

*Anna Majdzińska\**, *Witold Śmigielski\**

## THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUSNESS ON FAMILY PLANNING DECISIONS OF THE STUDENTS OF UNIVERISTY OF LODZ

**Summary.** This article discusses the findings of the survey investigating the influence of faith and religious beliefs on students' family plans, as well as the students' understanding of the ethical and moral aspects of marital life and cohabitation. The survey involved the full-time students in the last two years of different master's degree majors offered at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology.

The answers that the respondents gave to the survey questions allowed determining their views on different aspects of family life in relation to their religious beliefs. The questions were divided into two parts. One of them investigated the respondents' opinions about their prospective family life, such as entering into a marriage and having children. The second part asked about the ethical and moral aspects of family life and cohabitation, for instance partners living together before marriage, divorce, the use of contraceptives and the abortion pill, surgical abortion.

**Key words:** religiousness, matrimony, procreation.

### 1. Introduction

Because *the sacred* is part of all aspects of life, individuals' sets of values and priorities usually reflect their faith. Faith determines the way people behave, draws the paths of their thinking and models their perception of many things. People's involvement in religious life is a factor shaping their family life decisions, frequently affecting their attitudes to marriage and procreation.

The primary aim of this study is to present the findings of a survey investigating how students' faith and religious beliefs influence their views on family planning, as well their understanding of the ethical and moral aspects of marital life and cohabitation. Considering that the young persons' attitudes toward their own future are likely to influence the demographic future of Poland, the conducted survey lies within the scope of the conference.

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\* PhD students, University of Lodz, Unit of Demography and Social Gerontology

The faith-attitudes relationship was analysed using the answers the students gave during a questionnaire survey conducted at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Łódź.

## 2. The catholic and secular models of marriage and family

Most believers in Poland belong to the Catholic Church. Because its teachings were for long part of the set of moral principles accepted by a considerable part of Polish society, the most common model of family functioning matched its Catholic concept for many centuries. In pre-partition Poland, all marriages in Poland were concluded in the Catholic Church or according to other religious rites. Under the partitions, the ways of concluding marriages were determined by the given partition's legislation. The different rules for concluding marriages survived in Poland into the inter-war period. Some actions to make them uniform appeared only after the Second World War, when the *Decree on Marital Law* was put in force in 1946, making civil marriages obligatory. The decree introduced also the institution of divorce. After 1946, a marriage was recognized as legal only if concluded at the register office. This situation continued until 1998, when Church marriages with the civil-law consequences, so-called concordat marriages<sup>1</sup>, were allowed<sup>2</sup>. In other words, the family model in post-war Poland has been shaped by two ideologies, i.e. Catholic and secular, with its secular version becoming increasingly accepted by the Polish population [see Gajda, 2000, pp. 45–46; Zabłocki, 2000, pp. 194–196, 200–201; Duch, 1998, p. 68].

The Catholic family model emphasizes that a marriage, being a Holy sacrament given by God, is permanent and indissoluble. This approach is derived from the interpretation of a passage from the Holy Bible: „What God has joined together let no one separate! (...) Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery” [The Gospel of St. Mark, 10, 9–12, The Holy Bible – New Testament]. Consequently, the Church firmly opposes divorces, teaching that the spouses are obliged to love and be faithful to each other for their lifetime. The commonly used term „a Church divorce” is a misnomer, because the Church does not grant divorces in fact. It is possible, however, for the Church to nullify a marriage, which is tantamount to announcing that it has never been legal<sup>3</sup>. According to the Church teachings,

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<sup>1</sup> The concordat was signed between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland on 28 July 1993 (O.J. of 1998, no. 51, item 318)

<sup>2</sup> The law of 24 July 1998 r. (O.J. of 1998, no. 117, item 757)

<sup>3</sup> Such as one of the spouses being homosexual, a serious disease concealed from the spouse before the marriage, a forced marriage, etc.

love and procreation are equally important, so Catholics should reject contraceptives and abortion.

The above rules are at odds with the secular family model. The Polish legislation allows dissolving a marriage and grants the full freedom of using contraceptives, but abortion is legal only in several cases specified in the law [Duch, 1998, pp. 68, 81–82]. The two models of marriage and procreation, Catholic and secular, while inconsistent in many respects, are intertwined in Polish society. Many persons declaring themselves to be Catholics support certain aspects of the secular approach to marriage, while part of those who view themselves as non-believers, or confess religion other than Catholicism, approve of certain family life principles taught by the Church.

The family model and its underlying principles can also be considered in demographic terms. For many centuries, people built their families on the principles forming a solid system of values and norms. Matrimony and fertility started to change in the western and northern European countries in the 1960s. The alterations were caused not only by the extending range of people's personal freedom, but also by the individuals' drive for self-development and self-realization, as well as the emancipation of women. In the last decades, the average age at marriage in Europe has become significantly older, accompanied by the growing popularity of intimate relationships alternative to marriage. The number of illegitimate births has increased distinctly (by 5% in the present EU-25 in the 1960s, 18% in the 1990s, and 33% in 2005), women have postponed their decisions to have their first children until later and later years of age, the rate of childless women has gone up [Kurkiewicz, 2008, p. 1; Okólski, 2004, pp. 144–146, Sobotka 2008]. These trends have permanently reduced fertility below the replacement rate. In 1980s, Divan de Kaa and R. Lesthaeghe based their theory of the second demographic transition in relation to the processes, stating that marriage and procreation are characterised by demographic phenomena such as: „widespread pre-marital sex, delayed typical age at marriage, a smaller proportion of formal marriages, (...), popularity of intimate partner relationships alternative to marriage, growing number of divorces, (...), decreasing average number of children in a family, increasing voluntary childlessness, widespread use of contraceptives, birth postponement” [Okólski, 2004, p. 146].

Fertility has dropped in most European countries, but most dramatically in Spain. The Spanish fertility rate declined from 2.8 in 1975 to 1.15 in 1997 (now it is 1.2). The number of childless women has been growing in Spain for years. The percentage of childless 30 year-old women born in the years 1949–1953 stood at 9.6%, reaching 24.7% for those born between 1964 and 1968 [Adsera, 2006, p. 205, Kohler, 2006]. The same demographic trends have been developing in Poland since the beginning of the transition.

### 3. An overview of matrimony and fertility in Poland

The analysis presented in this part of the article essentially draws on the GUS (Central Statistical Office) data about marriages and fertility and on the data derived from the Demographic Yearbook 2008.

During the last two decades, the frequency of marriages has dropped in Poland (one possible reason being the changing age structure) and the rate of divorces has increased (from 0.8‰–1.2‰ in the 1990s to 1.7‰ in 2007). While towns and rural areas have similar rates of marriages (6.5‰ and 6.6‰, respectively, in 2007), divorces are more frequent in towns than in rural areas (2.3‰ and 0.9‰, respectively, in 2007). Over the last twenty years, the age at marriage has moved upwards. The frequency of entering into marriages, which was the highest in the 1990s for males aged 20–24 years, has moved in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. to the age group 25–29 years. As far as the females are concerned, most marriages are still concluded by the age group 20–24 years, but the numbers of marriages in the successive age groups are growing. Besides, intimate partner relationships have become a common phenomenon, especially in the large cities. Many persons either postpone their decisions to marry or do not have such plans at all, although they have become parents or plan to have children<sup>4</sup>. The authenticity of the attitudes is verified by a growing rate of illegitimate births in the total number of live births, which grew from 6.2 to as much as 19.5% between 1990 and 2007. Typical of the young people are also long-term engagements resembling the LAT-type relationships (Living Apart Together) mentioned in the literature of the subject, that are long-term intimate relations of two people having different homes.

The outlined changes in matrimonial behaviour contribute to falling fertility. In 1990, 1,000 females of reproductive age had 58 live born children, but seventeen years later that number dropped to merely 40. In the early 1990s, the most fertile were females aged 20–24 years, but at the end of the decade it was the age group 25–29 years. The total fertility rate, i.e. the number of children per one woman of reproductive age, dropped from 2.04 to 1.31 between 1990 and 2007. In the same period, the percentage of the first births increased (from 39.5% in 1990 to 50.8% 2007), while the rate of the third and further births declined considerably. Young people frequently postpone their decisions to start a family because of their plans for self-realization and professional fulfilment. Their choice is determined by many factors, such as stronger professional aspirations that are frequently driven by the escalating labour market's demands towards young people, as well as changing social norms applying to marriage. The grow-

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<sup>4</sup> According to the survey data, the students who were hesitant about marriage frequently wanted to have children.

ing social acceptance of both cohabitation and being single is a factor helping young people to concentrate their efforts on professional careers, because the people around them do not make them accomplish matrimonial and family goals.

As observed, faith strongly contributes to the family model changes. A case in point is Spain, where female religiousness was found to determine fertility. The practising women had more children than the non-believers did [Adsera, 2006, pp. 212–214]. Until mid-1970s, the Catholic family model was equated in the USA with high fertility. The declining respect for Church teachings adjusted family sizes towards smaller numbers of children [see Lehrer, 2004, p. 7].

#### **4. An overview of religiousness in Poland**

We already mentioned that most religious persons in Poland are Catholics, but in the recent years an outflow of the faithful from their Church has been noted. The number of the baptised persons was 35.9 million in 1991 (94.1% of the total population), but it dropped to 33.7 million (88.4%) by 2007 [*Rocznik Statystyczny* 1992, 2008]. It is worth noting that the number of churchgoers regularly attending Sunday service has also decreased in the recent years, although the number of people receiving Holy Communion has grown. According to the data derived from the *Catholic Church Statistical Office*, in 2008 slightly more than 40% of the faithful regularly attended Mass on Sunday (47% in 1992), with more than 15% in that group receiving Holy Communion.

The degree of religiousness as shown by Poles (regardless of their religion) was also studied and then published as part of the *Social Diagnosis 2007*. As shown by the survey data, 46% of the respondents (55.7% in 1992) attended religious services or other religious ceremonies regularly (at least once a week), whereas 29% did not take part in any religious ceremonies. Regular religious practices were declared by women rather than men (52% versus 39%). 43% of the surveyed schoolchildren and students attended religious ceremonies at least once a week. In geographical terms, the least religious were the Zachodniopomorskie and Łódzkie voivodeships, while the Podkarpackie, Opolskie and Małopolskie voivodeships were at the other end of the scale.

#### **5. Findings of the questionnaire survey**

The characteristics of matrimony, fertility and religiousness in Poland as outlined in the two previous sections provided a point of reference for the questionnaire survey of the University of Łódź students. Investigations into youth

religiousness and the world outlooks have been discussed in many reports [e.g. Blewiński, 2001; Wysocka, 2000]. In the next sections of this article, we shall frequently refer to Blewinsky's study reporting the results of the 1998 survey conducted among the first and fifth-year students at three tertiary education institutions in Łódź in order to investigate the religiousness and world outlook of young persons. Some of the opinions that were formulated by the then fifth year students of the University of Łódź will be used in this article to make comparisons.

### 5.1. Research methodology

Our survey primarily intended to explore how faith shapes students' views on their future families, as well as their understanding of some ethical and moral principles applying to marriage and cohabitation. The authors of this article conducted the survey at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Łódź, and the respondents were the full-time students in the last two years who studied different majors offered within the master's degree programmes. The survey intentionally concentrated on the older students, as the final years of studies usually involve deeper reflection about one's future life in general and in family terms.

The survey was carried out among 150 students in May 2009. The respondents were sampled in the following way: first, the major was drawn from the set of different majors offered under the master's degree programmes at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, and then the specific year was drawn from the selected major. Finally, the group of students was drawn from the given year. After repeating the procedure seven times, seven different groups of students were formed. The ultimate population of the respondents consisted of the full time students in their final years attending classes. Owing to the courtesy of the lecturers, the survey could be conducted during the classes.

The collected data were analysed using the *Statistica*<sup>5</sup> software package. The next sections of the article will present the survey results.

### 5.2. A description of the sample

The group of respondents comprised 103 women (69%) and 47 men (31%). Exactly half of them were aged 23 years, every third person was 24 years old and almost every seventh was 25 years old. Only 4 persons were at different ages and 2 persons did not state their ages at all. Every third respondent had

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<sup>5</sup>The analysis was intended to check whether respondents' sex and religiousness and their answers showed a statistically significant relationship. To this end, the  $\chi^2$  test for independence (Pearson's and the maximum likelihood tests) was applied and the Cramer's  $V$  coefficient was calculated. When the investigated relationship was statistically significant, then only the calculated Pearson's  $\chi^2$  statistics was mentioned.

been a Łódź resident before becoming a student, less than 6% of the respondents had lived close to the city<sup>6</sup>, and almost 60% of them had lived neither in Łódź nor nearby. Among the non-Łódź students, the largest group was persons living previously in the rural areas (41.84%) and every third respondent had lived before in a medium-sized town (with population ranging from 20,000 to 100,000). Less than 15% of the surveyed students had come from small towns. Around 10% of the respondents had previously lived in large cities other than Łódź.

Almost 92% of the students declared themselves to be Roman Catholics, one person indicated agnosticism (the declaration was omitted in the analysis as untypical), and 7.5% of the respondents described themselves as irreligious or non-believers.

Respondents' religious beliefs and the resulting practices were probed by means of two questions. One of them asked the students to formulate a possibly accurate description of their faith in God. Over 55% of the subjects had no doubts that God existed. Fewer than every fifth respondent believed in God despite having some doubts, every tenth believed in God „in their own way”, and 6% answered that „they sometimes believe in God and sometimes think that God does not exist”. More than 5% of the respondents believed in neither God nor supernatural forces, and for more than 2% the problem remained unresolved.

To answer the second of the two questions the respondents had to indicate their frequency of attending religious practices. The largest percentage of them would go to the church at least once a week (34.5%), every fourth several times a year, every fifth once or twice a month, and another every fifth person would go to the church only because of family ceremonies or not at all.

The surveyed students were assigned to three groups, depending on the level of their religiousness. The first group, accounting for 27.3% of the respondents, was the strong believers who would go to the church every Sunday. This group was arbitrarily named „the highly religious”. Students with weak religious beliefs and stating that they attended services on the holidays at the most or did not go to the Church at all were placed in the group “the low-religious”. This group numbered 45 persons constituting 30% of the whole sample. The remaining 64 persons (42.7%) were categorized as the “moderately religious”.

### 5.3. Students' views on their family future

Respondents' family plans were identified based on their answers to the questions about marriage and procreation. The questions specifically probed their attitudes to entering into a marriage and having children.

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<sup>6</sup> The adjacent Łódź area was understood as localities situated within a radius of 15 km of city limits.



Most respondents, i.e. over half, stated that they had intimate partners but did not live together with them. Every third respondent was single and every tenth lived together with his or her intimate partner, forming a relationship comparable to engagement or cohabitation. Only five respondents were already married.

86% of the unmarried students<sup>7</sup> (90% of the females and slightly above 80% of the males) wanted to get married in the future, only 2% did not have such plans (only the females), and almost 12% could not answer the question explicitly (8% of the females and 20% of the males). Almost 83% of those wishing to enter into a marriage in the future wanted a church ceremony. Less than 8% of the respondents made their church wedding plans contingent on their partners' decision, less than 2.5% intended to have civil marriages only, while 7% were hesitant about this issue. Among those persons who wanted church weddings 83% justified their plans on the grounds of their faith<sup>8</sup>, and the remaining 17% pointed to their being forced by the family and friends or to reasons other than religious.

The definite majority of the students (89%) wanted to have spouses before 30 years of age; 56% wished to marry at the age of 27–30 years and 33% before they turn 26 years old. As shown by the answers, the female students want to marry earlier than the males do. Every third female respondent wanted to enter into a marriage before she would turn 27, but the same answer was given by only every fourth student. More than half of the female students stated that the best age for marriage was 27–30 years; in other words, more than 90% of the females wanted to have a husband by the age of 30 years.

Most respondents (89%) wanted to have children in the future. Figure 1 shows how the planned numbers of children relate to respondent's religiousness.

As shown by the graph, none of the "highly religious" persons answered that he or she did not want to have children, probably because the wish to have offspring is a prerequisite for having a Catholic wedding ceremony. Every third person in this group wanted to have a family with many children, while three or more children were planned by every fifth of the "moderately" or "low" religious persons. We can therefore venture the conclusion that the multiple-child model promoted by the Catholic Church has an effect on the number of children declared by the religious students.

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<sup>7</sup> Over 91% of the highly and moderately religious students and almost 75% of the low religious ones.

<sup>8</sup> Almost 92% of the highly and moderately religious students and 50% of the low religious ones.



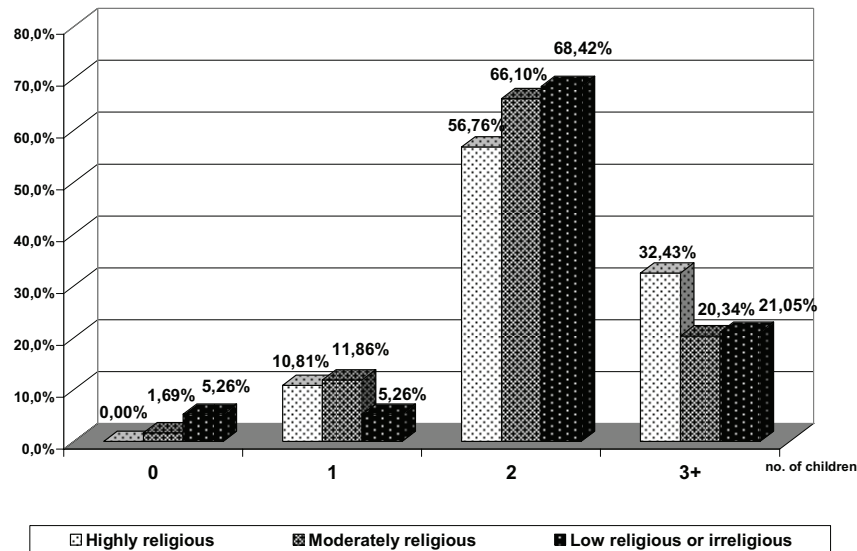


Fig. 1. The answers given to the question: „How many children would you like to have in the future?” by respondent's religiosity.

Source: developed by the authors.

Most respondents (63%) wishing to have offspring believed that the best age for having their first children was 27–30 years. As shown by the survey data, the females were ready for motherhood earlier than the males were willing to accept fatherhood. Almost 87% of the female students wanted to have their first children before 30 years of age, while among the male students less than 60% wanted to become fathers at this age. Every third male student was ready to have children only when being 31–34 years old. The relationship between sex and the age considered to be the most appropriate for having the first child is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=15.96$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

#### 5.4. The ethical and religious aspects of family life and cohabitation

As we already mentioned, students' religiosity may significantly shape their perception of the ethical and religious aspects of both family life and cohabitation. The answers they gave to the questions about living together before the marriage, the use of contraceptives and the abortion pill, surgical abortion and divorces were instrumental in forming some conclusions in this area.

In the last dozen or so years the so-called „trial cohabitation” or „trial marriage”, where the partners live together before they decide to enter into a marriage, has be-

come a widespread phenomenon in Poland [Blewiński, 2001, p. 122]. This type of a relationship was accepted by less than half of the respondents (49%), 7% were against it, and every fourth respondent approved of partners living together “occasionally”. In 1998, “trial marriages” were accepted by 55.2% of the fifth-year students at the same university (52.1% of the males and 61% of the females), while 26.4% of the respondents objected to the practice [Blewiński, 2001, pp. 122–123].

Respondents’ opinions on the „trial cohabitation” were largely at variance with their religiousness (Fig. 2). The relationship is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=28.39$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). As much as 80% of the “low religious” respondents accepted the „trial cohabitation”, but less than 24% of the “highly religious” students were of the same opinion. Most of the moderately religious respondents expressed also their full acceptance of unmarried couples living together. Over 40% of the highly religious respondents stated that the partners could live together “occasionally”, but not permanently. Every fifth “highly religious” person was incapable of answering the question. The probable reason for such strong variations in the respondents’ answers to the question about “trial cohabitation” could be the special ethical and moral aspect of living together, that is pre-marriage sex, which is rejected by the Catholic Church. As the Church teaches, „pre-marriage sexual abstinence (...) fosters the attitude of love. (...). The decision about sharing a home is also influenced by pregnancy. Pregnancy becomes then a force pushing towards a marriage and thus restricting individuals’ free choice” [Trosaka, 1998, p. 26].

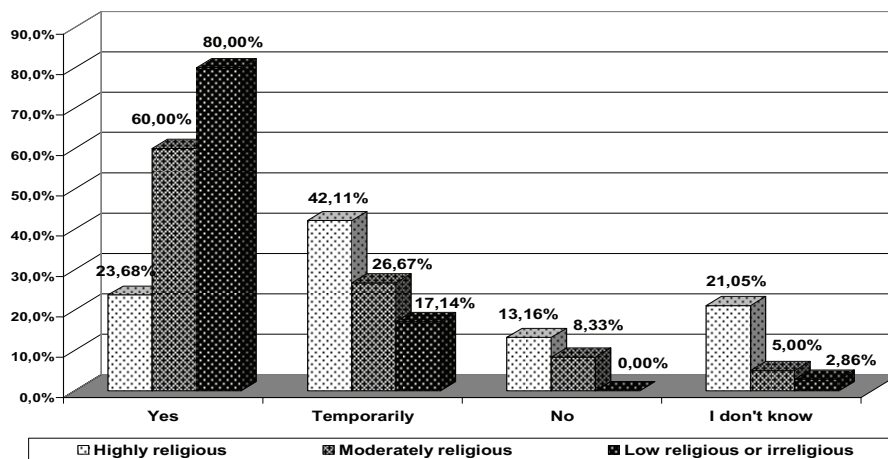


Fig. 2. The answers given to the question: *Do you think the intimate partners can live together on a trial basis before they decide to marry?* by respondent’s religiousness

Source: developed by the authors.

90% of the respondents accepted the use of contraceptives, which gives more emphasis to the opinion that young people commonly agree to this practice (Fig. 3).

Even 78% of the highly religious persons did not object to contraceptives, but the largest percentage of the opponents of contraceptives can also be found in their group – almost every eighth person rejected them. The relationship between respondents' religiousness and their views on contraceptives is statistically significant ( $\chi^2=10.47$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

More females than males objected to contraceptives (6% and slightly above 2%, respectively). This difference may arise from the fact that the surveyed females were more religious. 8% of the single respondents rejected contraceptives, but among the students who had intimate partners the rate was only 3%.

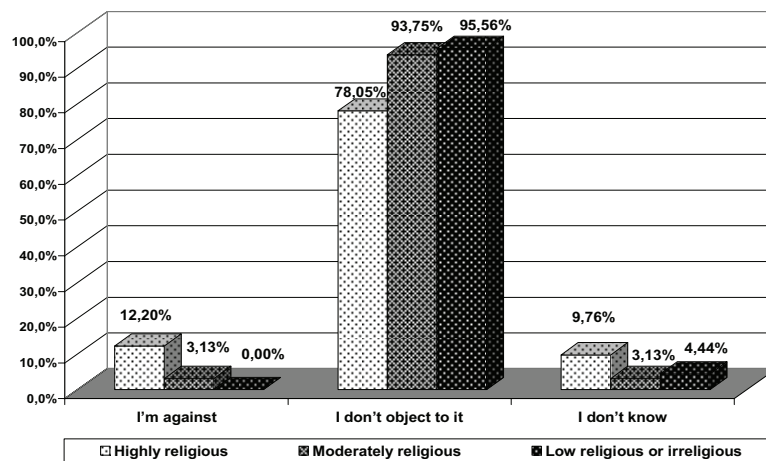


Fig. 3. The answers to the question: *What do you think about the use of contraceptives?* by respondent's religiousness

Source: developed by the authors.

Most of the respondents believed that the abortion pill could be used in special situations, such as rape. Every fourth highly religious person rejected it as a morally reprehensible solution, regardless of the circumstances. This opinion was supported by every fifth of the moderately religious respondents and every twentieth student in the "low religious" group. The latter group was the most frequent to consider the use of the abortion pill as a morally acceptable practice, but this opinion was shared by less than 7.5% of the highly religious ones. The males were more inclined to accept the abortion pill (32.6%) than the females

were (17.7%)<sup>9</sup>. The declared attitude to the abortion pill and respondents' religiousness show a statistically significant relationship ( $\chi^2=15.96$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), likewise the declared attitude to the abortion pill and respondent's sex ( $\chi^2=9.9$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

Most students (61%) accepted abortion only within the limits specified by the Polish law, 17% rejected abortion whatever the circumstances, while every fifth student did not object to it. The males tended to accept abortion more often than the female students did (36.2% and 18.4%, respectively)<sup>10</sup>. Every third highly religious student, more than 17% in the moderately religious group and slightly above 2% of the low religious ones rejected abortion regardless of the circumstances (see Fig. 4). Abortion was usually acceptable to the low religious persons or non-believers. Almost 5% of the highly religious persons were more liberal on abortion than the Polish law is. There is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' views on abortion and their religiousness ( $\chi^2=22.5$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and between their attitude to abortion and sex ( $\chi^2=11.38$ ;  $p<0.05$ ).

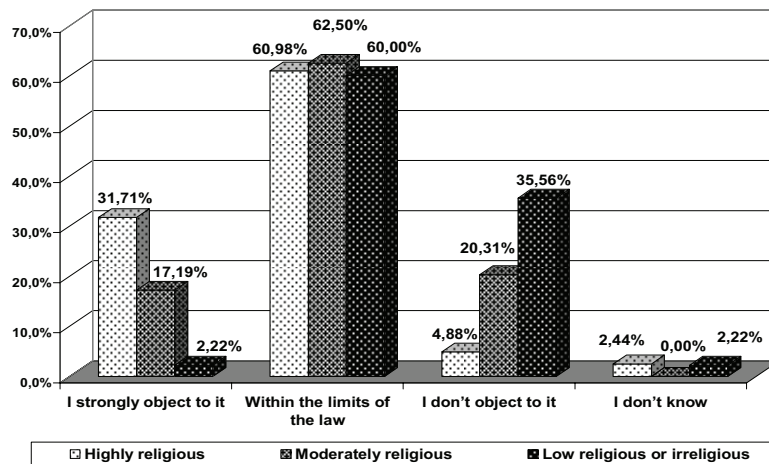


Fig. 4. The answers given to the question: "What do you think about abortion?" by respondent's religiousness.

Source: developed by the authors.

In the 1998 survey [Blewiński, 2001, p. 130], most students accepted the legitimacy of abortion. They justified their position by referring to situations such as mother's life being in danger (81.2% of the male respondents and 87.8% of

<sup>9</sup>As before, this can be due to the different levels of religiousness observed among both sexes.

<sup>10</sup>See above.

the female respondents), a rape (75% and 78%, respectively) and the probability of having a sick child (60.4% and 68.3%). Such circumstances make abortion legal.

Regarding divorces, half of the respondents believed that they should always be allowed, every third respondent stated that a divorce was a solution to be exercised only in special situations, and every tenth respondent rejected divorces. It is worth noting here that in the 1998 survey divorces were accepted by 82.7% of the Łódź University students (77.1% of the males and 30.2% of the females), while 7% were against them (8.4% and 4.9%, respectively) [Blewiński, 2001, p. 126].

The declared position on divorces and respondents' religiousness show a statistically significant relationship ( $\chi^2=35.2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Almost 80% of the low religious persons did not object to divorces (Fig. 5). A similar opinion was presented by less than half of the moderately religious ones and almost every fourth highly religious respondent.

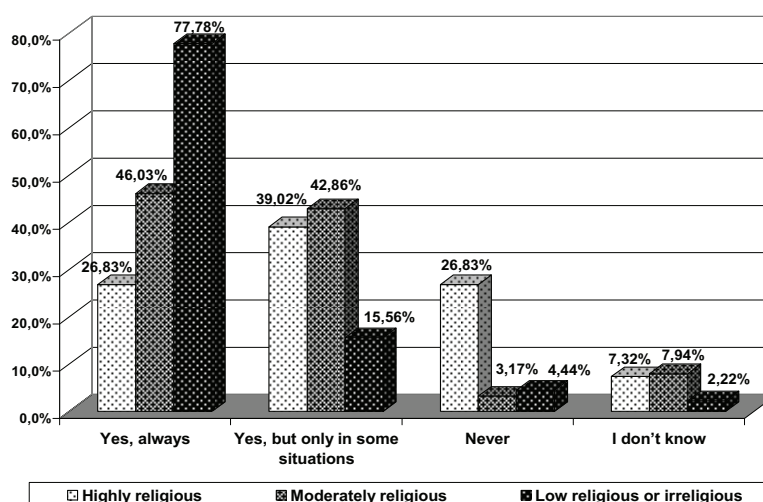


Fig. 5. The answers given to the question: *Do you think divorces are acceptable?* by respondent's religiousness

Source: developed by the authors.

Every fourth highly religious person expressed his or her unwavering opposition to divorces, but the attitude was supported by less than 5% of the less involved in religious life.

Divorces in special circumstances were accepted by almost 40% of the highly religious and moderately religious persons and by 15% of those uninvolved in religious life. The „special circumstances” as indicated by the respon-

dents usually included domestic violence, one of the spouses being an alcoholic, persistent marital crisis, or adultery.

The highly religious persons believe that a divorce is a symptom of a family being in deep crisis. Having gone through the disintegration of their marriages, such persons tend to perceive the situation as a spiritual failure and struggle to reconcile the event with their system of values [Paloutzian, Park, 2005, p. 184].

## 6. Summary and conclusions

The presented survey has allowed identifying how faith affects students' family plans as well as their understanding of the ethical and moral aspects of marital life and cohabitation. Because the survey involved a representative sample of 150 respondents, its conclusions can be generalised to the whole population studying in the last two years of the master's degree programmes at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Łódź.

The surveyed population was religiously diversified. Most of its members were the moderately religious students (43%), while the shares of the highly religious persons and the non-believers/the low religious persons were comparable (27% and 30%, respectively).

The large majority of the unmarried students wished to have a spouse in the future – most of them opted for church weddings. According to the respondents, the best age for entering into a marriage is the age of 27–30 years. The vast majority of the respondents would like to have two children in the future.

Students' involvement in religious practices strongly shapes their attitude towards the ethical and moral aspects of marital life and cohabitation. The "trial" cohabitation and the use of contraceptives are almost commonly accepted in society, likewise in the academic community. The very religious persons objected to the practice more often than the other persons did.

The very religious persons presented a more restrictive attitude to surgical abortion, the abortion pill and divorce. They were also more frequent to declare that they wanted to have families with many children.

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