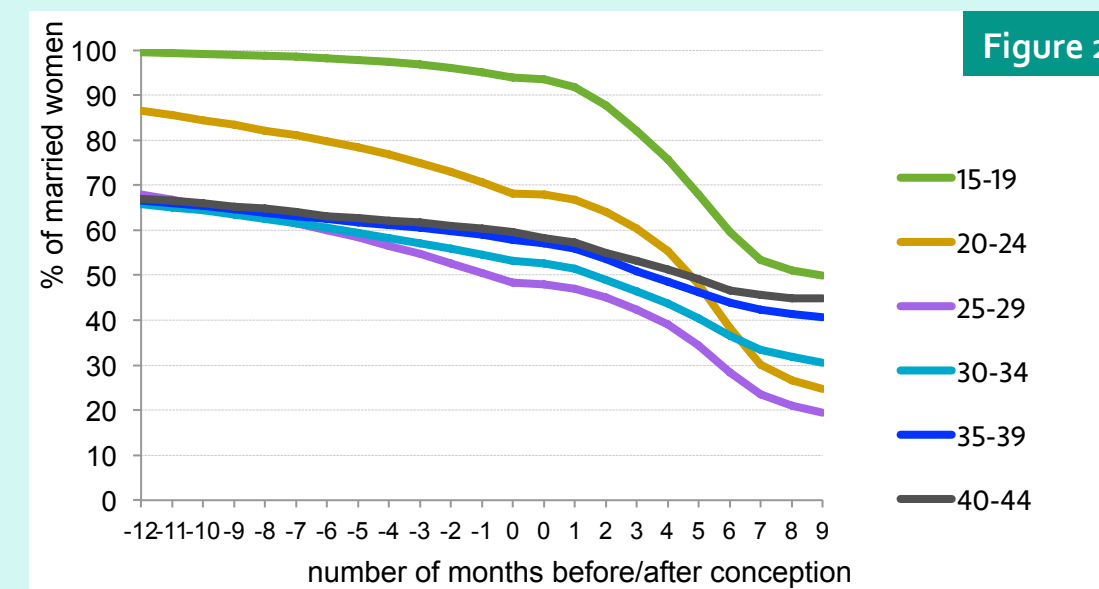


Figure 2. Percentage of unmarried women by time elapsed before/after conception by age

Mothers and fathers by age and time of marriage registration

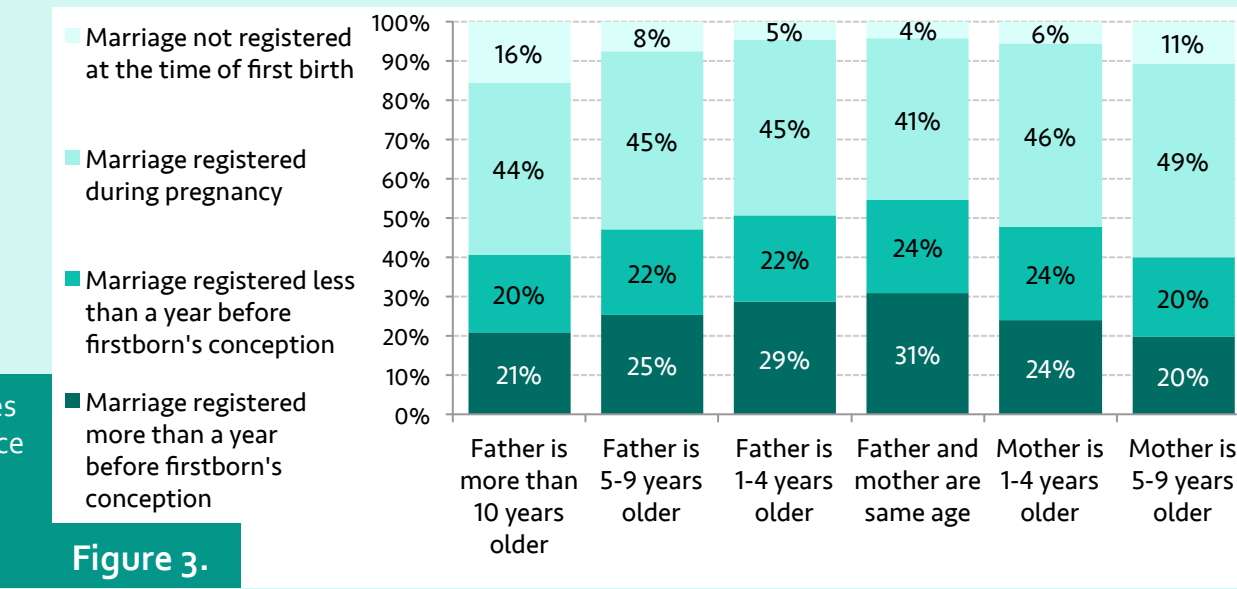


Figure 3.

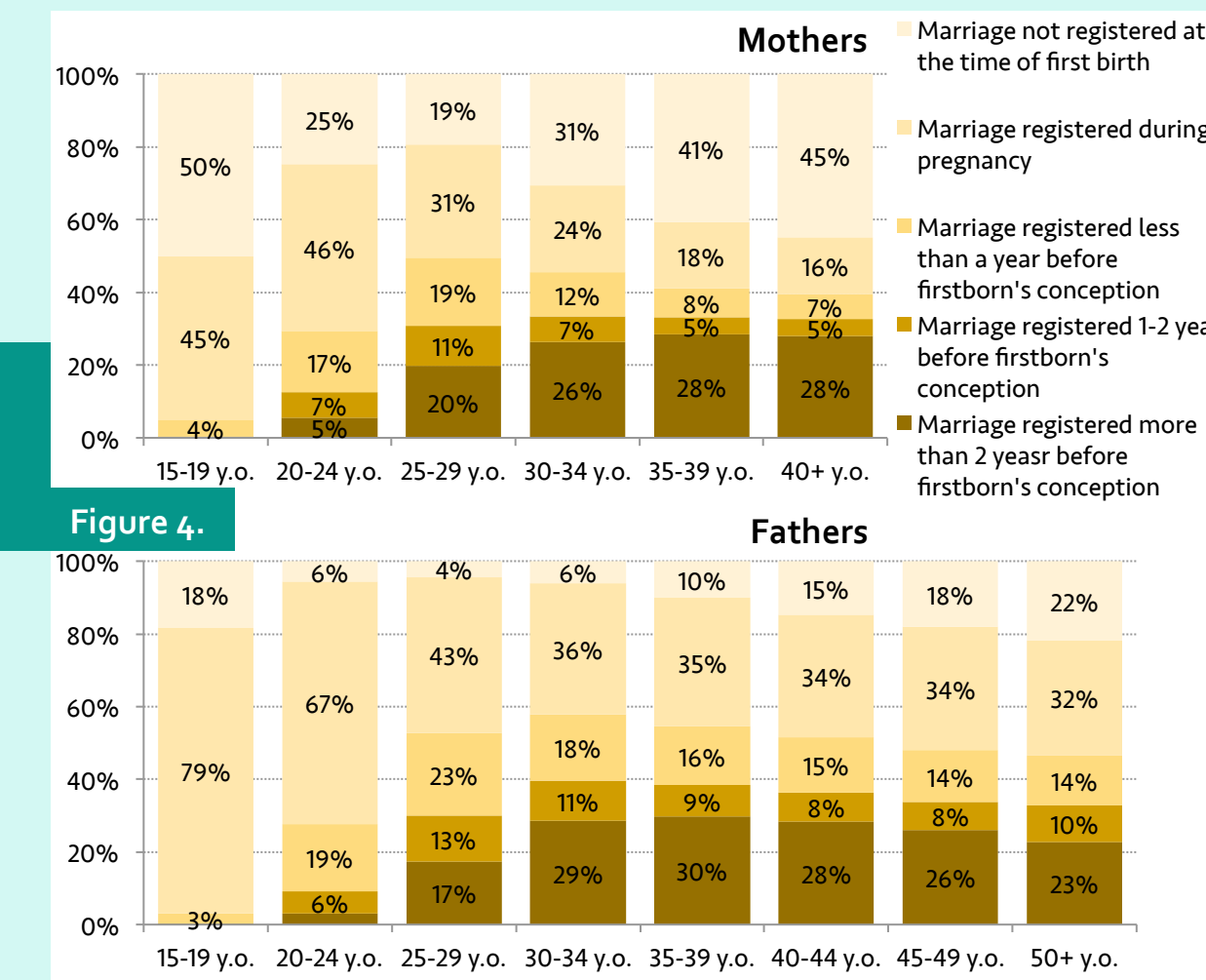


Figure 4.

RESULTS: DIFFERENCES BY MOTHER'S AGE

On Figures 2 and 4:

Before the age of 20

- 1/2 go through both events (marriage and birth) within one year,
- none of them is married a year before conception,
- 1/2 is not married at the time of birth.

Aged 25-29

- 63% go through marriage and first birth within one year.

After the age of 30

- 1/3 go through marriage and first birth within one year,
- 1/3 is a result of postponement in an already officially registered marriage,
- often prefer not to register marriage at all.

➔ Pregnancies in the youngest age group are still mostly unplanned.

➔ In Russia, registration of marriage and first birth form a status passage and often occur within one year.

➔ Women aged 30 and older refrain from marriage during pregnancy in favor of non-marital births which might be partially attributed to higher prevalence of second and consequent partnerships among them.

RESULTS: DIFFERENCES BY PARTNERSHIP TYPE

The extent to which marriage and birth of the first child are connected is influenced by the age of both spouses as well as by age difference between them (Figures 3 and 4).

- Among women under 25 who marry men of the same age shotgun wedding strategy is extremely popular, even dominant.
- Among men in older age groups we observe the growth of new marriages contracted 1-2 years ago, or even less than a year ago, which is a marker of remarriage.

- The smaller the difference in age between partners, the lower the proportion of women not in a registered marriage by the time of birth. Overall, only 4% of couples without age differences are not officially married when their first child is born.

- When the father is older than the mother by 10 years or more, and when the mother is older than the father at least by 6 years, the proportion of out-of-wedlock births exceeds 10%.

CONCLUSIONS

Three models of marriage behavior

- **Modern** High proportion of marriages registered in advance and a moderate proportion of weddings during pregnancy (St. Petersburg).
- **Traditional** Conception often coincides with the registration of the union or occurs within the first year of marriage (Republic Tatarstan).
- **Soviet** Shotgun marriages occur most frequently in the second trimester of pregnancy, while at the same time a relatively large number of women are unmarried at the time of giving birth (Primorsky Krai and majority of regions).

The last model is the most typical for shotgun marriages, more stereotypical than rational.

The data proves such a pattern to be common for men and women of all ages, but most of all for young couples where both partners are under 25. Older partners more often plan pregnancy after marriage or ultimately have their child born out-of-wedlock.

Taking into account absence of economic incentives for registering marriage or social penalties for having children in unregistered union in Russia, we attribute high marriage rates during late pregnancy to preserving Soviet social norms rather than to emerging modern ones.

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