

EMERGING ADULTHOOD AND LATER PARENTHOOD

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Abstract: Developed countries have witnessed an increase in parental age during the last decades. We deal with this change on the example of Slovakia, where mean age of mother at first birth increased from 22.7 in 1993 to 27.4 in 2011. Demographic studies usually ask the question, “Why do people nowadays postpone parenthood?” However, a substantial portion of people who in the past had their first child at a young age state that they would have preferred to have had that child later in life. Therefore we turn the question around and ask, “Why did people in the past accelerate parenthood?” We hypothesize that in the past it was appropriate to achieve the adulthood status at an earlier age for economic and social reasons. And achieving adulthood status was accelerated by starting a family. To test this hypothesis we use data from the European Social Survey 2006. We compare the attitudes of people towards adulthood with their attitudes towards the timing of parenthood. The results show that (a) people who think that a person matures at a young age report low ideal age at first birth; (b) people who think that a person matures at a young age become parents early in their life; (c) people who think that parenthood is necessary for adulthood report low ideal age at first birth. The results do not support the assumption that (d) people who think that parenthood is necessary for adulthood become parents early in their life.

Key words: parental age, first birth, emerging adulthood, transition to adulthood, fertility, Slovakia

1 INTRODUCTION

Countries of Central Europe recorded many significant demographic changes after the fall of communist regimes on the turn of the 1980s and 1990s – fertility and marriage rate dropped, age at childbirth and age at marriage increased, divorce rate increased, as well as the number of singles, unmarried cohabitation and children born outside marriage increased. One of such post-communist countries was Slovakia.

Probably the most characteristic change in the case of Slovakia was the increase of mean age of mothers at first birth (MAB1). The mean age of mothers at first birth

in Slovakia was very low and very stable during communism. The mean age of mother at first birth was in the sixties, seventies and eighties always 22.5 to 22.7 years. Then, in 1989, the communist regime fell and a few years later, in 1993, the MAB1 started to increase rapidly. It reached the value of 27.4 years by 2011, which means that there was first a fluctuation in range of ± 0.1 years during three decades, followed by an increase by almost 5 years (Fig. 1).

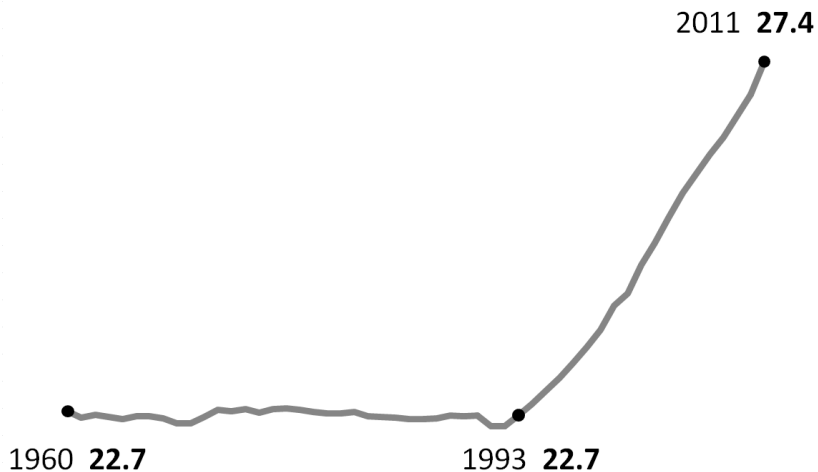


Figure 1 Mean age of mothers at first birth, Slovakia, 1960-2011. Source: Slovak Republic Population Information (2012) and authors' calculations based on Population Age Structure of the Slovak Republic (1993-2011) and Population Change in the Slovak Republic (1993-2011).

The most frequently occurring age of mothers at first birth has increased even more than the mean age – from 20 to 28 years. The age at birth has not only increased, but also grown less uniform. In 1993, half of all mothers gave birth to their first child as 19 to 22 years old, i.e. only during four years. And almost all others made it until thirty years of age. The first birth after thirty years of age was rare. In 2011, women gave first birth most frequently in their late twenties, but this peak is not very sharp. On one hand, the first birth at 18 is common, on the other hand, the first birth at 35 is common, too (Fig. 2).

Rapid increase of the parental age is not typical only for Slovakia. Similarly rapid increase of MAB1 has occurred also in other post-communist European countries, especially those successful in social and economic transformation. MAB1 has increased in the period 1989-2009 in the Czech Republic by 5 years, in Slovenia by 4.7, in former East Germany by 4.5, in Hungary by 4.3, in Slovakia by 4.1 years in

the said period (Human Fertility Database, 2013). A substantial increase in MABI has been occurring also in Western countries that are not post-communist, but the difference is that changes have started there earlier and took place more slowly.



Figure 2 Age-specific first-birth fertility rates, Slovakia, 1993 and 2011. Source: Authors' calculations based on Population Age Structure of the Slovak Republic (1993-2011) and Population Change in the Slovak Republic (1993-2011).

At the same time as changes in the timing of parenthood, other demographic changes were taking place in Slovakia. Between 1993 and 2011, total fertility rate fell from 1.9 to 1.4 children per woman (with a minimum of 1.2 around 2002). The decline in total fertility was to a certain extent a temporary decline due to the increase in parental age. Total first marriage rate fell from 0.7 to 0.5, and total divorce rate increased from 0.2 to 0.4. The proportion of children born outside marriage grew from 10% to 34% (Slovak Republic Population Information, 2012). Later parenthood is therefore part of two decades of changes in family behaviour after which the family start has moved to an older age and more and more people live in other than “traditional” family with a married mother and father and two or more children.

The natural way of considering the question “Why are children nowadays born later?” leads to searching for pressures or incentives that exist today but have not ex-

isted in the past. What has caused the postponement of parenthood? The answer can include economic difficulties, growing opportunity costs of childbearing, expansion of university education, increased endeavour for self-fulfilment outside the family, more diverse life possibilities, more reliable and available contraception etc. Possible reasons for postponing the parenthood are discussed in several studies, see e.g. Kohler, Billari, and Ortega (2002), Sobotka (2004), Billari, Liefbroer, and Philipov (2006), Mills et al. (2011). We are sceptical as to some reasons, about others we think that they play an important role. However, we will not deal with this issue in our study. We will not focus on incentives that have appeared, but rather on those that disappeared.

We will turn the question around. Why have children in the past been born so early? What pressures or incentives for early childbearing existed in the past and do not exist any longer? What in the past caused the acceleration of parenthood and does not cause it any longer?

We will try to show that the pressure to have children early, that existed in order to achieve the adulthood status early, disappeared. It was not so long ago when it was required to enter into marriage in order for a person to be deemed by the society to be a fully-fledged adult. In Slovakia this meant a time as late as the 1980s, as the ruling communist regime was strongly socially conservative and kept many old norms alive. A child came usually very early after marriage. At the same time, it was desirable to achieve the adulthood status as early as possible, ideally around the 20th year of life, for social and economic reasons. To simplify it, childbearing was accelerated by the following mechanism: it was necessary to achieve the adulthood status early; the achievement of adulthood status was significantly facilitated by marriage; childbirth came usually after marriage.

The nature of the transition to adulthood has started to change after the fall of communism in Slovakia. The transition to adulthood ceased to be conditioned by major life events such as marriage and has become a long-term process of achieving responsibility and independence. Today, it is possible to achieve the adulthood status later, and especially, it is not necessary to enter into marriage, to enter into long-term partnership or to become a parent in order to achieve the adulthood status. The pressure on an early start of a family disappeared.

In the following theoretical sections of the paper we will elaborate on the argument that the transition to adulthood has become a long-term process and starting a family has ceased to be necessary for attainment of adulthood status. Reasoning in these theoretical sections will be based on results of studies on the emerging adulthood. The emerging adulthood is a theory of development during the period from the late teens through the twenties (Arnett, 2000). The empirical part of the paper will start with introduction of exact hypotheses, based on the reasoning from the theoretical part. Next, we will introduce the data sources and the methods used to test hypotheses. We will use the data on people's attitudes towards the transition into adulthood and the timing of parenthood from the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey. Then, we will describe the results of hypotheses testing. We will finish the paper with a brief conclusion.

2 TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD HAS BECOME A LONG-TERM PROCESS

The life's career of majority of people in Slovakia up until the beginning of the 1990s could be described as follows: They visit school approximately until 18 years. In addition to duties at school they occasionally help with household works. Apart from that they do not bear any responsibility for more essential tasks. They are under the control of parents and cannot make essential life decisions independently. They do not work and therefore are not financially independent. Then several fundamental life transitions occur at the age approximately from 18 years until early twenties. Majority of people finish the school attendance. Only around a tenth of them continue with studies at a university. Two-year military service follows in case of men. The first employment comes, whereas some people continue to work in the same enterprise up until the end of their life. The first more serious relationship, marriage and child occur. Starting a family significantly increases the chance for the early acquisition of public housing. All mentioned changes often take place in the course of a few years. It is well illustrated by first-birth fertility rates of 1993 (see Fig. 2) with very marked peak in the 20th year of life. Majority of women already gave their first birth by their early twenties. Majority of men has stable employment. They bear full responsibility for their life, running of household, family budget and a child. We can speak about a very abrupt transition from the period with both low responsibility and low independence to the period with both high responsibility and high independence. (Under totalitarian state conditions this concerns the independence in private life.)

Today, 20 years later, the image of adolescents on one side and young adults on the other remains very similar. School, care and control by parents in case of adolescents. And employment, financial independence, independence in decision making, responsibility for own household and often also long-term relationship and child in case of young adults. However, there is one substantial change. The adulthood does not come immediately after adolescence. The adolescence ends approximately at 18-19 years of age, but the full feeling of adulthood comes usually 5 to 10 years later. Instead of the abrupt transition from adolescence to adulthood there occurs relatively long period between these two stages.

American psychologist Jeffrey Arnett (2000) suggests not to look at this period only as a prolonged transition from adolescence to adulthood, but to delimit it as a specific development stage in person's life. He termed this stage the *emerging adulthood*. The emerging adulthood is the period of examining own identity, life possibilities in areas of relationships and work, of forming the worldview. It is a period of changes when the future life direction remains open. Emerging adults are already relatively little restricted by parental control and are not yet restricted by many obligations related to the adulthood. There are no strict normative expectations with regard to social duties a person should attend to (Arnett, 2000, 2007). Arnett (2000, 2007) places emerging adulthood in USA at the age of approximately 18-25 years. It is difficult to exactly determine the upper limit. We would probably find

emerging adults also among people of late twenties, especially in Europe. Arnett's concept of emerging adulthood originally concerned especially non-communist Western countries. In Slovakia, described changes in life's careers of young people occurred only after the downfall of the communist regime. However, it seems, despite the time distance, that the concept of emerging adulthood is currently well applicable also to the life of young Slovaks, as we showed in a recent study (Roupa, 2016).

Prolongation of the period between adolescence and young adulthood is not the only reason for delimitation of the emerging adulthood as a separate developmental stage. The substantial thing is that whereas in the past the period between adolescence and young adulthood can be considered a cluster of abrupt transitions from one social role to another, currently it is possible to speak about a long-term process, about gradual acquisition of properties characterising the adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Up until the beginning of the 1990s majority of Slovaks experienced at their early twenties a relatively abrupt transition from the single status without any long-term partnerships to the married status. Abrupt transition from school to stable full-time employment. Abrupt transition from complete financial dependence on parents to financial independence from parents. Abrupt transition from living with parents to own living and related responsibility for running one's own household. So the person that was clearly and unambiguously considered not adult passed several abrupt role transitions within a few years, whereby s/he became an adult. S/he became an adult in the sense as being perceived adult by the society, and at the same time consequences of life changes, i.e. acquired independence and responsibility for himself/herself as well as family, together with the adult status received from the society, caused the perception of self as an adult.

Today, the life period of twenties can be denoted as the period of gradual acquisition of independence and responsibility. Not several leaps from roles typical for the adolescence stage to roles typical for the adulthood stage, but a long-term process, which in itself can be denoted as a unique developmental stage – the emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Partnerships during the emerging adulthood tend to be as compared to the adolescence longer and sometimes connected with cohabitation. However, they do not have to be necessarily perceived as lifelong. Many more people attend university than in the past. The control by parents is lower during university studies than during the adolescence, but we still cannot speak about complete independence from parents. Many people after graduation from studies change several employments before finding a suitable job. Part-time jobs during the study are common for university students. The transition from school, without any work experience, directly to a stable employment is becoming rare. The gradual acquisition of financial independence is related to that. Temporary and part-time jobs can be sufficient for covering some personal expenditure, mainly for leisure time activities, but are usually not sufficient for complete financing of own household, payment for food etc. The contribution to future career is also more and more considered in choosing temporary jobs with growing age (Arnett, 2000). The nature of transition to employment has changed in post-communist countries also due to the transforma-

tion of centrally planned economy that required a large amount of labour force, often poorly qualified. The transition from living with parents directly to own housing is less frequent, especially for university students. There is a growing number of people who have experience with living in college housing or rented flat with a roommate. Some functions, such as laundering, can be in such cases fulfilled by the original parental household. Living itself can alternate with living with parents. The number of people having experience with unmarried cohabitation is also growing (Arnett, 2000).

This illustration of a gradual transition to adulthood can be supported by data about the timing of major life events in today's Slovakia as shown in Tab. 1. Almost all young people between 18 and 24 years of age still live with their parents (96%). They leave the parental household gradually in the second half of their twenties and the first half of their thirties. In the age group 25-34 more than a half (56%) live with their parents. The average age at leaving the parental household is 30.8 years. Women leave the parental household on average at a younger age than men (women 29.5, men 32.0). These data are more or less in line with the perception of Slovaks about when a person is too old to live with parents. Respondents indicate an average of 31 years. It should be noted, however, that about a third of respondents think that person is never too old to live with parents. In fact, it is quite common in Slovakia that several generations live together in one household. Long-term residence with parents may not be interpreted as avoiding responsibility because most of these young people are studying or working. Only a small proportion of young people living with their parents are unemployed (12% of age group 18-24 and 15% of age group 25-34) (Tab. 1).

Although most young people do not definitively leave their parental household before reaching 30 years old, many of them have long-term experience living outside it. This clearly applies to university students. During the school semester, only 24% of full-time students live with their parents. They usually live in school dormitories (60%) and to a lesser extent in rented accommodation (16%). 46% of all people aged 20 are students, 36% of age 22, 22% of age 24, and 10% of age 26. The proportion of students is higher among women than among men, with the largest difference occurring at age 22 (30% of men and 44% of women). More than a half of the full-time students work during the semester; 25% regularly and 31% occasionally. Even more students work during school holidays, with almost 70% of them having employment. Seeking to gain work experience prior to entering full-time employment is quite common (Tab. 1).

Marriage and a first child come when Slovaks are around their thirties. The average woman marries at 28 years of age; the average man at 30 years of age. The mean age of mothers at first birth is 27.4 years. The relatively high mean age at first birth, over 26 years, includes mothers from most social groups. Only mothers with the lowest education, i.e. about one-tenth of all mothers, give birth on average at 20 years of age. In the timing of marriage and first birth, changes in real timing outrun changes in ideal timing. The average opinion about the ideal age for marriage, recorded in 2006, was about three years lower than the real mean age at first marriage in

the same year. For the first birth, the ideal age was lower than real age by 1.5 years. It should be noted that the perception of ideal age is not established on a sample of only newly-married couples or young parents, but on a sample of whole population. Therefore, it cannot be automatically concluded that people are not fulfilling their own perception of ideal timing of marriage and parenthood (Tab. 1).

Table 1 Timing of major life events, selected indicators, Slovakia, around 2011

	Total	Males	Females
(a) Share of young adults living with their parents (2011)			
Share of young adults aged 18-24 living with their parents	96.2 %	98.3 %	93.6 %
Share of young adults aged 18-24 living with their parents by self-defined current economic status			
Employed persons working full-time	21.8 %		
Employed persons working part-time	0.8 %		
Unemployed persons	11.9 %		
Students	64.0 %		
Other inactive persons	1.4 %		
Share of young adults aged 25-34 living with their parents	56.4 %	64.3 %	47.3 %
Share of young adults aged 25-34 living with their parents by self-defined current economic status			
Employed persons working full-time	72.4 %		
Employed persons working part-time	1.0 %		
Unemployed persons	15.2 %		
Students	5.1 %		
Other inactive persons	6.3 %		
(b) Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household (2011)	30.8 y.	32.0 y.	29.5 y.
(c) Students by age as % of corresponding age population (2011)			
18	84.5 %	83.5 %	85.5 %
20	45.8 %	40.3 %	51.6 %
22	36.4 %	29.6 %	43.5 %
24	22.3 %	19.3 %	25.5 %
26	9.5 %	8.5 %	10.5 %
(d) Share of students by type of residence and employment (2006)			
Share of full-time college students by type of residence during semester			
School dormitory	60.2 %		
Rented accommodation	15.6 %		
Parents	24.2 %		

Share of full-time college students by employment during semester		
During the whole semester		24.8 %
Occasionally		30.9 %
Never		44.3 %
Share of full-time college students working during holidays		69.1 %
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(e) Mean age at first marriage (2011)	30.3 y.	27.7 y.
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(f) Mean age of mothers at first birth (2011)		27.4 y.
Mean age of mothers at first birth by education of mother		
Low education (11 % of mothers)		20.1 y.
Lower medium education (11 % of mothers)		26.2 y.
Higher medium education (42 % of mothers)		28.1 y.
High education (36 % of mothers)		30.2 y.
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(g) Average opinion about the timing of major life events (2006)	For a man	For a wom.
Ideal age to start living with a partner (without marriage)	23.5 y.	21.3 y.
Ideal age to get married and live with a partner	25.7 y.	23.2 y.
Ideal age to become a father/mother	26.6 y.	24.4 y.
After what age a person is generally too old to still be living with parents	31.1 y.	30.8 y.
Never too old	31.3 %	37.1 %

Sources: **(a)** Eurostat Statistics Database. Income and living conditions (2014); **(b)** Eurostat Statistics Database. Youth (2014); **(c)** Eurostat Statistics Database. Education and training (2014); **(d)** Eurostudent III. Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe (2007); **(e)** Population Change in the Slovak Republic (2011); **(f)** Authors' calculations based on Population Age Structure of the Slovak Republic (2011) and Population Change in the Slovak Republic (2011); **(g)** European Social Survey Round 3 (2006).

Today it is thus not possible to determine a year, or even two or three years, when a person becomes an adult. It is confirmed also by studies concerning self-perception as an adult by people aged approximately 18-29 years in various Western countries. Around 45-65% respondents does not answer the question whether they have reached adulthood with simple “yes” or “no”, but rather “in some respects yes, in some respects no”, namely in USA (Arnett, 2001), Austria (Sirsch et al., 2009), Argentina (Facio and Micocci, 2003), Romania (Nelson, 2009), the Czech Republic (Macek, Bejček and Vaníčková, 2007), and Slovakia (Roupa, 2016). Results for Slovakia show that as much as two thirds of young people aged 18-27 years feel “in-between”. They no longer perceive themselves as being not adult, but still not yet fully adult.

The existence of emerging adulthood is economically and culturally conditioned (Arnett, 2000). Primarily, the society has to be sufficiently wealthy to allow young people to be financially dependent on parents for a longer time. In the past it was necessary for a person to become adult as soon as possible. For majority of fam-

ilies it would be economically unsustainable to allow their children to study until being 25 years of age, to have children economically dependent on parents in time of their biggest physical strength, to have children only gradually discovering their career possibilities etc. A person had to become independent as soon as possible. (Independence did not have to necessarily mean separate household, but also full contribution to running of parental household.) The achievement of adulthood status was strongly interconnected with marriage. A single person might have faced several practical difficulties resulting from the traditional gender division of roles. The pressure on marital cohabitation by the community as well as the church also played a role. Early start of a family has been during the 20th century gradually losing its economic justification and in liberal democracies also normative necessity.

It remains debatable whether the early transition to adulthood at the end of communism in Czechoslovakia was still an economic necessity or only obsolete social norm. The argument in favour of the economic necessity is especially non-efficient centrally planned economy with the need of large amount of labour force. On the other hand, totalitarian political regime led to stagnation of social development, what could have resulted in surviving of the early transition to adulthood only as a conserved norm. In order to overcome an obsolete norm it is necessary for the society to tolerate pioneers of new behaviour, but that could have put the stability of the totalitarian regime at risk. Anyway, the emerging adulthood has appeared in Slovakia only after the downfall of communism, from the 1990s. Apparently thanks to both economic changes as well as new cultural influences spread from the West through mass media and personal experience.

3 MARRIAGE AND CHILD CEASED TO BE NECESSARY FOR ADULTHOOD

We described the period between adolescence and young adulthood in a more traditional society as a cluster of abrupt transitions from one social role to another. The most important event in transition to adulthood in a traditional society was marriage (Arnett, 2001: 133-134; Kandert, 2004: 140; Švecová, 1997: 69) and subsequently the birth of a first child, so clearly identifiable moments when a single person becomes married and a childless one becomes parent. The key role of marriage in transition to adulthood is clearly testified by a traditional Slovak term for single people who exceeded the normative marriage age: “starý mládenec” and “stará dievka”, literally translated “old boy” and “old girl”, meaning bachelor and spinster; both terms having in Slovak language a certain degree of derogatory connotation. Even a fifty-year-old single was basically denoted an overgrown adolescent. The necessity of marriage for adulthood cannot be named more clearly. It is, of course, only a name and the achievement of adulthood occurred in reality also in case of a single person. However, the stigma of certain incompleteness remained with the single person until the end of life. It could be even said (with a certain degree of simplification) that marriage was not only necessary, but also a sufficient condition

for the achievement of the adulthood status. The above described term “old boy” was applied to a single fifty-year-old man, not to irresponsible fifty-year-old man.

The communist regime, although describing itself as social avant-garde, actually strived, same as the majority of other totalitarian regimes, to conserve social development as a prevention from its overthrowing (see also Rabušić, 2001). Thus the above mentioned perception of older singles remained preserved until the end of the 1980s, although maybe not in such harsh form as in really traditional society some 100 years earlier and not in all social layers (for instance among university educated in a bigger town).

Today, the key change in the perception of adulthood is the fact that the marriage and child ceased to be perceived as necessary for a person to be considered a full adult. This is confirmed by researches performed in various Western countries where emerging adults were asked to mark which characteristic they deem necessary for the achievement of adulthood. Marriage and child were always placed at the bottom. Less than 10% of emerging adults in USA (Arnett, 2001), in Austria (Sirsch et al., 2009), and in Slovakia (Roupa, 2016) consider them necessary for adulthood. The share of respondents who deem marriage and parenthood necessary for adulthood is slightly higher in Western societies which could be described as more traditional or collectivistic, such as Argentina (Facio and Micocci, 2003), Romania (Nelson, 2009) or Israel (Mayseless and Scharf, 2003), but even there they rank at the bottom of a scale of more than 40 criteria¹. Such perception of marriage and parenthood as not necessary for adulthood is not typical only for emerging adults. It holds also for their peers who consider themselves adults (Nelson and Barry, 2005) as well as for adolescents (Arnett, 2001; Mayseless and Scharf, 2003; Sirsch et al., 2009). It similarly holds for people in middle age (Arnett, 2001; Sirsch et al., 2009), and particularly also for parents of adolescents (Mayseless and Scharf, 2003) who will soon expect the fulfilment of various criteria necessary for the achievement of adulthood from their children.

To the contrary, criteria that tend to be most frequently marked as necessary for a person to be considered adult are across various developed countries and various age groups following: Accept responsibility for the consequences of one's actions; Decide on personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences; Establish a relationship with parents as an equal adult; Become financially independent from parents; Avoid committing petty crimes like shoplifting and vandalism; Use contraception if sexually active and not trying to conceive a child; Avoid drunk driving; Become less self-oriented and develop greater consideration for others (Arnett, 1997, 2001; Facio and Micocci, 2003; Mayseless and Scharf, 2003; Nelson, 2009; Sirsch et al., 2009; Roupa, 2016). These are criteria related to the growth of independence and responsibility. With many of them it is not possible to determine the exact moment when they start to apply or even one or two years, during which they start to apply, but on the contrary, their fulfilment is a long-term process. They denote a certain way of behaviour rather than a discrete event (Arnett, 1997).

¹ Used questionnaires follow Arnett with various modifications (e.g. Arnett 1997, 2001) and their results are thus relatively well comparable.

4 HYPOTHESES

Now we turn to the testing of described explanations of higher parental age. First, we claim that higher parental age is not caused only by the emergence of new incentives for postponing parenthood that are commonly discussed in the literature. A certain role has also been played by release of prior pressures that once led to acceleration of parenthood. In other words, it is incorrect to assume that all people perceive first child at age 20 (modal age at first birth until 1993) as something natural and first child at age 28 (modal age at first birth in 2011) as something postponed. A significant portion of people can, on the contrary, perceive first child at age 20 as something premature and first child at age 28 as something natural.

In order to verify this claim, we examine what people think about the timing of their first child when they look back. Do they think that it would have been better if they had had their first child earlier, later, or that the timing was about right? We hypothesize that the number of people who would have liked to have had a child later is not less than the number of people who would have rather had a child earlier. For demographers or sociologists this would mean that the exploration of previous pressures to accelerate parenthood has the same relevance as the exploration of current pressures to postpone parenthood. We also examine how the views on the timing of having a first child differ by the person's age at having a first child. We hypothesize that many would rather have had a child later especially among the people who had their first child around the age of 20 years (modal age at first birth until 1993). From their point of view, the increase in MAB1 may be seen as a shift to the more natural state.

Hypothesis 1a:

When people reconsider the timing of their first child, the number of people who would have liked to have had their child later is not substantially lower than the number of people who would have rather had their child earlier.

Hypothesis 1b:

When people reconsider the timing of their first child, a substantial portion of people who had a child around the age of 20 (modal age at first birth until 1993) would rather have had their child later.

Second, we argue that the incentive, which once led to the acceleration of parenthood, was the desire to achieve the adulthood status early. To achieve the adulthood status it was necessary to complete some major life events, such as completing school, having full-time employment, and especially starting one's own family. The transition to adulthood is today a long-term process and it is not necessary to start a family in order to achieve the adulthood status. Pressure for early family formation has disappeared. And this causes the MAB1 to rise.

Surveys on beliefs and attitudes of people in the period of communism were rather rare, for obvious reasons. Therefore, available data do not allow for a direct

comparison between the communist era and the present. For that reason, we use differing opinions within the contemporary population to test the explanation for the increase in MAB1. People's attitudes do not change suddenly and they are not homogeneous in any period. Even in today's population, in addition to people whose attitudes correspond to the "new" model of transition to adulthood, we can also find people whose attitudes are closer to the "old" model of transition to adulthood. We will show how these two groups differ in their attitudes to the timing of family formation.

The *General adult age* and the *Importance of parenthood for adulthood* are independent variables. This means people's opinion on the age when one becomes an adult; and people's opinion on how important it is to become a parent in order to be considered an adult. The *General ideal age at first birth* and the *Real age at first birth* are dependent variables. This means people's opinion on what is the ideal age for a person to become parents; and the age when they actually became parents. We hypothesize that people who think that a person becomes an adult at an earlier age and people who think that parenthood is necessary for obtaining the adulthood status, also think that it is better to become parents earlier and they also have actually become parents earlier. And people who consider the transition into adulthood to be a longer internal process that is possible without having a family do not experience incentives to have a family early and that their ideal and real age when having their first child is higher.

Hypothesis 2a:

People who report higher General adult age also report higher General ideal age at first birth.

Hypothesis 2b:

People who report higher General adult age became parents later in their life.

Hypothesis 2c:

People who think that parenthood is not necessary for attainment of adulthood status report higher General ideal age at first birth.

Hypothesis 2d:

People who think that parenthood is not necessary for attainment of adulthood status became parents later in their life.

5 DATA AND METHODS

The empirical tests of Hypotheses 1a and 1b are based on data from Eurobarometer 65.1 undertaken in the countries of European Union in February-March 2006. Eurobarometer 65.1 contains, among other things, survey data on Family Planning. All respondents were 15 years old or older. The number of respondents from Slovakia was 1092. Hypotheses 1a and 1b deal with how people reconsider the timing

of parenthood. In order to test Hypotheses 1a we use the question: *Looking back, what do you now think of the timing of your first child?* (Variable 495). Respondents could answer: (1) *It would have been better if I had had my first child earlier*, (2) *It would have been better if I had had my first child later*, or (3) *The timing was about right*. The number of respondents was 799. When testing Hypotheses 1b we use the previous question in combination with the question: *How old were you when you had your first child?* (Variable 493). The number of respondents responding to both questions was 789².

The empirical tests of Hypotheses 2a to 2d are based on data from the European Social Survey Round 3 undertaken in several European countries. European Social Survey 3 contains, among other things, a part on Timing of Key Life Events and Life Course. It was conducted in Slovakia from December 2006 to February 2007. All respondents were 15 years old or older. The number of respondents from Slovakia was 1766. Hypotheses 2a to 2d consider how people with different views on adulthood differ in their timing of parenthood. When testing Hypotheses 2a to 2d we have evaluated the relationship of the two independent variables and the two dependent variables.

The first independent variable is the General adult age. The exact wording of the question is: *At what age, approximately, would you say boys or men (girls or women) become adults?* (Variable D17). The second independent variable is the Importance of parenthood for adulthood. The wording of the question is *To be considered an adult how important is it for a man (or for a woman) to have become a father (a mother)?* (Variable D23). Respondents could answer: (1) *Not at all important*, (2) *Not important*, (3) *Neither important nor unimportant*, (4) *Important*, or (5) *Very important*. In analysis, categories (1)+(2) and (4)+(5) are combined. The first dependent variable is the General ideal age at first birth. The wording of the question is *In your opinion, what is the ideal age for a boy or man (for a girl or woman) to become a father (a mother)?* (Variable D29). The second dependent variable is the Real age at first birth. The wording of the question is *In what year was your first child born?* (Variable D10) and *In what year were you born?* (Variable F3 1a).

In the first three questions, half of the respondents (randomly selected) answered what they think about men and the other half answered what they think about women. The answers varied considerably and are therefore evaluated separately. We evaluate 8 relationships: each independent variable with each dependent variable (2×2), separately if the questions are related to men, and separately if the questions are related to women (×2).

The numbers of respondents varies depending on which relationship is evaluated. These are provided in the next section together with the results (in Tab. 2). We excluded the oldest respondents, aged 60 and over, because some of their attitudes in the interim data analysis were shown to be substantially different from the rest of the population. The age of respondents was from 15 to 59 years. We also excluded eight respondents with outlying ideal or real age at first birth (outside the range of 15-40

² We excluded three respondents with an outlying age at having their first child – aged 15, 46 and 53.

years). The results are controlled for age-sex structure of the respondents³. Controlling for other variables proved not to be necessary.

6 RESULTS

First we report people's views on the timing of their first child. These results are shown in Fig. 3a and 3b. When respondents were asked to reconsider the timing of having their first child, 17% said it would have been better if they had had their first child later. In contrast, 10% think it would have been better if they had had their first child earlier. Between 30% and 40% of the respondents who had a child at age 21 years or earlier would have preferred to have had the child later. It is precisely this young age that was very common for parenthood until the early 1990s. Even in 1993, 52% of firstborn children had a mother who was 21 years old or younger (see Fig. 2). About 15% of the respondents who had their first child when they were 22-23 years old would have preferred if they had had the child later. Only 3-4% would have had their first child earlier. The proportion of those who in retrospect would have wanted to have the child earlier or later balances at around 9%, in the respondents who became parents at age 24-25. From those with a first child at 26 years of age, the share of those who would have rather had the child earlier begins to grow.

The data therefore support Hypothesis 1a and 1b. The number of people who in retrospect would have wanted to have their first child later is significant. This applies particularly to people who had their first child at a young age, under age 21, which was very common until the early 1990s. This means that in the past many young parents had their first child earlier than when they now consider to be optimal. From their perspective, higher parental age is a shift to a natural, appropriate age. Therefore, when explaining the current increase in MAB1 it is necessary, in addition to finding the contemporary incentives for postponing parenthood, to find the previous incentives that had accelerated parenthood, which today have weakened.

We presented one of the possible reasons for the low MAB1 until the early 1990s in the theoretical sections: A substantial segment of society considered it appropriate that a young person become an adult relatively early. The adulthood status was significantly accelerated by having children. This (among other possible reasons) resulted in a young age for starting a family. We have also described the changes in the perception of adulthood that have taken place in Slovakia in the last twenty years: society accepts that the transition to adulthood is a gradual long-term process. The internal nature of a person's transition to adulthood is more likely accepted and role transitions, especially starting a family, are no longer needed to obtain the adulthood status. This allows starting a family later in life.

³ For example, dependence of the Real age at first birth on the Importance of parenthood for adulthood. There are three groups of respondents: (1) those who think that parenthood is important, (2) neither important nor unimportant, or (3) not important. Each group was divided into segments by age and sex. The real age at first birth in each segment of each group was calculated. Then the results were weighed and age-sex structure of respondents in all three groups together represents the weights. Differences in age-sex structure of the respondents between the three groups thus does not have any influence on the differences in the Real age at first birth between these three groups.

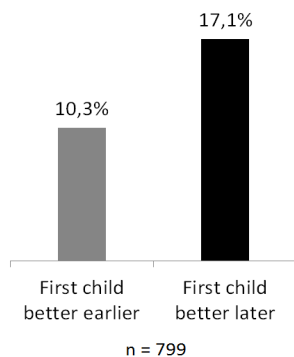


Figure 3a Share of respondents by retrospective view of one's own timing of first child, Slovakia, 2006.

Wording of question: *Looking back, what do you now think of the timing of your first child?*, (1) *It would have been better if I had had my first child earlier*, (2) *It would have been better if I had had my first child later*, (3) *The timing was about right*.

Source: Authors' calculations based on Eurobarometer 65.1 (2006).

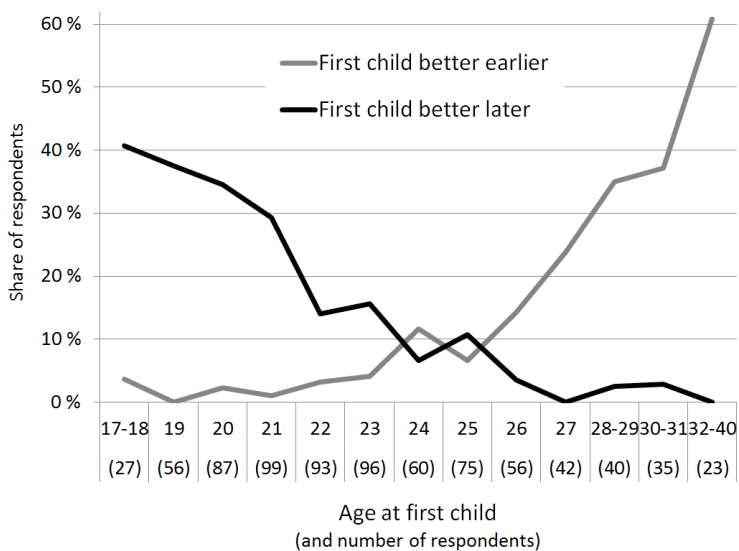


Figure 3b Retrospective view of one's own timing of first child by age of respondent at first child, Slovakia, 2006

Wording of questions: (A) *Looking back, what do you now think of the timing of your first child?*, (1) *It would have been better if I had had my first child earlier*, (2) *It would have been better if I had had my first child later*, (3) *The timing was about right*; (B) *How old were you when you had your first child?*

Source: Authors' calculations based on Eurobarometer 65.1 (2006).

In order to verify these assertions, we examine how people with different views on adulthood differ in their timing of parenthood. The results are shown in Tab. 2 and Fig. 4a to 4d. First we evaluate the relationship between the *General adult age* and the *General ideal age at first birth*. Respondents who think that a man matures at around age 17 to 19 indicate, on average, that the ideal age for a man to become a father is on average 25.4 years. In contrast, respondents who think that a man matures between the age of 25 to 30 years indicate that the ideal age for a man to become a father is 28.3 years, i.e. 2.8 years later. The difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. A similar relationship exists in terms of views about women, but with the difference that both adulthood and parenthood for women are generally expected earlier. Respondents who think that a woman matures at around age 16 to 18 indicate, on average, that the ideal age for a woman to become a mother is 23.8 years. In contrast, respondents who think that a woman matures between the age of 21 and 30 years indicate that the ideal age for a woman to become a mother is 26.0 years. The difference is 2.2 years and is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. The data therefore support Hypothesis 2a. People who think that a person should become mature earlier also favor a younger age for parenthood. In contrast, people who think that the transition to adulthood is a long-term process also think that it is better to start a family later.

We further compare the *General adult age* with the *Real age of respondent at first birth*. Respondents who think that a man matures at around age 17 to 19, had their first child at an average age of 23.1 years. In contrast, respondents who think that a man matures between the age of 25 to 30 years, had their first child at an average age of 24.6 years. The difference is 1.4 years and is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Regarding the views on women, respondents who think that a woman matures at around age 16-18 years, had their first child at an average age of 23.1 years. Respondents who think that a woman matures between the age of 21 and 30 years, had their first child at an average age of 23.9 years. The difference is 0.9 years. The difference is not significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.14$) due to the low number of respondents in the latter group. A larger number of respondents said that a woman matures at around 19 to 20 years. Their mean age at first birth was 24.0 years. The difference in comparison to the first group is 1.0 year and is statistically significant at $p = 0.03$. The data support Hypothesis 2b, although with certain limitations. People who think that adulthood comes early had children earlier than people who think that adulthood comes later in life. The limitation is that the number of respondents in one of the groups is small for the result to be statistically significant.

We further evaluate the relationship between the *Importance of parenthood for adulthood* and the *General ideal age at first birth*. Respondents who consider parenthood important for adulthood of a man, indicate, on average, that the ideal age for a man to become a father is 26.5 years. Respondents who think that parenthood is not necessary for a man to reach the adulthood status indicate, on average, that the ideal age for a man to become a father is 26.9 years, i.e. 0.4 years later. The difference is in the expected direction but is not statistically significant at conventional levels ($p = 0.20$). Regarding views on women, respondents who consider parenthood

Table 2 Relationship between perspectives on adulthood and timing of parenthood, Slovakia, 2006

General adult age of man	General ideal age of man at first birth	number of resp.	p-value	General adult age of woman	General ideal age of woman at first birth	number of resp.	p-value
17-19	25.4	169		16-18	23.8	269	
20-24	26.7	247		19-20	25.1	173	
25-30	28.3	132		21-30	26.0	94	
diff. between groups 3 and 1		2.8	< 0.01	diff. between groups 3 and 1		2.2	< 0.01
General adult age of man	Real age of respondent at first birth	number of resp.	p-value	General adult age of woman	Real age of respondent at first birth	number of resp.	p-value
17-19	23.1	100		16-18	23.1	185	
20-24	23.9	173		19-20	24.0	115	
25-30	24.6	101		21-30	23.9	61	
diff. between groups 3 and 1		1.4	< 0.01	diff. between groups 3 and 1		0.9	0.14
				diff. between groups 2 and 1		1.0	0.03
Importance of parenthood for adulthood of man	General ideal age of man at first birth	number of resp.	p-value	Importance of parenthood for adulthood of woman	General ideal age of woman at first birth	number of resp.	p-value
Important	26.5	145		Important	23.9	135	
Neither imp. nor unimp.	26.6	103		Neither imp. nor unimp.	24.7	94	
Not important	26.9	354		Not important	24.8	359	
diff. between groups 3 and 1		0.4	0.20	diff. between groups 3 and 1		0.9	< 0.01
Importance of parenthood for adulthood of man	Real age of respondent at first birth	number of resp.		Importance of parenthood for adulthood of woman	Real age of respondent at first birth	number of resp.	p-value
Important	24.2	96		Important	23.4	100	
Neither imp. nor unimp.	23.3	77		Neither imp. nor unimp.	23.8	65	
Not important	23.7	252		Not important	23.7	239	
diff. between groups 3 and 1		-0.6 (not in expected direction)		diff. between groups 3 and 1		0.3	0.57

Wording of questions:

General adult age: *At what age, approximately, would you say boys or men (girls or women) become adults?*

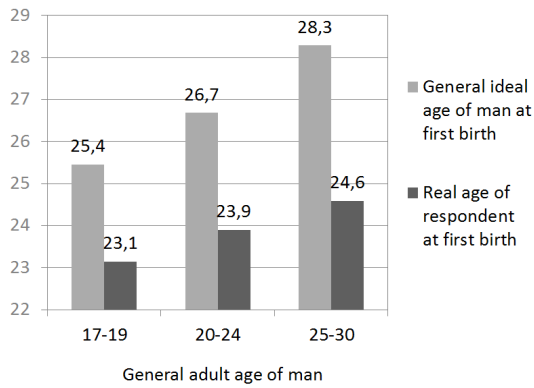
Importance of parenthood for adulthood: *To be considered an adult how important is it for a man (for a woman) to have become a father (a mother)? (1) Not at all important, (2) Not important, (3) Neither important nor unimportant, (4) Important, or (5) Very important.* In analysis, categories (1)+(2) and (4)+(5) are combined.

General ideal age at first birth: *In your opinion, what is the ideal age for a boy or man (for a girl or woman) to become a father (a mother)?*

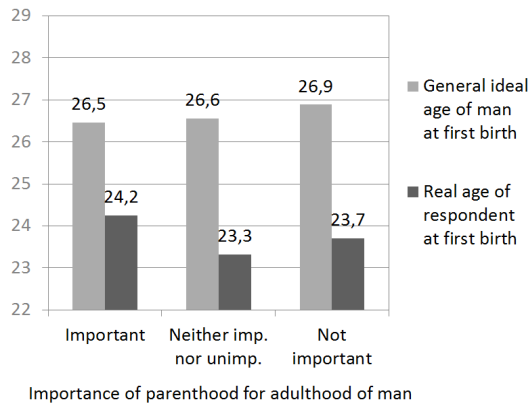
Real age of respondent at first birth: *In what year was your first child born? and In what year were you born?*

Statistical significance of differences: t-test for comparing two means (independent samples, equal variance, two-tailed).

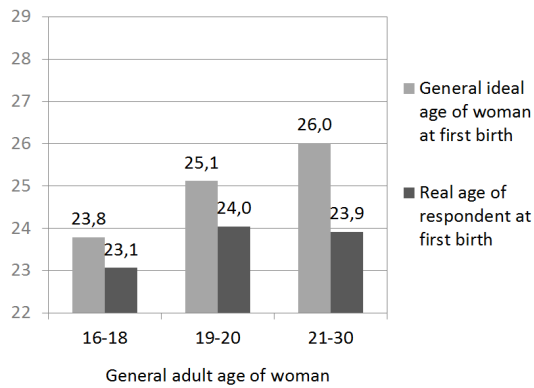
Source: Authors' calculations based on European Social Survey Round 3 (2006).



4a



4b



4c

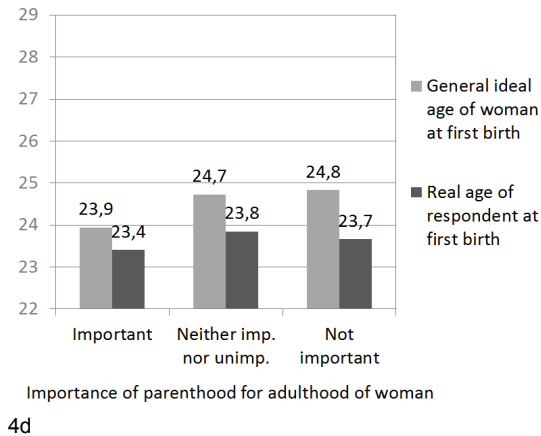


Figure 4a-4d Relationship between perspectives on adulthood and timing of parenthood, Slovakia, 2006

Wording of questions: see Tab. 2.

Source: Authors' calculations based on European Social Survey Round 3 (2006).

important for woman's adulthood indicate, on average, that the ideal age for a woman to become a mother is 23.9 years. In contrast, respondents who think that parenthood is not important for a woman to reach adulthood indicate, on average, that the ideal age of motherhood is 24.8 years. The difference is 0.9 years and is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. The data therefore support Hypothesis 2c, but again with certain limitations. People who consider parenthood to be necessary for reaching the adulthood status indicate a lower ideal age of parenthood than people who do not consider parenthood as necessary for adulthood. The limitation is that differences are statistically significant for opinions about women, but not about men.

Finally, we compare the *Importance of parenthood for adulthood* and the *Real age of respondent at first birth*. Respondents who think that parenthood is necessary for a man to become an adult became parents at an average age of 24.2 years. Respondents who think that parenthood is not necessary for a man to become an adult became parents a little earlier, at an average age of 23.7 years, contrary to expectations. Regarding views about women, the difference is in the expected direction but it is not statistically significant. Respondents who think that parenthood is necessary for a woman to become an adult became parents at an average age of 23.4 years while respondents who think that it is not necessary, became parents at an average age of 23.7 years. The data do not support Hypothesis 2d.

The differing views of respondents on reaching adulthood clearly differentiate their declared ideal age at first birth. Regarding the real age at first birth results are less satisfying and in one case difference is not even in the expected direction. One could say that the latter case is particularly important because the true attitudes of the respondents are best shown on the basis of their real behavior. But this may not

be true in this particular case. It should be noted that the majority of respondents had their first child during communism when it was not appropriate to deviate too much in their behavior from the norms (including reproductive behavior). Thus, there were not significant differences in age at first birth. In our opinion, the declared ideal age at first birth may say more about the real attitudes of these respondents than their real age at first birth.

7 CONCLUSION

Increasing parental age is a frequent topic in demographic research. The most common age of mothers at first birth increased in Slovakia from age 20 to 28 between 1993 and 2011, i.e. by eight years. This leads to the following question: What motivations lead to the *postponement* of parenthood? Several explanations have been discussed, from the desire for self-fulfillment to economic difficulties. People's attitudes to the timing of parenthood are however such that 30-40% of those who had a child when they were around age 20, would rather have had their first child later. They had their first child earlier than what they believe to be ideal (at least in hindsight). Therefore, the question can be considered also from the other side: What motivations in the past led to the *acceleration* of parenthood?

We introduced one possible explanation: In the past, it was desirable for economic and social reasons to become an adult as soon as possible. And starting a family significantly helped to reach the adulthood status. Today, it is accepted that the transition to adulthood is a longer internal process and that starting a family is not necessary for reaching the adulthood status. Therefore, many people have become parents later. In order to test this hypothesis, we compared attitudes of people to the adulthood with their attitudes to the timing of parenthood. The conclusions are that: (a) people who perceive adulthood as a long-term process indicate a higher ideal age for parenthood; (b) people who perceive adulthood as a long-term process actually had their first child at an older age; and (c) people who do not see the starting of a family as a necessary part of the transition to adulthood indicate a higher ideal age for parenthood. The data do not support the last hypothesis that (d) people who do not see starting a family as a necessary part of the transition to adulthood actually had their first child later in life.

Overall, if people think the transition to adulthood should be faster and family formation is a necessary part of the transition to adulthood, they, in most cases, also think it is good to have children at young age. If such perception of adulthood was common in the past, this can explain the low mean age at first birth.

This conclusion has some limitations. First, the data do not support Hypothesis 2d. Respondents who think that parenthood is necessary for adulthood did not to become parents at younger age. Second, this research explains the change in demographic behaviour between 1993 and 2011, but two groups of respondents (with "traditional" and "new" perceptions of adulthood) are interviewed at one time. Respondents with traditional perceptions serve as representatives of 1993 and respon-

dents with new perception are representatives of dominant view in 2011. The available data allowed only this way of hypothesis testing. Third, the available data do not allow saying unambiguously what cause is and what effect is. It is possible to think that people who, for some reason, prefer early parenthood, subsequently adapt their perception of the transition to adulthood. That is, the opposite direction of causality, as research suggests.

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Nastupujúca dospelosť a neskoršie rodičovstvo

Súhrn

Po roku 1989 došlo na Slovensku k viacerým zásadným demografickým zmenám. Jednou z najvýraznejších bolo zvýšenie veku matky pri prvom dieťati. Celé 60., 70., a 80. roky 20. storočia sa priemerný vek matky držal na úrovni 22,5 – 22,7 roka. V roku 1993 začal prudko rásť a do roku 2011 sa zvýšil o takmer 5 rokov – na 27,4 roka. K podobnej zmene došlo vo väčšine vyspelých krajín. Na západ od nás prebiehala zmena skôr a pozvoľnejšie, v stredoeurópskych krajinách bola obvykle rovnako prudká ako na Slovenku.

Pri vysvetľovaní tejto zmeny sa demografi obvykle pýtajú: „Prečo ľudia v dnešnej dobe odkladajú dieťa?“ Automaticky teda predpokladajú, že predchádzajúci vek pri prvom dieťati bol niečím prirodzeným, a súčasný vyšší vek je niečím odloženým. Hľadajú faktory, ktoré bránia mať dieťa skôr alebo motivujú mať ho neskôr. Určitý vplyv takýchto faktorov nepopierame. Skúsme však otázku otočiť a spýtať sa tiež: „Prečo ľudia v minulosti urýchlňovali pôrod prvého dieťaťa?“

Naša hypotéza je, že skoré rodičovstvo v minulosti súviselo so statusom dospelosti. Zo sociálnych a ekonomických dôvodov bolo v minulosti potrebné získať status dospelého v pomerne mladom veku. Status dospelého získala väčšina ľudí po niekoľkých „skokových“ zmenách okolo 20. roku života – ukončenie vzdelania, zamestnanie na plný úväzok, absolvovanie vojenskej služby a, snáď najdôležitejšie, založenie vlastnej rodiny. Skorý sobáš (a následne dieťa) významne pomáhali k skorému získaniu statusu dospelosti.

V súčasnej dobe nie je prechod do dospelosti spojený ani tak s výraznými životnými skokmi, ale skôr postupným rastom samostatnosti a zodpovednosti. Založenie rodiny nie je vnímané ako nevyhnutné pre dospelosť. Takéto vnímanie prechodu do dospelosti medzi mladými ľuďmi potvrdzujú viaceré štúdie o Nastupujúcej dospelosti (Emerging adulthood) aj naša nedávna štúdia medzi vysokoškolskými študentmi na Slovensku.

Aby sme overili, že zmeny v rodičovskom veku skutočne súvisia s uvedenými zmenami v prechode do dospelosti, testovali sme v predkladanej štúdii 6 hypotéz:

Podľa Hypotézy 1a existuje významné množstvo ľudí, ktorí, ak by mohli znovu premyslieť časovanie svojho prvého dieťaťa, mali by ho neskôr. Údaje túto hypotézu potvrdzujú – až 17 % ľudí by dieťa radšej malo vo vyššom veku ako v skutočnosti, naproti tomu len 10 % v nižšom veku.

V Hypotéze 1b predpokladáme, že vyšší vek rodičovstva by radšej volili hlavne ľudia, ktorí mali dieťa vo veku okolo 20 rokov. 20 rokov bol najčastejší vek ženy pri prvom dieťati až do roku 1993. A cez prizmu teórií o faktoroch spôsobujúcich „odkladanie“ rodičovstva to bol vlastne prirodzený vek rodičovstva. Údaje potvrdzujú aj Hypotézu 1b, keď až tretina ľudí, ktorí sa stali rodičmi ako 20 roční, by tento vek rada vymenila za vyšší. Opačná odpoveď, teda uprednostnenie nižšieho veku rodičovstva, sa začína častejšie objavovať až od 26 roku. Zdrojom údajov pre testovanie Hypotéz 1a a 1b je Eurobarometer 65.1 (rok 2006).

Hypotézy 2a až 2d sa týkajú rozdielov v časovaní rodičovstva u ľudí s rozličnými pohľadmi na dospelosť. Hypotéza 2a znie, že ľudia, ktorí uvádzajú vyšší Všeobecný vek dospelosti, budú tiež uvádzať vyšší Všeobecný ideálny vek pri prvom dieťati. Všeobecným vekom dospelosti sa tu myslí vek, o ktorom si respondent myslí, že sa v ňom priemerný človek stáva dospelým. Všeobecným ideálnym vekom pri prvom dieťati sa myslí vek, o ktorom si respondent myslí, že je v ňom pre priemerného človeka ideálne mať prvé dieťa. Dáta potvrdzujú Hypotézu 2a. Ľudia, ktorí si myslia, že človek by mal dospieť skôr, uprednostňujú nižší rodičovský vek. A naopak ľudia, ktorí si myslia, že prechod do dospelosti je dlhodobý proces, si myslia, že je lepšie založiť rodinu neskôr.

Podľa Hypotézy 2b ľudia, ktorí uvádzajú vyšší Všeobecný vek dospelosti, mali reálne svoje dieťa neskôr. Dáta podporujú aj Hypotézu 2b, hoci s menšími výhradami.

Podľa Hypotézy 2c ľudia, ktorí nepovažujú rodičovstvo za dôležité pre dospelosť, uvádzajú vyšší Všeobecný ideálny vek pri prvom dieťati. Dáta aj túto hypotézu potvrdili s určitými výhradami (nie všetky výsledky boli štatisticky významné).

Poslednou Hypotézou 2d je, že ľudia, ktorí nepovažujú rodičovstvo za dôležité pre dospelosť, reálne mali svoje deti vo vyššom veku. Túto hypotézu však údaje nepotvrdili. Hypotézy 2a-2d boli testované na údajoch z European Social Survey 3 (rok 2007).