

# Reproductive attitudes: gender aspect

T.A. Kamarova<sup>1\*</sup>, N.V. Tonkikh<sup>1</sup>, and T.L. Markova<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ural State University of Economics, March 8 st., 62, Yekaterinburg, Russia

**Abstract.** The paper actualizes the problem of studying fertility issues. The study aims to determine the reproductive attitudes of men and women. The subject of the study is the opinion of men and women about the ideal number of children they would like to have provided that all the necessary conditions are available and the number of children that they expect in their current living conditions. The authors put forward a hypothesis about the multifaceted significance of factors that positively influence the decision to have a child and barriers to fertility among men and women. The main research instrument is a sociological survey (online questionnaire). The pilot survey was conducted in the period 2022-2023 among citizens of reproductive age, who work or have work experience. The final sample included 89 respondents. The paper presents some research findings that made it possible to assess reproductive attitudes, identify the main barriers that impede the decision to have a child and significant factors influencing this decision by gender. The conclusion is substantiated about the need for further re-search into the reproductive attitudes of citizens depending on different criteria.

## 1 Introduction

The current demographic situation in the country is characterized by a decrease in the number of births against the background of a decline in the number of women of reproductive age, high mortality, and an increase in the proportion of elderly people. According to scientists' forecasts, the population of the country is expected to decrease in the nearest decades. The problem of demographic crisis is being solved at the state level, measures to support and stimulate fertility are being developed. The study of reproductive attitudes of men and women related to the reproduction of the future generation is relevant for further forecast research of demographic events. The transformation of the population's reproductive behavior is influenced by changes in society, prospective opportunities for development and career building, changes in lifestyle, family and marriage practices, changes in values and attitudes, and the socio-political situation. On the threshold of a large-scale demographic crisis, the study of behavioral factors and reproductive attitudes of the population becomes of great importance.

The purpose of the study is to determine the reproductive attitudes of citizens in a gender perspective. Based on the research goal, the objectives were set to identify male and female attitudes to:

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\* Corresponding author: [kta@usue.ru](mailto:kta@usue.ru)

- ideal number of children under all necessary conditions;
- expected number of children under current living conditions;
- the main barriers to the decision to have a child;
- significant factors affecting fertility.

We put forward the following research hypotheses:

- the obtained indicators about the ideal number of children under all necessary conditions will differ from the indicators of the expected number of children under current living conditions;

- the factors influencing the decision to have a child and the main barriers to fertility will differ in the groups of male and female respondents.

The results of the study can be used as an information base for improving demographic policy measures aimed at stimulating fertility and adjusting reproductive attitudes.

## 2 Literature review

The issues of reproductive attitudes have been the subject of scientific research for many years. Scientific works investigate the difference in reproductive attitudes among different groups of the population of students [1]; married couples, “singles” [2, 3, 4], childfree [5, 6]. The stages of formation of sociological analysis of fertility and evolution in the approach to the terms of childbearing are widely disclosed in studies [7]. Empirical studies of the influence of living standards on the reproductive behavior of Russians are presented in the literature [8; 9].

Vyalshina et al. considers gender peculiarities of parental attitudes, with the focus on the factors of reproductive orientations and parenthood status attitudes: the ideal number of children, the desire to have children [10].

Modern studies of marriage attitudes show a trend towards egalitarianism, in the concept of which the factors of common views on the organization of family life, similarity of life goals, financial independence, housing conditions, the ability to make decisions together, and the same culture are important for men and women [10]. A number of authors consider reproductive attitudes related to the value of health and longevity [11].

A number of publications deal with the issues of behavioral changes in relation to fatherhood and motherhood, the behavior of modern men in the context of the value of fatherhood [12], religious attitudes [13], involvement in pregnancy processes [14].

The researchers point out that men tend to be concerned with the issues of successful fatherhood, psycho-emotional costs and material solvency and stress that men are more inclined to the traditional family model [10].

A number of publications argue that the upward change in income levels due to women's full-time paid employment has not resulted in an increase in the birth rate. Overall, orientation towards education, high social status, financial independence tends to lead to an increase in the average age of motherhood [15, 16, 17].

Thus, significant changes in attitudes about reproductive attitudes have been actively manifested in recent decades in different areas of research. The interests and needs of men and women in the processes of family formation are different. The search for differences in attitudes will allow for a deeper understanding of gender roles and stereotypes in order to develop gender-oriented measures to support fertility.

## 3 Materials and methods

In the research work there have been used the methods of sociological research (online survey), generalization, comparative and correlation analysis.

The results of the questionnaire survey served as an empirical basis for the research. To achieve the research task, the authors conducted a pilot survey using standard digital technologies of Google Forms service. The object of the pilot study is men and women of reproductive age who currently are employed or have work experience. The subject of the study is reproductive attitudes of men and women. Reproductive age of women is 15-49 years old. For men, the reproductive age is defined by the age boundaries of 15-59 years. The authors designated this age taking into account the results of studies of male reproductive indicators [8] and the opinions of medical experts who define the reproductive age for men as 15-59 years. The choice of men and women of reproductive age as the object of the study made it possible to conduct a correlation analysis of reproductive attitudes by gender. The reference to the questionnaire was distributed by the “snowball” method through digital communication platforms: social networks, professional communities, and internal corporate services of companies in the Ural Federal District. The preamble of the questionnaire addressed respondents with the request to distribute the questionnaire among their acquaintances.

The geography of respondents covered all eight federal districts of the Russian Federation, with respondents from the Urals Federal District prevailing (81.8%). The survey was conducted in the period from 2022 to 2023, 880 people were interviewed. Respondents who did not specify their gender and are older than reproductive age were excluded from the total sample, thus the final sample included 829 respondents. The results were downloaded from Google Form into Excel format for further calculations.

Characteristics and age structure of respondents are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the respondents, %

Indicator	Meaning
Gender structure:	
men	35.7
women	64.3
Structure of marital status:	
have a partner, we're dating, but we don't live together (not married)	13.0
married (formal marriage)	43.8
live with a partner (civil partnership), consider ourselves to be husband and wife	12.1
live with a partner, but we don't consider ourselves to be husband and wife	8.6
single, not married (not dating anyone)	20.0
formal marriage, but live separately	1.1
other	1.4
Child availability profile:	
have children	52.7
have no children	47.3

Among respondents with children, 45.7% have one child, 42.6% - two children, 11.7% - three and more children.

**Table 2.** Age structure of the respondents, %

Age	Men	Women
15-20	14.2	9.2
21-25	19.6	34.7
26-30	12.8	11.4
31-35	13.5	14.4

36-40	11.5	13.1
41-50	19.3	17.1
51-59	9.1	-
Total	100.0	100.0

Respondents are represented in all age groups, the predominant age is 21-25 years old (19.6% men and 34.7% women).

## 4 Findings

To identify reproductive plans, respondents were asked the question “Do you plan to have a child/children?”, the results of the distribution of responses among all respondents and by gender are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Distribution of answers to the question “Do you plan to have a child/children?”. %.

Indicator	Men	Women
Yes, I am / we are already expecting a child	8.1	5.1
Yes, I plan to have a child in the next 2–3 years	12.2	20.3
I plan to have a child, but I don't know when	29.4	24.0
I don't plan to have a child, my health doesn't	6.4	4.9
I don't want to have children, I am pro-	2.0	2.6
I don't plan to have children	27.4	35.1
Difficult to say	8.1	7.1
Other	0.3	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0

More than a third of respondents answered that they do not plan to have children. At the same time, 27.3% of mothers with one child, 41.7% of mothers with two children and 11.8% of mothers with many children do not plan to have another child. 16.2% of fathers with one child, 40.4% of fathers with two children and 15.2% of fathers with many children do not plan to have another child. The results indicate the orientation towards small families with one or two children.

The share of women who do not have children and do not plan to have children amounted to 19.3%. The share of childless men who do not plan to have children is 9 p.p. higher than the same results among women (28.3%). The phenomenon of childlessness is attributed to the shift of priorities from traditional family values to individualistic values [6]. Among supporters of childlessness there are more women (2.6%) than men (2.0%), the predominant age group of childfree respondents is 21-25 years old. Young people represent the most promising part of the country's demographic potential, and their demographic attitudes will have the greatest impact on reproduction and the demographic situation in our country.

The women who chose the option “other” provided the following comments: “I do not plan to give birth to a child, I am considering adoption”; “I already have children”; “My age does not allow me to have a child”.

To identify the attitudes about the ideal number of children among men and women, the respondents were asked the question “How many children would you ideally like to have if you have all the necessary conditions?”, the results of the gender distribution of answers are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Distribution of answers to the question “How many children would you ideally like to have given all necessary conditions?”, %.

Indicator	Men	Women
One child	12.2	9.4
Two children	51.4	56.3
Three and more children	25.3	25.7
None	3.4	3.6
Difficult to say	7.8	5.1
Total	100.0	100.0

According to the table, almost half of respondents believe that ideally a family should have two children, 51.4% of men and 56.3% of women would like to have two children. The second most popular answer about the ideal number of children is three or more children, 25.3% of men and 25.7% of women think so. Around a tenth of the respondents tend to think that ideally they would like to have one child (12.2% men and 9.4%). Childless lifestyle was mentioned by 3.5% of respondents, and in the childfree group there are more women (3.6%) than men (3.4%). The age group of 21-29 years old prevails among the childfree respondents (36.3%); in terms of marital status, the majority of respondents (36.3%) have a partner, they are dating but do not live together (not married).

In order to find out whether there is a difference between ideas about the ideal number of children, given all the necessary conditions, and the expected, i.e. planned reproductive decision, made under the pressure of specific life circumstances, the respondents were asked: “How many children (including existing ones) do you intend to have in the current life conditions?” The results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Distribution of answers to the question “How many children in total (including existing ones) do you intend to have in current living conditions?”, %.

Indicator	Men	Women
One child	10.8	19.0
Two children	40.9	42.0
Three and more children	12.5	10.3
None	16.2	18.0
Difficult to say	19.6	10.7
Total	100.0	100.0

According to the results presented in the table, we can trace the gender difference in responses about reproductive decision regarding the total number of children, including existing ones, they intend to have in the current living conditions. The ranking of answers among men is as follows: the predominant majority (40.9%) actually intend to have two children; almost a fifth (19.6%) do not intend to have children; 12.5% are ready to have three or more children in the current circumstances; 10.8% - are planning to have only one child.

The ranking of answers given by women is different. The majority of women (42.0%) also plan to have two children in the current circumstances, which correlates with the results about the ideal number of children. Yet, in contrast to men, the second place among women’s answers is occupied by the reproductive decision to have one child (19.0%); followed by the decision to become childfree (18.0%). Around one tenth of the women in the survey intend to have three or more children (10.3%), which is 0.5 p.p. fewer than among men.

Table 6 shows the comparison between the ideal (desired) number of children in the opinion of men and women in the presence of all necessary conditions and the real (expected) number of children they are going to have in the current conditions of life.

**Table 6.** Comparison of desired and expected number of children, %.

Indicator	Men		Women	
	Desired number of children	Expected number of children	Desired number of children	Expected number of children
One child	12.2	10.8	9.4	19.0
Two children	51.4	40.9	56.3	42.0
Three and more children	25.3	12.5	25.7	10.3
None	3.4	16.2	9.6	18.0
Difficult to say	7.8	19.6	15.1	10.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The majority of respondents, regardless of gender, noted that they desire and expect to have two children in their families. Under current conditions, 16.2% of men and 18.0% of women do not plan to have children, which is 5 times more than the similar answers about the ideal number of children among both genders.

To become aware of the main factors that men and women consider when planning to have a child, they were asked the following question: "Which of the following is the most important for you when planning to have a child (another child)?", and the respondents were to choose three most important factors. The ranking of answers by gender is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Significant factors when planning for a child, %

Indicator	Men	Women
Health	63.5	85.7
Relationship with the spouse/partner	47.6	57.4
Stable employment	58.1	56.3
Formal marriage	18.6	22.3
Ability to choose flexible working hours	17.6	21.8
Ability to choose remote working format	10.8	13.7
Ability to choose hybrid work format	11.5	8.6
Moving to another location, region	10.1	5.8
Other	1.0	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0

Both men and women (63.5% and 85.7% respectively) consider health to be the most important factor taken into account when planning for a child. The second most important factor for women is the relationship with their spouse (57.4%). This factor is the third most important for men with the value 9.8 p.p. lower than in the female group. For men, the second most important factor is stable employment (58.1%); 56.3% women share this view. Obviously, stable employment implies stable wages, which is important for parents when planning for a child. 22.3% women and 18.6% men pointed out to the importance of such factor as formal marriage, i.e. a legitimate marriage reinforces the desire to have a child/children [4].

The survey results show that the top five significant factors influencing the decision to have children also include the possibility to choose a flexible working schedule. Flexible working hours are becoming a trend in the modern labor market, the right for flexible schedule allows parents with children to maintain a balance between work and childcare, especially when raising young children.

The women, choosing the option “other”, provided the following comments: “I don't want to have children”, “I don't plan to have children at all”, “I don't intend to have children”, as well as “It's important to own a home” and “It's essential to have sufficient income level”. Among men, the responses included: “adequate level of income” “money”, as well as the possibility of self-realization: “Family does not interfere with career. Career does not interfere with family”.

To identify the main barriers to fertility, the respondents were asked: “What can prevent you from making a decision to have a child (another child)?”. They were to choose the three most significant factors. The respondents' ranking of answers by gender is presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Main barriers to fertility, %

Indicator	Men	Women
Low income	62.8	64.4
Health	30.4	53.1
Relationship with the spouse / partner	21.6	28.5
Age	20.6	28.0
Lack of stable employment	38.2	27.2
Instability (economy, geopolitics)	22.0	22.7
Unfavourable housing conditions	18.6	19.5
Risk of having a 'special' child	12.2	17.6
Desire to build a successful career	9.1	12.6
Reluctance to change the way of life	6.4	12.4
Lack of former marriage	9.8	10.9
Epidemiological situation	11.5	10.7
Nature and conditions of employment (overtime, business trips, busy schedule)	10.8	10.3
Lack of opportunity to switch to a flexible schedule after the birth of a child	5.1	6.9
Lack of opportunity to switch to a remote work schedule after the birth of a child	4.4	4.9
Other	-	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Both women and men consider low income to be the most significant barrier to the decision to have a child. Another major barrier for men is the lack of stability (stable employment; stable situation in the country), which becomes of special importance during the period of geopolitical turbulence. These factors appear to be less important for women who plan for a child. The health factor ranks second and third among women and men respectively (53.1% vs. 30.4%). For 28.5% of women, the relationship with their spouse/partner can be an obstacle to the decision to have children, while the proportion of men who share this idea is smaller and equals to 21.6%. Age is viewed as a barrier by 28.0% of women and 20.0% of men. For men, the factor of age is less significant than for women; 26.0% of male respondents consider 41-45 years as the limit age for fertility. At the same time, the majority of respondents (27.7% of male respondents and 30.4% of

female respondents) consider 36-40 years as the age limit for fertility; 6.1% of men and 5.8% of women believe that there is no age limit for having a child. At present, changes in the age structure of fertility are observed, the average age of the mother at the birth of the first and subsequent children is increasing.

Unfavourable housing conditions were among the top ten important barriers to the decision to have a child (8.6% and 19.5% for men and women respectively). The young people aged 21-25 make up the majority (46.5%) in the group of respondents who pointed out the lack of housing conditions as a significant factor hindering childbirth.

There were identified gender differences related to the factor “The desire to build a successful career”. Among women this factor ranks 9th (12.6%), while among men it ranks 12th (9.1% of men included it in the top three most significant barriers to fertility). This may be due to the transformation of perceptions among women about the degree of importance of building a career/self-realization over family values and fertility [6]. Traditionally, it is women who are on maternity leave after childbirth, which can be an obstacle for them in building a career.

Distribution of answers to the question: “Is a two-parent family a prerequisite for you to make a decision to have a child?” is presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Distribution of answers to the question “Is a two-parent family a prerequisite for you to make a decision to have a child?”, %

Indicator	Men	Women
Yes	54.0	48.3
Rather yes than no	26.1	26.7
Rather no than yes	8.9	13.3
No	5.2	8.9
Difficult to say	5.8	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0

The majority of respondents noted the presence of a two-parent family as a prerequisite for making a decision to have a child, and among women this indicator is 5.7 p.p. lower than among men. If we add up the answers "rather no than yes" and "no", this proportion will amount to 14.1% and 22.2% among men and women respectively. Traditional family-marital relations are important for over a half of respondents. At the same time, approximately a fifth of women are ready to have a child without a spouse or partner.

## 5 Conclusion

The results of the pilot study of citizens of reproductive age allowed us to determine the reproductive attitudes of men and women. We believe that the first hypothesis was partially confirmed. The idea of the ideal number of children, given the presence of all necessary conditions, coincides among men and women, the majority of them consider the ideal number to be two children in a family; in the second place - three or more children, in the third place - one child, in the fourth place - childfree. The majority of men and women intend to have two children in the current living conditions. The answers show differences between the ideal and expected number of children among men and women. The second hypothesis about different factors influencing the decision to have a child and the main barriers to fertility in the groups of men and women was partially confirmed. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents consider a traditional two-parent family as a prerequisite for childbirth, among respondents there are those who are ready to have children without having a traditional two-parent family. The authors plan further research

on reproductive attitudes among men and women depending on the possible impact of digitalization of employment.

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