

FACTORS INFLUENCE ON THE ENTRY INTO FATHERHOOD

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Submitted: 2014-09-26

Accepted: 2014-10-03

Published online: 2015-06-26

Abstract

Objectives: The scope of this article focuses on issues related to family planning from the men's point of view. The men's participation in studies on family planning and reproduction is increasingly recognized as important; both men and women make important contributions to bringing children into life.

Methods: Data of qualitative research were collected in interviews with 170 Czech men aged between 25 and 50. A grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data.

Results: The results show strong social pressure determining the ideal form of material and psychosocial background for offspring confronts current generation with very demanding decision – making on parenthood timing. Family planning decision – making is influenced by personal values as well as structural factors.

Discussion: Although men are in need of negotiations, the responsibility and practical decision-making is left up mainly to women. In the case of speaker's parents, we see the role of education. Especially level of education of female partner influence timing of parenthood.

Conclusion: In men's opinion, the setting of conditions for the beginning of reproduction should be the result of negotiation within the couple. Although men speak of the need to negotiate, the responsibility and practical decision-making is left up mainly to women.

Key words: *fatherhood; family planning; personal values; partnership; qualitative research*

INTRODUCTION

In spite of many visions and predictions about the decreasing consistency of the family, about the threats resulting from the looseness of marital relationships and increase of divorce, the family still remains the most important foothold, as well as an institution of socialization for humans (Možný 2002).

In the nature of today's family's functions, it is possible to characterise the essential change so that the family is primarily the place of construction and authentication of personal identity on the basis of close emotional relationships

between individual members (Beck and Beck-Gershaim 1995).

A steep decline of birth-rate under the simple reproduction rate, decrease of marriage and delay of these events until a higher age, reduction of abortions, improvement of mortality and, among others, the growth of cohabitation proportion and extramarital children, high rate of divorce, and a growth of general plurality of family organization may be considered the main characteristics of demographic development of nowadays' family. Experts are trying to explain these changes either as a natural outcome of a value change or individualization growth

of a given society or as negative socioeconomic impacts of political transformation. Truth lies, most probably, somewhere between these polarized opinions (Dudová and Vohlřídaldová 2007).

If we look closer at the explanation of changes from the viewpoint of role arrangement of man and woman within the family, then it is possible to say that men still take on the political and economical power, on average they earn more than women. In nowadays's society another significant change took place, women's role has changed. Women may do equally qualified jobs and ensure the family's material existence by a job. A liberating role is also played by hormonal contraception, it is the woman nowadays who knowingly decides about further existence of offspring (Poněšický 2003).

It is the disposition to parenthood that in human world expands from the instinct desire to reproduce genes to the need of experience and social bonds. People develop their disposition and promote from the moment of expecting something like that (Bakalář 2002).

People plan their parenthood, they are therefore trying to become pregnant and give birth to a baby in the most suitable time. Parenthood planning may have positive or negative character. Positive planned parenthood means a targetted effort to get pregnant. It includes couple's behaviour, the target being the woman's pregnancy, on the level of medical care this is the care for infertile couples. Society's and state's measures to the improvement of population development are included within a broader socio-economic level of positive planning. Negative planned parenthood are methods or devices used to prevent pregnancy. There are still more and more of modern contraceptive methods which enable the regulation of not only the numbers of born children but also when and whether to become a parent (Pařizek 2009).

Planned parenthood is considered a basic human right in all civilised countries of the world. In 1995 a significant document called *The Chart of sexual and reproduction rights* entered into force. The 'Chart' demands a right of freedom and personal safety, it stresses the recognition of everyone being free from being forced to pregnancy, sterilization nor abortions (SPRSV 1997).

The right to a free decision to become a parent is rooted in our society. However, the contemporary society has brought further behavioral features that accompany parenthood planning. The question of decision-making significantly interferes with the reproduction reflections of couples. If a young couple starts to consider whether or not to have a baby, this is in fact a very difficult decision-making process (Dunovský 1999).

People find emotional satisfaction also in other life-activities, not only in procreation (Rabušic 2001). Within the last years people have obtained several possibilities how to regulate the arrival of parenthood. Parenthood has become a conscious choice on the level of any other experience that is possible to plan (Beets et al. 2010).

In sociological research works there are several theories pointing to the theoretical context of deciding about entry into parenthood. In the Czech Republic we have found a work by a sociologist named Hašková (2009) on this topic, that analyses the effects and sociological theories explaining reproductive behaviour. Also the degree of consensus between partners on reproduction plans is marked as one of the most important factors. Most research however focuses on women, although the inclusion of men within fertility studies is very important. The influence of men's reproductive preference and plans has a significant influence on the fertility of their partners, because they do have their own reproductive preference and plans as well. Hašková claims that the Czech Republic misses a qualitative research that would explain the processes through which negotiations about parenthood occur between partners.

With regard to the described state of the problem the author has agreed with implementation of a qualitative research, the goal of which has become the mapping of reproduction plans and analysis of conditions significant for the timing of parenthood, by Czech men.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

With respect to experience and studied sources that have pointed to the unexplored attitudes

of men towards parenthood planning, qualitative research procedures have been used for collecting, analysis and evaluation of data. Semi-structured depth interview has been used as a tool for data collecting within the qualitative research. Planned parenthood has been the topic of the semi-structured interview.

A part of research data has been collected by the author of the work. The main part of interviews has been done by students of Faculty of Health and Social Studies of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, who have been given a seminar paper with the topic of carrying out an interview with a man of specific age on the topic of parenthood planning. Students have been instructed in the subjects of Education of reproductive health and Sexual education and Parenthood planning. Data was being collected in terrain from the autumn of 2008 until the spring of 2011. Within the subject the students were introduced to the meaning of the term 'parenthood planning' and its correlations, as it has been defined in the theoretical part of the article according to Pařízek (2009).

Interviewers randomly approached individuals in their surroundings. Not to distort the validity of data, the random choice of respondents was combined with a purposeful choice. Especially age, parenthood/childlessness, the presence of a relationship were watched deliberately. Adult men of Czech nationality, living in the Czech Republic, were interviewed. The agreed to be interviewed and with the results to be used in the research.

In total, 170 men in the age of early and mid- adulthood, in the age of 25–50 commented on the questions of parenthood. The average age of the respondents within the research file was 33 and the age that came up most often was the age of 26.

Table 1 refers to the fact that the research file included 87 childless single men, living in a promising partner relationship. There were 15 divorced fathers within the research file. A smaller representation was given by 11 childless men without a current partnership, 8 childless married people, two single fathers and one divorced, childless man.

Table 1. The link between number of children, family situation and presence of partnership

Marital status	Partnership	Fathers	Childless
single	partner	2	87
	no partner	0	11
married		46	8
divorced	partner	15	0
	no partner	0	1
total		63	107

Other characteristics of the research file are not known to us in all interviewed. From the total of respondents 78 respondents gave us information about the level of education attained, out of which 26 were university educated, 40 reached high-school education and 12 men were apprenticed.

For the analysis and evaluation of qualitative data obtained for this dissertation thesis the method of grounded theory has been used (*Grounded theory*) (Strauss and Corbin 1999).

After the initial analysis the interviews were uploaded into an Atlas.ti programme database for a qualitative processing of research data, which is a program creating conceptual networks that may be displayed or printed out (Heller 2004).

Subsequently the author has determined basic concepts, to which she assigned the respondents' testimonies, that related to the given topic. By generating these answers a material rich on testimony material has come up, that was needed to sort further and code

so that the author of the thesis could make hypothetical conclusions out of the obtained data. Gradually, the testimonies were compared to other testimonies and the same names were allocated to similar phenomena.

RESULTS

In this chapter already generalized respondents' testimonies to the research objectives, that focused on the conditions deciding about the entering or delaying of parenthood, will be presented.

From the research results it is clear that the central topic for awareness of reproduction plans becomes a perspective of the relationship with a partner and a degree of a sense of longing for a child, either isolated by an individual or assessed together, in couple. The longing for a child itself and for finding a suitable partner is not, however, sufficient for

fulfilling reproduction plans. Men negotiated with their partners about the conditions suitable for conceiving children. Men within the research file put a huge significance to the agreement with their long-term partner. For clarity, in the text we recognize conditions of value and structural character.

Through value factors that spread into several levels, men express their own life experience. They reflect their life in the original family in the form of values important for children, the idea of a functioning relationship with their partner and personal characteristics for the exercise of parental role.

In the following table, Table 2, the factors of value character are given, that were considered by the respondents when delaying parenthood. They are ordered without regard to the frequency of testimonies. With respect to the cumulation of factors in the testimonies, it is difficult to quantify them.

Table 2. Factors of value character in respondents' testimonies

- **Organization of family relationships:** marriage or cohabitation
- **Personal maturity:** mental readiness, age, willingness to accept responsibility or willingness to live a free life
- **Biological clock:** age, health condition, generation cycle

The trend to support a certain *material and economical* standard is obvious. Men who had been aware of this expressed their level of responsibility. As if through their demands on material and financial security they strengthened the borders of a male role. At the same moment though, they mentioned

the importance of conditions from the points of view of their partners', especially of graduating from school and gaining experience. For a clearer organization Table 3 refers to structural conditions mentioned by the respondents.

Table 3. Factors of structural character mentioned in respondents' testimonies

- **Material background:** housing, independence from parents, financial security
- **Employment:** career, a suitable job position, practice, sufficient income, graduation from school
- **Outer support:** family, state's social policy

From the intergenerational analysis of results' point of view it is obvious that unlike the nowadays' generation of forties', today's young men are exposed to a greater pressure of society to ensure material conditions. They assigned the socioeconomic situation a greater importance than the previous generation did, the respondents referred to a *'time'* which was

more acceptable for founding a family. Unlike middle-aged men, childless men have dealt with the fact that the entering into parenthood is becoming a complicated decision-making process, where an individual's and partner's personal interests are meeting with social pressures on the ideal background for a child's arrival. A responsible decision-making,

due to the complexity of all contemplated conditions may paradoxically weaken the certainty that the decision will be right. A responsible decision-making strengthens the option of using contraceptive methods by which it is possible to reliably delay the time of decision-making.

DISCUSSION

The relationship to the partner is, according to the testimonies, an important entry condition for parenthood timing. In addition to own *reproduction plans*, a huge role for entering into parenthood is played by life partner's ideas and wishes. From the thesis results it is clear that parenthood planning is a question of joint *negotiations* with the partner.

In 2009 it was found out in our population by the Public Opinion Research Center's research, that most respondents found a *long-term partnership* the most important thing in their lives (Šamanová 2009). From another Czech research of reproduction preference it is obvious that men aged 25 to 54 gave their partner's opinion on the number of children and parenthood timing a greater influence a little more than women did (Dudová and Vohlídalová 2007).

In connection to *marriage* respondents talked about maturity and about confirmation of willingness of mutual commitment. Single respondents within the dissertation research put a relatively great importance to the condition of a marriage, although in general it is thought that this form of family organization is losing its popularity. The reason may be the relatively high number of respondents' partners, who have been university educated.

Hamplová (2006) has stated in her work, that education plays an important role in marriage rates. The increase in the proportion of university graduates, and especially females, in the population is responsible or delaying marriages until an older age.

Another important factor for parenthood timing is the expressed respondents' *personal maturity* for child upbringing. One of the mentioned aspects of personal maturity was the *willingness to give up own freedom and hobbies and accept liabilities* connected to children's lives.

In the research of value orientation in the Czech Republic university graduates or Secondary School graduates stressed mutual responsibility much stronger than people with a lower education (Červenka 2005).

Maturity was expressed as internally felt, mostly associated with a *suitable age* for founding a family. The most suitable age was attributed to the 30th year of age by the respondents, provided that the woman's age was regarded differently than man's. Men attributed a different age limit for the conception of a first child to themselves than to their partners. As the respondents said, *the biological clock* 'ticked' to their partners around the age of 30.

Hašková (2010) cites Foucault, who described reproduction considerations in the context of biological clock. In women their ticking is expected. From men it is expected to listen to the ticking of biological clock in their partners. Biology draws this clock to women's bodies, that are, within the concept of biological clock, programmed, by nature, for motherhood.

Other than mere biological maturity, the suitable age also means individual life conditions in which respondents might find themselves. The idea that there are certain social expectations or norms related to age and suitable timing of significant life events is the basis for a paradigm of life course (Chaloupková 2008).

A modest surprise has been brought by results pointing to the importance that respondents gave to material security as a condition for founding a family. Respondents (childless as well as parents) gave a huge importance to having their own *housing* that responds, equipmentwise and sizewise, to the needs of a family's life.

According to the Czech Statistical Office's findings, young Czechs stay longer living with their parents. Two decades ago 15 percent of women and approximately one third of men aged 25 to 29 lived with their parents. A late departure from home is linked to three factors. The proportion of those who study at universities is increasing, there are no radical clashes and conflicts between parents' and childrens' generations, separate housing is expensive, young people spend money rather on entertainment (Kohoutová 2014).

Rabušić (2014) sees one of important circuits of pro-family policy in the support of housing. According to him the state should ensure a free apartment market, where it is possible, with the help of available mortgages, to get housing of different financial levels.

Also *stable employment, career building* and enough finance from work activity was one of the main conditions for parenthood delay. The changes of reproduction and family behaviour are still more often attached to the opposition between the market and the family (McDonald 2002).

The assumption of economic stability has, within the respondents' testimonies, three basic mental levels. The first one relates to saving enough financial resources for buying things the respondents see as essential for the right care and upbringing of a child. The second level relies on the man's need to realize himself in the family, as the breadgiver. The third point of view of this factor's importance may be seen in the woman's need to realize herself in the public sphere, build a more stable position on the work market so that she finds a better application after the end of maternal leave.

To the question of education a great importance was given by the respondents, especially in cases when respondents' partners delayed parenthood due to *school graduation*. Men respected their partners and they attributed them the right to decide about their children, although they themselves already wished to be parents.

Such behaviour is explained by Hašková (2009) by a theory of reduction of uncertainty and the value of children. She explains the transition from the state of childlessness into parenthood so, that not all people have the same opportunities and the degree of life uncertainty they have to face, differs. The stabilization of own position on the work market in nowadays' society is perceived by educated women as the reduction of uncertainty. Less educated women, who don't have that many opportunities to realize themselves out of their family may see the reduction of uncertainty, on the contrary, in the start of parenthood.

Regarding intergenerational analysis of testimonies, at the first sight it might seem that younger respondents put a greater emphasis on ensuring of financial conditions

than their generationally older predecessors, founding a family 20 years ago, did.

Hašková (2006) points to the association with the value system change. The fact that younger parents as well as childless people put more emphasis on the economical indicators, does not necessarily mean that the relative income and housing situation of today's young people worse than it used to be in times of family-founding in older generations. A bigger emphasis that young people give to their economic situation may mean their bigger economical uncertainty in comparison to the situation of people who founded their families earlier, but also their higher financial and property claims.

CONCLUSION

To the entrance into parenthood men are led by their reproduction wishes and plans that, under the influence of other factors, do not have to be implemented. The perspective of the relationship with a partner and the rate of sense of longing for a child are becoming the initial condition for implementing reproduction plans. Men negotiated with their partners about suitable conditions for the arrival of children. They considered many different factors of not only value but also structural character.

Although men assign the importance to their ability to support their family financially, considering the conditions pointing to the delay of parenthood, the ones that were influenced more by their partner's life situation were more decision-making. Respondents attached this privilege to their partners, because they were aware of the complexity of nowadays' society's demands on the professional application of women and the reconciliation of the child's material and emotional security claims. Putting importance of respondents' partners' on education and subsequently a greater probability of a better application in the work market probably gives a better sense to them and a feeling of life certainty, than to women who do not seek for a career development. For another research it would be interesting to carry out a qualitative research (from this point of view) focused on the comparison of attitudes to parenthood planning by young parents

with a lower education (primary education, apprenticeship) and by university-educated parents.

Analysing intergenerational changes it has been proved that unlike middle-aged men childless men and young fathers deal with the fact that the entrance into parenthood is becoming a complex decision-making process. Responsible decision-making, due to the complexity of all considered conditions, paradoxically may weaken the certainty that the decision will be the right one.

Despite a range of interesting findings this research has not unambiguously discovered what conditions play a greater role for men in delaying parenthood, whether value conditions or structural. It has however pointed to the meaning of education and work application, especially in their partners.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

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