



ARTICLE IN THE SPECIAL SECTION

Institutional Factors in Reproductive Decision-Making Among Large Families in Russia

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ABSTRACT

Amidst pressing global challenges and internal demographic threats, it is crucial to understand the institutional dynamics shaping the well-being of large families. This study delves into the intricate web of institutional factors that influence the prosperity of such families, examining key theoretical frameworks including institutional theory, human and social capital theories, and concepts of family. The empirical investigation draws upon extensive data sources, encompassing population censuses spanning five decades (1970–2020) and the comprehensive 2021 All-Russian sociological study *Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii* [Demographic Well-Being of the Regions of Russia]. We conducted 22 in-depth interviews with members of large families across 10 regions. These interviews gave us a nuanced picture of the trends in family structure and the reasons behind reproductive decisions within these families. While institutional support is viewed as a “bonus” rather than a decisive factor in reproductive decisions, parents require various resources, including material, temporal, socio-psychological, informational, and

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educational resources, to develop necessary family and human capital skills. Furthermore, the study identifies the institutional conditions and resources crucial for bolstering the well-being of large families as well as the importance of effective family policies.

KEYWORDS

prosperous family, large family, family structure, reproductive behavior, institutional conditions, family policy

Introduction

A substantial body of research literature examines the motivations behind reproductive decision-making, that is, the reasons behind people's decision to have their first or second child or more children. Some argue that having more than one child, especially three or more, is not economically feasible while having one child allows the family to concentrate their resources on this child's education and upbringing to foster the growth of their human capital. Research also aims to shed light on the factors behind the decision to have a third child, suggesting that impediments such as economic downturn and social problems are leading to the decrease in the number of large families and additionally, children from larger families are more vulnerable to social risks (Desai, 1995).

An analysis of data from the Generation and Gender survey spanning 2004–2015 for Austria, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia suggests that lower opportunity costs and positive public opinion influence third-child births (Panova et al., 2023). A Norwegian study investigated three factors influencing third-child births: the birth rate in neighboring families (social environment influence); propensity to relocate; and likelihood of living in a suitable home for a large family (Bergsvik et al., 2023).

The research aims to systematize the institutional conditions that determine families' reproductive decision-making, highlight the main trends in the evolving structure of Russian families, identify motives for reproductive behavior, and outline the necessary institutional conditions and resources contributing to the well-being of multi-child families.

The main hypothesis of the study is that to help families realize their reproductive plans, it is important to assist them in tapping into their own resources while also enhancing external support systems. This, in turn, could lead to an increase in the number of large families in Russia. The verification of this hypothesis requires the use of data from quantitative and qualitative studies of families.

Theoretical Framework

Analysis of the institutional conditions shaping large family dynamics requires us to consider both enabling and constraining factors. By applying the lens of institutional theory, we can explore how governmental regulations influence the evolution of socio-

economic structures (Abolafia & Biggart, 1991; Fligstein, 1997; Granovetter, 1992; North, 1990; Polanyi et al., 1957).

Beyond institutional conditions, it is also important to understand the values influencing reproductive behavior since these values shape individuals' interests (constitutive impact) and guide their decisions in pursuing reproductive goals (regulatory impact). To address the questions outlined above, we need to inquire into what resources are necessary for families to prevent their standard of living from declining after the birth of subsequent children. Another question is whether the model of a large family in this study corresponds to the concept of a "well-functioning family" developed by T. Rostovskaya (Rostovskaya & Kalachikova, 2022; Rostovskaya & Kuchmaeva, 2020; Rostovskaya et al., 2021, 2023).

Resources can be systematized according to the standard scheme: internal family resources such as human and social capital, values, etc. and external resources, i.e., state support through social protection institutions, regulatory documents, etc. (Coleman, 1988; Lee, 2020; Putnam, 1995; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; etc.). While interactions with bureaucratic structures providing social support tend to be impersonal, socially oriented non-profit organizations (SO NPOs) offer more interpersonal support, fostering the accumulation of social capital. The effectiveness of resource use in families is determined by the actions, decisions, and behaviors of the family members themselves, which is why it is also essential to study the family's human capital.

At this point it should be noted that worthy of special interest for this study are the approaches that regard the family as an institution where members make rational decisions about distributing and redistributing available resources, often seeking external support (Anderson & Bidner, 2023; Deschênes et al., 2020; Dorofeeva, 2021; Pavlyutkin & Goleva, 2020). In large families, time (Goleva, 2019) and social capital play crucial roles in redistributing tasks (Dorofeeva, 2021). External family resources are accumulated in the system of state support, social protection, and medical services, which is discussed by Stuart et al. (2023), Egger and Radulescu (2012), Ilyin et al. (2021).

Economic institutions directly determine what efforts an actor needs to make to form the family's material resources. Australian and Chinese studies assess the impact of housing affordability and real estate market prices on fertility (Atalay et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2023). Additionally, the resource distribution in Russian families is discussed by Borisova and Pavlyutkin (2019), Dorofeeva (2021), and etc.

The resource potential of public organizations, civil society, and non-profit organizations is analyzed by Mersianova and Benevolenski (2016). More comprehensive research is needed, however, to understand the support provided by public organizations to large families. The question about the influence of religion on family values and reproductive behavior is also surrounded by much debate (Ildarhanova et al., 2022).

We summarized the information on the institutions and corresponding resources for large families in Table 1. We also examined the internal and external resources available to large families to gain a better understanding of how these families develop and function in modern Russia.

Table 1*Institutions That Determine the Availability of Resources to Large Families in Russia*

Institutes	Resources
Family	Human capital (social status of family members, education, experience, career, health, etc.) Material resources (income earned, housing, etc.) Social capital (multi-generation family, comprising parents, brothers and sisters, friends, colleagues) Norms and values (sustainability of parent–child relationships, etc.) Time and management resources
Education	Human capital Social capital Norms and values (traditional Russian values)
Healthcare	Support and development of human capital (availability and quality of medical care)
Economic institutions	Labor market (employment structure, regional wage levels) Development of entrepreneurship and self-employment Infrastructure, including the quality of the family's living environment (educational and sports facilities, transportation accessibility, recreational services) Real estate market
Social protection institutions	Material support (benefits, subsidies, maternity capital, discounts and free travel passes, preferential mortgage loans, tax breaks) Maintenance and development of human capital (educational programs for women with children, for children; recreation opportunities for families and children, sports)
Public opinion	Norms and values (positive, negative, or neutral attitudes towards large families)
Mass media	Information access (about state and regional support measures for large families, about the activities of public organizations, etc.) Public opinion (practices of shaping public opinion, advertising)
Religious institutions	Norms and values Accumulation of social capital through expanding social networks
Public organizations (SO NPOs)	Accumulation of social capital Time (redistribution through receipt of additional social services) Maintenance and development of human capital (educational programs for family members and children) Information access

Methodology

To identify the trends in the changing structure of the modern Russian family, in particular regarding the number of children, and to determine the prevalence of large families among urban and rural populations, data from the Russian censuses over the past 50 years have been systematized. The censuses took place in 1970, 1979, 1989, 2002, 2010, and 2020.

We analyzed the institutional conditions influencing the reproductive behavior of large families using data collected in 2021 from the second phase of the national sociological study *Demograficheskoe samochuvstvie regionov Rossii* [Demographic Well-Being of the Regions of Russia] (Project No. 20-18-00256 on the Demographic Behavior of the Population in the Context of National Security of Russia). We conducted 22 in-depth interviews across various federal districts, including the Central, Northwestern, Volga, Urals, North Caucasus, and Southern regions. Representatives of large families from urban households were selected based on specific criteria, such as income level, absence of addictions, and a healthy socio-psychological environment. These selection criteria helped us focus on the motivations and circumstances behind the decision to form large families as a deliberate and responsible choice. We used a methodology for reconstructing the family's life trajectory to explore the reproductive motivations of parents in large families.

Demographic Trends of Large Families in Russia

Despite the birth rates decreasing worldwide, the situation with large families varies significantly by country and region. Large families (that is, families with three or more children) currently (as of 2020) account for 12.6% of the total number of families with children in Europe, though this figure varies significantly. For example, Finland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Croatia had the highest proportion of households with three or more children, that is more than 15.0%. In Portugal (6.3%), Bulgaria (7.4%), Italy (8.1%), Spain (9.3%), Lithuania (9.4%), and Greece (9.8%), less than one in ten families with children could be classified as large (Stamoulis & Pierrakos, 2023).

According to the European Statistical Agency (Eurostat), there is a growing trend in the number of large families, despite the fact that the average family size is getting smaller. There are now more families with four or more children in Britain than at any time since the 1970s (OECD, n.d.). The share of large families in the United States is more than a fifth of families with children, 21.6%. In Japan this figure is 11.5% (OECD, n.d.). Families with a large number of people are still the norm in Africa and South Asia. Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have shown a slight decrease in the prevalence of large households in recent years (De Silva, 2003; Obembe et al., 2018).

Population censuses, both in Russia and elsewhere, offer crucial insights into family structures, enabling analysis of childbearing trends and the adoption of the large family model among Russians across different regions. Over the past 50 years, data shows a notable decline in the prevalence of large families and overall childbearing rates in Russia. In 1970, 214 out of 1,000 families had no children under 18; by 2020, this figure nearly tripled to 604 (Table 2). According to the latest census, only 396 out of 1,000 families had children under 18. The remaining families include those who choose not to have children, those yet to start families, or parents whose children have reached adulthood. It is crucial to recognize that the high number of childless families reflects low birth rates. For instance, if a family has only one child after 18 years, it is

categorized as childless due to the absence of children under 18 in the household, as per census methodology.

Analysis of the structure of families with children should take into account the growth—until recently—in the number of families with only one child. In 1970, there were 485 one-child families per 1,000 families with children, and by 2010, their number had increased to 655. This trend slowed down in 2010 and was replaced by a decrease, according to the 2020 census data. Between the 2010 and 2020 censuses, the indicator decreased to 552.

The 2020 census showed an increase in the proportion of families with two and three or more children, which contradicts the trends in previous decades. By 2010, the proportion of families with two children decreased to 275 per 1,000 families with children, and those with three or more children decreased to 70. Over 40 years, the reduction was 1.25 and 2.44 times, respectively. However, in 2020, the indicators practically returned to the 1979 level.

We could safely assume that the dynamics of the family structure in terms of the number of children were influenced by measures of demographic and family policy, implemented in the form of the maternal capital at the federal (since 2007) and regional levels (gradually since 2012). These support measures are designed to encourage the birth of second and subsequent children. However, the rise in the proportion of families with multiple children may be short-lived if additional large-scale measures are not implemented to strengthen family-oriented policies.

Table 2

The Structure of Families by the Number of Children Under 18, per 1,000 Private Households Consisting of Two or More People

Population	Families				
	Without children	With children	With one child	With two children	With three and more children
	1970				
Total	214	786	485	344	171
Urban	206	794	541	357	102
Rural	228	772	384	319	297
	1979				
Total	384	616	581	327	92
Urban	376	624	625	326	49
Rural	403	597	474	332	194
	1989				
Total	416	584	508	394	98
Urban	402	598	541	391	68
Rural	457	543	406	401	193

Table 2 Continued

Population	Families				
	Without children	With children	With one child	With two children	With three and more children
2002					
Total	483	517	652	282	66
Urban	489	511	700	258	42
Rural	463	537	522	347	131
2010					
Total	559	441	655	275	70
Urban	568	432	694	258	48
Rural	532	468	545	324	131
2020					
Total	604	396	552	331	117
Urban	612	388	583	327	90
Rural	578	422	466	342	192

Note. Calculated by the authors according to the results of the All-Union Population Census of 1970 (Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi, 1974); the All-Union Population Census of 1979 (Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi, 1989); the All-Union Population Census of 1989 (Kratkaia sotsial'no-demograficheskaja kharakteristika, 1991); the All-Russian Census 2002 (Chislo i sostav, 2004); the All-Russian Population Census 2010 (Rosstat, n.d.); the All-Russian Population Census 2020 (Rosstat, 2022).

During the period under consideration, urban families' childbearing level was lower than that of rural families. It should be noted that most Russian families are urban (63.6% in 1970 and 75.1% in 2020), and their lifestyle and reproductive behavior determine the demographic situation.

In a way, the trend towards the nuclearization of family life, which stands for people's reluctance to have several children, is confirmed by the increase in the number of single people in Russia, particularly significant among the urban population (Table 3). In 2020, every fifth city dweller lived alone, outside a family. Furthermore, recent years have seen a notable rise in the number of single individuals. Between 2010 and 2020, their numbers increased from 99 to 189 per 1,000, marking a 1.9-fold increase.

The key metrics for family childbearing, used in calculations based on population censuses, include the proportion of families with children, the prevalence of large families among all families with children, and the average number of children in families with children. These indicators exhibit significant variation across Russian regions. The proportion of families with three or more children ranged from 7.0% in Magadan Oblast to 52.5% in the Republic of Ingushetia in 2020. In 63 regions, the proportion of large families does not exceed 13.3%. The proportion of large families is particularly high in national autonomies, where traditions of having many children are still strong.

Table 3*Proportion of Single Persons Living Outside the Family, per 1,000 Population*

Population	Year						
	1959	1970	1979	1989	2002	2010	2020
Total	48	66	70	69	82	99	189
Urban	59	71	69	68	84	104	207
Rural	36	57	71	71	78	87	137

Note. Calculated by the authors according to the results of the 1959 All-Union Population Census of the RSFSR (Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi, 1963); results of the All-Union Population Census of 1970 (Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda, 1974; Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1979 goda, 1989); All-Union Population Census of 1989 (Kratkaia sotsial'no-demograficheskaia kharakteristika, 1991); All-Russian Census 2002 (Chislo i sostav, 2004); All-Russian Population Census 2010 (Rosstat, n.d.); All-Russian Population Census 2020 (Rosstat, 2022).

The share of families with children among all families fluctuates significantly: this indicator ranges from 31.2% in the capital to 68.9% in the Chechen Republic. In 20 regions, the share of families with children under 18 does not exceed 37.3% (Moscow, Volgograd, Ryazan, Tver, Tambov, Novgorod, Smolensk, Tula, Kursk, Saratov, Voronezh, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Lipetsk, Leningrad, Belgorod, and Pskov Oblasts, Primorsky Krai, St. Petersburg, Sevastopol).

Despite significant regional variations, families with children under 18 are less represented in the European part of the country. Again, the share of families with children is higher in the national republics (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Republics of Buryatia, Khakassia, Altai, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Tuva, etc.).

The average number of children in families with children points to a statistically insignificant fertility of Russian families, the national average being 1.6 children. In the overwhelming majority of Russian regions, the average number of children in families with children under 18 does not exceed 1.7 children. Only in 6 republics this figure exceeds two children (Kabardino-Balkarian, Karachay-Cherkess, Chechen, Tuva, Dagestan, and Ingushetia Republics). Figure 1 shows that a similar distribution of the indicators characterizing the childbearing of families by region.

The calculation of Kendall's tau-b rank correlation coefficient revealed significant relationships between the following indicators (the correlation is significant at .01):

- the proportion of families with multiple children among all families with children and the proportion of families with children among all families (Kendall's tau-b value is 0.576);
- the proportion of families with children among all families and the average number of children under 18 per family with children (Kendall's tau-b value is 0.603);
- the average number of children under 18 per family with children and the proportion of families with multiple children among all families with children (Kendall's tau-b value is 0.832).

Figure 1
Distribution of Families by Number of Children Across Russian Regions: Insights From the 2020 All-Russian Population Census

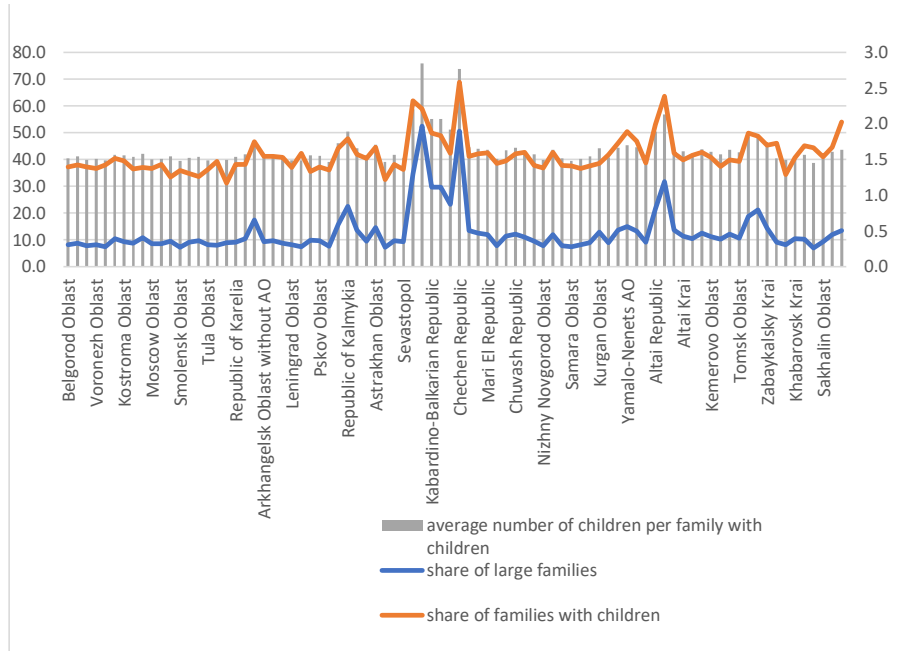


Table 4 illustrates the proportion of families with multiple children across various types of households, indicating significant variation among them. Notably, families with many children are more typical of rural rather than urban areas. Families with three or more children are most frequently found among multi-generational families, which can be explained by the prevalence of a more traditional approach to the organization of family life.

Table 4
The Number of Children in Various Types of Households in Russia According to the All-Russian Population Census 2020, %

Household	Proportion of households with children under 18				Average number of children, people
	Total	With one child	With two children	With three or more children	
Couple with or without children	41.6	48.4	38.4	13.2	1.69
Couple with or without children and living with one of the spouses' parents	54.6	49.0	37.0	14.0	1.69
Couple with or without children and living with both parents of one of the spouses with or without children	71.6	45.5	37.3	17.2	1.78

Table 4 Continued

Household	Proportion of households with children under 18				Average number of children, people
	Total	With one child	With two children	With three or more children	
Couple with or without children and living with both parents of one of the spouses with or without children and other relatives (or without them) and non-relatives (or without them)	72.6	35.6	31.7	32.7	2.23
Three or more couples living with relatives (or without them) and non-relatives (or without them)	80.2	16.8	21.7	61.5	3.44
Mother with child/children	46.0	64.5	27.4	8.1	1.46
Father with child/children	45.4	71.9	22.5	5.6	1.35
Mother (or father) with child (children) and living with one of the mother's (father's) parents	71.9	73.5	21.8	4.7	1.32
Mother (or father) with child (children) and living with one of the mother's (father's) parents, and other relatives (or without them) and non-relatives (or without them)	61.1	62.4	26.6	11.0	1.54

The highest proportion of large families, encompassing three or more married couples, relatives (or none), and non-relatives (or none), stands at 61.4%. Following closely are families consisting of a married couple with children, both parents of one spouse with or without children, as well as other relatives (or none) and non-relatives (or none), comprising 32.7%. These family types also exhibit the highest fertility rates, with 3.44 and 2.23 children under 18 per family, respectively.

However, it is worth noting that the proportion of such families in the total number of families in Russia is small and amounted to about 1.7%, according to the 2021 census data.

The most common type of family with children in Russia is the nuclear family, consisting of parents and children (48.6%). Its contribution to the fertility of Russian families determines the model of the Russian family with children. Within this category, only 13.2% of families have three or more children, leading to an average fertility rate of 1.69 children per family with children under 18.

In Russia, the proportion of incomplete families is significant, standing at 25.3%, and this figure continues to rise. In 1970, their share was 15.9%, increasing to 21.0% by 2010. These families exhibit the lowest fertility levels and the smallest share of large families, ranging from 4.7% to 11.0%.

Information about family units confirms the changing family structure. A family unit can be a married couple with or without children, a mother with children, or a father with children. In Russia, data on family units have been collected and published since 2002, which limits the analysis of long-term trends. Among family units, the majority (according to the 2020 census) are married couples (68.2%). At the same

time, only 39.4% of married couples had children under 18. Of family units, 26.0% were mothers with children, 5.8% were fathers with children. The childbearing rate of married couples is higher than that of single-parent families. According to the 2020 census, 13.5% of married couples with children could be classified as having many children. As many as 7.1% of mothers in single-parent families and 5.3% of fathers have many children. The analysis of data indicates a decrease in the prevalence of large families in Russia, reflecting global trends in family transformation such as the increasing prominence of nuclear families, declining fertility rates, and the diverse array of preferred family models.

Moreover, if we examine the structure of Russian families by the number of children, we will see a potential impact of demographic policy interventions on the proportion of large families. An essential objective for our research is therefore to understand the perspectives of members of large families regarding their reproductive motivations and the support they need to realize their reproductive plans. This aspect is crucial for developing effective family and demographic policies.

Motivations Behind Reproductive Decision-Making in Large Families

During in-depth interviews, respondents connected their values, such as family, health, material well-being, and others, with the concept of “happiness”: “It’s hard for me to talk about this, but probably family, children, grandchildren” (Female, 45, Moscow, three children; Trans. by Tamara Rostovskaya, Oksana Kuchmaeva, & Ekaterina Vasilieva—T. R., O. K., & E. V.). “To have sufficient means in the family. So that the children are as well-dressed and well-shod as everyone else, to try to take them somewhere for vacations, so that the children are happy” (Female, 35, Ivanovo Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

The study found that family and health are integral to the concept of happiness and serve as key motivators for having many children. However, with few exceptions, there were some discrepancies in the reproductive plans between spouses, as one partner often desired to have many children while the other did not, or vice versa.

Respondent: No, we did not discuss [the number of children], but Dina wanted a large family since childhood. As they say, she got what she was asking for. At the time when Arthur was born, we were living with my parents.

Interviewer: Despite the challenges, did you opt for decisions that prioritized having children?

Respondent: It was more for the sake of my wife’s health. Abortions have negative consequences. (Male, 36, Bashkortostan, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

I never thought about having a large family. Honestly, I thought about having one or two children. I was more inclined towards having one child. ... My husband was inclined towards having a larger family. He talked about having three children. (Female, 35, Volgograd Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Psychological factors influence reproductive decision-making: “It’s a very good thing to have many children, their laughter is contagious. You come home tired from

work, and the first, second, and third child kiss you, and there's no more tiredness" (Female, 35, Ivanovo Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Religious motives are also important: "My wife had doubts, but I firmly said, yes, we should have a third child. So, we will do as it is said [*gesturing upwards*], and it will be so" (Male, 40, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children, the respondent himself is or was the elder of two children to his parents; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

One more reason is the compensation of the loneliness of only children, which allows formulating hypotheses within the theory of human and social capitals about the necessity of internal resources for the implementation of the multi-child model.

I don't know, I've always thought, the more, the better. Because I am alone in my family. We are few here, and we have no relatives, so I think that, in a way, children are the future, and the more of them, the better. They will also have children, and the family line will continue. (Male, 31, three children, wife is pregnant with their fourth child, Bashkortostan; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Yes, my mother says that since childhood I have said that I would have many children, apparently, I was bored being alone. (Female, 43, Bashkortostan, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

The parents' scenario of having many children is reproduced.

It's like this: my parents were also from large families. My dad had five brothers, and there were three children in my mom's family: my mom, her sister, and her brother. I suppose there's a genetic predisposition for parents from large families to continue ... By the way, my spouse's mom is also from a large family: four or five ... We are all from large families ... This lineage of ours continues with having many children (Male, 40 years old, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children, the respondent himself is or was the elder of two children to his parents; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Evaluation of Institutional Factors Impacting the Functioning of Large Families

Most of our respondents expressed positive attitudes towards state socio-demographic policies and regional support measures. However, they also indicated issues related to receiving assistance, including the negative public opinion towards large families.

Parents with multiple children observed that getting support often involves dealing with lengthy and complex procedures: "Yes, we received governor's payments and small payments from social security, also [payments for children] from three to seven years. But there are constant problems with registration, etc." (Male, 31, Stavropol Krai, 3 children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Respondents also note a negative attitude from government officials:

Once, when I had five of them [children], I went to the head of the city, they didn't even let me into his doorstep, they said: "You will have more children, and we will give you

cars?” That was enough, it’s enough for me to hear something once, I understand. (Female, 39, Stavropol Krai, seven children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Parents with many children also mention difficulties in using land plots due to the lack of infrastructure and communications, and funds for construction: “But the land, it exists, of course, many thanks to the state for it. But no infrastructure, no communications ... How to live there, how to build there?” (Female, 43, Tatarstan, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Public opinion towards large families is different. According to our respondents, people generally have a positive attitude towards large families, viewing them as normal as long as they manage well on their own and are functioning effectively:

I noticed that most people are still very skeptical about having many children, i.e., initially they believe that these are antisocial, drinking, low-income families. Since we are not like that, looking at us, as I see it, many people feel admiration: “You are so great, your kids are so cool, you should give birth to more children, there should be more of people like you” ... We also have many friends. (Female, 42, Vologda Oblast, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Well, I won’t say that it happens often, but I’ve had situations like this, when they say, “Why do you, idiots, have to give birth so much?!” Yes, in our time it is generally impossible to have so many children. (Female, 33, Vologda Oblast, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Our family is perceived wonderfully because we invested our best in our children: tutors, trips, sports, schools, including abroad. (Female, 45, Moscow, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

They treat us well, we are friends with our neighbors. Whenever we mention our four children, they often comment “Such great kids!” (Female, 35, Ivanovo Oblast, the respondent and her current husband have two children together and are also raising their respective daughters from previous marriages; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

According to our respondents, people, however, do not consider access to government assistance as a robust reason for having another child:

We did not have kids because someone would give us something. We had them because we wanted our children, that’s all. (Male, 45, Tatarstan, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

You know, there is not much support there, that is, we cannot, for example, even count on being given land. Therefore, there was no reason at all. If they give something, it’s good, if not, well, we won’t die of hunger either. (Female, 34, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Informants pointed to the resources needed by large families: accessible infrastructure and investment in children's human capital: "The school curriculum does not cover everything that is tested in the exams. I believe that it is not necessary to help financially, but please ensure that education is accessible to every family" (Female, 43, Bashkortostan, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "Clubs and activities must be accessible and free. You need to pay attention to this so that the child develops" (Male, 40, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "The most important kind of help is to build infrastructure, so that the children could be taken to hockey, so that he could play hockey ... The issue of accessibility and development of infrastructure" (Female, 28, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Financial assistance and investment in children's human capital were also mentioned by the respondents: "Well, financial support is always needed, because you see, now our eldest goes to three clubs. So, you have to pay for more than just one" (Male, 50, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, five children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Other issues included childcare assistance, e.g., the distribution of time resources and costs: "I would like a person who could accompany at least one of the children to places [to clubs and sports activities]. Not a full-time nanny, just for this purpose" (Female, 27, three children, Volgograd Oblast; Trans. by T.R., O.K., & E.V.).

Large families' social capital (including grandparents, siblings) enables them to access extra help, including material assistance, childcare support, and time resources, particularly when warm, trusting relationships of mutual support and emotional ties with relatives are established:

We have a good relationship, we visit each other, communicate, celebrate holidays together, meet at our mother's and sister's. And my sister and children come to visit us. We help each other with some things, stories, and happiness, that is, we share everything we can. We even help each other financially when needed. (Male, 41, Ivanovo Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

It's my sister and me. It's really good now that she's grown up and we have common interests. Really good. She comes and helps us with my children and you can always chat with her about something. (Female, 28, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

We asked participants about the assistance they receive from parents, relatives, friends, and non-profit organizations. In the sample, there were no families that sought assistance from NGOs, possibly because the financial well-being of families, which was controlled in the sample, was modal by region. Intra- and intergenerational connections (social capital) play a significant role in distributing resources (temporal and material) and advancing careers. Different types of support are combined in various ways and are received not only from parents but also from other relatives.

The husband's mom is retired, and so is mine. I don't have any issues here; I can attend to my affairs and go to work without worry [that is, the grandmothers look after the children]. (Female, 43, Bashkortostan, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

My parents helped me pay off my debts, so I was able to get a mortgage. (Male, 36, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

We only have relatives: parents, uncles. Help us with cash. Parents could take care of the children, take them for a walk. Vika's mother helped us with money, lived with us, helped with household chores. (Male, 42, Vologda Oblast, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Yes, our parents helped us a lot. While the children were small, only my husband worked, so they helped. Brother helped in any way he could. Not only financially, they helped to do repairs. (Female, 35, Ivanovo Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Parents with many children prioritize finding employment, but they face constraints or restrictions in terms of available job opportunities: "They didn't hire me for a long time because of sick leaves [the employer was afraid that the respondents would be taking too many sick leaves]. Then, when they hired me part-time, I was happy" (Female, 34, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "Well, I've had a career in the military, which I've completed, and I'm now retired. My wife mostly stayed at home with the children ... she never found a good job" (Male, 46, Volgograd Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "In principle, we find time ... We understand that there is time for both (work and children). We work for ourselves. We have our own small private business" (Female, 28, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "Now I work freelance as a graphic designer ... this has not affected my life in any way, on the contrary, it has even become better, since I can be with my children and work successfully at the same time" (Female, 27, Volgograd Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

There is also a traditional model, where a man acts as a breadwinner for the family:

She was trying to [work], and I said, but there's no point in you finding a job that pays twenty [thousand roubles], because ten you will spend on food, on commuting ... Here you don't have to worry, you are with the children, you raise them properly, at least for me. (Male, 50, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, five children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

My career was difficult because I had to change jobs, as a large family requires a lot of, so to speak, financial stability, so in the end I organized my own business, so now everything is good and stable, but having many children did not affect employment, because mostly, of course, my wife took care of the children. (Male, 45, Moscow, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Parents with many children often discuss their careers with extreme caution and skepticism: “There is no particular career, there is nowhere to grow. We are working slowly. No growth prospects” (Female, 35, Ivanovo Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). “We’re no longer striving for a career; we just work wherever we can. It’s all about where the opportunity arises” (Male, 50, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, five children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). “At least they [the employer] didn’t kick me out after I had four children, they allowed me to come back, stay at least for two hours, they told me to come (Female, 42, Vologda Oblast, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Some respondents also provided positive evaluations regarding the career of a mother with many children. Typically, the youngest children of these parents are already of school age: “Having many children did not affect employment, because I had all my children when I was employed at the university” (Female, 45, Moscow, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). “Our careers are going well; my wife, regardless of the fact that she has three children, is progressing in her career. I also have a lot of career development at work, intellectual expansion of connections, financial prosperity” (Male, 41, Ivanovo Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

The main challenges faced by large families include balancing family responsibilities with work, financial constraints, limited time, and the need for professional socio-psychological and pedagogical support to foster the development of children’s human capital.

I wouldn’t trade children for a career. My wife also says, it was the right time when everything happened. Now I would ... If I had stayed a year, I would have taken up a career—that’s it, I wouldn’t have had children. (Male, 50, Nizhny Novgorod Oblast, five children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

For 12 years, we haven’t been able to go on vacation anywhere to relax. Financial difficulties, yes, we’ve faced some. (Male, 36, Bashkortostan, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Firstly, financial situation. Providing for children. The second difficulty is time. It costs a lot for both me and my wife. We ask grandparents to help. (Male, 42, Vologda Oblast, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Disobedience of children ... That is, relationships between people, relationships with their children. (Male, 34, Volgograd Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Children are growing older; we need to look for a new approach to them ... We need some kind of knowledge ... And we need to devote time to this, but we are always short of time. (Female, 28, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

The family's internal resources include the psychological strength of parent-child relationships, as well as the joy and pride that parents take in their children's accomplishments. "As for the positive side, it's a joy that children are all different. They are interesting to observe, watch, interact with" (Male, 42, Vologda Oblast, four children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "I always rejoice at the successes of my children, their achievements, I try to support them in everything, just as they supported me" (Female, 45, Moscow, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.). "Now, I believe that if there were no children, life would have turned out so boring and maybe would have gone downhill" (Male, 40, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

Some respondents expressed doubt that having many children is a joy, attributing it to the "slow development of a sense of fatherhood":

Where does joy come from for a father of many children? I have my own joys, so to speak, male ones, which I can afford. Diana has her own. There are also family joys that we share. The realization of paternity may come late ... If you look at your youngest daughter, then, of course, you are happy, no matter what conflicts arise. The feeling of fatherhood evolves. (Male, 36, Bashkortostan, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.)

Another important resource for large families is health:

A flourishing family is when everyone is healthy, when there are no disabilities, God forbid, any deviations. This is a flourishing family. And the fact that they are rich or poor is not an indicator for me. The most important thing is to be healthy. Healthy, smart, not hooligans, not criminals. It is most important. (Male, 40, Sverdlovsk Oblast, three children; Trans. by T. R., O. K., & E. V.).

In-depth interviews have broadened our understanding of the resources available to large families. Institutional support is seen as a "bonus" rather than a decisive factor in their reproductive decisions. However, parents require various resources, including material, temporal, socio-psychological, informational (for shaping positive public opinion about large families), and educational resources to acquire necessary skills for family life and human capital development.

Conclusion

Our study confirmed the initial hypothesis that the formation and functioning of large families hinge primarily on internal family resources, such as accumulated human capital (skills, knowledge, and character traits essential for both family life and professional, recreational, or charitable pursuits). Parental investment in human capital includes education, knowledge, and experience in crafting personal and family strategies and careers.

Moreover, the viability of large families also relies on external institutional resources, which encompass formal interactions with government bodies and other organizations offering support for large families. These institutions assess requests to ensure compliance with regulations and determine whether the requested assistance will contribute to supporting large families effectively.

Additionally, the living conditions of large families are influenced by the development of social capital, encompassing networks like multi-generational families, religious communities, and friendships. For instance, agricultural communities often require significant labor, making large families valuable as a resource base and a form of old-age security (De Silva, 2003).

An analysis of trends in the structure of Russian families shows that the proportion of large families is higher among traditional, multi-generational families. This happens because families maintaining intra- and intergenerational ties have more resources, for example, they have more social capital, more temporal and managerial resources. The involvement of multiple family members enables more effective monitoring and distribution of responsibilities, allowing large multi-generational families to combine and leverage their resources more effectively.

Research (Children's Commissioner, 2022) indicates that, across various countries, for most individuals, the family remains the primary source of support during challenging times. For instance, in a British study, when asked about seeking help for family-related matters, 78% of parents preferred turning to family members, followed by 51% opting for friends and 20% considering medical services. Fewer parents expressed a willingness to reach out to social networks (including support groups), support forums, municipal services, or local public services.

Large families facing resource challenges can seek assistance from both state (such as social welfare systems) and non-state institutions (like civil organizations).

A significant number of experts believe that public policies that ensure universal access to child care services and child subsidies can help people realize their choices and create large families (Icardi et al., 2023). Despite the fact that many countries provide families with some form of financial assistance, the formats and amounts may vary greatly from country to country, and the opportunities available to families in the context of institutional support vary. For example, in Russia, large families (in the legislation they are defined as families with three or more children) are entitled to social benefits. In Italy, Lithuania, and Poland, there are benefits for families with three or more children, for example, they are offered "family card programs" to access certain services. Hungary has abolished the personal income tax for women raising four or more children. Poland has implemented the *Mama 4 Plus* program, which provides financial support to all mothers over the age of 60 who have had four or more children and who meet certain income criteria (Bruckmayer et al., 2020). However, in countries like Germany, large families are not actively encouraged or supported through specific family policies (Bujard et al., 2019).

The costs and benefits of family support programs vary significantly among countries worldwide. In several Western and Northern European nations, such as France, Sweden, and Poland, these expenses reach up to 3.44%, 3.42%, and 3.35%

of GDP, respectively (2019). OECD data shows that spending on family benefits is generally higher in most European countries, typically exceeding 2% of GDP, with figures dropping to 1.95% in Japan, 1.87% in Canada, 1.04% in the USA, and 0.54% in Turkey (OECD, n.d.). In Russia, this expenditure stood at 1.1% in 2019, rising to 1.4% in 2022 (Rosstat, 2023). Economic prosperity and the prevailing social policy framework largely dictate the amount of expenditure.

In Russia, government support for families includes various measures such as subsidies for children's goods, preferential housing loans for large families, and land allocation through federal and regional programs. The 2020 Constitutional Amendments emphasize children as a top priority of state policy, along with defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman (O sovershenstvovanii regulirovaniia, 2020). Other relevant support measures include sanctions for dysfunctional behaviors, such as deprivation of parental authority or restriction of parental responsibility.

Specialized institutions, such as coordinating councils, encourage public support for families. An important role is played by economic and regional state institutions, improving material well-being of families, childhood infrastructure, availability of family-friendly workplaces, small family businesses, and access to additional education for children.

Public organizations play a vital role in enhancing social capital by serving as effective communication tools and advocating for the interests of large families in social policies. Participation in these organizations builds specific social ties and helps large families to effectively make use of both internal and external resources.

While there are segments in public organizations dedicated to supporting large families, research suggests that these families may be reluctant to seek the assistance of such organizations due to factors such as trust levels and lack of awareness. Further investigation is needed to understand the extent of these barriers.

Despite the opportunities described above, the effectiveness of tapping into external institutional resources remains limited due to the lack of mainstream support for state fertility strategies, inadequate access to pedagogical and psychological assistance, concerns about the quality of medical care, and the availability of programs to develop children's human capital. Many large families struggle with insufficient living standards, which hinder their ability to fulfill their educational and social roles. Parental labor income, coupled with the time demands of childcare and social benefits, often place large families in the low-income bracket.

An important aspect to consider is the role of the "sharing economy" in supporting large families. This economic model, based on principles of shared consumption, aligns with traditions of reciprocity and mutual aid. Many Russian families, especially families with many children, tend to exchange children's items, both online and offline, among friends, acquaintances, and neighbors. This informal exchange, often involving free assistance or item transfers, is preferred by many families who are skeptical of formal practices due to high prices and short usage periods of children's goods. Additionally, informal exchanges of services are gaining popularity among families struggling with the rising costs of living, such as household, childcare, and transportation expenses (Kuchmaeva, 2020). In short, the informal communication

and network cohesion around childcare, education, and provision tasks are key aspects of the sharing economy's development in modern Russian society, which makes this area a promising avenue for further research.

To sustain their well-being, families need to mobilize their skills and abilities to search for and combine resources. However, as this effort intensifies, there is typically a decline in the number of large families due to prevailing negative or neutral societal attitudes towards them. Promoting a more positive perception of large families should involve both establishing institutional frameworks for their support and disseminating successful family models through various channels.

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