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Summary

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S U M M A R Y

The study presented is divided into three parts. The first part summarizes Czechoslovak and foreign data on the relations between the causes, consequences, and social background of early sexuality and marriages of minor adolescents. The second part reports the results of a research on young engaged couples, while the third part examines the characteristics of these couples after three years of married life, considers the forms of untraditional support to young families, the question of mate selection and the distribution of legitimate power in the family. Attention is also paid to families which do not adequately perform their socialization function.

In all developed socialist and western industrial countries a group of adolescents appear who start sex life earlier than conforms to the social norms. This group includes girls who become pregnant and cope with the situation by marriage or abortion. In Czechoslovakia, minors under 18 years of age are allowed to marry only with judicial consent and under special, worthy of consideration conditions. Very young married couples represent a problem of developed countries that, to a certain degree, is independent of the social system. Other cultural societies such as the Arabic or African world have not been confronted with this problem.

Early marriage entered by one of the spouses under 18 years of age has been considered an undesirable phenomenon and social problem in both the socialist and western industrial countries. Sociological investigations report on the mainly adverse characteristics of such marriages. Marital dissatisfaction and a higher divorce rate have been stated; many factors such as low socioeconomic status, little education, lack of money, the need of monetary parental aid that contribute to family breakdown correlate positively with the young age of the engaged couple at the time of marriage. Investigations conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries emphasize the fact that couples who precociously enter marriage because of the bride's gravidity often come from the lower social strata of society and from families with conflicting intrafamilial relationships.

Literature reports the high social permissiveness of the developed industrial societies and the considerable sexual stimulation by the mass media to be one of the principal causes of early sexuality and the ensuing early marriages; sex has been associated with success and, therefore, a high social value has been placed on it. Another motive that comes forward mainly in socialist countries is the high social value ascribed to the married-woman status: the unmarried woman has a markedly lower status in social value judgement. Early marriages may also be due to the

high discrepancy between the physical and the social maturity of some of the adolescents who want to escape the restraining environment of family and school and gain illusory freedom. However, some girls do not aspire to education or an interesting occupation, but place the highest social value on marriage and motherhood. The social status of the married woman and mother is a rather high one in the society of real socialism, and it is more valued than the woman's status attained by qualification and education.

Early marriages have also been explained by increasing individualism and by the unwillingness to delay gratification including that from marital and sexual life. The gratification of their wishes and needs has become the life goal for some people. The dissolution and breakdown of extended urban family units and the trend of state agencies towards taking over some of the functions of the family contribute to these attitudes and value judgements.

Contraception and education to family planning are becoming ever more serious problems in socialist and western industrial countries. As has been established by Czechoslovak, European, and U.S. investigations, the major part of premarital pregnancies concentrate in the youngest age groups of adolescents. Thus, the education level negatively correlates with premarital gravidity: the lower the education level, the higher the rate of premarital pregnancies. In Czechoslovakia, all minor girls who apply for legal consent to marriage are pregnant. This situation results in the fact that a high number of children are born whose chances for being raised in well-functioning families are diminished already before birth.

Early motherhood and marriage entail another grave consequence: they restrain the social development and the education of the very young married couples who precociously have to step into the roles of adults. The roles of husband and wife have been defined as adult roles in all developed cultures. They are associated with decision-making and with the responsibility for providing for the family. If the adolescents perform these roles with success, their social maturation may be accelerated, which, however, often occurs at the expense of school training and qualification. The enacted adult roles force the very young spouses to rapidly complete some elementary vocational training and to enter paid employment. This significantly impedes their personal and educational development, even though the latter need not be rendered quite impossible in socialist society. The high social value placed on education reflects in the selfdenying support by close relatives and in the broad system of adult education programmes and available alternative forms of studies for young mothers.

As opposed to other societies, the socialist society of this country lends public aid in the form of family allowances and services to the very young spouses who even under critical conditions succeed in completing their vocational training and performing their parental obligations. This aid includes various financial advantages, a network of pre-school day-care facilities, etc. Nevertheless, even in socialist society early motherhood is a severe handicap to the young girl. However, if the girl or the young spouses overcome the accumulated adverse factors to complete their vocational training or continue their studies, they can expect to take such places in society that correspond to their qualification. Then the handicap of early marriage no longer prevents their successful entrance into society. In this country, too, the success of these marriages depends on good marital relationships between the spouses, on their education level, and on the assistance by their families of origin.

While a group of very young girls overcome the situation induced by pregnancy by marriage and childbirth, other girls resort to abortion. Nearly all socialist and non-socialist countries grant the woman the right to decide whether to have or not to have a baby. In Czechoslovakia, however, this liberalism has made the abortion rate among the youngest age group of girls a serious problem.

Factors affecting early sexuality and gravidity have been a matter of concern

for many bourgeois authors. Such factors include social permissiveness, low education level, early biological maturity, malfunctioning families; they, too, are the causes of early marriage. The literature reports differences to exist between the girls who resorted to abortion and those willing to have the baby. The girls who chose the role of the unmarried mother more frequently came from a lower socioeconomic stratum than did the girls who interrupted pregnancy. The comparison of Czech and Finnic girls who underwent abortion has revealed differing views on the definition of early sexuality: the age considered early in Czechoslovakia is more or less the statistical norm in Finland and the Scandinavian countries. Early sexual activity and pregnancy have been more often associated with girls from discording and partial families, irrespective of the social system. The problems concerning effectively functioning families with two parents seem to go beyond countries and continents. Studies made in Czechoslovakia, Finland, and in the U.S.A. agree on this fact. The comparison has also shown that Czech adolescents have considerable reserves in the use of efficient contraceptives as compared to the young people in Finland.

The second part of the paper analyses the socioeconomic situation of very young engaged couples at the time of marriage. Basing upon an empirical research, the paper examines social and demographic characteristics, housing conditions, the economic situation, attitudes towards sex, and the social characteristics of the families of origin. The very young couples were compared with a group of spouses who entered their first marriage at the age of 18 to 30 years.

All brides of the experimental group and 8% of their partners were minor before marriage. A third of the girls were under 17, half the partners were younger than 22. As compared to the older engaged couples, the level of education was low. The representation of the minor girls in the lowest education category was twice that of the older brides. A third of the minor girls started no vocational training and worked as unskilled labourers, about half the girls had not completed vocational training, and a quarter were attending secondary school. Similarly, their partners exhibited a generally lower education level than the older grooms.

Both groups tended to educational homogamy: mate selection was distinctly affected by the level of the own education in both groups. Very low school success was found for the very young couples; this fact positively correlates with results of investigations made abroad. In this country, early marriages are typical of individuals with below-average school results. Their goals mainly concentrated on completing an elementary vocational qualification; neither the minor girls nor their partners showed interest in attaining higher education levels.

Most minor girls had met their partners at a dance; about a fifth had known their mates because they had been living nearby. Over half of them had been dating not even for a year. All minor girls married because of pregnancy, while only 50% of the older brides did so, which agrees with the proportion of pregnant brides in the Czechoslovak population. 13% of the minor girls as compared to 3% of the older brides had sexual intercourse under 15 years of age. Minor girls with an eight-grade-education only more frequently than the others chose partners with early sexual experience and with a greater number of sex partners. Girls attending secondary schools did not admit such frequent sexual intercourse; by the number of sex partners, however, they surpassed the group of girls serving apprenticeship and the girls with eight-grade education. 13% of the girls had experienced at least one interruption of pregnancy. It was typical of most of the minor girls that they had used no contraception. Lacking contraception was associated with insufficient information on the facts of sex. Only a third of the minor girls as opposed to two-thirds of the older brides were prepared to rear the newborn by themselves. The others relied upon the help of their mothers or other adults.

At the time of marriage, the housing conditions of the very young couples were

much inferior to those of the older spouses: two — thirds of the young couples married without having a home of their own. The comparison of incomes, savings and other monetary resources required for furnishing and equipping the home indicated the markedly more disadvantageous situation of the young couples. The situation was adverse mainly for the girls with mere eight-grade education who had the lowest savings and negligible other resources, even though they and their partners mostly were included into the group with higher incomes. Most frequently, these girls were willing to burden the young family with debts from the very beginning. Girls serving apprenticeship or those attending secondary school who, for the most part, disposed of no incomes of their own, had higher savings and they more often than the other girls chose partners tending to economy. With respect to their economic situation, the very young couples can be divided into two groups:

- Those who despite of relatively high personal earnings dispose of no savings and expect no material help from the parents. These couples rely on the public loan to newly-weds.
- Those who despite lacking personal incomes dispose of higher financial reserves and expect material support from the extended family.

Data on the parents of the engaged couples and on the families of origin were also of interest. A significant difference between the groups of the younger and older girls showed up in the increased percentage of very young brides coming from partial families. Every third minor girl together with her partner came from families that revealed destructive elements in solving family conflicts in their model of intrafamilial relationships or from families in which the father was absent.

In accordance with family background, the minor couples were divided into three groups:

- couples in which both partners came from an intact family,
- couples with a remarried mother (a step-father)
- couples coming from partial families.

It has been accepted, generally, that the optimum socialization of the child is provided by a smoothly functioning family, by the education level of the parents, and by the type of their occupation. Three-quarters of the parents of the very young couples were skilled workers and the character of the work they performed corresponded to this level of education. Our research has supported the findings of authors from abroad who relate early marriages to the less educated groups of society.

A third of the minor girls had been raised in families of lower quality. It was the girls from families with low education level and conflicting familial relationships who selected mates with similar characteristics. This otherwise natural tendency toward homogamy in spouse selection considerably increases the risk of establishing a malfunctioning family, because both partners transmit less positive patterns of family life to their social behaviour. Our research also supports the thesis which relates early marriage to family size: as compared to the older couples, the minor girls and their partners coöe three times as often from families of five or larger. The younger and the older engaged couples also significantly differed in their way of socialization during childhood. A fourth of the minor girls had lived a large part of their childhood otherwise than with both parents; girls with mere eight-grade education prevailed in this group. The most stabilized family relationships were mostly found for the girls who attended secondary school.

In connection with the gravidity of the minor brides, their mothers' ages of marriage and first childbirth were also established. This comparison, too, revealed a profound difference between the mothers of the younger and the older brides. Twice as much mothers of the minor than of the older girls had married under 18 years of age and nearly four times as much had their first child under 18 years of age. The data showed some similarity in the familial behaviour of mothers and daughters which has been much discussed by family sociologists.

The distribution of power and decision-making in the family life of the parents was another characteristic of the families of origin of all brides and grooms. In both groups under study markedly more frequently the mother was indicated as the dominant person, which seems to be a specific of socialist society brought about by the profound change in the woman's position and her full participation in the occupational world.

If supposing that the success rate of a marriage is affected by the success rate of the parents' marriage, we also should evaluate the family life of the parents of the engaged couples. Here too, comparison has pointed to a tendency toward homogamy in mate selection. Not regarding the age-at-marriage, the brides coming from smoothly functioning families chose, in their major part, partners from harmonious families. Only about half the girls coming from discording families chose mates from nonconflicting families, while most of them chose partners who also were dissatisfied with the family life of their parents.

The analysis of the family background of the engaged couples revealed a relation between the quality of the adolescent's family and his early marriage. As, in our culture, early marriage is a consequence of early sexual intercourse, the analysis also suggests a relation between education within the family and early sexuality.

The third part of the study discusses familial behaviour and summarizes the results of an inquiry concerning the young couples after three years of married life. At that time, the most serious problems of these families were the very low qualification which was further adversely affected by marriage and childbirth for many of the wives, the still unsolved housing problem, and the birth of additional children within a short interval. While only a quarter of the brides had mere eight-grade-education at the time of marriage, their proportion had nearly doubled within the three years of marriage. Nearly every second family had no place of their own to live in; 60% of the families had two children or were awaiting the arrival of the second child.

The study has also shown that even very young marriages have some chances for success — every second married couple seemed to be happy and satisfied. From the less satisfied half of the young families about a fourth could hope to maintain and stabilize their marriages after overcoming adjustment problems. About a quarter of the very young families broke down within the first three years of married life.

The best chance for a stabilized married life was found in families with only one child, living soon after marriage in a home of their own, in which the wife had terminated her vocational training or had some higher qualification. For families in which the wife cannot obtain an elementary qualification, and in which soon after the first a second child is born in inadequate housing conditions, the risk of not overcoming the problems accumulated increases to the extent, that the couple consider divorce the only solution to the crisis.

Above all, society should aid families tending toward dissatisfaction who do not yet envisage a radical solution. The study proposes suitable forms of public support as, for instance, to facilitate the completion of vocational training, better education in family planning and also intensive consultation service in marriage clinics.

The concluding part of the study also deals with the theory of mate selection and with the resources allowing the allocation of power within the family. The theoretical constructions were considered within the theoretical framework of bourgeois and marxistic sociology. The last chapter examines family breakdown that endangers young families and the consequences of divorce to the children. It points to important findings of studies of the social and psychical situation of single mothers and their children, to the child-father relation, and to the psychical burden to the child who grows up with one parent only. Social stigmatization and the risk of transmitting non-adjusted familial behaviour to the next generation is discussed.

Attention is also paid to the remarriage of the mother. The study presents interesting data on the structure of the reconstituted family, on intrafamilial relationships, on changes in the social behaviour of the child. With respect to the material equipment and culture of the household, the reconstituted family more closely resembles the intact family even though it is not fully equal to it. From the viewpoint of performing its socialization function, the reconstituted family is not inferior to the partial family, but it is nearer to the latter than to the intact family with both parents. The study confirmed the thesis according to which changes in family status affect not only the child's personality, but also his social behaviour.