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MAIN PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE FORMATION OF THE WELL-BEING OF YOUNG RUSSIAN FAMILIES: ACCORDING TO THE RESULTS OF THE ALL-RUSSIAN SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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The paper presents the findings of a study conducted using a mass questionnaire survey of members of young families (n = 893). The purpose of the study is to identify what problems affecting well-being are faced by members of young families. In the sample, young families are represented by two groups — families with children and families without children. It was revealed that the assessment of the significance of problems in family life is different in families with children and childless families, including the number of children in the family that affects the situation. Ratings of family problems were built according to the following criteria — self-assessment of men and women and parenting experience. It is concluded that, according to a number of criteria (both material and non-material), well-being is formed.

Key words: young family; demography; reproductive behavior; marital behavior; childbearing; measures to support a young family; prosperous family.

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Introduction

The demographic situation in the Russian Federation is becoming more complicated, which is recognized at the state level as a problem of national security. In order to stabilize the situation, measures have been taken to support a young family whose members are under 35 years old: subsidies for the purchase of housing; lump-sum payments to women upon the birth of a child under the age of 24 inclusive, etc., however, the total fertility rate continues to decline. Not only Russian scientists [1–3] discuss the effectiveness of government measures to support families as a tool for population regulation, but also T. Buttner and V. Lutz [4], J. M. Hoem [5], P. L. Tan, S. P. Morgan, E. Zaghen [6], G. Bognar [7], J. Bergsvik, A. Fauske, R. Hart [8] and others.

Scientists attribute the decrease in the number of births per woman to a variety of factors, including the delayed birth of the first child, family material problems, changes in value orientations and cultural codes that underpin the decision to have children, an increase in women's employment, an increase in the age of marriage, and so on [9–11, and others]. Scientists (Familists) propose to consider changes in the reproductive behavior of women in a complex way; they introduce the concept of “family well-being.” Well-being is formed on the basis of the unity of marriage, matrimony, parenthood, and kinship, i.e., marital, and parental roles are performed in officially registered relationships. The model of a prosperous young family was developed with the participation of Russian scientists [12–14, and others] in the preparation of the Concept of State Policy for a Young Family¹. In practical terms, it has become the basis for the formalization of policy in the interests of the family. In theoretical terms, in 2007, the conceptualization of approaches to the study of family well-being

began; in the works of representatives of the Russian school of familism, the study of the young family as a significant social phenomenon was deepened.

In 2007, the principle of creating conditions for the formation of sustainable family well-being was theoretically substantiated and for the first time laid the basis for the implementation of state family policy, which is enshrined in regulatory documents. An officially concluded marriage and the availability of housing for a young family are recognized as important indicators of well-being. Today, well-being indicators are being supplemented, which leads to the optimization of social policy measures aimed at ensuring demographic security. Modern scientific research continues to study the motivation of young people to marry, childbearing attitudes, and strategies for shaping family life.

In the presented work, the model of well-being is considered on the basis of the theoretical concept of a prosperous family by T. K. Rostovskaya [15]. The following indicators of a prosperous, happy family are proposed — this is a complete family with children, maintaining functional ties with parents and other relatives, provided with comfortable housing, quality medical care, regular health improvement, recreation, and leisure (for all family members), and ability to provide children with quality education and other life needs. A prosperous and happy family builds healthy psychological relationships, implements involved parenthood.

The purpose of the presented study is to find an answer to the question: what problems impede the well-being of Russian families? The novelty of the study lies

¹ Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation dated 08.05.2007 N AF-163/06 “On the Concept of State Policy towards a Young Family”. Available at: <https://legalacts.ru/doc/pismo-minobrnauki-rf-ot-08052007-n-af-16306/> (accessed 03.12.2022).

in the search for answers to the following questions: how do the assessments of problems by men and women differ in families with children and childless young families? How does the structure of problems change depend on the number of children in the family? The data obtained will make it possible to draw conclusions about promising areas of social support for members of young families, in addition to housing policy, to determine the potential for stimulating the increase in childbearing.

Materials and methods

The well-being of a young Russian family can be assessed on the basis of data obtained by mass survey from the All-Russian sociological survey “Demographic well-being of the population of Russian regions” (for more information about the research methodology, see the link). The study was carried out in 10 regions of Russia. The choice of regions was made according to the following criteria: First, the regions of the European part of Russia were selected, which are included in the Central Federal District, the Volga Federal District, the Southern Federal District, the North Caucasian Federal District, the North-Western Federal District, and the Urals Federal District. Secondly, the rating of the socio-economic situation of the regions at the end of 2019 was taken into account: Moscow (1st place), Ivanovskaya (61st place), Volgograd (29th place), Vologda (28th place), Moscow (4th place), Nizhny Novgorod (14th place), Sverdlovsk (7th place) regions, the Republic of Bashkortostan (13th place), the Republic of Tatarstan (5th place), and Stavropol Territory (30th place), which made it possible to include regions with different levels of economic development in the sample. Thirdly, the regions that form the ethnic and religious diversity of the European part of the Russian Federation were purposefully included in the sample. From the total array of data obtained in these regions, a subsample was made; members of young families were selected according to the following parameters: age of the respondents up to 35 years old, inclusive; marital status — they are in the first registered marriage ($n = 893$). The Federal Law of December 30, 2020, No. 489-FZ “On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation”² fixes the concept of a young family and identifies three types of young families: a complete young family without children, a complete young family with children, and an incomplete young family with children. The paper considers some aspects of the reproductive behavior of the first two types of young families.

Research results

The first places in the overall rating of significance (assessment was made on a five-point scale) were occupied by the following problems: “lack of free time”, “lack of money, constant material problems”, “fatigue, overwork”, “fear of losing a job”, “bad environment at the

place of residence”, “poor health and difficulties with medical care for family members” (see Table 1). The rating of problems for men and women is different; it was found that most of the problems (except for the “organization of children's recreation”) are perceived more acutely by men than women. The most significant difference is in assessing the significance of the problems of “fear of losing a job” (2.45 women and 2.77 men) and “difficulties with placing a child in a kindergarten or nursery” (2.03 women and 2.45 men). The results obtained are explained both by the psychological characteristics of men and women and by traditional ideas about marriage and matrimonial roles, where a man is the head of the family and bears increased responsibility for the well-being of his wife and children. Depending on the resources of the spouses and the family as a whole, problems are overcome or their significance increases, which can lead to a crisis and divorce.

Interesting data were obtained when comparing the ratings of the significance of the problems of members of young families with and without children. Factors that rate the significance of the problem in families who do not have children are “lack of money, constant material problems” lower (2.73) than actors with one child (2.79), two (2.94), or three (3.08). Lack of money is the most acute problem for young families with three children; in general, the picture is typical — with an increase in the number of children, the level of material well-being of the family decreases. In this regard, maternity capital³ for the first child partially stimulates the reduction of the interval of deferred parenthood, but for the second child, for families that received maternity capital for the first child, it is not significant — 168.6 thousand rubles, an amount close to the average wage in some regions of the Russian Federation. The significance of the problems of “difficulties in organizing everyday life”, “housekeeping”, “conflict relations with a spouse (wife)” is also higher in families with three children. The most significant problems for those who do not have children are “lack of free time” (3.06) and “fatigue, overwork” (3.04). The importance of many problems is rated higher by members of young families with two children. For example, “lack of free time” is 3.03 with two children; 2.79 with one child; 2.48 with three children, etc. (see Table 1). Thus, the negative experience gained by families with two children can become an obstacle to the birth of a third child for these families and is also the basis (if there are communication channels) for the formation of public opinion about the negative effects of repeated parenthood.

For the well-being of young families, it is important not only to diagnose problems but also to look for resources to strengthen the family. Based on the answer to the question: “In your opinion, to what extent would the following activities contribute to strengthening the family in Russia?” (Please check for each line, bearing in

² Federal Law No. 489-FZ “On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation” dated December 30, 2020. Available at: <https://fzrf.su/zakon/molodezhnoj-politike-489-fz/> (accessed 03.12.2022).

³ Everything you need to know about maternity capital in 2022 // Official website of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. URL: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/53277/> (date of access: 03.12.2022).

Table 1

Distribution of answers to the question: “Do you and your family have to face the following problems?” (Please rate the significance of each of the listed problems on a five-point scale: “1” means that it has practically no significance, “5” means that it has a very large value, and “0” means that you find it difficult to answer)?

Dependent variables	Array mean	Independent variables					
		Gender		Number of children			
		Women	Men	No children	One	Two	Three
Lack of free time	2.92	2.86	2.99	3.06	2.79	3.03	2.48
Lack of money, constant material problems	2.84	2.79	2.91	2.73	2.79	2.94	3.08
Fatigue, overwork	2.78	2.78	2.79	3.04	2.65	2.80	2.48
Fear of losing your job	2.60	2.45	2.77	2.83	2.55	2.53	2.29
Poor environment at the place of residence	2.59	2.51	2.68	2.74	2.59	2.58	2.35
Poor health and difficulties with medical care of family members;	2.51	2.50	2.53	2.63	2.36	2.60	2.56
Difficulties in organizing everyday life, housekeeping	2.50	2.48	2.53	2.48	2.43	2.59	2.67
Poor living conditions	2.43	2.34	2.52	2.43	2.40	2.39	2.68
Hopelessness, lack of prospects in life	2.35	2.26	2.44	2.56	2.24	2.35	2.12
Poor development of the neighborhood	2.35	2.28	2.42	2.32	2.30	2.49	2.13
Negative social atmosphere at the place of residence	2.34	2.30	2.39	2.45	2.24	2.45	2.20
Difficulties with placing a child in kindergarten, nursery	2.23	2.03	2.45	2.12	2.38	2.18	1.89
Problems with the organization of children's recreation	2.22	2.26	2.17	1.79	2.25	2.41	2.38
Difficulties in introducing the child to sports, music, painting, and other developmental activities	2.22	2.15	2.31	2.08	2.10	2.39	2.38
Problems with drugs	2.20	2.16	2.25	2.19	2.13	2.31	2.29
Problems with children's education	1.96	1.89	2.04	1.99	1.85	2.19	1.68
Conflict relations with spouse	1.90	1.85	1.95	1.88	1.77	2.00	2.07
The need to care for sick relatives (disabled, elderly, ...)	1.83	1.74	1.93	1.95	1.77	1.94	1.39
Conflict relations with children	1.75	1.68	1.83	2.04	1.64	1.77	1.56
Conflict relations with parents	1.74	1.65	1.84	1.86	1.69	1.77	1.12
Drunkenness of a family member	1.58	1.57	1.59	1.75	1.49	1.56	1.74
Drug use by a family member	1.46	1.39	1.54	1.66	1.41	1.40	1.13

mind that “1” means that this direction is not important at all, and “5” means that it is very important, and “0” means that I find it difficult to answer.) An overall rating and ratings based on the opinions of men and women (see Table 2).

In the overall rating, the first lines are occupied by the following areas of activity: “the introduction of decent pay for parental labor” (4.28); “providing a large-scale benefit at the birth of a child” (4.28); “partial repayment of a loan or subsidy for the purchase of housing at the birth of a child” (4.27); “development of the system of benefits for families with children, an increase in their size” (4.25); and “providing guarantees for children to receive quality vocational education” (4.24). High scores on the indicator “ensuring guarantees for children to receive high-quality professional education” show the high orientation of young spouses towards the implementation of involved parenthood.

The last lines of the rating are occupied by “an increase in the duration of parental leave due to partially paid leave only for the father” (3.74); “education in educational institutions of positive reproductive attitudes” (3.57); “the formation in society with the help of the media of the image of a family with three children as a norm for modern society” (3.40); “the formation of a negative attitude of society towards abortion” (2.81);

“the introduction of legislative norms that complicate the procedure for divorce” (2.32). The data show that material support for young families is prioritized, as is young people's tolerance for abortions and divorces.

Differences in the assessments of men and women were recorded; women more often than men gave higher scores, excluding the position “taking into account the interests of families with children in the taxation system, increasing tax deductions”. The biggest difference in assessments of the areas of activity is “providing a real opportunity to have a flexible work schedule” (women 4.05 and men 3.39); “improving the health of the population” (women 4.25 and men 3.93). In the first case, this is due to the fact that women are more busy solving household problems and caring for children than men. In the second case, it explains that self-preserving behavior remains ineffective and negatively affects the life expectancy of men.

We noted above that the well-being of the family is based on healthy psychological relationships. Problems such as “conflict relations with a spouse”; “the need to care for sick relatives (disabled people, the elderly)”; “conflict relations with children”; “conflict relations with parents”; “drunkenness of any of the family members”; and “drug use by one of the family members” occupied the last lines in the rating of significance, which indi-

Table 2

Distribution of answers to the question: “In your opinion, to what extent would the following areas of activity contribute to strengthening the family in Russia?” (Please check each line, keeping in mind that “1” means that this direction is not important at all, and “5” is very important, and “0” means that I find it difficult to answer)

Dependent variables	Total	Independent variables	
		Women	Men
Introduction of decent pay for parenting	4.28	4.40	4.14
Provision of a large-scale benefit at the birth of a child	4.28	4.35	4.20
Partial repayment of a loan or housing subsidy at the birth of a child	4.27	4.33	4.20
Development of a system of benefits for families with children, increasing their size	4.25	4.32	4.15
Ensuring guarantees for children to receive quality vocational education	4.24	4.38	4.07
Providing housing for families in need	4.23	4.30	4.16
Providing benefits for a child up to 3 years in the amount of the child's subsistence minimum for families whose income is below average	4.22	4.33	4.09
Measures to improve women's reproductive health	4.16	4.29	4.00
Infrastructure development	4.11	4.20	4.02
Promoting public health	4.10	4.25	3.93
Provision of land plots for construction to families at the birth of a third (or subsequent) child	4.06	4.20	3.89
For women, undergo vocational retraining free of charge during and after leaving maternity leave	4.06	4.20	3.89
Increasing the compensation of parents' expenses for paying for visits to preschool institutions	4.01	4.06	3.96
Ensuring employment guarantees for parents in families with children	3.96	4.02	3.89
Expansion of the network of various kinds of preschool institutions	3.94	4.05	3.82
Attracting children and youth to participate in the work of public, sports, and creative organizations	3.94	3.98	3.89
Making it possible to have flexible working hours	3.89	4.05	3.69
Creation and development of psychological services to help families in difficult life situations	3.85	4.00	3.69
Considering the interests of families with children in the taxation system, increasing tax deductions	3.85	3.75	3.96
Development of the social service system and strengthening of social work with families	3.82	3.93	3.71
Creating conditions for running a family business	3.80	3.81	3.78
Extension of parental leave through partially paid paternity leave only	3.74	3.82	3.66
Education in educational institutions of positive reproductive attitudes	3.57	3.61	3.53
Formation in society with the help of the media of the image of a family with 3 children as a norm for modern society	3.40	3.43	3.35
Formation of a negative attitude of society towards abortion	2.81	2.83	2.79
Legislation to make divorce more difficult	2.32	2.41	2.22

cates, in general, a good psychological climate in young families. Additionally, questions were asked about the admissibility of the use of physical force in the event of a serious conflict in the family in relation to the spouse and children. If 87.5% of the respondents consider violence against a marriage partner unacceptable, then 78.8% consider violence against children; if less than 5% is acceptable for a partner, then more than 10% for children.

The situation was clarified by two questions: “Are there major quarrels or scandals in your family?” and “What causes quarrels and conflicts?” Note that the absence of major quarrels does not negate minor conflicts and misunderstandings in the family. The answers to the first question were distributed as follows: “no, almost never” (50.4%); “yes, but rarely” (32.5%); “yes, from time to time” (8.5%); “they used to be, but now they are not” (4.7%); “yes, often” (2.1%); missing 1.8%. Conflicts in young families are most often caused by family members not understanding each other (54.2%), refusing to participate in family affairs, worrying (19.1%), disagreeing on matters of raising children (17.2%), violating the ethics of relationships (16.1%), and abusing alcohol (6.5%). When offering their answer, members of young families most often indicated material problems as the cause of tense relations in the family.

High points in the rating of problems were “lack of free time” and “fatigue, overwork” (see Table 1). According to Article 91 of the Labor Code of the Russian Federation, a person should not work more than 40 hours a week. We received the following answers to the question “What is the duration of your working week?”: “40

hours” — 40.1%; “41–50 hours” — 21.9%; “more than 50 hours” — 13.9%; “21–39 hours” — 10.6%. Thus, more than 35% of the members of young families are overworked, which is aggravated by the fact that only a small part of the members of young families can afford a comfortable rest (see Table 3).

At the same time, most of the members of young families often experience stress and feel depressed. Considering that the presented study was conducted in early 2020, it can be assumed that during the pandemic and in subsequent periods, the amount of stress increased. At the beginning of 2020, the situation was as follows: To the question, “Over the past 6 months, how often have you experienced stressful situations?” the following answers were received: 27.4% — several times a month; 20.3 — several times a year; 18.3% — several times a week; 15.7% — almost daily. To the question: “How often do you feel depressed?”: 33.7% say several times a

Table 3

Distribution of answers to the question: “How do you usually spend your vacation?”; %

At home doing household chores	35.2
In the countryside	14.1
I travel abroad	11.8
Visiting relatives	7.8
On a hike, traveling in Russia	8.4
At the resort	8.2
Haven't been on vacation in a few years.	4.6
Other	1.5
In a sanatorium, took care of his health	0.8
Vacation is a waste of time	0.3
Missed	7.4
Total	92.6

Table 4

Distribution of answers to the question: “Types of assistance that your family used?”, %

One-time allowance at the birth of a child	59.2
Maternity allowance	57.3
Provision of partially paid parental leave until the child reaches the age of 1.5 years	45.4
monthly child allowance	42.1
Provision of “maternal (family) capital”	37.6
Lump-sum allowance for women registered in early pregnancy birth certificate	36.2
Income tax cuts for parents, per child (so-called “standard tax deductions”)	27.4
Compensation for parents' expenses for visiting preschool institutions	21.1
Provision of benefits on leave to care for a child aged 1.5–3 years	19.3
Compensation for caring for a child under 7 years of age	11.5
Providing a young family with housing loans and subsidies on preferential terms	7.6
Lending for the purchase of housing and improvement of living conditions	5.8
Benefits of paying for housing and communal services	5.8
easy access to public transport	3.7
Benefits of the provision of medicines	3.5
Free lunches and natural help	3.0
Preferential loans for urgent needs	1.6
Provision of goods (products) at preferential prices	1.2
Educational loans	1.1

year; 22.2% say never; 18.6% say every month; 15.8% say every week; 6% say every day.

Social support measures developed for young families, in addition to the maternity capital provided at the birth of children, are mainly provided to families recognized as needing support. These are families that are found to need a housing subsidy and/or have incomes per member below the subsistence level. In general, 31.1% of young family members indicated that they had never received any state assistance. The types of assistance that young families used are presented in Table 4. It can be noted that a small percentage of the members of a young family have experience obtaining subsidized housing loans.

A study of the reproductive plans of young families (the desired and expected number of children) showed that strategies vary significantly depending on the age of the actors (parents), their socioeconomic status, their parenting experience, etc. Due to 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, he correlates income with the number of children. Women's attitudes are related to family income, but not so strongly because women are focused on maintaining health and rely on the upbringing of children. As a result, in both men and women, the desire to have three or more children in practice is transformed into the expectation of having two children; the desire for two children becomes the anticipation of having one child. The proportion of undecided men is higher; it was found that the older the men are (material well-being grows with age), the higher their orientation towards increasing the desired number of children.

The significance of the factors that determine the difference between the desired and expected number of children is somewhat different in young families who already have children and are only planning to have a

child. The experience of parenthood determines attitudes towards childbearing, the proportion of respondents who are less hindered and/or not hindered by: lack of work (with an increase in competence in a stable socio-economic situation, finding a job does not cause great difficulties); employment at work and domestic work; the desire to achieve success at work; the opinion of relatives; and the placement of the child in a preschool educational institution.

Conclusions

Members of young families with a positive attitude toward having many children are ready to plan the birth of another child if the necessary conditions are available — in fact, the conditions set by us as well-being criteria. Due to the fact that each family has its own rating of problems, the conditions necessary for the birth of children are different depending on the specific situation (health, material wealth, rest, overcoming fatigue, etc.).

The data obtained as a result of a mass survey show that the modern support system is focused on helping low-income families and does not significantly improve the well-being of a young family; therefore, it does not determine childbearing. Today, young families refusing to have a second and subsequent child or deciding to postpone the birth of a child are developing behavioral strategies, regardless of the implementation of the main state programs of social support for the family.

Thus, young spouses are guided by having few children, postponing the birth of children (for 40% of members of young families under 30 years old, on average, by 3–4 years). On a 5-point scale, the reasons for deferring childbirth are the search for a better-paying job (3.9 points), material opportunities (3.7 points), housing conditions, and the labor intensity of childrearing (3.5 points each). At the same time, young spouses between 30 and 35 years old are no longer planning subsequent children because they have enough children.

Today, the most significant measures to support young families are those aimed at improving housing conditions, which are also the most affordable measures to support families during parental leave. The need for quality medical care is more relevant for young families whose members have systemic diseases, and special social support programs have been developed to support them. However, some aspects of the well-being of young families are not reflected in the family and demographic policy. The problem of young families' access to regular health improvement, recreation, and leisure is an urgent problem, which is confirmed by the high significance of such problems as lack of free time, general fatigue among young family members, the inability to provide children with quality education, and other vital needs. The current situation leads first to psychological dissatisfaction and then to unpreparedness for the birth of children because the model of responsible parenthood requires the fullness of resources, not only material but also psychological.

Thus, based on the data of the mass survey, it was revealed that the ratings of problems that impede the well-

being of young spouses in families with or without children have a number of differences that affect the significance of the problem for the family and the number of children the spouses have. At the same time, inverse relationships have also been established: an increase in the well-being of the family leads to an increase in the need for children in men, but since the material well-being of the family is established only by the age of 35, women are no longer ready for the birth of subsequent children. The main reasons for delayed parenthood and refusal to give birth to subsequent children are described.

As a result, the goal of the study was achieved — the problems of young families that affect well-being were identified and their significance was determined. The results obtained by the method of a mass survey show that family problems are more acutely perceived by men than by women. It is concluded that the refusal to have children is determined not only by the material difficulties of the family but also by intangible ones. Important factors include the psychological fatigue of young family members, the lack of quality leisure, overtime as a tool to increase the material well-being of the family, etc. Thus, the differences in the self-assessments of the respondents, due to gender factors and parenting experience, are manifested in the ranking of the reasons for the delayed birth of the first child in comparison with the reasons for the delayed birth of the second and subsequent children, and the ranking of the significance of problems affecting the well-being of the family.

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