

PROBLEMS OF MOTHERS WITH MULTIPLE CHILDREN FAMILIES

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Abstract

The measures and scenarios of sustainable reproduction are discussed at scientific forums. Support, interest in multiple children families, especially the mothers and their problems, can be one of the solutions, because families with multiple children represent significant potential for the sustainability of reproduction. The objective of the study was to find out, analyse and evaluate the problems of mothers of multiple children families. *Methods:* 140 mothers participated in the study (aged 35.84 ± 8.34 years) with 4 or more children. The questionnaire exploratory method was used. We used descriptive statistics for evaluation.

Results: Mothers with more children mentioned that among the biggest problems are the undervaluation of women that take care of children (30%), the material security of children/family (24.29%), harmonisation of family and working life (15.71%) and the education of children (11.43%). Health problems as a consequence of repetitive pregnancies have occurred in 34.29% of women. Women respondents felt themselves the most unappreciated in the social-economic area (47.86%), social area (22.86%) and in the working area (17.14%).

Conclusion: Generosity and fertility are characteristics of life culture. Healthy, responsible families with more children are the wealth of each nation because they represent the fundamental precondition of mankind sustainability, dignified life and the development of the society.

Key words: *multiple children family; families with more children; mother of multiple children; problems of mothers; motherhood*

INTRODUCTION

Levická (2008) states that it is not possible to unambiguously determine when the term supernumerary family became domesticated in our social environment. In every case, the term supernumerary family was already used in the 1970s for the determination of families with 4 to 7 children. Along with the ideally ordered marital relationships, the right to woman's emancipation, as well as with the development of double-career marriage in our society, the ideal of a less numerous

family arose and the term supernumerary family started to be used for families with 3 and 4 children. Families with more than 4 children started to be named as numerous or ample (Možný 2006).

Supernumerosity of the family is a phenomenon that is becoming more and more uncommon. Despite this fact, not only in Slovakia, but generally in Europe, supernumerary families represent significant potential. The sustainability of human reproduction is primarily a social issue, but its solution is at first an individual challenge (Bianchi et al.

2013). Možný (2006) describes the changes in the family order in the last 10 years. The number of families with only one adult (mainly mother) has been increasing, the number of incomplete families has also risen, young people are postponing marriage and parenthood to a later age, and so the number of marriages and the stability of the family are decreased. The divorce rate has increased, there were changes in reproductive behaviour and the values have changed, and the birth rate has decreased as well. Podmanický (2008) states that nowadays the term supernumerary family can give an impression of troubles, stress, sacrifice, demandingness, low economic status, and basically as something that is not preferred and attractive. However such a family could also be a great source, particularly a source of human potential.

At present we can legitimately state that the attitude towards the value of maternity is to a certain extent weakened by the influence of feminist ideology (Černáková 2000). To accept maternity, it involves the willingness of a woman to face the difficulties and accept sacrifices (Trizuljaková 2013). The larger number of family members could be stressful for a mother. It could be a period susceptible to conflicts and crisis. A woman/mother becomes less attractive for the labour market and she has to face great pressure in her decision-making over how to harmonize family and work. Not less important and certainly necessary, in relation to parenthood, are also the sacrifices such as: slowing down of the mother's career, financial disadvantages, and restriction of personal freedom – child care, which especially at a very young age means high demands that limit a family lifestyle. The other one is the impact on the marital relationship – particularly the negative influence of exhaustion and possibly emotional oscillations in sexual life (Sobotková 2012). The goal of the study was to identify the problems of mothers in supernumerary families.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and sample

In order to gather the relevant data, we used a non-standardized questionnaire of own construction. The items in the questionnaire

of our own construction were composed on the basis of studies of professional, domestic and foreign literature on the given subject.

The questionnaire was composed of 41 questions, which were targeted towards file description, the coordination of family and professional life, mothers' problems, childbirth planning, the objections to having more children, the perception of children by their mothers, the reactions of neighbourhood to a higher number of children, the problems of their children, their success at school and supporting their talents, and a value chart of mothers having more children. In the article we point out only the selected questions targeted towards the file description of respondents and the problems of mothers having more children.

The research file was represented by 140 women. The selection of respondents was intentional. The file of respondents was composed of women that have met beforehand and determined inclusive criteria: women of supernumerary families, minimum number of children was 4, woman had to be willing to cooperate (this means she is willing to fill in every item in the questionnaire) and we required a written agreement from each woman involved in the research study. Women were in an average age of 35.84 (± 8.34 years; age range between 26 and 66). In our file, the average number of children in one family was 5.14 children, and the most frequent number of children in one family was 12 children. Most respondents had a higher education (40% college, 16.43% university) and 43.57% of respondents had finished secondary education. Almost 92.86% of respondents were of the roman-catholic religion. The major group (96.44%) was composed of respondents with a complete and stable family (93.57%) (Table 1).

The questionnaire of own construction was first verified by a pilot study with 10 respondents filling in the questionnaire. On the basis of the pilot study, we modified the problematic formulations of 3 items, as well as the introduction of the questionnaire including the information related to the study and instructions. The questionnaire in its final form was distributed personally as well as electronically in forums for discussion on several Internet pages via hypertext link. 80 questionnaires were personally distributed.

The recoverability of personally distributed questionnaires was 56 (recoverability of 70%). Regarding the distribution of questionnaires in the electronic form, our target was to gain 100 questionnaires and the recoverability in the determined period was 94 questionnaires (recoverability of 94%). Overall, for the purpose of our study, our target was to gain 150 questionnaires. 140 questionnaires were finally able to be evaluated and have been included in the statistical processing of results (10 questionnaires have been excluded from processing due to the fact that they did not meet the criteria for inclusion). The study was realized in the period from December 2014 to February 2015.

Ethical considerations

All participants were provided with information about the research aims and methods, data collection was anonymous, and

all participants signed an informed consent letter.

Data analysis

Empirical data from the questionnaire were coded and subsequently transferred to the electronic form in MS Excel 2000. Gathered data were processed with the method of descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Most respondents had finished higher education (40% college, 16.43% university) and 43.57% of respondents had finished secondary education. Almost 92.86% of respondents were of the roman-catholic religion. The major group (96.44%) was composed of respondents with a complete and stable family (93.57%) – Table 1.

Table 1 – Basic characteristics of participants

Education	<i>n</i>	%
Secondary	61	43.57
College	23	16.43
University	56	40.00
Σ	140	100.00
Religion	<i>n</i>	%
Roman-catholic	130	92.86
Evangelic	1	0.71
Atheist	6	4.29
Other	3	2.14
Σ	140	100.00
Family structure	<i>n</i>	%
Complete	135	96.44
Incomplete	2	1.43
Additional	1	0.71
Substitutional	1	0.71
Partner	1	0.71
Σ	140	100.00
Family stableness	<i>n</i>	%
Stable (the relations among all family members are firm and lasting)	131	93.57
Disturbed (problems among parents, which don't harm the family unit)	7	5.00
Split (serious problems lead to problems between parents that caused marriage breaking)	2	1.43
Σ	140	100.00

47.86% of women stated that as mothers they feel unappreciated in the social-economic area, 22.86% in the social area, and 17.14% in the labour area (Table 2).

Table 2 – Areas of unappreciation of mothers in supernumerary families

Answers	<i>n</i>	%
Social area	32	22.86
Social-economic area	67	47.86
Labour area	24	17.14
Other	17	12.14
Σ	140	100.00

47.86% of respondents stated that they are content and try to perform in a way that all the needs of their families are fully covered. 32.14% have no feeling of poverty or lack of anything. 12.86% are aware that those surrounding them notice their poverty in spite of their contentment. 5.71% of respondents noticed the poverty (Table 3).

Table 3 – Perception of the feeling of poverty

Answers	<i>n</i>	%
Yes, I don't know how to improve my situation	8	5.71
People in my surroundings consider my family as poor, however I am satisfied with myself as a mother, my family has all its needs fulfilled	18	12.86
I'm content with how we perform, all the needs of our family are satisfied	67	47.86
No, I have no feeling of any poverty or shortage	45	32.14
Other	2	1.43
Σ	140	100.00

30% of respondents determined “little evaluation of women taking care of children” as the biggest problem, 24.29% of women stated the problem of financial security of the children/family, 15.71% considered

family harmony and working life as the most problematic, and finally 11.43% regarded bringing up children as the most problematic (Table 4).

Table 4 – The biggest problems of mothers

Answers	<i>n</i>	%
Financial security of children/family	34	24.29
Housing	10	7.14
Bringing up children	16	11.43
Family harmony and working life	22	15.71
Little evaluation of women taking care of children	42	30.00
Other	16	11.43
Σ	140	100.00

65.71% of respondents stated that they have not had any health problems as a result of repetitive pregnancies, and 34.29% of

respondents stated that they have faced health problems (Table 5).

Table 5 – Health problems as a result of repetitive pregnancies/child births

Answers	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	48	34.29
No	92	65.71
Σ	140	100.00

DISCUSSION

Roman et al. (2004) stated that grand multipara was associated with a low education and socioeconomic status and poorer prenatal care. It is sometimes considered by society through the influence of myths and prejudice that parents of families with more children are usually people with a lower education (Levická 2008), this is something our survey hasn't proven because most of the questioned mothers were university educated. Having more children can be connected with values and spirituality. Šarkan (2008) indicates that spiritually-religious sources can be considered as activating – setting the basis for the developing of the potential for having a large family. This was also proved by our survey within which most mothers were religious. However in the first phase the structured allied families are more vulnerable to the standard stress of large families. On the other hand the consequences of a crisis do not influence the correct level of life satisfaction, as it is positively influenced in the second phase by the calming effect of marital status. This has also been proved in our survey in which most families were complete and stable, which can be explained by Trizuljaková (2013) who says that large families are based on the significant supposition that parents establish them as a stable unit. Children come into relationships that are permanent and are planned for once and for all.

The arrival of a child into the world represents a significant life experience for the parents, this is partly happy, but also partly demanding. Parenthood is really a mixture of “contributions” represented by happy moments full of joy and happiness, and “sacrifices” represented by crisis, conflicts, and

exhaustion resulting from a greater or lesser success. Society mainly offers opportunities for raising the level of knowledge and building a career, these are considered as life successes, whereas maternity has become a personal matter for each woman. Since the last century, it has been known how women/mothers are under pressure from the family side as well as from the side of their employer. Everyday experience proves that nowadays this pressure is getting stronger. The main reason for this is a high working involvement of women in the labour market and the predominated model of the double income household where every parent works full time. In our study, we were trying to find out in which areas mothers of supernumerary families feel unappreciated. 47.86% of women stated that they feel unappreciated in the social economic area, 22.86% respondents in the social area, 17.14% respondents in the labour area and 12.14% have not felt unappreciated and on the contrary feel good in all areas (Table 2). According to the information from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, most families endangered by the risk of poverty in Slovakia in 2012 were those with three and more unsupported children (Csontos 2013). Bednárík (2008) states that in the social-economic area families in Slovakia are exposed to more risks and one of these is the income gap for supernumerary families. In our study, it was confirmed that this area has been the most negatively perceived by women. The risk of falling under the subsistence level is significantly higher in supernumerary families in comparison to the population as a whole. In 2012, 13.2% of the population was endangered by the risk of poverty. According to the type of household, households with 3 and more dependent children were mainly

endangered by poverty (35.1%). The social policy of Slovakia does not excessively foresee the difficult financial situation of supernumerary families. According to the law, child allowance is not differentiated if it is 1st or 5th child. However, in many European countries the child allowance is higher for children in the order from 3, 4, 5... etc. Slovak legislation gives them an equal amount as well, as there is no additional allowance for bigger households due to the larger number of children (Bednárik 2008). Grey (2013) states that the state often argues that the minimal child allowance would be abused. The criticism against supernumerary families is partially justified by those families abusing the social system. It is necessary to support the interest of the state in functional families. State support of supernumerary families in Slovakia is not sufficient and almost discriminatory despite the fact that demographic indicators clearly caution against a reproduction index that is even not sufficient for continuing the current state of the population. According to Mikuš (2013), inconvenient family state policy plays a significant role in reproduction behaviour. In our study, we inquired about whether women have the feeling of poverty due to supernumerary family and we found out that only a fractional number of women (5.71%) perceive the feeling of poverty and do not know how to improve their situation. Of those questioned, 12.86% stated that people in their surroundings perceive their family to be in poverty, but from mothers' point of view their families have ensured all the needs for a balanced household. The positive finding within the perception of the supernumerary family situation could be the fact that 47.86% of women have stated contentment with the situation and that all the necessary needs for the household are covered. 32.14% of women do not have the feeling of any poverty or lack of anything. Just 1.43% of respondents stated another option where the following opinion dominates: "If the family is supernumerary, it is quite normal that expenses for keeping the common household are significantly higher than in families with fewer children" (Table 3). Within the families, it is not about the luxury, wealthy material environment and welfare. It is the love as a mutual empathy, mutual interest, and sign of respect, willingness to help as a service and responsibility, which is

an effective educational programme towards inter-subjectivity (Grey 2013).

We also surveyed what is the biggest problem for mothers of supernumerary families. 30% of women stated that they see the biggest problem in the lack of appreciation for women taking care of children, 24.29% saw a problem in the material security of children/family, 15.71% considered the harmonisation of family and working life as problematic, 11.43% of women determined bringing up children as the most problematic, equally 11.43% considered problematic the lack of time for relaxation and for gaining physical and psychical strength, and 7.14% perceived the question of housing as the problematic area (Table 4). Trizuljaková (2013) states that a mother at home or a mother of a supernumerary family is labelled as so-called "not working" remains at the very bottom of the social scale. Society denies her the respect that she deserves as she has not shown success in the working area. A woman is predetermined for the role of a mother biologically as well as psychologically. Activities and the denying of maternity respect have influenced society because in modern society there is a widespread opinion that a woman on maternity leave does not do anything. Care for children has been named maternity leave (holiday) that evokes relaxation, rest and is not a demanding and important activity requiring the qualities of a skilful manager. Since the last century, it has been known how women/mothers are under pressure from the side of the family as well as from the side of their employer. Nowadays this pressure is getting stronger. The main reason is a high working involvement of women in the labour market and the predominated model of the double income household where every parent works full time. Current society deals with women's rights and equal opportunities, but it neglects the most fundamental and irreplaceable role of the mother in relation to maternity. It could seem that by caring for a family, mothers lose something and so can have more difficulties in finding a job. It does not have to be like this provided that a mother realizes the meaning of the time spent with the family and the consequent impact on the activities she carries out. Personal development arises when a woman reaches a sensible self-confidence level and self-respect and if she realizes

the reasons behind her effort. Healthy self-esteem is dependent on recognizing the self-value and on the awareness of everything that man is capable of. Mothers of supernumerary families are daily using various skills that are neither a result of long-time studies nor automatically gained by a long period of work experience; instead they are a result of eventful life experience. They are named as family competencies, such as communication and organizational skills, flexibility, the ability to solve conflicts, initiative, and the ability to learn new things, stress resistance, and pedagogical competence.

Care for the health of mothers is an important target in the area of public health. Care for mothers of supernumerary families should be strengthened even more because repeated pregnancies as well as care for more children represent a bigger stress for the woman's organism. We were interested in the health problems of women that occurred as a consequence of repeated pregnancies and child births. The majority of mothers (65.71%) stated that they have not had any health problems as a consequence of repeated pregnancies and childbirths and the remaining 34.29% respondents stated they have faced some problems (Table 5). The women involved in our study stated the most frequent problems as follows: varicosities (possibly worsening of varicosity status), weakened abdominal muscles, incontinence, anaemia, overweight, backbone problems, haemorrhoids, joint problems, eclampsia and hypertension. Similar problems were also identified on the basis of a foreign comparative study according to which the incidence of health problems by grant mutlipar (4 and more children) was 9.8%. The occurrence of anaemia, hypertension, and diabetes mellitus

was significantly higher in comparison to expectant mothers with lower parity (Shahida et al. 2011). Other studies focused on grand multipar have also confirmed the increased risk of anaemia, hypertension, pre-eclampsia, placenta praevia, placenta abruption, and postpartum haemorrhage (Akwuruoha et al. 2011, Singh et al. 2015). From the side of the midwives, it would be necessary to actively search for mothers of supernumerary families in order to improve the access to information and to the services of medical care in antenatal, birth, and postpartum care. It is also necessary to improve the awareness and health education of mothers in relation to a higher amount of pregnancies and births in the area of health problems prevention.

CONCLUSION

Generosity and fertility are the characteristics of cultural life. Healthy, responsible supernumerary families are the wealth of each nation because they are the fundamental preconditions of mankind sustainability, dignified life, and the development of the society. It is necessary to socially appreciate the mothers of supernumerary families, increase the interest in the socio-economic, social, labour area, in their health as well as to give them adequate appreciation for their work in the family and for society.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest and they have followed the ethical guidelines when conducting the research.

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