

## CHANGES IN MEAN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE AND REMARRIAGE OF THE POPULATION FROM CENTRAL BELARUS BETWEEN 1860-2018

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### Abstract

**Objectives.** The aim of our study was to show the changes in the nubility of the population of the central Belarus that happened during 1860-2018. Due to the fact that patterns of marriage and unions have changed significantly across the world, it was important to characterize these processes in Belarus.

**Materials and methods.** The marriage data were acquired from the analysis of the parish registers (5831 entries) and statistical sources. Data was treated by conventional statistical methods.

**Results.** In the second half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the mean age at first marriage varied between 24.3 and 25.5 for men and between 21.5 and 22.5 for women. The two World Wars were events that greatly affected the marriage patterns on the territory of Belarus in the 20th century, reducing the male population. The first divorces were registered in the 1920s, and in the early 21st century, more than half of the registered marriages ended in divorce. Significant changes in the marriage pattern occurred in the early 21st century. Over the period between 2000 and 2017, the mean age at first marriage increased by 3 years for men (28.0 years), and by 2.9 years for women (25.6 years).

**Conclusions.** The population in the central part of Belarus in the second half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century was characterized by the traditional type of nuptiality (young age at first marriage, low permanent celibacy levels). The traditional marriage pattern was substituted by a European one at the turn of the 21st century (late age at first marriage, high permanent celibacy rates and high percentage of consensual unions).

**Keywords:** nubility, Central Belarus, traditional and European marriage patterns.

### Introduction

During the 20th and the early 21st centuries marriage and family as institutions of reproduction and primary socialization of new generations were losing their functions in many countries: the birth rate is declining, the number of divorces and illegitimate births is increasing. Transformational processes in the sphere of marriage, family are the result of the influence of many factors: culture, economy, state, law, religion and others.

Today in Belarus, family is considered as a social value, state efforts are directed to supporting family relations, preparing young people for family life. However, researchers more objectively describe realities and prospects of modern society (Kalacheva, 2008; Sosnovskaya, 2015; Solovey and Shuhno, 2018). Over the last 160 years, the marriage patterns of the population on the territory of Belarus have changed significantly. There are not enough works that would reflect changes of separate characteristics in the marriage and family sphere throughout such long time.

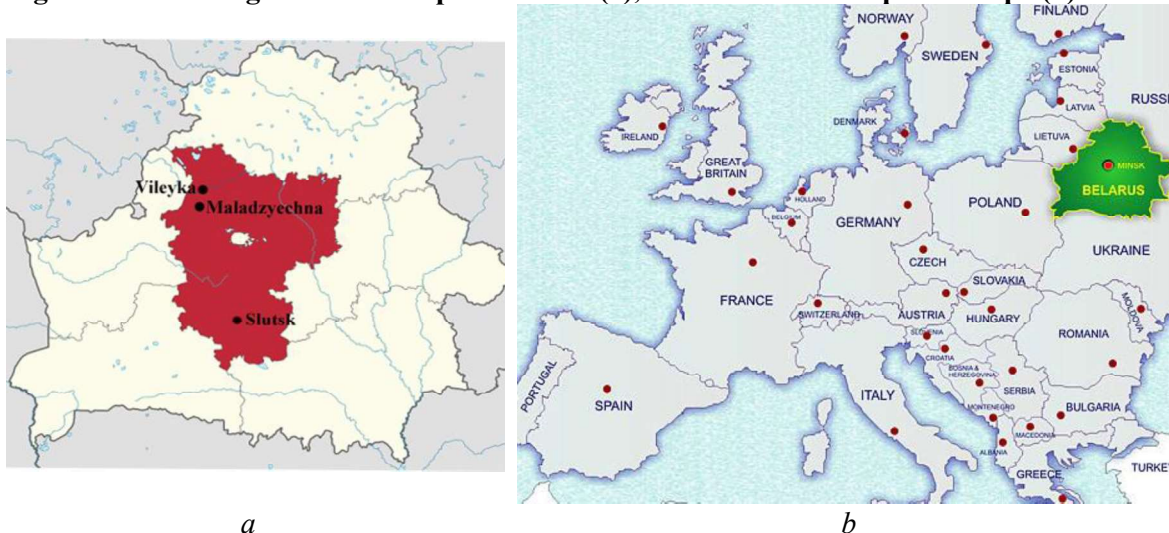
In 2017-2019, with the support of the Belarusian Republican Foundation for Fundamental Research, Belarusian anthropologists and historical demographers implemented the project "Evolution of socio-demographic aspects of the Belarusian family (the second half of 19th – the early 21st centuries)", which allowed to take the first steps in the analysis of long-term dynamics in the field of marriage and family relations.

The aim of our study was to show the changes in the nubility of the population of the central Belarus that happened during 1860-2018.

### Material and methods

Analysis of data on the age at marriage of the population in the central part of Belarus, we conducted on the basis of information on the Minsk region. The territory of the Minsk region within its modern boundaries was determined only by 1960 and today includes 22 districts (figure 1). During the period of the Russian Empire (up to 1917) some territories of the modern Minsk region were a part of the Minsk, Mogilev and Vilnius provinces. In 1921, western Belarus (including the region studied) became part of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the eastern part of the modern Minsk region then became part of the USSR.

**Figure 1. Minsk region on the map of Belarus (a), Belarus on the map of Europe (b)**



The marriage data for the period between the 1860s and the 1930s were acquired from the analysis of the parish registers (5831 entries). Parish registers (metric books) on this region are kept in the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk, the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Grodno and in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives, and are also partially accessible online (National Historical Archives of Belarus, etc.).

Metric books are the only mass sources containing data on births, marriages and deaths in the 19th – the early 20th centuries. In the interwar period (between World War I and World War II) in the Soviet territory due to the negative attitude to religion, as well as the gradual development of the state system for civil registration, metric records were actively replaced by public records. After the end of World War II in the territory of Minsk region marriages officially began to be registered only by the civil registry offices.

For the analysis of age at marriage from the 1860 to 1938, we took data on 13 Orthodox parishes of Vileyka and Sventyany districts of Vilnius province (now – Minsk region). 3 Orthodox parishes were located in cities (Vileyka, Maladzyechna), 10 – in the nearby countryside. The

population in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries in this area was predominantly rural: according to the 1897 census, the proportion of rural dwellers in the region was 86.5% (The first general census of the Russian Empire in 1897). Nationality was not specifically indicated in the metric books. Belarusians comprised the majority of the region's population (86.9% according to the 1897 census). Apart from marriages between Orthodox people, mixed marriages (Orthodox with Catholic or with Protestant) were also registered in churches of that time: the share of such marriages in the parishes studied varied from 0.7 to 14.4%. Data on marriages and divorces in Slutsk district for 1928 were also studied (State Archives of Minsk Region, 1928).

The marriage data between the second half of the 20th and the early 21st centuries were acquired from statistical sources and scientific articles (Statistical Yearbook of Minsk region, 2018; Demographic yearbook of the Republic of Belarus, 2018). Although the data for that period encompassed the representatives of all nationalities, Belarusians in the Minsk region made up the majority of the population. Their share in the total population varied during those years from 85.1 to 88.8% (Ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Belarus, 2011). It is quite difficult to calculate the share of the Orthodox population in modern Belarus given that certain part of the population does not identify themselves with the members of any specific religious denomination after the period of active atheistic propaganda in times of the Soviet Union. The majority of believers in Minsk region consider themselves Orthodox.

We have considered the following periods:

1) 1860-1913 (before World War I) – this is the time when the territory of Belarus was part of the Russian Empire. This period was divided into 2 parts: 1860-1889 and 1890-1913;

2) 1914-1920 (wartime) – the time of World War I (1914-1918), the Civil war (1917-1922), and the Soviet-Polish war (1919-1921). We limited time interval to the year of 1920, since the military operations in the studied region ended in 1920, the following year of 1921 was the beginning of peacetime;

3) 1921-1939 – interwar time, the territory of Minsk region was a part of the USSR and the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth;

4) 1945-1990 – the time of the USSR, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union;

5) 1991-2019 – time of independent Belarus.

The period of World War II was not included into the analysis; data on marriages at this time are not developed.

Basic descriptive statistics were computed. Chi-square test was used to evaluate differences between relative indicators. Between-period comparisons of mean age at marriage were performed separately for each gender using the Student's t-test. Significance of differences is determined by the  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ .

## Results

**1860-1913.** In 1860-1889, the mean age at first marriage was 24.3 years for men and 21.5 years for women (Table 1). The majority of women (50.6%) took marriage to 20 years, 41.2% – at the age of 21-25 years, i.e. 91.8% of women under 25 years were already married. Men most often formed a family in 21-25 years (47.2%), somewhat less – under the age of 20 years (22.2%) and 26-30 years (21.7%) (Tables 2, 3).

In the second half of the 19th century divorces were extremely rare. For the period 1867-1887 among the Orthodox population of the local Lithuanian diocese only 85 divorces were registered (4.7 per 10 thousand marriages), of which: for unknown absence – 50, for adultery – 19, for deprivation of all rights – 15 and for the inability to marital cohabitation – 1 (Bechasnov, 1893). Up to the late 1910s, both men and women remarried only after the death of their spouse, divorces were not common.

In 1860–1889 in the Minsk region men remarried at the age of 41.7 years on average, women – at the age of 35.9 years. Women most actively entered into a second (or third) marriage after 40 years (28.2%), as well as at the age of 26–30 and 31–35 years (21.2% and 20.0%, respectively). Men were also more likely to remarry after 40 years (47.4% of all remarriages). Men remarried almost twice as often as women.

Mean age at first marriage in the early 20th century was for men 24.9 years, which is by half a year ( $p < 0.01$ ) more than in the second half of the 19th century, for women – 22.3 years, which is by 0.8 year higher ( $p < 0.001$ ).

In 1890–1913 in relation to 1860–1889 the proportion of men forming families at earlier ages declined: up to 20 years – from 22.2 to 13.4% (-8.8%,  $p < 0.001$ ), in 21–25 years – from 47.2 to 45.6 % (-1.6%). The percent of grooms aged 36–40 years also decreased from 3.3% to 0.7% (-2.6%,  $p < 0.001$ ). At the same time, the proportion of marriages at 26–30 years was increased – from 21.7% to 34.5% (+12.8%,  $p < 0.001$ ) and at 31–35 years – from 4.5% to 5.3% (+0.8%).

As well as men, the share of women who married at earlier age fell: up to 20 years – from 50.6 to 46.3% (-4.3%,  $p < 0.05$ ), in 21–25 years – from 41.2 to 37.6% (-3.6%). At the same time, the percent of later marriages increased: in 26–30 years – from 5.6 to 10.7% (+5.1%,  $p < 0.001$ ), in 31–35 years – from 1.7 to 3.4% (+1.7%,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Mean remarriage age in 1890–1913 was 40.1 years for men and 35.3 years for women. Men, as in the previous period, most often enter into a second (third) marriage after 40 years (45.4%), women had three such periods — after 40 years (24.0%), 31–35 (23.0%) and 26–30 years (22.0%).

**1914–1920.** During the 160-year period under consideration, military events in the central part of Belarus happened several times: in 1914–1921 – World War I (1914–1918), Civil war (1918–1919) and the Soviet-Polish war (1919–1921); in 1941–1944 – World War II. The two World Wars were the events that greatly affected the marriage patterns on the territory of Belarus in the 20th century, reducing the male population, and also increasing the migration activity of the population. We have considered the peculiarities of marriage during World War I.

On the Belarusian lands in 1914 martial law was imposed. According to different calculations, 800–900 thousand men were mobilized from the Belarusian provinces. In addition to mobilization, the Belarusian lands were affected by the refugee process. According to various sources, from 1 million 130 thousand to 2 million 290 thousand people left their permanent place of residence for the period of military actions (Volkava, 2018). Since 1915 in the territory of the region for two and a half years the Russian-German's front line stabilized (Smolyaninov, 2017). Most of the land of the current Minsk region was on the Russian side of the front. In the frontline zone a large number of men – soldiers, officers of the active army – appeared near local girls.

**Table 1. Mean age at marriage of the population of the central part of Belarus in 1860-1938 (years)**

Marriage	Parameter	Men						Women							
		time periods			differences of mean values between time periods			time periods			differences of mean values between time periods				
		1	2	3	4	1-2	2-3	3-4	1	2	3	4	1-2	2-3	3-4
First	N	949	1464	973	1425	+0.6	+0.6	-0.2	1078	1674	1065	1488	+0.8	-0.4	-0.4
	M	24.3	24.9	25.5	25.3	**	***		21.5	22.3	21.9	21.5	***		**
	S	4.9	4.0	4.1	4.2				3.6	4.6	4.0	3.6			
Remarriage	N	302	306	189	184	-1.6	-0.2	-1.8	170	100	92	119	-0.6	-1.9	-1.3
	M	41.7	40.1	39.9	38.1				35.9	35.3	33.4	32.1			
	S	10.5	9.5	9.8	10.1				9.0	8.3	8.3	8.2			

Time periods: 1 – 1860-1889, 2 – 1890-1913, 3 – 1914-1920, 4 – 1921-1938; t-test, p-value: \* –< 0,05; \*\* –< 0,01; \*\*\* –< 0,001;

N – number of records, M – average age at marriage, S – standard deviation

**Table 2. First marriages and remarriages at different age intervals for men of the central part of Belarus in 1860–1938**

Years	1860–1889 (1)		1890–1913 (2)		1914–1920 (3)		1921–1938 (4)		Differences between time periods						
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	1–2		2–3		3–4		
									d	$\chi^2$	d	$\chi^2$	d	$\chi^2$	
First marriage															
≤20	211	22.2	197	13.4	95	9.8	142	10.0	-8.8***	31.58	-3.6**	7.56	+0.2	0.03	
21–25	448	47.2	667	45.6	429	44.1	703	49.3	-1.6	0.63	-1.5	0.51	+5.2*	6.38	
26–30	206	21.7	505	34.5	367	37.7	455	31.9	+12.8***	45.30	+3.2	2.64	-5.9**	8.60	
31–35	43	4.5	78	5.3	55	5.6	90	6.3	+0.8	0.77	+0.3	0.12	+0.7	0.45	
36–40	31	3.3	10	0.7	22	2.3	25	1.8	-2.6***	23.01	+1.6***	11.23	-0.5	0.77	
>40	10	1.1	7	0.5	5	0.5	10	0.7	-0.6	2.73	0.0	0.02	+0.2	0.33	
Total	949	100.0	1464	100.0	973	100.0	1425	100.0							
Remarriage															
≤20	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0.0	-	0.0	-	0.0	-	
21–25	10	3.3	12	3.9	3	1.6	11	5.9	+0.6	0.16	-2.3	2.17	+4.3*	4.98	
26–30	42	13.9	48	15.7	37	19.6	38	20.7	+1.8	0.38	+3.9	1.24	+1.1	0.07	
31–35	48	15.9	43	14.1	32	16.9	35	19.0	-1.8	0.41	+2.8	0.75	+2.1	0.28	
36–40	59	19.5	64	20.9	33	17.5	38	20.7	+1.4	0.18	-3.4	0.89	+3.2	0.62	
>40	143	47.4	139	45.4	84	44.4	62	33.7	-1.9	0.23	-1.0	0.05	-10.7*	4.52	
Total	302	100.0	306	100.0	189	100.0	184	100.0							

In tables 2-3 d – differences, %; p-value: \* –< 0,05; \*\* –< 0,01; \*\*\* –< 0,001

**Table 3. First marriages and remarriages at different age intervals for women of the central part of Belarus in 1860–1938**

Years	1860–1889 (1)		1890–1913 (2)		1914–1920 (3)		1921–1938 (4)		Differences between time periods						
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	1–2		2–3		3–4		
									d	$\chi^2$	d	$\chi^2$	d	$\chi^2$	
<b>First marriage</b>															
≤20	546	50.6	775	46.3	488	45.8	736	49.4	-4.3*	4.98	-0.5	0.06	+3.6	3.30	
21–25	444	41.2	630	37.6	438	41.1	607	40.8	-3.6	3.48	+3.5	3.34	-0.3	0.03	
26–30	60	5.6	178	10.7	101	9.5	116	7.8	+5.1***	21.31	-1.2	0.94	-1.7	2.27	
31–35	18	1.7	57	3.4	25	2.3	15	1.0	+1.7**	7.45	-1.1	2.51	-1.3**	7.24	
36–40	4	0.4	22	1.3	8	0.8	7	0.5	+0.9*	6.23	-0.5	1.90	-0.3	0.84	
>40	6	0.5	12	0.7	5	0.5	7	0.5	+0.2	0.26	-0.2	0.65	0.0	0.00	
Total	1078	100.0	1674	100.0	1065	100.0	1488	100.0							
<b>Remarriage</b>															
≤20	2	1.2	0	0.0	2	2.2	2	1.7	-1.2	1.19	+2.2	2.20	-0.5	0.07	
21–25	21	12.3	12	12.0	16	17.4	18	15.1	-0.3	0.01	+5.4	1.12	-2.3	0.20	
26–30	36	21.2	22	22.0	24	26.1	50	42.0	+0.8	0.03	+4.1	0.44	+15.9*	5.78	
31–35	34	20.0	23	23.0	16	17.4	19	16.0	+3.0	0.34	-5.6	2.70	-1.4	0.08	
36–40	29	17.1	19	19.0	13	14.1	13	10.9	+1.9	0.16	-4.9	2.59	-3.2	0.49	
>40	48	28.2	24	24.0	21	22.8	17	14.3	-4.2	0.58	-1.2	1.79	-8.5	2.56	
Total	170	100.0	100	100.0	92	100.0	119	100.0							

If in 1914-1915 only local people took marriage, then in the next three years of World War I (1916–1918) local girls actively married soldiers and officers of the field force from different regions of the Russian Empire (54.7% of the registered marriages).

The average age at first marriage in war period compared with the previous one for men increased by 0.6 years ( $p < 0.001$ ) and amounted to 25.5 years, while for women, on the contrary, it decreased slightly (-0.4 years) and was equal to 21.9 years. As in 1890-1913, during this period men more often started a family in 21-25 years (44.1%) and in 26-30 years (37.7%). The proportion of young grooms (up to 20 years) continued to decrease – from 13.4 to 9.8% ( $p < 0.01$ ), but the share of 36-40-year-old grooms increased – from 0.7 to 2.3% ( $p < 0.001$ ). The share of young brides remained high among girls: under 20 years (45.8%) and 21-25 years (41.1%).

The mean age at remarriage continued to decline in both men and women and amounted to 39.9 and 33.4 years, respectively. Men, as before, entered into the second and third marriages mainly after 40 years (44.4%), women most often remarried at the age of 26-30 and after 40 (26.1 and 22.8% of all marriages, respectively).

**1921-1938.** The average age at first marriage in 1921-1938 was 25.3 years in men. For the period from 1860-1889 to 1921-1938 the average age at first marriage in men increased by 1.0 year ( $p < 0.001$ ). Women entered into their first marriage at the age of 21.5 (-0.4 years by 1914-1920,  $p < 0.01$ ). In the period from 1860-1889 to 1921-1938 the mean age at first marriage for women varied somewhat, but eventually returned to its original value.

In 1921-1938, 49.3% of men preferred to marry at 21-25 years (+5.2% to the previous period,  $p < 0.05$ ), 31.9% – at 26-30 years (-5.9%,  $p < 0.01$ , respectively). As in all previous periods, girls married more often before the age of 20 (49.4%) and at the age of 21-25 (40.8%).

Men remarried at 38.1 years, women – at 32.1 years. In the period from 1860-1889 to 1921-1938 the average age at remarriage in both men and women has been steadily decreasing: by 3.6 and 3.8 years, respectively (in both cases  $p < 0.001$ ). So, men became less likely to remarry after 40 years – only 33.7% (-10.7% compared to 1914-1920,  $p < 0.05$ ), but more often at 21-40 years (in 21-25 years – +4.3%,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**1939-1990.** Information on the characteristics of the marriage of the population during World War II in Belarus is not available and requires further development. Also, there are no data both in official statistics and in scientific studies on the mean age at marriage in the period from 1946 to 1989. There is only data on the mean age of the bride and groom in 1990 – the last year of Belarus's stay in the Soviet Union (figure 2). Thus, the mean age of a man from the Minsk region in 1990 at the first marriage was 24.6 years (-0.7 years to the period 1921-1938), at the second – 37.9 years (-0.2 years), women – 22.5 (+1.0 years) and 35.7 years (+3.6 years), respectively.

On the basis of published and unpublished statistics from the USSR Russian researcher Zakharov tried to reconstruct the average age at marriage of women in the European region of the Soviet Union, including Belarus (Table 4). Thus, the average age of women at their first marriage varied from 1949 to 1984 in the range of 21.9-22.5 years, which is close to the data we received. The high percentage of unmarried women by the age of 50 in 1949-1959 reflected significant losses in the male population during World War II.

**Table 4. Mean age at first marriage of women in certain regions of the USSR (Zaharov, 2006a; Zaharov, 2006b)**

Years	Territory	Mean age for marriage up to 50 years	Never married by 50 years, %
1949-1959	USSR	22.3	8.0
1965-1968	Russia, Ukraine, Belarus	21.9	2.2
1975-1978	Russia, Ukraine, Belarus	21.9	2.6



Years	Territory	Mean age for marriage up to 50 years	Never married by 50 years, %
1980-1984	Russia, Ukraine, Belarus	22.5	3.1

In the statistical yearbook "Population of the USSR, 1988" was demonstrated within which age range the citizens of BSSR married in 1978 and 1988 (Population of the USSR, 1988, 1989). In this period both young men and women most frequently started families between the ages of 20-24: 53.6-61.1% of young men and 42.4-49.0% of women (Table 5). Furthermore, young women also often married before the age of 20 (24.1-26.2% of early marriages of the total). From 1978 to 1988 the proportion of earlier marriages declined for both young men and women. Accordingly, the percentage of marriages contracted at older ages increased. Unfortunately, the data on first marriages and remarriages were combined impeding the analysis.

**Table 5. Marriages of Belarusians of the BSSR (first marriage and remarriages together) at different age intervals in 1978 and 1988 (Population of the USSR. 1988, 1989)**

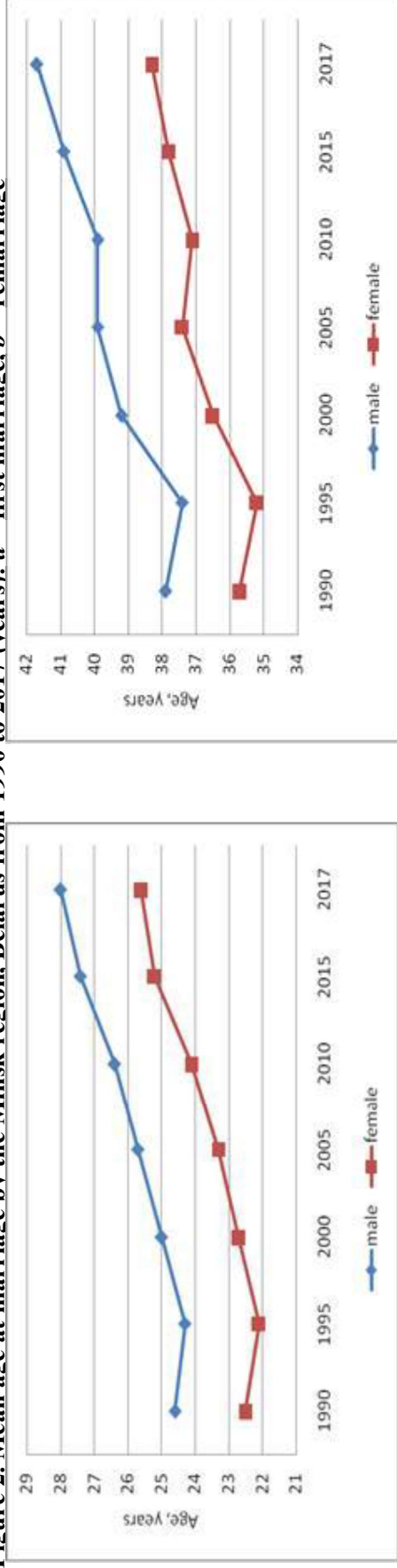
Years	Men				Women			
	1978		1988		1978		1988	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
> 20	2795	3.7	2446	3.4	20511	26.2	17361	24.1
20-24	46145	61.1	37884	53.6	38373	49.0	30587	42.4
25-29	14209	18.8	16020	22.7	8321	10.6	10902	15.1
30-34	3315	4.4	5838	8.3	2481	3.1	5133	7.1
35-39	2018	2.7	2845	4.0	1703	2.2	2682	3.7
> 40	7020	9.3	5632	8.0	6979	8.9	5458	7.6
age not specified	-	-	3	0.0	-	-	1	0.0
Total	75502	100.0	70668	100.0	783680	100.0	72124	100.0

**1991-2018.** In 1991, Belarus gained independence and since this time began to develop as the independent state. Since mid-1995, official statistics have recorded a significant change in the average age of first marriage registration for both men and women.

Throughout the 20th century, the mean age at first marriage varied between 24.3 and 25.5 for men and between 21.5 and 22.5 for women. The progressive increase in the age of first and second marriages began in 1995. From 1995 to 2017 the average age of first marriage in the Minsk region increased for men by 3.7 years: from 24.3 to 28.0 years, for women by 3.5 years: from 22.5 to 25.6 years. The average age at remarriage also increased accordingly – for men by 4.3 years: from 37.4 to 41.7 years, for women by 3.1 years: from 35.2 to 38.3 years (figure 2).

The first divorces were registered in the 1920s, and their number has increased greatly over time. So, for example, already in 1928 in the Slutsk region, there were 69 divorces for 441 marriages (State Archives of Minsk Region, 1928). The change in the dynamics of the crude marriage and divorce rates by the Minsk region after World War II was shown in figure 3.

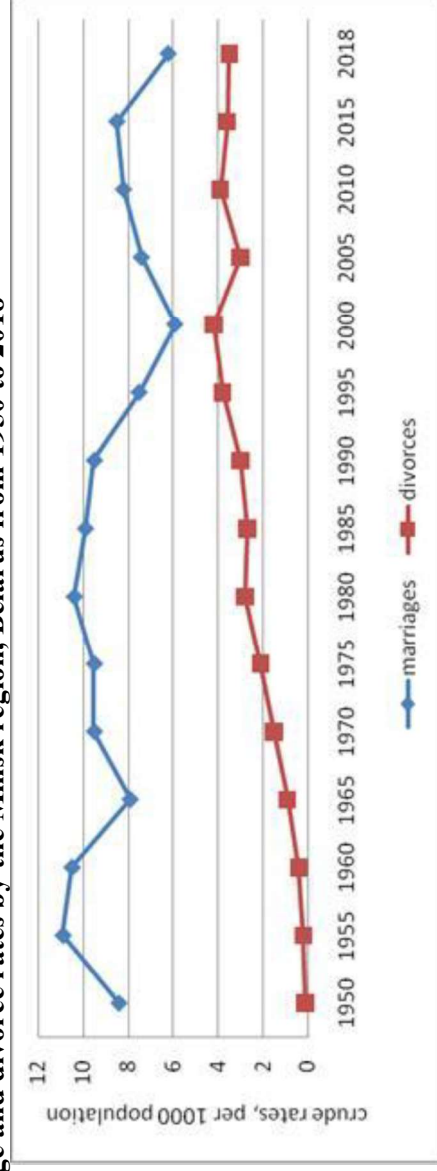
Figure 2. Mean age at marriage by the Minsk region, Belarus from 1990 to 2017 (years): *a* – first marriage, *b* – remarriage



*a*

*b*

Figure 3. Crude marriage and divorce rates by the Minsk region, Belarus from 1950 to 2018



In 2018 in the Minsk region there were 5041 divorces for 8881 marriages (Minsk region in numbers, 2019). Divorce rates have been steadily increasing since 1950, reaching their maximum value in 2000 (4.2). Whereas previously the only possibility of remarriage was the death of a spouse, now in most cases remarriage is after divorce.

## Discussions

Metric books are the primary sources with a huge information base for researchers. The Belarusian researcher Nosevich (2004) on the example of one micro-region (now it is the Logoisk district of the Minsk region), using metric books, traced the peculiarities of marriage among the population from 1740 to 1858 (Nosevich, 2004). It was found that between 1780-1793 and 1821-1851 the mean marriage age for men increased by 3.5 years: from 20.1 to 23.6 years, for women – by 3.0 years: from 19.8 to 22.8 years (data for 485 men and 501 women).

Then (based on an analysis of our data) over a long period of time – from 1860 to 1995 – the average age at first marriage varied in a rather tight range: for men from 24.3 to 25.5 years, for women from 21.5 to 22.5 years. During this period significant socio-economic, political and other changes took place in what is now Belarus as a whole, and the Minsk region in particular. However these changes did not significantly affect the age at marriage.

As the region under consideration was primarily agricultural, the Manifesto on the abolition of serfdom in 1861 was an important event in life of the peasant population of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. Peasant reform did not lead to a simultaneous change in the situation of peasants, but created the conditions for the gradual cessation of serfdom in subsequent years.

In general, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in terms of the average age at first marriage, European Russia, even taking into account the western and northern provinces with their later marriage, was much closer to the agrarian East European countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia), or to the countries of Asia than to the countries of Western Europe and North America. Whereas in Western Europe and North America the mean marriage age for women ranged from 24 to 27 years and for men – from 27 to 29 years, in Russia it was at least 4 years lower for both sexes (Zaharov, 2006a).

The tradition of early marriages existed long in the Russian Empire. In Western Europe from the middle of the second millennium, a new, European marriage pattern began to spread (Hajnal, 1979). Two main distinguishing features of the European marriage pattern were the late age at first marriage and the high incidence of permanent celibacy. With the exception of the Baltic provinces and some other areas with a significant share of the Protestant and Catholic population, whose marriage pattern was close to the European one, traditional early and almost universal marriage dominated throughout the rest of the Russian Empire (Vishnevskiy and Tolc, 1988).

According to our data, although the average age at first marriage for both men and women was quite stable between 1860-1913, but in 1890-1913 compared to 1860–1889 a slight increase was observed (by 0.5-0.8 years), a decrease in the proportion of marriages at an early age and a certain increase in the percentage of marriages at later ages are also revealed. At the same time almost half of girls (46.3-50.6%) married under 20 years of age.

According to Vishnevskiy (1977), the traditions of early marriages were still very strong. Changes in the second half of the 19th – the early 20th centuries although have occurred, were not very pronounced and affected only those provinces where after the agrarian reform

industry quickly developed and the peasantry's migratory mobility intensified. In our case, the proportion of early marriages in men decreased significantly: from 22.2 to 13.5%.

The World War I and World War II, the Russian Revolution were important events in the 20th century. Since 1921, the territory of the Minsk region was divided between two states – the USSR and the Second Polish Republic. Two world wars influenced the marriage behavior of the population: due to the significant loss of the male population during the wars, many women at a young age became widows, i.e. the average age of remarriage decreased especially strongly among women (32.1 years in 1921-1938). Also, after the war, the proportion of never-married women under 50 increased (8.0% after World War II).

The process of urbanization was a significant socio-economic process in Belarus in the 20th century. Urbanization took place most actively during the second half of the century. The share of urban population in the republic increased more than 3 times due to migrations of the rural population: from 21.0 in 1950 to 66.1% in 1990 respectively.

The social norm, determining the age of the first marriage as 21–22 years for women and 24–25 years for men, has been maintained throughout the life of a number of generations, despite the gigantic political and socio-economic changes that have occurred in Belarusian society during this time.

Recent trends in the transformation of the age model of marriage do not look an exception against the background of other countries. In Western countries the first signs of an increase in the age at marriage were found in the second half of the 1970s, and in the 1980s this trend became prevailing in almost all European and non-European developed countries, with the exception of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Zaharov, 2006a; Zaharov, 2006b). In Belarus and the Minsk region, these trends began to appear only after 1995, at the beginning of the 21st century. New aspects in the reproductive behavior of the population, which European demographers associate with ideas about the second demographic transition, became especially noticeable in Belarus in the 1990s.

In 2017, the average age at first marriage for women in the Minsk region, Belarus was 25.6, for men – 28.0 years. However, in comparison with other countries, the mean age at first marriage was relatively low. In European countries, for example, the mean age at first marriage varied between 24.8 (Turkey) and 33.8 years (Sweden) for women, 29.6 (Poland) and 36.6 years (Sweden) for men (Eurostat).

In addition to increasing the mean age at marriage, the number of divorces, the number of consensual unions in Belarus as a whole was growing. As the 2009 census showed, 5.1% of men and 4.2% of women out of the total number were in cohabiting relationships. For 10 intercensus years (1999-2009) this indicator has grown almost one and a half times, from 3.5% to 5.1% in men and from 3% to 4.2% in women. The vast majority of men and women in Belarus have married. Permanent celibacy rates in the republic were relatively low. According to the 2009 census, only 5.9% of men aged 50 years and 3.9% of women were never married. Comparison of the proportion of never-married men and women in the Republic of Belarus aged 45-49 years with the corresponding data for other countries indicated that in Belarus this indicator remained at a relatively low level, although it had rather high growth rates (Shakhotska, 2015).

## Conclusions

The population in the central part of Belarus in the second half of the 19th century and

throughout the 20th century was characterized by the traditional pattern of nuptiality, with early marriage and low permanent celibacy levels. Until the 1910s, the vast majority of remarriages followed the death of a spouse. The number of divorces started growing in the 1920s, and thus in the early 21st century, more than half of the registered marriages eventually broke up. Due to socio-economic, political, and cultural changes in the country, the traditional marriage pattern was substituted by a European one at the turn of the 21st century (late age at first marriage, high permanent celibacy rates, and high percentage of consensual unions).

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