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Factors Shaping the Reproductive Behavior of Young Families in Russia: Data Triangulation

Tamara K. Rostovskaya,

Institute for Demographic Research of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Peoples Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia

Ekaterina N. Vasilieva

Institute for Demographic Research of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

Veronika N. Kholina

Peoples Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors that influence the reproductive behavior of young Russian families (heterosexual families consisting of two persons below the age of 35 with or without children). The analysis relies on the results of a mass questionnaire survey of young first-time married people ($n = 893$) conducted in 10 Russian regions in 2019–2020, in-depth interviews with young married people ($n = 50$) and an expert survey of managers and specialists working for social non-profits ($n = 10$), both conducted in 2021. Based on the data of the mass survey, we found that there are differences in the values of young families with children and without children. Moreover, young couples may choose to postpone childbearing not only for financial reasons but also because of their marital attitudes and reproductive strategies formed in the process of socialization. Marital behavior has a great influence on reproductive behavior. The differences in the respondents' attitudes to parenthood are determined by their gender roles, experience of having and raising children or absence

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© 2023 Tamara K. Rostovskaya, Ekaterina N. Vasilieva,

Veronika N. Kholina

rostovskaya.tamara@mail.ru

vasilevaen@yandex.ru

kholina-vn@rudn.ru

of such experience. We found that state social support does not have a significant impact on the reproductive behavior of young families in Russia. Expert assessments show that the current measures of social support for young families do not cover all the needs of these families and that there is a perceived need for a more comprehensive assistance model.

KEYWORDS

young family, demographics, reproductive behavior, marital behavior, average number of children born, social support for young families, thriving young families

Introduction

The demographic decline that Russia is now facing is seen by the government as a challenge to national security. The alarming demographic trends are reflected in a number of indicators, including the average number of children per woman, which has been falling since 1960. It should be noted, however, that similar trends are characteristic of many other countries (Aries, 1980). States with shrinking populations are adopting a range of policies and measures to tackle this problem. There is a vast body of research literature on state measures to promote fertility (see, for example: Bergsvik et al., 2021; Bognar, 2019; Buttner & Lutz, 1990; Hoem, 2008; Tan et al., 2016).

The main question that this study seeks to address is as follows: How does social support for young families affect their reproductive behavior and which policy responses and interventions can be used to stimulate childbearing more effectively? This issue is particularly relevant to Russia because in order to achieve the goals of state policy (to stimulate population growth and human development), it is necessary to raise the fertility level. Other questions this study addresses are the value orientations of childless families and families with children and the factors that determine the reproductive strategies of young Russian families. The latter is especially important due to the fact that the majority of Russian children are born in marriage.

Theoretical Framework

In the research literature, various factors affecting the fertility rate are discussed: for example, an increase in the educational level and employment of women (van der Lippe & van Dijk, 2002); an increase in the age of marriage and the birth of a woman's first child (Rindfuss et al., 2020); family and demographic policy (Feng et al., 2013); the socio-economic living conditions of the family (Bagirova & Ilyshev, 2009). The variety of concepts explaining the change in reproductive attitudes is determined by the complexity of the process of their formation and the difference in the values and cultural codes underlying the decision to procreate.

Our understanding of young families is determined by the official documents of the Russian Federation, in particular Federal Law No. 489-FZ *O molodezhnoi politike v Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation] (2020), which identifies three types of young families—a full young family without children, a full young family with children, and a young single-parent family with children¹. Measures of state support are targeted primarily at the families whose members are below the age of 35 (subsidies for the purchase of housing, lump-sum payments to women under 24 at the birth of a child, etc.). Despite these measures, however, the total fertility rate continues to decline (Osipov & Ryazantsev, 2014; Vishnevsky, 2019, p. 114).

In this study, the following factors that influence reproductive behavior will be considered: marital behavior (delayed marriage leads to delayed parenthood), marital and reproductive attitudes of young spouses' parents, material, psychological, and legal support for young families.

Conceptually, this study is based on the interpretive sociology of Max Weber.

Research Methodology

In this paper, we are going to focus on the two types of young families specified in the Federal Law cited above: two-person families with and without children. Based on the theoretical concept of a thriving family (for more details see Rostovskaya & Kumchaeva, 2020), we have selected young families who are in their first registered marriage. A thriving family is understood as meeting the following criteria: demographic (full family with children, both spouses having functional relationships with their parents and other relatives), material (comfortable housing, access to quality health care, recreation and leisure opportunities, access to education for children, etc.), and psychological (healthy family relationships based on trust, open communication, shared interests, etc.). Leaving aside the demographic and psychological criteria, we focus on the material criterion, more specifically, on the state's efforts to improve housing affordability for young families and to offer them sufficient financial support.

The study uses triangulation mass survey data obtained as part of the first stage of the national monitoring survey *Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii* [Demographic Well-Being of the Population in Russian Regions] (from late 2019 to early 2020). It also uses the data obtained through in-depth interviews and an expert survey (2021, February–May), which comprised the second stage of the national monitoring survey.

Both stages of data collection were carried out in ten regions in the European part of Russia (the Central Federal District, the Volga Federal District, the Southern Federal District, the North Caucasus Federal District, the Northwestern Federal District, and the Ural Federal District). The regions were selected according to the rating of the socio-economic situation of the Russian regions in 2019: Moscow (1st place), Ivanovo Region (61st place), Volgograd Region (29th place), Vologda Region (28th place), Moscow

¹ See also Letter from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation AF-163/06 *O Kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki v otnoshenii molodoi sem'i* [On the Concept of the State Policy in Relation to Young Family] (2007).

Region (4th place), Nizhny Novgorod Region (14th place), Sverdlovsk Region (7th place), the Republic of Bashkortostan (13th place), the Republic of Tatarstan (5th place), and Stavropol Region (30th place). Thus, the sample includes regions with different levels of economic development and the regions with diverse ethnic and religious makeup².

The study comprised two main stages. At the first stage, the data from the mass survey of people in the chosen regions were collected and processed. Those respondents selected from the available database were members of young families under the age of 35 years inclusive and in their first registered marriage ($n = 893$) (for more details see Rostovskaya, Zolotareva, & Vasilieva, 2022). At the second stage, 50 respondents from young families under the age of 35 were interviewed: 20 of them were childless and the other 30 were those with children. Afterwards, an expert survey was conducted, with one expert being chosen for each region (in total, 10 experts).

Respondents for the sample of qualitative research were purposefully selected from first-time married young people. The data we thus obtained have provided us with some valuable insights into the marital and reproductive behavior of young Russian families. For an expert survey, we selected managers and specialists from socially-oriented non-profit organizations whose main focus is on supporting families, women, and children in difficult life situations.

Reproductive Intentions, Deferred Parenthood, and Values of Young Families

This study tested the relationship between the couple's intention to enter a registered marriage and their childbearing intention. This hypothesis was confirmed.

The influence of the attitudes towards marriage was also tested with the help of the following inverse question: on a 5-point scale, the respondents were asked to assess the significance of different factors affecting people's decision to enter into a marriage. "The desire to have a child in a registered marriage" was rated at 4.19 by childless young couples; by couples with children, at 4.36. The answer "marriage registration ensures the rights of a parent staying with children in case of divorce" scored 3.60 and 3.61, respectively. According to the results of the mass survey, compliance with the moral and social norms got lower scores, 3.21 and 2.27, respectively. Similarly, getting married in order to ensure that the relationship will be more long lasting got a low score that is 2.84 and 2.74.

It was revealed that the reproductive plans of young families (the desired and expected number of children) vary significantly depending on the age of the prospective parents, their socio-economic status, and parenting experience, etc. As many as 27.8% of young families have not yet decided whether they are going to have a child (first or second). The birth of the first or subsequent children is postponed by 27.7% of young families. For 45.8% put off having their first or subsequent children by two years; 31.1% by three years; 11.3% by four years; and 9.2% by five years. The proportion of men and women planning to have a child in 5 years' time differs significantly—4.5% and 13.4%, respectively.

² For more on the project Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii [Demographic Well-Being of the Population in Russian Regions], see https://www.fnisc.ru/index.php?page_id=1198&id=10111

Table 1*Assessment of the Desired and Expected Number of Children, %*

Number of children	“How many children in total (including the ones you already have) would you like to have if the conditions were right?”			“How many children in total (including the ones you already have) are you going to have?”		
	Gender role		Total	Gender role		Total
	woman	man		woman	man	
None	0.8	2.8	1.7	1.1	3.0	2.0
1	5.6	6.5	6.0	11.6	15.3	13.3
2	48.1	44.9	46.7	54.4	47.0	51.0
3	31.9	27.8	30.0	18.5	17.3	18.0
4	2.7	2.3	2.5	1.7	1.8	1.7
5 or more	4.7	5.3	4.9	0.9	1.8	1.3
Don't know	6.3	10.4	8.3	11.8	13.8	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Our study has highlighted the main reproductive intentions of young families (see Table 1). The orientation toward a two- and three-child family is higher for women than for men. This can be explained by the fact that a man's desire to have a child (children) directly depends on his confidence in the material well-being of the family, in other words, for men there is a direct correlation between the family's income and the number of children. Women's attitudes are also related to the family's income but not so rigidly. Women are more focused on maintaining their health and the main factor that determines childbearing timing decisions is their physical and emotional state. As a result, in both gender groups we observe that the desire to have three or more children in practice is transformed into the expectation of two children and the desire of two children is transformed into the expectation of one child. The proportion of undecided people among men is higher. It was found that the older men are, the more prone they are to desire more children.

The significance of the factors determining the difference between the desired and expected number of children is somewhat different in young families who already have children and are just planning the birth of a child. The experience of parenthood determines people's attitudes towards childbearing. There is a growing proportion of respondents who consider themselves less hindered or not hindered by the lack of employment or career opportunities, large workloads and the inability to combine career with household work, the desire to make a career, the opinion of relatives, difficulties in accessing childcare (see Table 2).

Table 2

Assessment of Hindrances to Having the Desired Number of Children, %

“If you would like to have more children than you are going to, what and to what extent prevents you personally from having the desired number of children?”	Average number of children born					
	No			Yes		
	Greatly hinders	Hinders	Does not hinder	Greatly hinders	Hinders	Does not hinder
Difficult relationships in the family (with spouse, parents or in-laws)	3.4	6.8	57.3	6.0	8.0	56.8
No job	18.9	20.4	31.6	10.8	16.7	42.2
Large work load	14.6	24.3	28.2	8.9	25.8	36.8
I work far from home, I spend a lot of time commuting	8.3	16.5	48.5	6.7	8.9	54.6
Desire to make a career	9.2	12.6	49.0	3.5	15.0	53.0
Financial difficulties	29.1	27.2	18.0	23.3	29.1	21.5
Uncertainty about the future	24.3	26.2	24.8	18.6	31.1	21.5
Desire to spend more interesting leisure time	7.8	11.2	54.9	3.9	9.2	56.8
Desire to properly raise and educate the child (children) one already has	6.3	17.0	42.7	9.8	20.8	41.8
Health problems	7.8	17.0	39.8	5.7	17.0	46.1
Husband (or wife) having health problems	2.4	14.1	42.7	4.7	11.5	50.9
Housing difficulties	14.1	31.1	28.6	18.6	23.0	30.3
Fear that the birth of another child will infringe on the interests of the child (children) one already has	3.4	8.7	51.5	3.6	17.5	50.5
The husband (wife) doesn't want to have children (or more children).	6.3	13.1	42.7	4.4	12.1	49.6
It is difficult to arrange childcare, it is hard to get a place in a nearby kindergarten	6.8	19.9	33.0	7.3	18.2	44.4
Inflexible work schedule	8.3	16.5	44.2	6.7	18.2	45.6
It is difficult (for the wife) to combine work and household chores	8.7	25.2	29.6	6.3	20.8	43.2
There will be no one to leave the child with when I start (my wife will start) working	9.7	25.7	31.1	10.3	27.8	34.5
Relatives are still against the birth of another child (children)	2.4	4.4	57.8	1.7	4.7	63.3

Note. The percentages of those who answered “I don't know” or gave no answer are not given.

There are gender-related differences in the reasons people give for deferred parenthood, they are especially pronounced in the barriers that respondents choose as “greatly hindering” their decision-making process regarding childbearing. For instance, in the option “We don’t have a place of our own to raise the child in”, the average score is 32.8%, with 25.8% women and 40.2% men. Similarly, in the option “I need to find a better-paid job” with the average score 29.3%, the distribution is 25.4% women and 33.6% men. Other examples of gender-related differences include the following: the option “I am not financially prepared for this yet” 26.7% (19.2% women and 34.8% men); “the youngest child is still too small” 20.3% (22.5% women and 18.0% men); “I need to pay loans” 18.8% (13.0% women and 25.2% men); “raising a child is a difficult task, which requires a lot of effort and time” 18.4% (22.2% women and 14.2% men). These data lead us to the conclusion that a large proportion of young families reproduce the traditional family model where the husband is responsible for material well-being of the family and the wife is responsible for the child’s upbringing. Such situation is especially typical of families that already have a preschool child. As many as 9.9% of young families postpone parenthood because they have not completed their education and 9.4% delay childbirth because they want to “enjoy time for themselves”.

The reasons behind the decision to have a child also differ depending on the gender of the respondent: “married life is going well, you can have a child” 20.8% (16.1% women and 27.4% men); “we are now in a registered marriage” 19.5% (20.7% women and 17.7% men); “it is impossible to postpone further because of the age” 19.5% (20.7% women and 17.7% men); “we have enjoyed the no-kids lifestyle, now it is time to have a child” 17.4% (14.9% women and 21.0% men). Comparing the reasons for deferred parenthood and the reasons for deciding to have a child, it is clear that if the young family is not struggling financially and does not have a housing problem, then mutual understanding of spouses, registered marriage (it is especially important for women as a guarantee of their legal rights), psychological comfort in marriage (especially for men) become the most critical factors as well as their reproductive age.

Measures of state support that may have an impact on the birth of a child (see Table 3) received different assessments depending on young couples’ experience of parenthood: for families with children, the quality of medical care is more important; for families without children—the availability of child benefits. Traditionally, measures to assist young families in obtaining housing were rated highly (4.23).

Table 3

Assessment of the Importance of Family Support Measures on a Five-Point Scale, %

“To increase the average number of children born, additional measures of family support should include the following”:	Average number of children born		Total
	No	Yes	
Housing assistance	4.35	4.19	4.23
Improvement of the quality of health care	3.48	4.12	4.18
Raising child benefits (for children under 3)	4.20	4.16	4.17
Raising child benefits (for children under 1.5)	4.21	4.02	4.07

Table 3 Continued

“To increase the average number of children born, additional measures of family support should include the following”:	Average number of children born		Total
	No	Yes	
Raising maternity allowance (paid after the birth of a child)	4.10	4.02	4.04
Preferential mortgages for families with several children	4.03	4.0	4.01
Fostering access to high-quality preschool education	3.99	3.88	3.91
Lowering the retirement age for women with children	3.75	3.86	3.83
Improvement of the quality of consumer service	4.04	3.72	3.79
Promoting flexible work schedules for working parents	3.98	3.70	3.76
Child care assistance to families provided on a contractual basis	3.94	3.68	3.74
More leisure opportunities for families with children	3.88	3.67	3.72
Expanding remote employment opportunities for parents	3.83	3.56	3.62
Preferential loans depending on the number of children	3.55	3.57	3.56
No changes to the amount of child benefits but their extension until the school-going age	3.54	3.50	3.51

The life goals of young families with children are the material well-being (4.76), raising a child (4.76), good health (4.72), the opportunity to give children good education (4.70), possession of a good house (4.69), and being in a loving relationship (4.63). For childless couples, the order of importance is as follows: good health, good house, being in a loving relationship, and education for future children.

Young people’s answers to the question “What, in your opinion, is necessary to succeed in life?” have shown that their top priorities are good health and flexible skills—the ability to build relationships with other people, to adapt to change, to have talent, and to be able to work well and conscientiously. The value of family and children on the path to success is higher among the respondents with parenthood experience (4.07) than among the respondents without children (3.68). Similarly, the ability to work hard is evaluated higher by couples with children than by childless respondents (4.23 and 4.02 respectively).

Of the respondents, 67.3% agreed with the statement “a family is, above all, a lot of work and tolerance for each other”; 46.6%, “it’s not worth staying in a loveless relationship, even for the sake of children”; 38.3%, “a man should share household chores and child-rearing responsibilities with a woman”; 31.4%, “a family without children is not a real family”; 30.6%, “marriage must be registered; otherwise it is not a real family”; 30.4%, “a single person cannot be happy, the meaning of life is in the family.” Not surprisingly, young first-time married couples place a high value on the family.

The experience of parenthood has a significant impact on the respondents’ answers and changes their life goals. Some goals score higher because the respondents’ experience of parenthood makes them more meaningful: for example, “to have grandchildren”, 4.17 and 4.64, respectively; “to raise two children”, 4.01 and 4.26; and “gain respect from others”, 3.72 and 3.93.

Reproductive Strategies of Young Families: The Results of In-Depth Interviews

As the mass survey has shown, marriage is a significant factor in couples' decision to have a child. During our in-depth interviews with young spouses planning parenthood or already having children, we asked the following questions: How did you take the decision to register your marriage? How did you meet? Did you live together before getting married? Our survey has shed some light on the reasons behind young couples' choice of one of the possible strategies (short-term premarital cohabitation, long-term premarital cohabitation, and no premarital cohabitation) and their satisfaction with the results of this choice.

We detected a certain change in the respondents' assessment of cohabitation practices while they were preparing for the birth of a child: *"Yes, we lived together for a short period [that is, before the official marriage]. I don't quite approve of it, I wouldn't want them to do it [their future children]"* (man, 22 y.o., married, no children but is expecting a child, two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by Tamara Rostovskaya, Ekaterina Vasilieva, & Veronika Kholina—T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

The length of premarital cohabitation is determined by the (dis)approval of and/or support for such a practice on the part of the couple's inner circle:

We got married in 2018, so it's been three years already and we have been together for five years. We started living together almost immediately. Before getting married, we lived with my parents for four years. (Man, 25 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Nizhny Novgorod Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

I have got married recently; it was a little over six months ago ... We dated for six months, then I invited her to live with me, then we were still living with my parents. We lived with my parents for 1.5 years, and then we moved out and lived separately for six months, and then decided to formalize our relationship. We lived in a civil marriage for a long time, then decided to formalize it. (Man, 32 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, unfinished higher education, Tatarstan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Those of our respondents whose parents strongly disapprove of premarital cohabitation tended to avoid this practice:

No, we had not lived together before marriage because since childhood we have been told that life together should begin only after marriage. We discussed this with my future spouse and decided that only after getting married, we would start a life together. (Woman, 21 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

It is necessary to highlight the role of religious attitudes as a factor that influences marital behavior. The choice to live together before marriage largely

depends on the religion the respondent was born into (e.g., in Muslim families it is possible to conduct the *nikah* ceremony—the rite of marriage in the Muslim tradition, which allows a young couple to start marital relations before the state registration):

We are representatives of the Islamic religion. According to tradition, first we concluded a Muslim marriage. This is the equivalent of an Orthodox wedding and after that we signed the marriage document at the registry office and began to live together. (Woman, 30 y.o., married, no children, the only child in the parent family, higher education, Vologda Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

In some cases, a young couple cannot start living together for objective rather than moral reasons:

My husband and I both conscientiously approached the issue of creating a family. We discussed this repeatedly while we were living separately. Still, we believed that there was no need to get married at that time because we lived in different cities and so on and when the question of living together arose, we got married. (Woman, 22 y.o., married, one child, two children in the parent family, higher education, Stavropol Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

We found some gender differences in the way our respondents answered the question: “Which of the following views on the family do you agree with?”. 24.8% of women and 18.2% of men strongly agreed with the statement “Nowadays divorce is normal, it is nothing terrible”.

We also asked the respondents the following questions: “Have you dreamt of marriage?” and “What are your plans regarding marriage/children/their number?”

Some informants believe that parenthood has a higher value than marriage:

I did not dream of marriage as such. I didn't have such a direct specific goal to get married sooner ... Since childhood, I have had a very respectful attitude towards children. I've always been very touched by the kids. I've nursed nephews, brothers, sisters, and anyone I could. I've always wanted a big family for myself. My husband and I are planning to have three children, at least. (Woman, 22 y.o., married, one child, two children in the parent family, higher education, Stavropol Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

In fact, I didn't dream of a white dress from an early age, of a prince charming. No, there was no such thing ... Well, of course, I really want children. You can't predict it but I would like three children. I believe that every woman should become a mother and continue her family line. I have a very positive attitude to this, and I consider it everyone's duty. (Woman, 24 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Volgograd Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Respondents who dreamed of a family (marriage, children) note that they are not going to postpone parenthood:

Well, like all little girls, I dreamed that I would have a good family ... We'll see how it goes, of course, but we'd like to have two or three children. (Woman, 21 y.o., married, no children, three children in the parent family (stepbrother and stepsister), university student, Bashkortostan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

And we would like a big family, too. At about the age of 16, we thought that we'd like to have six children ... My older brother had a son when he was 28 years old. It's a little late for us. (Man, 20 years old, married, no children, two children in the parent family, university student, Bashkortostan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Yes, since childhood I have dreamed of getting married in a beautiful white dress ... As for children, we plan two or three depending on the situation with work, the earnings and financial situation ... I love children very much. I want to have a lot of children, and I hope I will. (Woman, 21 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

During the in-depth interviews, we sought to clarify the factors that influence the couples' decision about childbearing as well as the importance of state support measures for such decision-making. Respondents willing to have many children are ready to plan the birth of another child if the conditions are right. In each individual case, the desired conditions are different depending on the couple's situation (health, well-being, etc.):

We are planning two children. However, if things go well, we want more children if there are no contraindications to pregnancy. I don't think we'll have only one, otherwise he may grow up selfish. (Man, 22 y.o., married, no children (but is expecting a child), two children in the parent family, university student, Ivanovo Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

The ideal and optimal number of children in the family is two. If we had everything we needed, we would like to have no more than three children. (Man, 22 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Moscow Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Well, I would like two, of course. We want more than one child but we'll see. Three children, yes, I wouldn't mind having three children [that is, if they earned more and had a three-room apartment]. (Man, 32 y.o., married, no children, two children in the parent family, incomplete higher education, Tatarstan; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Some informants do not believe that all the necessary conditions are achievable, so they deliberately limit the desired number of children to one or two:

If we had everything we need, we would like to have at least two children. We want to give our children everything, they shouldn't be deprived of anything they need in order to thrive, two children would be an ideal solution. (Woman, 30 y.o., married, no children, the only child in the parent family, higher education, Vologda Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Well, again, it seems to me that you need to give birth to at least one and see how you feel ... in general, whether you have enough strength for one child. If you are healthy enough to give birth to more than one, then why not? And the image of an ideal family, like, you know, in this TV commercial of a juice—a boy, a girl and everything. (Woman, 26 y.o., married, no children, the only child in the parent family, higher education, Nizhny Novgorod Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

The data obtained through in-depth interviews show that state support measures do not significantly affect couples' decision-making regarding the birth of their first child. However, there is a potential impact of state benefit schemes and programs on the birth of the third child, e.g., the effect of the so-called maternity capital benefit that applies to families that have had or adopted their second child (third, fourth, or any other subsequent child) since 2007. There are also baby-bonus schemes for families who have had their first child since 2020, January 1 and Regional incentive programs stimulating families to have more than two children:

We have received the maternity capital benefit but we have not used it yet. The state support for families with three or more children significantly affects our desire to give birth to a third child. In the case of the first two children, measures of state/regional support did not affect our decision-making in any way. (Man, 35 y.o., married, two children, two children in the parent family, higher education, Moscow Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

Yes, we've received the maternity capital benefit. Our decision to have children was not affected by state/regional support measures. In Moscow Region you are not entitled to social support benefits if you just have many children. There is a category "low-income with many children". Since we have many children but we are not low-income, we can't get these payments. We have maternity capital, but we need money for a mortgage or to build a house, which we don't have yet. Therefore, this certificate is not applicable yet. We do not understand how it can be applied in our case. We are on the waiting list to receive a certificate for a land plot. We are 2000+ in the queue; land plots are given to 10 large families in our area each year. (Woman, 32 y.o., married, three children, the only child in the parent family, vocational education, Moscow Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

First, the more children there are in the family, the more state assistance is required, and the more problems families are facing that they cannot solve on their own. Second, the more expensive housing is in the region where a young family lives

or the lower is the average wage level in the region, the fewer opportunities this family has to use the most effective family support—the maternity certificate. To claim the maternity capital benefit, you don't have to be a low-income parent.

State support for Russian families is largely focused on helping low-income families, which means that higher-income young families are left with an option of applying to socially-oriented non-profit organizations (SO NPOs).

The Main Areas of Activity of Non-Profits Working With Young Families

The state system of support for young families is focused primarily on helping them solve their housing problems and thus on enhancing their well-being. The question we were interested in was as follows: Do family-oriented non-profits work with young families from categories other than low-income families?

The Russian government actively supports SO NPOs, including those focused on family and childhood support. These organizations' work focuses on helping families in difficult life situations, large families, and single parents, and female victims of violence. There is no specific work done for "young families" but specialists working in the social services market undertake to develop projects to promote family values among young people:

These include awareness raising activities, creation of a favourable environment, work should be started from kindergarten—there is a mom, a dad, children, a family. In kindergartens this work is conducted, it is included in the educational standard. There are no such standards for school education yet, so it will be more difficult to organize such work. We have started working with grades 10–11 and 1–2 years of colleges; we have an interactive exhibition "Pro Birth". We are talking about responsible parenting, about the moral portfolio of an individual. (Expert, Volgograd Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

The second area is aimed at strengthening marriage and preventing divorces:

Why do most young people get divorced? Because they are faced with the fact that they have to fight for happiness, that they need to work with problems, and family problems. We need to go through them somehow. Everything can't be going smoothly forever. And a happy family is characterized not by the absence of difficult moments, but by the number of difficult moments that you manage to successfully overcome. (Expert, Stavropol Region; trans. by T. R., E. V. & V. Kh.)

As our expert survey has shown, the activities carried out by Russian SO NPOs to support young families are as follows:

- support for families in difficult life situations, including young families (financial problems, divorce, complicated pregnancy, abortion prevention, etc.);
- assistance in organizing children's leisure activities;
- legal advice on obtaining the required state assistance;

- raising awareness of available support;
- psychological counselling.

In addition to the above-described areas of work, non-profits also campaign for the legislative initiatives aimed at abolishing the “low income” criterion for receiving child benefits, optimizing the system of land plot allocation for large families, and introducing additional family tax benefits. Experts believe that taken together, these initiatives will form a comprehensive model of support for young families. Educational projects are being implemented to promote a positive image of large successful families. Experts negatively assess the effectiveness of those state measures that stimulate the practice of “fake divorces” when people arrange for a divorce to apply for single-parent benefits, because they see this practice as a threat to the model of a thriving family (Mintrud predstavil pravila, 2021).

Thus, non-profits can take up some of the work aimed at supporting young families. The main barrier to effective support on the part of the non-profits, however, is that young families are generally unwilling to reach out to these organizations for help or that they are unaware of this opportunity. As experts put it, in their practice, young families make just a few isolated cases.

Conclusion

The results of the mass survey, in-depth interviews of young married people, and expert survey have demonstrated that the support system in Russia is focused on helping only low-income families and does not significantly improve the quality of life of young families with larger incomes. Therefore, the availability of such benefits does not have a significant effect on the fertility rate. Today’s young families either decide against having a second child or having more than two children or choose to postpone childbirth. Their behavioral strategies are not affected by the available family support programs implemented by the government.

Strategies of reproductive behavior of young families can be linked to the types of social action described by M. Weber: goal rational social action, value-rational social action, affective social action, and traditional social action. Thus, we can identify the strategy of rational reproductive behavior, the strategy of value-rational reproductive behavior, and traditional reproductive behavior. The strategy of rational reproductive behavior is determined by the family’s financial situation and health. It may also correlate with the fact that the couple has registered their marriage. If the couple attach a high value to family values and children, then they are more likely to choose the strategy of value-rational reproductive behavior. In this case, material considerations play a secondary role in their decision-making regarding childbearing. Finally, there is traditional reproductive behavior, which means that families tend to follow the tradition of having many children inherited from the parental family (or families). A hypothetical assumption can be made about affective reproductive behavior, which was left beyond the scope of this study. In this case, we may be talking about dysfunctional families.

We found that following the birth of the first and subsequent children, families’ behavioral strategies change. As a rule, the birth of the first child correlates with the

strategy of value-rational reproductive behavior; the birth of the second child, with the strategy of rational reproductive behavior. The conscious choice of having many children is linked either to value-rational reproductive behavior or traditional reproductive behavior. These strategies, in their turn, also correlate with the types of marital behavior: after marriage is officially registered, the mechanisms of behavior rationalization are activated.

The main factors shaping the reproductive behavior of young people are gender, age, marital attitudes, children, influence of parental families. Our study has also brought to light the relationship between marital and reproductive behavior in young families as well as the models of marital and reproductive behavior determined by the attitudes rooted in the parental families of the young spouses. There are resources to increase the fertility rate: for example, to offer young families expanded social support by abolishing the “low income” criterion. In this case, young families may be more motivated to have the desired number of children. There will possibly be shifts in the timing of childbearing, especially for couples planning their first pregnancy.

We have also found some gender-related differences in young people’s decision-making regarding childbearing: since men are generally more concerned about the family’s finances, it would make sense to offer systematic support to young families so that fathers could feel more confident that they would be able to maintain the family’s quality of life if the couple decides to have more children.

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