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**Family or Career: Policies That
Shaped the Roles of Czech Women
Within the Family Structure**

Master Thesis

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Abstract

The thesis is an analysis of the roles of Czech women within the family structure, as influenced by social and welfare policies. The primary goal of the thesis is to examine social and welfare policies implemented during the communist rule against the changes made in the transition to the democratic state after 1989, and evaluate what impact they have had on women. Individual policies regarding housing, childcare, parental leave, pensions, education, reproductive rights and women's role in employment are studied both before and after 1989, and compared with the changing roles of women in the family. Themes in the study include the cultural expectation of women to remain in the household as primary caretakers of children, the rapid advancement of women within education and employment, and the influence of policies over the maintenance of family and fertility.

Key Words:

Czech, women, family, Czech family structure, social and welfare policy

Abstrakt

Tato práce je analýza role českých žen v rámci rodinné struktury, jak je ovlivněn sociální a sociální politiky. Primárním cílem této práce je prozkoumat sociální a podpůrné politiky prováděné za komunistického režimu proti změnám provedeným v oblasti přechodu k demokratickému státu po roce 1989, a zhodnotit, jaký dopad budou mít na ženy. Jednotlivá opatření v oblasti bydlení, péče o děti, rodičovskou dovolenou, důchodů, vzdělávání, reprodukční práva a role žen v zaměstnání jsou studovány před i po roce 1989, a ve srovnání s měnící se role žen v rodině. Témata ve studii patří kulturní očekávání žen zůstat v domácnosti jako primární ošetřovatelé dětí, rychlý pokrok žen v oblasti vzdělávání a zaměstnanosti, a vliv politiky nad udržování rodiny a plodnosti.

Klíčová slova:

České ženy, rodina, česká rodinná struktura, sociální a pomocné politika

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague

Rebecca Heinen

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Master Thesis Proposal

Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences

Institute of Sociological Studies: Sociology in the European Context

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Topic: Policy effects on Czech women and their role in the family structure under the communist rule and through the transition into the democratic state.

Research Question: Did the changes in social welfare policies before and after the democratic transition in 1989 shape the desire of women in the Czech Republic to remain home with the family or pursue a full time career?

Hypothesis: Policies implemented under the communist regime forced women out of the home and into the workforce, leading to a change in the Czech tradition of women putting emphasis on remaining home with the family even after the democratic transition.

Outline: 1. Introduction 2. Methodology 3. Historical Background 4. Policies pre 1989 5. Policies post 1989 6. Conclusions

Literature Review: *Gender, Globalization and Postsocialism* by Jacqui True (publishing year: 2003), *The Gender Dimension of Social Security Reform in Central and Eastern Europe: Case Studies of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland* (publishing year: 2003), *Re-Emerging Diversity: Rapid Fertility Changes in Central and Eastern Europe after the Collapse of the Communist Regimes* by Tomas Sobotka (2003), *Czech Republic: A Rapids Transformation of Fertility and Family behavior* by Tomas Sobotka et al (2008), *Divorce and Marital Dissolution in the Czech Republic and Austria: The Role of Premarital Cohabitation* by Krystof Zeman (2003), *The Transition of Nuptiality and Fertility in the Czech Republic since the 1990s: The Role of Women's Education and its Expansion* by Krystof Zeman (2007)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Exploring the transition of women's rights and gender roles in a variety of societies is a commonly researched topic. Especially in the last century, many aspects of gender have evolved within countless cultures around the world. There are, at times, commonalities in the evolution of women in society, however each region experiences change within the context of their social and cultural parameters.

Regions such as the former Czechoslovak state encounter a more unique situation. The women of Czechoslovakia didn't only face natural societal shifts that influenced their place in the family structure, but they did so during a century of great political change and upheaval. For over four decades, Czech women were forced to exist in a society with sudden new social policies encouraging them out of the household while the people still clung to the cultural model of the woman being the caretaker of the home and the family unit.

After World War II, Czechoslovak women found their country overtaken by the new socialist regime, and thus were required to take on differing roles as new social policies were put into place. As a result of the war efforts, women were already beginning to become accustomed to assuming roles of employment outside of the household. World War II left many women with few options other than to support their country and their family by entering the workforce. The socialist regime built on this by placing the majority of women into employment positions as a way to maintain and strengthen the society and economy. Simultaneously, the regime pushed a pro-family agenda; creating many policy incentives to drive Czechoslovak women toward the desire to bear children.

During the socialist era, women arguably had a smooth transition going from roles predominately focused on childcare and running of the households to holding positions of employment outside the home while also still expected to be the main family caregiver. This was achieved by the implementation of pro-family policies, including housing assistance, childcare, parental leave, and guaranteed employment. Most families became reliant on two incomes, yet the tradition of women holding the position of the main caretaker of children and the one who ran the household and completely most housekeeping tasks and cooking was maintained (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber 2003).

The reason this so called smooth transition out of the household and into careers can be argued is due to the societal familial model change being part of the new communist view of an ideal society. Traditional Czech families put an emphasis on men as the head of the household, yet strongly recognized women as the head of the home as far as being responsible for childcare, cooking, shopping and overall household cleaning and upkeep¹. With the introduction of the Communist regime, women were expected to join the workforce to support the culture of each individual doing their part to benefit the collective society. The regime proudly flaunted policies and benefits that were put into place to make this system effective, yet when taking a closer look at the actual conditions for Czech families it is evident that not all of the policies and systems that were implemented were as seamless and constructive as the regime wanted them to appear.

¹ With the gender roles clearly defined in Czech society, it would be assumed that most women desired to return to their roles within the home with the conclusion of WWII. Instead they were suddenly faced with the introduction of Communist ideals (True, 2003).

It has been debated that the regime opened the door for the introduction of Czech feminism (True, 2003). The new system focused on the equality of genders², praising itself for placing women in new employment roles, in political positions, and increased the level of education for the female population. When taking a closer look at the socialist attempt to equalize genders in society, it can be easily seen that the opportunities provided to women may have perhaps on the surface appeared to position them in equal positions with men, but were essentially only in place to constrain the women into remaining in familial roles. Instead of equalizing society, the failed policies resulted in increasing the overall workload for Czech women, resulting in them feeling the pressure to not only maintain full time careers but also still keep up with their traditional roles as homemakers and child caretakers.

The gap between gender equality became unmistakable after the dissolution of the Soviet rule in 1989. When transferring into the new democracy, economic and social equality gaps between men and women were exposed. Women were now openly living in a culture depending on them to be the main household caretakers, cooks, childcare providers and also still hold a higher level of education as well as a career outside of the home. Without many of the pre-existing socialist policies that had been in place, entirely successful or not, for over four decades, the women of the newly forming Czech democracy needed to find their place in the new society. The Communist mentality had bragged that their political and economic system was empowering and equalizing women, but when the new democracy was faced with developing its own social welfare policies it became evident that Czech women were now faced with a similar dilemma

² While this was a stated policy of the regime, it is commonly disputed as farce and simply covered up the increasing separation of genders and their rights in society.

that Western women complained of; trying to balance a career while also maintaining the home and childcare responsibilities.

There are an abundance of studies that have been conducted on gender equality and the democratic transformation, as well as on the evolution of the Czech family in regards to fertility, marriage and divorce, cohabitation, childcare, and household responsibilities. What can be valuable to examine and explore further, are any differences between women living under the socialist rule in regards to their familial responsibilities, and the roles of women within the modern family structure in the Czech Republic. This comparison is an interesting one since the women living during both periods were exposed to similar cultural expectations of managing children and the household, while also being pressured by the government and by societal factors to be employed. The two political eras share the issues of women maintaining traditional roles within the household as well as exploring careers, yet these issues were caused by different forces, and the differing policies surely influenced the choices that women made between staying home in the traditional fashion or wholeheartedly venturing into employment and an independent life outside of the home.

I was especially interested in exploring the Communist assertion that their political system enabled women to be equals in society and provided all policies and resources necessary to enable women to work outside of the home. Since it can be said that Czech women entered the workforce and sprung into a feminist period, I was curious to study whether or not this sudden shift in family structure was effective and how many of the Soviet policies were kept in place during the democratic transition in the early 1990s and onward to the present. In a time when many women in Western

cultures are struggling with finding a way to “have it all” and balance both a career and time at home with their children as well as potentially focusing on a marriage, I wanted to compare to see if the rushed Czech advancement of women resulted in a different outcome.

The thesis is not intended to contrast and compare all gender related topics between the two time periods and political systems, but instead focus on women within the family structure. In particular, the welfare and social policies that influence women’s familial roles are examined. It is also not intended to be a thorough explanation of each individual policy, but instead an overview of a number of policies to identify major themes and see how the policies were an influence on women’s life choices. The study begins by exploring the shared experience of the implemented policies during the socialist era, and then compares how each emerging democratic state chose to revise the policies to better suit the new, modern society. Since 1989 have Czech women found themselves in similar or differing situations in regards to childcare and the balance between household and family and employment outside of the home? Comparison is also done on the cultural expectation of gender roles and their participation in child rearing, household work and cooking.

While in the thesis I am curious to discover if Czech women feel the same internal struggle being caught between family and career like is a common complaint among Western women, it is also not intended to be a comparison study between Czechs and the Western cultures. This idea is only mentioned assist in explaining the desire to uncover aspects of the past and current Czech culture. The research is intended to investigate whether or not the social welfare policies put in place at any time under the Communist regime or currently allow Czech women the freedom to

maintain the homes and efficiently care for their children and relationships while also succeeding in a full time career if that is what they have chosen.

For this study, the term 'family' is used to refer to a traditional model of the nuclear family, including two heterosexual adults either married or cohabitating and the addition of children. Other family constructs, including homosexual relationships, have not been taken into consideration at this time as a way to simplify the study. The thesis is intended to examine policies and the way they affect the lives of women living in this defined 'traditional' lifestyle and structure.

Just as it is necessary to define the family unit, so is it to define the meaning of women's roles within the family. In this case, it is an investigation into the traditional Czech family, which possess a clear emphasis on the women maintaining control in the home. The traditional Czech viewpoint holds an expectation for the women to remain home to care for children full-time, as well as complete the household tasks including cooking, cleaning and the running of errands. It is therefore the intent to study any change in this traditional allocation of gender roles. The data has been analyzed to determine what influence social and welfare policies have had on the perception of society towards this traditional view of the women's place at home, as well as the women's perspective and how the policies may influence the Czech women's motivation to remain home in the traditional role, or pursue activities outside of the home, creating a shift in gender roles and the traditional set-up of the family.

Acknowledging that social policies only play a small role in the formation of gender roles and the culture of families, this study in no way diminishes the importance of looking at other factors. Other societal factors

such as marriage, cohabitation, divorce, etc. have their own unique influence on women and the family structure, however this study will compare and draw conclusions on the narrowed area of social and welfare policies in regards to women and the family to provide a more simplified research and analysis perspective, given the time and length of the project. The one exception has been the inclusion of the discussion on birthrate. This has been added to the discussion surrounding the evolution of social policies, as the changing birthrate was commonly the main motivation behind the implementation of many of the policies. It should also be noted that the study is not intended to be a complete and thorough review of each policy and their transformations. Instead, it provides a general overview of the important policies, both during the socialist era and into the new democracy, that hold any responsibility in determining what roles the women hold within the family.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The topics of social and welfare policies, as well as gender studies are well researched, and therefore there are a wide variety of studies and theories to investigate. Every attempt was made to locate studies and examine articles that explained the policies of social welfare, but that also assisted in analyzing information and statistics in a way that provided insight into the way the policies were an influence on women; specifically the impact on their choice to live traditional, family focused lives, pursue a career, or try to balance both lifestyles together.

Initial research for the thesis began by reading *Gender, Globalization and Postsocialism* by Jacqui True (publishing year: 2003) as well as *The Gender Dimension of Social Security Reform in Central and Eastern Europe: Case Studies of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland* (publishing year: 2003). These were invaluable sources in providing and overview of many policies that influenced women's roles and family dynamics under the socialist rule, as well as explaining many of the transitions that occurred as the new democracy took shape. Beginning by reading several books written entirely on topics in my research area was helpful in bringing to light some of they key issues and therefore providing further direction towards areas that would be beneficial to explore further.

True's book certainly served as an initial source of inspiration for the thesis and it's direction. The intent of True's book is to present a study of gender revolution for Czech women during the post-socialist transition period. She states that instead of focusing on economics and politics, she wanted to focus on individuals and the reality of how the changes shaped their lives (p.1). This particular book aimed to explore gender and global

transformations as well as the feminist view on globalization (p.1) Similar to True's focus on the individual and personal level, I wanted to study specific lifestyles and personal experiences, though I have chosen to look at some of the same topics highlighted in the book and focus on their influence on women within the family structure. The book was a pleasant mixture statistics and policy information, along with summaries and conclusions made by the author.

Tomas Sobotka and Krystof Zeman became two of my favored researchers. Sobotka has authored several studies on fertility that explore many of the Czech social policies in great detail. He conducted a comparative analysis of fertility and demographics in his publication *Re-Emerging Diversity: Rapid Fertility Changes in Central and Eastern Europe after the Collapse of the Communist Regimes* (2003). Sobotka examines topics of birthrates, reproductive policies, and marriage and living arrangements in 16 countries, including both the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. His interpretations of government reported statistics from the Council of Europe and Eurostat mixed with information from a variety of other studies are combined to provide a concise representation of the issues surrounding fertility both prior to and post 1989. Sobotka was also a contributing author in the report, *Czech Republic: A Rapid Transformation of Fertility and Family Behaviour After the Collapse of State Socialism* (2008). Written five years after the previous article, this study presented updated information on some of the same policies, as well as took a look at others that the previous report did not mention.

I used Krystof Zeman's diploma thesis from Charles University titled *Divorce and Marital Dissolution in the Czech Republic and Australia: The Role of Premarital Cohabitation* (2003), as well as his report *Transition Of*

Nuptiality And Fertility In The Czech Republic Since The 1990S: The Role Of Women's Education And Its Expansion, (2007). Although each of Zeman's reports do not directly line up the policies I am comparing, Zeman refers to many of the policies and how they relate to his specific studies. His research was particularly invaluable, as he is employed in the demographic statistics section of the Czech Statistical Office. Therefore, Zeman's studies contain many specific statistics that other sources perhaps did not provide, but Zeman also provided in depth analysis of the statistics, which was especially helpful when doing research.

Zeman's research was a helpful introduction to statistical sources and data, such as the Fertility and Family Survey (FFS), Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), Council of Europe, and Eurostat have been examined by myself as well as many authors of references cited. The statistical results were scrutinized according to my chosen methodology and analyzed for the purposes of answering the specific research question. Every care was taken to not make assumptions, but to question the raw results within social and cultural context. In many cases, authors analyzed the statistical data to fit their specific research model. In those instances, the data has been analyzed independently and the additional researcher's analysis was also taken into consideration.

3. METHODOLOGY

When conducting research on Czech social and welfare policies, gender issues and the roles of women in the Czech family, the information was analyzed using comparative historical and inverse deductive methods. The overall goal of the research and its produced conclusions is to simply provide another aspect into the larger, more complex topics of gender relations and the influences of policies. It is my desire that this narrower focus on one part of these multifaceted issues may find a place within the other theoretical studies done on similar topics to altogether provide a better understanding of each facet.

It is my belief that the continuing research on each aspect of gender relations and, specifically, the woman's role evolving role in the family is an important topic of study. Now in the 21st century, the roles of women and the construction of families is an important and heavily studied topic. The Czech case is an exceptionally interesting one in this area, as the Czech women didn't only experience the natural progression of society during the past seventy years, but they were also forced to continually redefine their roles in society while experiencing major political revolutions.

Many societies around the world have seen the evolution of women breaking out from the traditional familial roles as wives, mothers, cooks and housekeepers to developing a more individual focused lifestyle that revolves less around children and the family and looks more towards individual goals and accomplishments such as obtaining education or employment. In this regard, the Czech case is again a unique one, as the post Second World War transition into the socialist state rapidly pushed women out of their homes and into the workplace. However, producing a

culture where the majority of women were employed outside of the home did not necessarily guarantee that the traditional Czech view of women as child caretakers and housekeepers was also changed as quickly. The policies examined in the thesis look at the push and pull factors that influenced women to remain home in the traditional female family roles or to modernize their view of family and place their focus on a lifestyle outside of the home.

I fully recognize that not all social, cultural or policy factors may have been taken into account during the study. Considering the complex mixture of variables that influence family structures as well as gender roles, I consciously chose to focus on specific policies and draw conclusions from those alone. Again, the aim of the thesis is simply to be a piece of the larger puzzle, focusing on and drawing conclusions from selection of policies.

Since the research involved a larger range of social policies, the comparative historical method was the main choice for my analysis. Many conclusions have been drawn by comparing the long and short-term outcomes of each policy under the socialist rule with the outcomes of the updated policies developed under the new democratic rule. The comparison of each policy revision sheds light on the impact on both women and Czech society as a whole. This comparison makes it possible to see how the forty years of communist rule influenced society permanently or served only as a façade of what the regime was providing.

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1948 the totalitarian regime took over Czechoslovakia, leaving all residents subject to the new socialist government and policies. During the forty-one years of socialist rule, the Czech people experienced some dramatic changes in the social welfare systems that significantly affected individuals; specifically women and their new role in society and the family. The regimes' agenda of mass nationalization was introduced as a method to equalize society; including equality between the genders. The way the regime shaped the labor force and the policies put into place were all explained as fundamental aspects of their master equalization plan. With further investigation into how the policies actually resulted in affecting the lives of women on an individual level, it becomes clear that the policies did not always succeed in the mass equalizing that they were advertised to provide. Instead, many of these policies restructured and at times complicated what role women became required to hold in the family.

To be able to evaluate and draw conclusions of the effects that policies developed during the establishment of new democratic systems in the Czech Republic has had on women, it is first necessary to understand these policies that were in place under the regime. The socialist policies regarding housing, childcare, reproductive rights and women's retirement age played a large role in shaping the society. New democratic policies were chosen in reaction to the result of the previous policy outcomes.

5. POLICIES UNDER THE COMMUNIST REGIME

5.1 HOUSING

Under the rule of the socialist system, not only businesses, but also private property became a possession of the state. This nationalized system offered the illusion of low cost rent, yet subsequently led to a massive housing shortage throughout the country (Zerecor, 2011). Notably during the first portion of the socialist era, very little focus was placed on the construction of new residential buildings, nor was there concern over the general upkeep and repair of the existing communities. (Ibid.). Once new residential facilities were ultimately constructed, many Czechs were in need of housing and the newly built residences became highly sought after. Many citizens began to resort to constructing their own homes instead of waiting for state owned properties to become available (True, 2003).

By the end of the socialist regimes' rule in the late 1980s, the vast majority of the population could be found living in communal apartment communities as opposed to single-family housing. Though there were slightly more available living options in the rural areas, the majority of the population was still drawn to live in populated areas for employment opportunities. The country was short between 120,000 – 260,000 homes to satisfy the needs of the population by the fall of the regime in 1989. Approximately sixteen percent of the population lived with relatives, and nine percent of the flats were home at least two nuclear families (True, 2003).

Limited housing options became the societal norm, and consequently began to also influence the culture of the family structure.

The unavailability of additional housing options caused it to be commonplace for multiple generations of a family to share a residence (True, 2003; Zeman, 2003). According to Zeman (2003), 14% of women born around 1960 moved out of their parents' home before entering into marriage. After marriage, many young couples found it necessary to reside with their in-laws, as no other options were available. This type of living arrangement became a cause of contention for many as family members were forced to share close quarters and personal living space was intensely restricted.

The housing shortage also doubled as a method for the regime to motivate the population to reproduce. In a society with a declining fertility rate, young couples producing children were given priority when it came to obtaining independent housing. Young couples³ were provided with low-interest loans for purchasing housing (Frejka, 1980). Additionally, the government provided these couples with additional financial support once they began to produce children. The rates increased with every additional child the couple had, providing incentive to create multiple children.⁴ (Ibid.). This in turn inspired many young couples to marry and begin having children at an early age to achieve household and financial independence. While half of young couples were still forced to remain in their family home, forty-four percent were given independent housing (True, 2003). Couples with young children also learned to rely on their mothers or grandmothers to provide free childcare for the babies, as they were accustomed to sharing housing with the entire extended family. In this way women were raised to marry early, produce children at a young age while still

³ In this case, young referred to couples under the age of 30 (Frejka, 1980).

⁴ The financial incentives for having one or more children were raised multiple times during the 1960s and 1970s as the country experienced a greater decline in fertility rates (Ibid.).

maintaining both a household and a career outside of the home, then taking on the role of caretaker to their grandchildren later in life (Jusova, Siklova, 2016).

Numerous studies⁵ mention the cultural phenomena of individuals remaining in the same family home even after a marriage or romantic partnerships has been dissolved. Many couples had no alternative living arrangements, forcing ex partners to remain in a cohabiting environment for years at a time even after a separation. This is believed to be a contributing factor to many women choosing to remain in their marriage, as a divorce could not ensure a physical separation from their partner (Wagner and Wiess, 2006).

5.2 REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Under the socialist rule, the concept of having children and building a family unit was encouraged and was strongly ingrained as the social norm. For women to live their entire adult lives without producing children was highly unusual. During this communist era, contraceptive use was not a widespread custom for Czech women. Additionally, the public's education on sexual health and reproduction was limited, forming a society with a great number of unwanted pregnancies for both married and unmarried women.

After a dip in fertility after the Second World War, the Czechoslovak birthrate rose again until the era of mass political disagreement in the late

⁵ The concepts of individuals forced continue cohabiting even after the dissolution of a romantic relationship was mentioned in many studies; for example, True, 2003; Zeman, 2003.

1960s (Frejka, 1980). In this period of higher fertility rate, the already more secularized Czechoslovak state legalized abortion in 1957. No accounts of any government or social pushback on the issue have been found, suggesting that the vast majority of the population did not have concerns or opposition to such a policy. Abortion had been legalized for cases of genetic mutations or the threat to the life of the mother in 1950, but women seeking abortions for the use of personal family planning prior to the full legalization in 1957 could face jail time if discovered (un.org).

The combination of low rates of education regarding reproduction and sexual health and the legalization of abortion in 1957 led to a society with a high rate of abortions by the end of the socialist period. According to law, each woman was required to request permission and provide a reason to be eligible for an abortion. A special commission of four members⁶ was formed for this purpose, though statistically speaking; very few women were ever denied the right to an abortion for any circumstance (Frejka, 1980; un.org). Abortions were permitted until the 12th week, though in some cases performed until the 26th week with medical permission in cases of health concerns for the mother or the fetus (Ibid.). By 1986, the abortion commission was removed entirely, giving women the right to the procedure by consulting their physician directly and without the need for permission⁷ (Ibid.).

Abortion rose to be the leading form of contraception in Czechoslovakia due to its increased accessibility for women and the cost

⁶ The commission was reduced from four members to three in 1962. The members were a medical professional, counselor and a deputy (un.org).

⁷ According to Gawdiak (1989), the removal of the abortion commission was a clear indication that the regime recognized the need to improve the declining birthrate in the country.

being waived by the state. Even with the associated risks, 144,712 abortions were reported in 1985 (Gawdiak, 1989). Access to this service beginning in the late 1950s also allowed women to begin to consciously control the size of the family they desired and possess more control over their reproductive health. The Czechoslovak society perceived abortion as a positive form of conscious family planning, not a controversial or highly debated social topic as it was seen in other areas.

5.3 CHILDCARE

Traditionally, the Czech family was a unit consisting of a father, mother, and children. The role of the father was obtaining employment outside of the family home to economically care for the other members. In turn, the mother's role was to stay at home caring for the children, as well as serving as the primary housekeeper and provide the cooking. This model fit right into the proclaimed socialist ideal of maintaining a strong family unit with a male as the head and the woman supporting the family as child bearer and caretaker.

Under the socialist rule however, the nationalized economy was formulated around the concept of not only men, but now also women entering the workforce fulltime. This societal shift presented an entirely new lifestyle for Czech women, and along with it came a variety of new challenges. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges became sorting new childcare as the women were taken from their typical positions in the home.

To provide a balance for women between their newly expected roles in the workplace and the need for child caretakers in their absence, the

regime put into place a state run childcare system. Though it may have appeared on the surface as though these systems created a seamless adjustment for women to enter the workforce fulltime as well as receive convenient childcare paid for by the state, in truth the reality for most women remained slightly more complicated.

The narrative told by the regime was that their newly implemented childcare facilities made it possible for women to be employed outside of their home, be ensured that their children were well cared for during their working hours, and no incur any additional costs for childcare. Unfortunately, many women found the state run childcare facilities to be overfilled and the conditions inadequate. Reportedly in 1984, the state run nurseries for children under age five could only accept approximately 10 percent or less of the children in that age group in need of care (Gawdiak, 1989).

Many of the younger families with women who had young children had taken advantage of the tax breaks and housing incentives provided by the state. Under the regime's conditions, the families were given housing priority to support their family expansion and the production of children. Countless young mothers, no doubt happy to have received private and new housing, found that most of the childcare centers and kindergartens were located quite far from the new housing communities (Gawdiak, 1989). This situation left many women not only competing for spaces in the already over filled childcare facilities, but with the added bourdon of a long commute before and after their work to drop off and retrieve their children. The combination of poorly run facilities, the distance of travel to the facilities, and the competitiveness to gain placement for children meant that for many families the offered childcare services were simply unusable.

Without socialized childcare for many families, yet the demand for women to be employed, the extended family became the primary form of childcare. Using mothers or grandmothers as the primary caregivers while mothers were at work created a cost free solution for both the families and the state. The regime took pride in publicly showing how the state-run childcare centers and schools were provided, while in reality the regime benefitted from not needing to invest in improving what childcare was offered. The reliance that mothers were forced to have with the older female members of their extended family certainly shaped the role of the women in society. The young mothers were expected to work during the day and then resume the primary childcare role in the evening and on the weekends while the retired mothers and grandmothers were expected to take over as the primary childcare providers while the mothers were at work, receiving no compensation for this expectation. The pressure of these roles were made easy for some by the already forced joint living situation for many extended families, but almost all women had to accept their roles as essentially providing childcare for family members free of charge in lieu of state resources. Ultimately, this assumed burden on the family unit led to a decline of the overall birthrate, as more and more women came to the realization that it was too difficult to maintain their work life while also ensuring proper care for their children (Gawdiak, 1989). By the fall of the regime in 1989, more women were choosing to focus on their careers than were choosing to both work and try to successfully raise children.

Many Czech women felt a sense of pride regarding their ability to manage the household and childcare responsibilities; comparing the new culture under the regime as being somewhat an extension of the way women forced themselves to cope with the hardships of life during the

Second World War (Paludi, 2014). The constant expectation to remain responsible for all household tasks, shopping, childcare and expected full-time employment did wear on the women over the decades, and frustrations were expressed over need to excel and succeed both in and outside of the home (Gawdiak, 1989, Paludi, 2014). Even with an increase in women choosing to focus more intently on their individual careers, many preferred the option to work part-time to ease the double workload, though these types of positions were rarely available (Paludi, 2014).

5.4 PARENTAL LEAVE

The women of Czechoslovakia assumed their new dual roles as both workers outside of the home and caretakers of children during all non-working times. The socialist system went through its own transformation of policies surrounding the allotted time off women were given for the birth of a child, as well as pay allowances. The driving force behind updating the system was the rapid decline in the country's birthrate due to the shift of women leaving the household and working full-time.

With Czechoslovakia's birthrate experiencing decline in the 1960s, by the summer of 1970 the regime implemented the first update to accommodate the women in the workplace as an attempt to keep the female population from getting turned off to the idea of creating a family. The new policy gave an option for mothers to extend their maternity leave, if desired. There were also newly introduced grants to provide extra incentive for bearing children, including a monthly sum of anywhere between 500 to 1,200 Czech Crowns, depending on the number of

children in the family under age two⁸, and under the condition that the mother chose to stay home as the caregiver for the children (Frejka, 1980). Even with these added motivations to maintain focus on building a family, the country saw a continuation in the drop in birthrate. The policies were extended to also provide support to mothers who stayed home to care for their children even if they were not previously employed in the fall of 1971 (Ibid). As long as women had a minimum of two children (one in school and one under age two), they were eligible to apply for the state monthly supplements, and many women – up to 80 percent (Ibid) - did take advantage of the support.

The 1960s through 1980s were a time of borderline desperation for the socialist regime to keep control of the birthrate to ensure that the next generation would provide a large enough workforce to be able to keep the economy running. Even though it had become commonplace for women to place in employment roles, there was new pressure to bring back ideological views of traditional families and encourage the women not to abandon the desire to raise children. The policies implemented in the 1970s produced positive results, as women surveyed in 1973 admitted that receiving monetary benefits for having children and leaving their careers to stay home was the greatest incentive for them to be attracted to return to that traditional lifestyle (Frejka, 1980). Frejka (1980) reported that between 1970 and 1976 the number of women taking time off for an extended maternity leave rose from 156,000 to 371,000.

Additionally, women were offered the possibility of added benefits under special circumstances. Women who were single heads of their household received higher allowances, as did mothers encountering

⁸ Grants were also dependent on mothers having school-aged children (Frejka, 1980).

multiple births or those possessing a child with a handicap (Gawdiak, 1989). The allowances given as incentives to mothers also bore their burdens on the employers. The laws went so far to protect women in their role as primary child bearers and providers that employers were banned from terminating any mother with at least one child under the age of three. As long as the children were under age fifteen, a woman's employer was also lawfully required to find alternate employment for any woman they wished to fire before they were able to let her go (Ibid).

By the time of the regime's dissolution in 1989, policy stated that women had the right to twenty-six weeks of maternity leave and were given 90 percent of their pay during the leave (Gawdiak, 1989). In special circumstances, women were allowed to extend the leave an additional nine weeks, and if requested, women could take another year away from employment to stay home, knowing that their employer was required to hold their level of seniority in their absence (True, 2003).

The increase in maternity leave, especially in the final thirty years of the regime, had both positive and negative effects on women, families, and the relationship between women and their employers. These new policies did succeed in motivating women to consider making staying home to raise their children a priority over the advancement of their careers. However, many women also experience severe conflict when choosing between traditional family focused lives and succeeding in the workplace.

By the 1960s, Czech women had adjusted to the new culture norm of exploring a career outside of their household. Women began take their new careers more seriously and were advancing into new roles. However, the cultural expectation, as well as pressure from the regime, was still to make children and family the priority. The conflict of trying to juggle both a

successful career and raise happy and healthy children increased for the majority of women. The regime covered a lot of the negativity by publicly putting these new policies into place, giving the appearance of being pro-women, pro-families and providing support so women could still pursue careers as well as take time off for raising their children. Unfortunately, the reality for many women was increasing hidden discrimination in the workplace.

As women were given more state benefits and the laws restricted employers from replacing women during their time of leave, the employers began to fight against this by limiting the roles they gave to women of childbearing age (Gawdiak, 1989). Since employers knew it was likely that these women would at any time become pregnant and then make use of the leave allowances, commonly women were kept from higher ranking positions in the workplace, invoking a separation of advancement between the genders. This subtle discrimination was an area of frustration for women, but the employers' way of fighting back against policies that they saw hurting their business.

5.5 RETIREMENT AGE AND PENSIONS

During the socialist era, the country's set retirement age and allocation of pensions were directly related to the family structure. This area was one where the regime was able to paint the illusion of providing the best options for the citizens, while making the policies most benefit the regime. The government chose to lower the retirement age for women to 53. This may have appeared to be a generous way of allowing the women to leave the workforce and retire at an early age, but the other social

policies left the female retirees no option but to use their retirement as a time to provide care for their grandchildren. The policy systems were strategically set up that women could retire early enough to provide care for the younger generation in the family, as well as care for their aging parents if necessary, while saving the government the costs of childcare and elder care (True, 2003). Though many women were not satisfied with this way of life, they also felt compelled to provide the support to family members, knowing that if they did not provide assistance, there were limited other options for care.

By the end of the socialist rule, approximately twenty-five percent of the population was receiving a government pension. The pension rate was standard for all beneficiaries, and most were disabled, widows, senior citizens or orphans. The pension rate was below the average monthly wage, putting those receiving benefits in a state of poverty. Most of the individuals eligible for such benefits found the amount unsatisfactory, and therefore took initiative in many instances to seek out employment for supplementary income (Gawdiak, 1989).

5.6 BIRTHRATE

Even though birthrate itself is not a social policy, many of the policies discussed were created or edited in reaction to the change in birthrates. Since this factor has proven to be so influential and is tied up in the policies and many of their overall intents, it is being included into the study.

By the 1960s, the socialist regime had succeeded in implementing the social policies that had been advertised to society as being the policies

to equalize society, including the equalizing of genders. These policies included pushing all women into the full-time labor force while state run facilities cared for children and making a clear path for women to achieve the same educational levels as the Czech males. These shifts for women and where their was in society has been both praised for accelerating the so-called feminist movement and advancement of women within record time, as well as criticized for inciting an expectation of a double workload for women, since the traditional views of the woman as the primary childcare provider and maintainer of the household were not diminished as the new roles rose in society. Ultimately women were left caught between modernity and their push to advance outside of the home while still being culturally expected to complete all traditional female household duties.

While the new social policies were intended to further equalize society and maintain the socialist labor force and economy, the real outcome was a rapid decline in Czech fertility rates. As women were given access to education and instructed to leave the house and create a full-time career, they began to put their focus on these new priorities, many leaving their past lives as housewives behind. In the 1960s, most women had obtained employments outside of the home. Additionally, families were feeling the restrictions of the housing policies by that time. The mixture of women gaining access to education and career paths while feeling as if the socialist housing system provided no room for families to grow independently resulted in the Czechoslovak birth rate plummeting (True, 2003).

Before the 1960s, there was usually no time between women leaving their parents' home and moving to live with a husband or partner. Entering into a serious, committed relationship at an early age led women

to commonly give up the pursuit of education or a career and instead begin to have children at an earlier age. More than half of Czech women in the 1950s had born at least two children (Zeman, 2003). The introduction of the initial socialist policies interrupted this cycle of entering into marriage, and an increasing amount of women began to put it off until a later age. Female focus on education and career caused a steady rise in the average marriage age, which in turn also prolonged starting a family in many cases.

The sudden and unexpected drop in fertility cause the socialist regime to re-evaluate their policies and begin providing incentives to make family life appeal to women once again. The lowest birthrate was reached in 1968, yet the regime was able to make the rate rise during the 1970s with their pro-family policies (True, 2003). Financial incentives were added to existing policies, allowing women that bore children priority to services and promised to assist in relieving the burden of working while also raising a family (Sobotka et al, 2008). In fact, Czechoslovakia's fertility rate was raised so greatly that only seven years later in 1975 it was at one of the highest levels throughout Europe after new policies promoted around 200,000 additional births (True, 2003). The socialist structure idealized a two-child family structure, yet the success of the pro-family policies and incentives caused 55% of the population in 1974 to express feeling as though the family size should preferably include more than two children⁹ (Sobotka et al, 2008).

5.7 EDUCATION

⁹ Sobotka's results also found that results from the same survey circulated in 1977 showed the percentage fall only slightly to 53% preferring greater than two children.

Some have argued that the socialist system encouraged the beginnings of feminism and pushing the Czechoslovak women to pursue a life outside of staying home to raise children and perform household tasks. Many times this view is backed by looking at the rise in women obtaining higher education under the socialist rule. In addition to putting the women to work, the regime put emphasis on improving their education level. By the 1980s, Czech women had a higher level of education in specialized fields than the women in Western societies, proving that under the socialist rule women had been allowed to gain a higher standard of education in a shorter amount of time than many women throughout the world (True, 2003). The argument can be made that without the socialist push towards education and employment the advancement of Czech women in specialized careers may still be lagging far behind.

According to Gawdiak (1989), the level of women achieving higher education increased 93 percent in the decade from 1970 to 1980. As women became comfortable with their new roles of employment, and were able to rely mainly on extended family to care for children during the day, more found it desirable to attend higher education and ultimately advance their career paths.

Even as the women were flocking towards higher education and using their degrees in the work field, most women were still stereotyped and confined within certain subjects that were considered to be suitable. These fields were typically healthcare, teaching, social services and childcare (Gawdiak, 1989). Men typically dominated areas such as science, medicine and possessed the majority management roles in business (True, 2003).

5.8 WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

To complete the regime's economic plan to form a socialist society, the women were expected to leave their roles as homemakers and childcare providers and enter the workforce full-time. With a society that was built to rely on every individual participating in a way to keep all industries functioning, the women were forced to adjust to working outside of the home and learning to balance full time employment while still viewed culturally as the primary caretaker of the home as well. The regime promoted their ideology that women entering the workforce was their way of creating equality between the sexes (Frejka, 1980). While the socialist period did provide entrance for Czech women into the working world, the transition came with difficulty for them as well.

Czech women had already begun to enter the workforce before the socialist takeover, due to the demand for a greater labor force during and immediately following the Second World War (Gawdiak, 1989). The amount of women assimilated into employment positions increased with each decade. By 1950, about thirty percent of women were employed, and that number increased to sixty percent by 1960 (Frejka, 1980), and had reached ninety percent of women employed by 1984¹⁰ (Gawdiak, 1989). Like their male counterparts, women under the socialist system were expected to be employed on a full time basis, but the employment itself was automatically granted to women by the state (True, 2003).

Data collected in the 1980s reflects that even though the vast majority of Czech women had entered the workforce and were pursuing full-time careers, the scope of their work remained limited. Women remained typecast in fields that were viewed as traditionally female

¹⁰ Percentages taken from women aged 20 – 30, or what the regime considered to be the prime childbearing age (Frejka, 1980; Gawdiak, 1989).

dominated, such as healthcare, social work, customer service, childcare and retail (Gawdiak, 1989). Not only were women only represented in some fields, but their rate of pay was significantly lower than the pay rate of men. In 1986, the average woman's salary was about 2/3 the rate of a man's in a similar position, and only around six percent of management level positions were held by a female worker (Gawdiak, 1989). Even with women seemingly restricted to certain types of employment roles, the official policy of the regime stated that the push of women into the workforce was one of the main ways to make the rights of men and women equal in the socialist society.

Along with the typecasting of careers women held, the plan of implementing the women to work policy as a society equalizer also failed in regards to wages earned. During the socialist years the average woman working full-time only earned sixty-seven percent of what the average male earnings were (Paludi, 2014). This wage discrepancy clearly showed how the regime's 'equality' system was failing, but also kept women dependent on men, typically a husband or significant other, to provide for the family economically, as the women's salary was not sufficient enough to become fully independent. In turn, many women were inspired to maintain focus on their children and running of the households, knowing that holding a full-time career as successful as their male counterparts was highly unlikely.

The regime also took credit for the set-up of state run assistance for women, such as increased access to education and childcare as ways that the socialist society lightened the burden of women attempting to deal with the stresses of balancing a full-time career along with raising a family. To many women though, the transition into the workforce was only seen as the start of women working two shifts – the daytime shift in their career,

and the evening and weekend shift as child caretaker and homemaker (True, 2003). In the 1970s the average family was dependent on two incomes, yet also maintained an average of two children per family (Ibid). This reveals that the family structure in regards to have children to care for was not altered; yet the new society was now fully reliant on women maintaining their roles of employment for the financial stability of the family unit. As much as women began to advance in the workplace, society did not release the traditional view that women were responsible for children and the upkeep of the house. Therefore, women essentially took on two full time jobs, with the second being the evening and weekend responsibilities of childcare and household maintenance. Rarely did Czech men step in to lend a hand, still holding onto those traditional views that it remained the requirement of the woman to complete such tasks. True (2003) recognized that there were no discussions over ways to implement policies to socialize housework. The issues revolving around the completion of household tasks were never a verbalized or acted upon concern.

6. TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

The Czech Republic was caught up in a difficult time in the early 1990s. With the removal of the communist rule, they face the task of not only creating a politically and economically secure democracy, but Czech also needed to adapt to the split with the Slovak Republic. With so many issues to sort through and put into place, policies were put into place relatively quickly. While the systems under the communist rule were by no mean perfect or ideal, the change over to the democratic state highlighted the strengths and weaknesses in both the old and new policies. The new democracy found itself unable to support all of the initiatives that had been available under the regime. This did cause women and families to re-prioritize some lifestyle choices, as more responsibility for success within the society was put on the individual.

With the democratic government in power, employment was not a requirement for all, nor was employment any longer a guaranteed commodity. Caught between a culture that still found value in a traditional family unit with the male breadwinner and female homemaker and child caretaker and new capitalist society that made it more difficult for women to financially remain at home, Czech women looked to the developing policies for assistance. The reforms to the socialist policies began to shape women's family and career decisions, making an impact on the overall culture of Czech women and their modern roles within the family.

The following sections explore the change in policies under the newly formed, capitalist democracy. The same policies will be examined to compare the policy revisions that were put into place and the effects the revisions had on the women and families.

7. POLICIES UNDER THE NEW DEMOCRACY

7.1 HOUSING

With the fall of the socialist regime, the Czech housing market was once again privatized. While the housing shortage had posed many problems for Czech families for decades, including long wait times and highly competitive requirements for new housing, the transition into the new market was in no way a quick fix for the many families yearning to gain independence and a house or flat of their own¹¹.

In the process of privatization, many of the flats and buildings were thus returned to the original owner, or, in the case of their death, returned to any decedents of the original owner; buildings lacking former, pre-socialist days owners became the property of the municipalities to manage (Mikeszova, 2007). A policy of regulated rent was put into place for all citizens for their housing obtained before the ousting of the regime in 1989. At the same time, the state began to limit the previously given state housing subsidies, phasing them out by 1993 (True, 2003). Lacking the subsidies that many had become accustomed to, many families fell into situations where they no longer had the resources to properly maintain the upkeep of their homes (Lux, 2009).

As the Czech Republic moved forward with the privatization of housing, the façade of the low rents under socialism were exposed. Families who were reinstated their properties were able to survive with the newly regulated rent, conversely families who did not own such properties found themselves fighting for housing in a market that was already

¹¹ Housing availability varied greatly between urban and rural areas, but most of the population resided within or near to an urban area in 1989, and many families were anxious to live independently as a nuclear family unit.

competitive under the socialist rule, and was now subject to inflated prices under the new capitalist system. This separation of equality in the new privatized housing market is what Lux (2009) refers to as a case of privileged and unprivileged households. Instead of the new housing policies fixing the already complex and competitive market, they simply achieved splitting society in half, leaving some comfortably living with moderate prices while the rest found the even more competitive market too expensive to afford, and even if affordable housing could be found, they were not allocated the same regulated rent going forward (Lux, 2009). To help alleviate some of the housing stress, families owning multiple properties often transferred deeds between other family members, allowing relatives security in rent regulations as no official sale took place.

Complicating the system even further, the fall of the iron curtain and the opening of borders also made the new Czech housing market available to the affluent expatriate community. Possessing higher incomes than many Czechs, the foreigners were then able to enter and begin to purchase their share of property, only increasing the difficulty of the market for Czech citizens (Lux, 2009; True, 2003). The beginnings of a tourist market and the economic benefits of an inflated market surely played a part in the state remaining fairly hands off amidst these concerns.

Not only was the socialist housing shortage not solved and rent and purchasing prices increased for many, but the absence of the pro-family socialist incentives were removed. Countless young couples had relied on the housing subsidies allocated to their demographic as the most likely child bearers, and countless others had been receiving subsidies based on the number of children in the household. This was both an economic setback for the citizens as well as a reproductive setback for society. With

the family driven socialist incentives, many young couples were influenced to marry young and begin to have children early to obtain independent housing and the state subsidies. With these policies removed, the most effective policy for encouraging family and reproduction had ended, meaning that families and singles were places on an even playing field as far as housing and subsidies were concerned (True, 2003).

The state did attempt to put into place new resources for citizens on saving and obtaining long-term loans to be able to afford housing, but it was less desirable than the family subsidies had been before 1989, resulting in a decreased demand for living space and therefore drove the costs up even farther (Potuček and Raičová 1997). Ultimately, it became quickly apparent that in the new democracy housing would only be widely attainable to citizens with the greatest economic resources. The entire focus of the socialist housing scheme by 1989 had been on promoting marriage and the production of children and almost overnight the system had been reversed to promote growing personal wealth through career endeavors.

Women were not exempt from feeling the increasing need of financial success to be able to maneuver the new democratic system. After several decades of being given monetary incentives and housing to marry, stay home and raise children, suddenly there was pressure to be more mindful about the success of a career (True, 2003). The increasingly rising housing rates in such a short amount of time rapidly made it difficult for families to remain functioning on one income, giving women who may have otherwise been inclined to stay home raising children to return to or begin a career to assist with financial support of the family (Potuček and Radičová 1997).

This sudden financial strain, along with the size of the home a family could afford began to influence a couple's decisions regarding the size of their family almost immediately after the transition to the democracy (Sokačová 2010). Instead of following the ingrained Czech cultural norm of marrying and producing children, women more frequently chose to pursue educational or career goals instead of focusing on family. Unlike the socialist regime, the new democracy did not initially pursue any attempts to assist young couples in finding affordable housing options in which they could settle into and comfortably begin a family. 1989 became a turning point where the Czech culture still respected and supported the importance of the family, yet this value was not always reflected in the new welfare policies, leaving the citizens no choice but to settle for a more financially responsible lifestyle; perhaps without children.

7.2 REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In 1989, abortion remained the primary form of contraception for both married and unmarried women in Czechoslovakia. In fact, in 1988 there were 130,000 abortions recorded, making it the highest year for the procedure (Koldinska, 2015). After the transition to democracy, the Czech people did not gain a less liberal view on the issue, but policy changes did play a role in decreasing the number of procedures performed each year.

The democratic state made the decision to privatize abortion by 1991. This was done for two reasons: to cut back on the appeal for foreigners to come to the Czech Republic to obtain an abortion, and as a method to increase the birthrate (True, 2003). With the open borders, the fear was that non-citizens would start flocking to the Czech Republic for

abortion services from more conservative countries such as Poland. The privatization also affected the Czech citizens. Abortions that had been previously been state funded and therefore a convenient, free of charge method of birth control now cost women about the same as an average month's salary (Ibid).

It can be argued that requiring women to pay a relatively large amount out of pocket for a formerly free of charge reproductive healthcare service put a limitation on women's rights and their advancement of options in this area, but the state also obtained its desired outcome of limiting the amount of procedures performed annually. From the 130,000 abortions performed in 1988, the number had declined to 126,000 in 1990 and down to less than forty thousand by 2006 (Kolindska, 2015). Worried about the decline in fertility rates, the state has been pleased that since the Czech Republic's formation, the rate of abortions performed has never exceeded the country's annual birthrate (Ibid).

Other than the addition of cost due to privatization, abortion has remained legal in the Czech Republic and still follows many of the policies put in place under socialism. There had not been debates regarding the morality of the practice under the socialist rule, and the liberal idea of abortion continued into the Czech Republic's society, with sixty-eight percent of the population in 1994 stating they believed women should be granted the right under any circumstances. By 2005 the public approval had raised slightly to seventy percent in favor of the woman's right to abortion¹² (Sobotka et al, 2008). Czech women maintain the right to an abortion for any reason if they present a written request to their physician

¹² Compare with 1/3 of the Czechoslovak population believing the abortion policies were too liberal in 1970, according to the Public Opinion Research Institute Survey in 1971 (Sobotka et al, 2008).

by the twelfth week of pregnancy (Koldinska, 2015). Additionally, the procedure may be completed up until the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy under the condition that there is a proven medical issue or genetic disorder (Ibid.).

The Czech Republic began offering access to other types of contraceptives for women in lieu of relying on abortion. Oral contraceptive pills became more widely distributed and affordable than they had been during socialism. This access allowed women to make conscious decisions regarding their childbearing before pregnancy occurred, and has become a preferred method of contraception in the country. Plan B, alternatively called the Day After Pill, is available at pharmacies throughout the country without a written prescription from a physician, and in 2013 an abortion pill was legalized and can be offered to women by prescription at select facilities (Koldinska, 2015). The increase of alternative family planning methods lead to a significant decrease in abortions performed throughout the Czech Republic. The abortion rate dipped pointedly in the first decade of the new democracy, and by 2009 abortions were at an all time low (Sokačová, 2010). This can easily be attributed to the percentage of women using oral contraceptives increasing from only seventeen percent in 1990 all the way to fifty-five percent by 2008 (Ibid.). Currently, abortion is no longer perceived as the primary method of birth control for a high percentage of women, but does remain most common among unmarried women and women both married and unmarried who already have given birth to at least two children (Koldinska, 2015).

7.3 CHILDCARE

Even though childcare had been a policy that the regime had boasted was an accessible part of society that enabled all women to be

employed while avoiding the stress of where to place their children, the reality had been a run-down system with poorly kept facilities and not enough spaces to actually be sufficiently useful to many Czechoslovak women. During the privatization phase of the democratic transition, many women were hopeful for improvements to ease their stress in finding adequate care, especially for the youngest children, while they remained employed.

Unfortunately, the privatization that occurred between 1989 and 1991 left the childcare system even less useful for women than before. In 1989 childcare centers had held approximately 78,555 spots, yet by 1991 availability had been drastically lowered to only 17,210 open places for children (Cesky Statisticky Urad, 1992; True, 2003). This rapid decline of available spots for children led to a large increase in competitiveness among women to find a place for their children, and put stress on their ability to continue with their own employment if a childcare spot could not be obtained.

The childcare system had become nearly unusable for most women in less than a two-year period during the privatization process, but their access only continued to decline in the years following. Facilities that were able to care for children under the age of three were nearly inexistent in the early 1990s; by 2005 there were only fifty-six facilities managed by the state remaining, only able to accept 1,600 children (Zeman, 2007). The state's failure to focus on the availability of childcare for the youngest children pushed women back into the homes as almost forced caretakers for the first three years of a child's life, since they lacked any alternative placements. Women who were interested in taking a shorter maternity leave than was offered to them had a difficult time doing so if they could

not find a facility with open availability and lacked any family members able to care for a baby full-time.

The state-run childcare facilities able to accommodate children over the age of three remained in large quantities, and about ninety percent of children were placed into such facilities, as this was the age where many mothers left the home to return to their careers after the end of their allotted parental leave (Zeman, 2007). By 2005, there was eighty-eight percent enrollment in the nurseries and kindergartens able to take children aged three to six. Fewer of these providers are state run, as state support lessened with the increase in parental leave (Sobotka et al, 2008). With the increase of privately owned childcare centers also came the rise in prices that women were required to pay in order to place their children.

Along with the increase in childcare costs, the policy on family benefits also went through reforms. While the childcare centers were going through the initial privatization phase between 1989 and 1991, the state also decided to do away with childcare subsidies that had once been allotted to families to at least partially cover the cost of care under the socialist rule (True, 2003). Women were then left to determine if it was even cost effective to fight for one of the limited spots in the new system of childcare, or if the family would be better served financially if she abandoned work altogether and instead remained home to care for the children herself. This sudden reform of childcare provision and the disappearance of family subsidies had great influence on women pursuing careers or higher education outside of the home (Zeman, 2007). Koldinska (2015) refers to the modern Czech Republic as being the country in the European Union in which the high cost and low accessibility to childcare has the greatest influence on the amount of women overall

who are able to pursue individual achievements aside from staying home with their children.

7.4 PARENTAL LEAVE

In 1989, at the time of the communist dissolution, women had seen a large increase in their rights to extended maternity leave in the previous thirty years as a way for the regime to idealize the lifestyle of women staying home to raise their young children without the stress of risking the loss of employment. The increase to twenty-six weeks of maternity leave paid at ninety percent of their original salary had proven to be a successful policy in increasing the fertility rate across the country (Gawdiak, 1989). However, once the transition began, many women felt compelled to once again return to work as a way to manage the increasing living costs and competitiveness within the workplace.

The regime had granted allowances to promote family growth and make it desirable for women to leave the workplace and stay home with the children during their earliest years. In 1990, the updated policy also included allowances for men, however these allowances were only available for men who took on the role of the primary caregiver. By 1998, these allowances had only been approved for less than four thousand men; yet nearly half a million women were taking advantage (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber 2003).

Under the new democracy, the policy dictating maternity leave was also revised, as to not decrease the desire of women to stay home with their young children even amongst the rapid societal changes. In fact, the Civil Forum's public policy group published in the early 1990s "a

differentiation of incomes will gradually help to reduce the disproportionate economic activity of women, a rehabilitation of the family and the creation of better conditions for raising children” (True, 2003). In 1995, parental was given an increased from three years to four years that mothers could take off from employment while still having the security to return to their position (Sobotka et al, 2008; True, 2003). The extension of leave until the age of four made the Czech Republic a country with one of the most generous maternity leave policies within Europe (Sobotka et al, 2008). The addition of the fourth year to the Czech leave policy caused the percentage of women who chose to stay home with their young children longer than two years to jump from only twenty-two percent using the full allotted time off in the 1970s to seventy-eight percent taking longer time off in the 1990s (Ibid.).

Before the political transition in 1989, many of the allowances given to women increased with each child that was produced. Therefore, a mother of three or four children was entitled to far greater allowances than a mother of an only child (Sobotka et al, 2008). This was taken away from the policy revamp post 1989, and the democratic policy stated that all mothers were entitled to the same amount of allowances, regardless of the number of children in the family (Ibid.) Along these family adjustments came other edits, such as putting a limit for the amount of childcare that could be used while receiving the allowances (Sokačová, 2010)

The pay granted to women while on maternity leave became dependent on their salary, yet with maximum monthly amounts that could be earned (Zeman, 2007). Leave was also extended for single mothers who could prove that the father of the child was not living under the same roof from twenty-eight weeks to thirty-seven (Ibid.). Women are not entitled

to sixty-nine percent of the wages they were earning before the birth of their child along with the parental leave allotments (Sobotka et al, 2008).

In 2001, the policy on maternity leave was again revised, this time to also provide leave for men, officially making it parental leave. While this policy update was meant to play a role in gender equalizing, yet barely one percent of men immediately took advantage of the policy addition (Zeman, 2007). Men in areas of high unemployment were more likely to stay home to help with the children and accept their allotments, but by 2005 still only 1.4% of the male population country-wide were taking time off from work for parental leave (Sobotka et al, 2008, Zeman, 2003). The extreme lack of men who have showed interest in stepping away from their career in order to stay home and spend an extended amount of time assisting in the care for their young children reveals the deep social expectation of the woman to be the sole provider for the children. Men have not shown a large increase in desire to play more of an active role within the family unit even after given the incentive of leave with pay. True (2003) argues that the extension of family leave to the fathers was only illusion of gender equally appearing within society, and that in reality the parental leave policies are really only designed with women in mind.

It is possible that Czech men do not gain enough incentive to stay at home with their children even with the offered allowances due to the common women's reliance on the man's full salary. Not only do most Czech men earn more than the women, but under the parental leave policy, men are only given twenty percent of their wage while on leave, while the women can earn twenty-nine percent of their former wage¹³ (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber 2003). The pay differential encouraged many

¹³ This was the policy on wage allowance during parental leave as of 2000 (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber, 2003)

families to decide on the woman staying home with the children while the man quickly returned to work to better support the family financially.

The Czech parental leave is now one of the largest allowances in the world (True, 2003). Such an expansive, apparently generous and gender equal policy may appear to be the ultimate ideal, however it certainly poses a number of issues for women as well. The Czech Labor code legally insures women rights in their workplace, including equal treatment and the ability to return to the same role held previously even after four years off for parental leave (possibly eight years, depending on the addition of multiple children). Women have found subtle discrimination commonplace in their employment setting and the policies have aided in increasing the wage gap between the men and women.

Even after the leave increase from three to four years, on average most women stay home with their children for just three years after their birth (genderstudies.cz). Czech women on average spend more time with their children, especially in the early years, than in any other European country, however the policy has also shown to cast negative outcomes in the women's professional careers (Ibid.). If three or four years are taken from their career, the women do not simply have an easy time walking back onto the job. There are many instances of the employers or the work colleagues having negative feelings regarding women returning to these held positions, as many changes occur in three or four years time and it thus becomes a case of the woman needing to relearn workplace practices. The reentry into employment is even more difficult for both the women and employers if the woman had multiple children and therefore was granted upwards of twelve years off for parental leave. The law does protect women who choose have children in other ways, however. These

protections include making it forbidding for employers to let go of an employee who is pregnant, any pregnant worker must be allowed to be put into a position that can be completely safely during the pregnancy, and employers must allow ample amount of breaks and provide accommodation for any woman who returns to work while still breastfeeding (Koldinksa, 2015; Sokačová, 2010).

In addition, the modern system has failed in solving the problem of creating a substantial amount of childcare centers and nurseries for children below the age of four. With very few facilities to choose from, the limit on the amount of days or even hours per day that children are able to be enrolled before the women lose their eligibility to receive parental allowances, and the general unavailability of part-time work, many women find it nearly impossible to go back to work within the first three years simply because there would be nobody to care for their children (genderstudies.cz; Koldinska, 2015). Women who might prefer to spend less time at home after having children to instead put the focus back on their career typically find returning the most difficult, as they must compete for the limited number of available spots in childcare facilities, as well as hold a position of employment with a high enough wage to cover childcare costs if they are at risk of losing their allowances. The difficulty of finding childcare to make it possible to return to work serves as a large deterrent for many women, and they instead choose to stay at home with the children over jumping back into careers (True, 2003).

Just as the Czech Republic has one of the longest policies of parental leave offered, it also has one of the highest rates of different wages between women who have children and those who do not (genderstudies.cz). Women who do not take years off from their career to

stay home with children are paid a significantly higher wage than the women who do take advantage of the extended parental leave. There also remains large gap in the average wage of men and of women, which leaves many women feeling as though to be successful and independent it becomes necessary to choose between children and raising a family or foregoing the children to focus on an uninterrupted career (Ibid.). Younger women tend to be criticized if they leave a career to choose the path of raising children instead, and women of childbearing age are statistically the most unemployed group in the Czech Republic (Ibid.).

7.5 RETIREMENT AGE AND PENSIONS

The transition to democracy of course also forced the retirement and pension policies to be examined and reformed. Under the socialist system, pensions had been standardized and retirement age for women set at a young age so the retired women would still be able to provide full-time childcare for their grandchildren, saving the state the burden of funding additional childcare facilities. With the transition, pensions became an issue for the state along with private insurance companies, and the Czech Republic desired to slowly increase the retirement age to be at the same level as other European countries (Potuček & Radičová, 1997).

Pension reform was arguably one of the most challenging of undertakings during the transition, and the changes were implemented over a longer period of time than many of the other policies. The Czech social service reforms included healthcare, pension and unemployment benefits, which were guaranteed for all. Costs for these services came directly from the state, yet private insurance companies would also provide

additional insurance to cover these areas for citizens who were interested in putting their money towards it (Potuček & Radičová, 1997).

A major change in the Czech policy was the increasing of retirement age. Initially, women over fifty were nearly forced out of their employment and given small pensions. Then, in 1996 the state gradually raised the age of retirement and pension eligibility for both men and women (True, 2003). Pensions for Czech citizens were typically given after twenty-five years of employment, but this was increased for both genders as by 2006 the retirement age for men was raised from sixty to sixty-five, and for women from age fifty-three up to age sixty (Potuček & Radičová, 1997; True, 2003). This rise in retirement age placed the Czech Republic's retirement policies more in alignment with the policies of other European countries.

Even with the policy reforms, the Czech retirement and pension system exposes an inequality between men and women. With the pensions determined an individual's employment, specifically the number of years in their career, women typically retired after having worked fewer years than their male colleagues due to time off for periods of parental leave (Sokačová 2010). When women took time off to raise their children in the home, they not only sacrificed possible advancement in their career, but also years adding towards their future pension. This puts women at risk of becoming financially unstable in their senior years if they lack a partner to help support them as a consequence of choosing to be with their children at a young age.

Overall, the reformed Czech system includes some of the best benefits in comparison with the retirement policies of other European countries. However, the lasting inequalities in the benefits for men and women caused Koldinska to suggest further changes in her article *The*

Policy On Gender Equality In The Czech Republic (2015). She recognizes the importance of including years of parental leave towards years employed, as without this guarantee, women who choose to have multiple children lose a number of years in the workplace while on parental leave, and therefore retire with the lowest pension. Her article also discusses the discrimination towards men. The current policy allows different retirement ages for women depending on the number of children they have, yet the retirement age is set firm for men. For men who find themselves the primary caretaker of children, this then becomes unequal towards them. Koldinska does state that the pension policy aims to equalize rights for men and women by 2044.

7.6 BIRTHRATE

During the socialist 1960s, the steep decline of the fertility rate was the primary force that inspired the development of pre-family policies discussed in section 4. The implementation of family incentives did correct the drop in fertility and inspired many women to remain focused on children and family. With the collapse of the socialist system, the transformation to the Czech democracy once again triggered reason for women to focus on education and careers in order to deal with the rising costs and increasing unemployment. The overall result of the focus shift was once again a decline in the country's birthrate.

By 1994, the birthrate was below the population replacement rate, and the new government became concerned about the appearance of Czech family growth at a time when the country was striving for acceptance into the European Union (True, 2003). Many families had

relied on the housing and child subsidies provided by the state, and the elimination of the policies left families searching for new ways to remain financially sufficient under the new system. The Czech system of state social support was meant to provide supplementary income to disadvantaged families determined by their income level, the disability or illness of a family member, or other such hardships. In 1994 their records show that families considered normal were being passed over for receiving such benefits, while the lowest income families were receiving support (Potucek & Radicova, 1997). The average, now middle class families needed to rely solely on their own salaries to support their families. The struggles that many families faced remained reflected in the birthrate, as it continued to drop until it reached an all-time low in 1999, when there were less than 90,000 children born in the country throughout the year (Sokačová 2010).

The traditional Czech ideal family size for generations was two children. This average was maintained almost precisely during much of the socialist years (Sobotka, 2003), and carried over into the democratic transformation. Surveys taken in 1993 and in 2005 show that within that time period, the majority of women still idealized a family consisting of two children. In both surveys, only a small percentage of women expressed desire to have a larger family, yet interestingly the number of women sharing a desire to have only one or no children increased in the twelve year span¹⁴ (Sobotka et al, 2008). The survey results can indicate a cultural shift of Czech women away from the desire to have children and family and towards the pursuit of alternate endeavors. Especially among women under 25, the ideal family size that they envision continues to

¹⁴ Statistical data was taken from the 1993 RHS Survey and the 2005 Generation and Gender Survey. The women respondents were below age 25 (Sobotka et al, 2008).

shrink. Sobotka's 2008 study showed that the younger women only intended to have on average 1.85 children, putting them on track to be below population replacement rates. The same study showed that women of all ages do not anticipate having much larger families, with the overall average sitting at 2 children per household in 2005.

The sudden drop of the birthrate in the 1990s is a direct reflection of mood of the country and their uncertain feelings about the outcome of the transformation and the ways the new government may impact all aspects of their lives (Sobotka, 2003). The loss of family subsidies, increase in housing costs, and unemployment rates rising drove citizens away from the family and towards education and careers for survival. Women during this time were also granted much higher access to oral contraceptives, allowing the more freedom to control their production of children as well the timing (Zeman, 2007). The entire experience of drastic change can also be described as a turning point in the values of the post-socialist societies and emerging new views of the traditional family and fertility (Sobotka, 2003; True, 2003).

7.7 EDUCATION

Providing women with the opportunity to achieve high education had been one of policies the socialist regime used to strengthen then labor force as well as portray equality between the genders. Under the regime,

the enrollment of women had been increased, yet education became even more respected in the Czech Republic after 1989. In the democracy, education was seen to have even more value, as citizens quickly realized the growing gap in incomes and felt the pressure to obtain high levels of employment to remain financially secure (Zeman, 2007). For men and women alike, the best path to gainful employment was to obtain a high level of education.

The rise of both unemployment and university enrollment was clearly evident by the 1990s. In the period between 1995 and 2004, young people were obtaining an average of 2.7 additional years of education compared to previous years, and the average amount of lifetime education for women was 17.1 years¹⁵ (Zeman, 2007). Just over half (51%) of students enrolled in university studies in 2004/2005 were also female. (Ibid.).

The enrollment of women in university studies was beneficial to their career and financial status as well as their contribution to the skilled labor market, however this was also a clear shift in a societal focus away from families. Zeman (2007) reports that the increase of Czech women in higher education was the greatest influence on the decline of the family after the transition into democracy. The women enrolling in university studies were more likely to delay or forgo marriage altogether, and were far less likely to begin to think about the prospect of children until after their studies were completed (Zeman, 2007). During this time an increasing amount of women who achieved advanced degrees then chose to enter the workforce immediately, pushing off marriage and/or children even longer. There developed a clear trend of women with less formal education choosing to marry and bear children at a young age while the growing

¹⁵ Comparatively, in 2004 the average length of educational studies over a lifetime for men was 16.1 years (Zeman, 2007).

group of women who pursued a higher level of studies put off any family building until much later in life (Ibid.). Upwards of twenty-five percent of highly educated women had chosen to waive having children by 2001 to focus on education and careers instead (Ibid.).

7.8 WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

After being thrust into full time employment during the socialist era and learning to find a balance between raising a family and managing a career, the Czech women in 1989 were faced with all of the changes that the democratic transition imposed. Almost immediately, the cost of living increased and therefore so did the desire to pursue a financially beneficial employment position both for men and for women. While the societal focus shifted towards prosperous careers nearly overnight, the women were left factoring in all of the other changes that impacted their careers, finances, and childcare. The transformation of policies was focused on benefitting the state and the evolving economy, resulting in a shift of responsibility to the individual to succeed financially, as many of the subsidies and services were eliminated or reduced (Potuček and Radičová 1997).

In the early 1990s, while companies were going through the transition to privatization, many of the positions that were held by women during the socialist period were eliminated to cut costs, leaving many women who had been guaranteed employment under the previous system now searching for new opportunities in a greatly competitive market (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber, 2003). The shift to democracy created a culture suffering from growing unemployment as the state gave control of business to private owners. The unemployment rates were a great concern for all citizens, yet a larger amount of women were affected than men

(Ibid.). This rapid societal change was a shock for the Czech people, after over forty years of being accustomed to guaranteed employment and the elimination of competitive culture in the workplace.

The Czech people as a whole were unaccustomed with managing the issue of unemployment. Perhaps unsure of how to handle the increasing concern, the new Czech government was very slow to act and create policies that would help eliminate this stressor for its citizens. Even several years into the transition, Potuček and Radičová (1997) describe the government as seeming stalled in its ability to create a policy solution to begin to alleviate the unemployment risk. As a culture now accustomed to a government system that guaranteed employment for all, the people were left to scramble for new ways to become successful through putting increased focus on their success and ability to advance at work, as well as on obtaining higher education.

In the new rise of the unemployment culture, it was the Czech women who were affected most of all. The lasting effects of the shift to a democratic a capitalist system are clear to see when examining the inequality that remains between men and women. Even though Czech legislation through the Anti-Discrimination Act promises that any employee can be ensured equal treatment, the position of women in the workplace, specifically regarding the equality of wages, is one of the largest gaps seen throughout Europe (Koldisnka, 2015). This legislation promising women equal treatment was only put into place in the late 1990s, as the Czech Republic was pressured to keep their policies even with the policies of other countries within the European Union (Ibid.). Already during the transition period in the 1990s, the pay gap between men and women rose to between twenty to twenty-five percent. (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber

2003). The Czech Republic has been unable to close the gap in the equality of wages in the nearly three decades following.

The Czech Anti-Discrimination policies protect a woman's right to their allotted parental leave and employment protection during this time, as well as fair treatment in the workplace and reasonable accommodations made on their behalf during pregnancy and as they transition back into their employment after returning from maternity leave (Koldinska, 2015). The policy also gives all working citizens the right to additional training within the work setting, access to membership in trade unions, and self-employment. These rights cannot be altered based on the gender of the employee (Ibid.). The key loophole for the advancement of women in the workplace remains where the legislation legally protects equal pay for equal work done, but bears no specific mention of requiring equal pay between genders.

Without explicit mention of gender equality in legislation, employers are able to discreetly discriminate against women in the workplace. This commonly occurs when the women are absent for years at a time during their period of parental leave. Though the law protects the position that the woman held within the company and guarantees that she may return to the same position even after three to four years of parental leave, this time away from the workplace often prohibits women from achieving the same promotions and career success that the men who do not take extended leaves of absences are able to attain (Koldinska, 2015).

In 1997, Potuček and Radičová also examined the Czech culture and reasons why these loopholes remain. They relay that even though the difference in pay between men and women is large and widely recognized, the people remain to afraid to confront employers regarding instances of

perceived discrimination. Most women remained unsure over how to effectively prove that their lack of career advancement was due to time away from the job to spend at home with their children; so very few cases were ever brought to light. The culture is also one where it is uncommon to discuss wages even with the closest of relationships, so it is possible that many women were unaware of the different in pay that their male colleagues were receiving (Potuček and Radičová 1997).

Nearly thirty years after the initial democratic transition, many of the same inequalities persist for Czech women. The Czech Republic's culture and policies have failed to resolve the inequality of wages between men and women, nor eliminate the persisting cultural view of women as the gender responsible for sorting childcare as well as completing household tasks even while pursuing a full time career. The parental leave policies suggest providing women the opportunity to thrive both at home and in the workplace, but the current legislation still allows for the loophole discrimination to legally limit women who take advantage of these leave allowance from the possibility to also advance in their career. Women are still left basically forced to choose between lives within the household, or lives focused on a career. As a result, many women who obtained higher education put their focus in the workplace and must decide if entering into motherhood and a life with a family is worth risking their career for. Alternatively, the women with lower levels of education tend to choose the benefits of subsidies offered to them to stay home for long periods of time with their children instead of actively striving to succeed in a career (Zeman, 2007).

Even with the persisting hardships, a large number of the female Czech population remains employed. Under the socialist system, almost all

women were employed in some capacity, and according to the Czech Statistical Office, by 2005 still more than half of Czech women reported being employed. The Czech Statistical Office also highlighted the issue of part-time work that women face. According to the office, in 2005 just over 8% of the employed women were working in part-time positions. Part-time positions would be the most beneficial solution for women trying to maintain a career while also spending adequate time with the children and caring for the household. Unfortunately, the Czech system offers very few of these opportunities, leaving women ultimately with a full-time or nothing option, often leaving them to choose between time with the family or fulfilling financial obligations.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Czech women overall have found themselves with the challenge of maneuvering through a culture that still culturally expects them to hold the traditional gender role of the housewife who cares for the children and her husband while also taking on the responsibility of handling errands and shopping and cooking. Through all of the changes during the years under

the communist regime as well as the changes as the country transformed into a capitalist democracy, the Czech people as a whole did not lose the respect for the family unit, nor the expectation that the female is to be the one managing it.

This poses a problem for many women, as the world around them has changed significantly. Though some may argue that Czech women were pioneers of feminism because they headed off to full time careers in higher numbers much earlier than most women in Western cultures, the overall outcome has left the women of the Czech Republic in nearly the same predicaments that their Western counterparts face. Czechoslovak law even stated by 1950 that men and women were equal. This was something that most Western countries did not begin to see for another twenty years (True, 2003). Though there were aspects of Czech law and culture that seemed highly advanced for the time, the reality did not always measure up to what might be expected. In the 1960's there were ongoing debates over single women being "incomplete families" and referring to maternity leave as a "holiday" (True, 2003).

The women were forced quickly out of their homes and into some kind of full time employment. Often the jobs were entry level and were not matched adequately with an individual's skillset, so women were not necessarily inspired to feel passionately about their career. Once the women working full-time began to negatively affect the birthrate, additional benefits and incentives were given by the state to encourage women to stay home and raise their children, reinforcing the traditional Czech family concept. Maintaining a family was one way to receive better benefits and living conditions within the communist system. Women were given employment and higher education opportunities in large numbers that had

never been seen before, but many of the promised state run services were operated so poorly that they failed to create a seamless work-home balance for most women.

Jaqui True (2003) argues that the Czechoslovak system of 'equalizing' under the socialist rule only managed to create further inequality between genders. The entire system controlled who worked and who reproduced and raised children, giving the Czech women very few choices to make on their own. Men were continually given management positions over women, while the secretarial, human services or customer service positions were reserved for the women.

Still under the socialist rule, some women did recognize the growing inequality that existed under the façade of an all-equal society. Women began having gatherings and publishing magazines such as *Vlasta*, which emerged in the 1960's and provided an outlet for women to discuss everything from politics to their frustration with the cultural expectation to continue to be held accountable for all household responsibilities while now also working (Paludi, 2014). It was clear that husbands saw no need to take on further responsibilities within the household, leaving most women with essentially two jobs; one required full-time career outside of the household along with all of the responsibilities that had been required at home before women were thrust into the workforce.

With the dissolution of the regime, the emerging democracy allowed women more choices in opportunities, but the policy revisions left many women with no choice but to pursue a full-time career and/or higher education to simply be able to afford the same standards of living that were achieved under the regime. Many families required two incomes to make

ends meet, and also discovered that finding available and affordable childcare was at times impossible.

The introduction of the democratic society also opened up opportunities for women to begin to pursue careers that were of interest to them, and were driven to succeed at work by the competitive nature of the new capitalist system. The new found passion for some women for their career was met with many of the problems that women in Western countries face; issues around equality in pay, pensions, parental leave and so on. The females in each generation following the transition are overall putting less emphasis on marrying young and settling down with a family and more thought and time into obtaining higher education and becoming successful in a career. With women's focus shifting, the state has continually debated over incentives to offer the population to encourage women to still become invested in creating a family.

Many of the policies the Czech Republic put in place have been effective for assisting those women who do want to 'have it all' – that is, those who desire to have a full-time career along with a family. Greater access to contraceptives has allowed young women to finish their studies and begin careers before settling down and beginning their family. There are those that argue this is hurting the overall society in the long run however, since these women are choosing to have children later in life and are therefore lowering the country's overall birthrate. Achieving the ability to live independently and pursue endeavors self-reliantly as young women has also influenced the acceptance of divorce, co-habitation, and single parenting (Zeman, 2007).

One lingering issue that none of the policies have seemed to entirely solve for women is the 'double duty' expectation. Czechs are still culturally

bound to the notion that the woman should still be obligated to handle the household responsibilities. Currently, the statistic is around 53% of the Czech population that still claim to believe it should be the responsibility of the man to earn money to support the family while the woman manages the household and children (Paludi, 2014). Many families who choose to live in a more modern style while younger tend to revert to this cultural norm once their first child is born. Around 75% of Czech women are responsible for shopping, cooking, cleaning and childcare regardless of whether they are employed or not. What may come as a surprise is that 60% of the women also agree that the household tasks should be left solely for the woman instead of seeking shared assistance from a husband or partner (Paludi, 2014).

In addition to overcoming long-standing cultural norms to be rid of their 'double duty', many of the Czech policies still contain many loopholes that allow working women to be at a disadvantage compared to the men in similar positions. The state provided childcare services are lacking, and there are not enough part-time positions to give mothers of young children the option to better balance work and childcare responsibilities. Some women who are trying to move up within a career put off having children entirely out of fear of losing their status if they choose to take the offered parental leave.

Though Czech women entered the workforce and were promised equality by the government both at home and in the workplace long before many other countries around the world, currently most Czech women are caught up in the same kinds of struggles that women living in countries that pushed for the advancement of women much later are also facing. It is clear to see that social welfare policies under the socialist system played a

role in the lifestyle that women had, and the revised policies continued the influence lifestyles and personal decisions throughout the transition to the democracy. Today Czech women are still faced with choices both if they choose to pursue a career and if they decide to stay home to raise children, and undoubtedly the policies are continuing and will continue to play a big role in the options available for women.

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