

“Two children puts you in the zone of social misery.”

Childbearing and risk perception among Russian women.

Anna Rotkirch and Katja Kesseli

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Introduction

In most EU member states and other industrialized countries, people have few children and become parents at older ages than previous generations did. Women on average have their first child in their late twenties and men a couple of years later. This trend has stimulated much research and debate focused on explaining the postponement of first births (Sobotka 2004; Billari, Liefbroer and Philipov 2006) . However, there is another, distinct social path to low fertility, where parenthood arrives early in the life course while the second child is postponed or cancelled altogether. Not enough attention has been paid to Eastern European countries such as Russia and the Ukraine, which “have achieved very low fertility through the postponement of second and higher-order births while maintaining a relatively early and universal pattern of first births” (Perelli-Harris 2006: 729). The aim of this chapter is to discuss “postponement Russian style” by studying women’s incentives and hesitations related to having a second child.¹

For over a century, Russians have formed families at a younger age than in other European countries. At the same time, the numbers of children a woman had on average fell rapidly from almost ten in the late nineteenth century to below two in the late twentieth century. Childlessness has remained rare in Russia. The one-child family became increasingly more common, however, although most people prefer to have at least two children of their own. Today one child only is especially typical for highly educated women, ethnic Russians, and women living in urban areas (Zakharov 2008). This makes St Petersburg – Russia’s second largest city characterized by a highly educated, ethnically mainly Russian population – a suitable case for studying the underpinnings of the single-child family.

This chapter first discusses the two-child norm and the actual numbers and timing of children among St Petersburg women. I then present the main reasons for hesitating to have a second child based on in-depth interviews. These reasons relate to economic concerns, health, and personal and social independence.

Research materials and methods

In 2004, the Reproductive Health and Fertility Patterns (REFER) research consortium directed by Professor Elina Hemminki collected qualitative and statistical materials on women's fertility behavior in St Petersburg. Both the in-depth and the survey materials are available for researchers upon request. First, we collected 72 in-depth interviews on domestic life, reproductive decisions and sexuality. The collection was organized by the Centre for Independent Social Research under the direction of Professor Elena Zdravomyslova from the European University of St Petersburg. Interview topics covered wage work and domestic work, family life, reproductive health, fertility intentions and child-care arrangements. A majority of respondents were middle class women, although poor working women, the upper classes and men were also represented. We interviewed 45 respondents aged 24–42 years (born 1962-1980). 15 were career-oriented single women with and without children, 15 women and 1 man were living in a dual-earner relation with small children and 14 were housewives with small children. We also interviewed 10 nannies and 9 cleaners aged 22-61 years and made 4 expert interviews. The respondents were recruited through acquaintances, by the snowball method and through Internet advertisements. In-depth interviews were analyzed with thematic analysis.²

Second, we conducted a representative survey of women's reproductive health and fertility intentions in St Petersburg in 2004. The survey studied women of fertile age (18-44 years old, born between 1959 and 1985) with a target sample of 2500 and response rate of 67 percent, final sample N=1147. Study participants were randomly chosen from the catchment areas of three clinics from two St Petersburg city districts, Krasnogvardeiskii and Primorskij. Both districts have a socially diversified population, although more workers live in Krasnogvardejskij while more middle class and business people live in Primorskii. We here generalize these two areas to represent St Petersburg as a whole. Study participants were primarily encouraged to visit a women's clinic to answer the survey questions. In some cases, women were provided with the questionnaire at their homes. For more details see Kesseli et al. (2005). The survey data was analyzed with cross-tabulations and logistic regressions.

Third, we collected register data on births in St Petersburg. Data by birth order and age of mother were obtained from St Petersburg demographic statistics (Statisticheskii sbornik 1990–2004). Age structures for the female population were obtained from the Institute of Urban Planning in St Petersburg (courtesy of Semyon Sivanshinsky).

The solid two-child norm

As outlined above, our 72 in-depth interviews were conducted with Petersburg women from different social classes and life situations. The oldest respondent entered adulthood just before the Soviet perestroika in the mid-1980s, while the youngest came of age during the turbulent first decade of post-socialism in Russia. Notwithstanding these differences, most respondents declared without any particular reflection their ideal number of children to be two, in rare cases three.

“– What do you think... what’s the ideal number of children in a family?

– For me it is two. Without a doubt, I want two children. Having just one seems somehow incomplete and it is very sad to be the only child in a family.” (30 year-old professional woman, no children.)

“Two... when there are three children – it’s just unrealistic.” (30 year-old housewife, two children.)

“We always wanted two children with two years between them. Well, we wanted two children, a boy and a girl.” (35 year-old housewife, two children.)

The three quotations above came from educated, economically well-to-do women. But the two-child norm was also reflected, although less rigidly, among working class respondents. For them as well the zone of childbearing expectations appeared to lie in the region of two or maximum three children:

“Generally I would have wanted more /than two/ children, but the way the situation has developed in our country made me simply afraid of making more children – I wouldn’t have been able to raise them. I can’t even provide these two with everything I would like to, so if... But if suddenly... [refers to an accidental pregnancy], God forbid, but then yes, probably, there would be three.” (46 year-old uneducated woman, working as a nanny and housekeeper for a rich family.)

Only a few respondents defended higher numbers of children than two.

”I think that two children is a must. Three is, in principle, normal.” (32 year-old professional woman, one child.)

“The thing is that we had three in our family, me and my brothers, and my husband, they had five, so for us, three children, for us it is totally normal.” (41-year-old mother of three children born from two unions, has worked in kindergartens.)

The last quoted respondent stresses that having several children is “totally normal” for her and her husband. It is, however, clearly a choice that has to be justified and defended among friends; as the same mother noted:

“My girlfriends were saying things like what do you need this for, you have a son and a daughter, what more do you need? What for? I say, what else is there to do, we all started laughing.” (41-year old mother of three.)

Ideals of having more than two children were rare and typically reported indirectly, by referring to the opinion of other family members. For example, the husband of one respondent was said to “like to be with children. In his fantasies, he is the head of the family (laughs), the head of a large and happy family.”

While two children is the ideal and sometimes a “must,” having three children is for most respondents “many” if not “toomany.” People in St Petersburg typically associated having three children with irresponsibility and wayward parents.

“In our conditions families with many children are, as a rule, poor families.”

“If you can’t look after your children, then you shouldn’t have them; you lack money, you lack this and that.”

“Three –it’s just unreal.”

“I consider many children a very positive thing, if it does not include living off others, as it usually does.”

This strong two-child ideal was also visible in our survey results. The ideal number of children in a family in general was on average 2.3 among women in St Petersburg (see Table 1). The clear majority, more than two out of every three women, said two children was the ideal number in a family. Every fourth woman thought three children was the best number. One child was seen as the ideal number in a family by only three percent of the respondents.

Table 1. The ideal number of children in a family in general and in the family of the respondent, from a survey of 18-44 year-old women in St. Petersburg in 2004

<i>Desired number of children</i>	18-24 years		25-34 years		35-44 years		Total, 18-44 y	
	In general	For oneself	In general	For oneself	In general	For oneself	In general	For oneself
0	-	0	-	0.6	-	0.4	-	0.3
1	1.8	22.8	2.5	24.6	3.6	18.7	2.9	21.8
2	76.3	63.5	66.9	57.5	63.0	55.5	68.0	58.4
3	19.0	8.8	28.3	11.0	28.3	14.7	25.5	11.9
4 and more	2.6	1.5	1.7	1.7	2.2	2.2	2.2	1.8
No answer	0.3	3.5	0.6	4.5	2.9	8.5	1.4	5.8
Average	2.2	1.9	2.3	1.9	2.3	2.1	2.3	2.0
N	341	330	352	337	436	411	1132	1081

Source: Kesseli et. al. 2005, 63-65.

As in other low fertility societies, the declared ideal number of children in general exceeds the number that respondents judge is ideal in their own lives. Every fifth respondent saw one child as the ideal number for herself. However, childlessness was an extremely rare choice. Not a single woman among the 18-34 year old respondents wished to have no children at all.

A clear majority, 58 percent, regarded two children as a personal ideal. The youngest women most clearly favored two children, while older age groups voiced more support for other family sizes, including the single-child family. This may reflect a generational difference in attitudes. Two or even three children are lately emerging as signs of wealth and family success in Russia, and it is possible that the youngest respondents were more positive than the older to having several children. It may also be that older women who have already stopped their childbearing adjusted their personal ideals to match their actual number of children. Among all respondents, 12 percent thought three children would be the ideal number of children in their own lives. Interestingly, when the question concerned four or more children, the ideal number and the actually desired number lined up: very few, only around two percent, supported the idea of so many children in general or for themselves.

“Dva luchshe” – policies countering the single child trend

The strong ideal of a two-child family rooted itself in Soviet Russia in the 1960s. During this period the total fertility rates of Soviet Russia for the first time fell below the hypothetical replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. According to the leading scholar on Russian fertility, Sergei Zakharov (2008: 914), young postwar couples clearly sought “to fulfill this ideal model of a two-child family with great consistency,” and this marked the end of the first Russian demographic transition from large to small families.³

The drop in fertility raised concern among Soviet politicians. Several campaigns aimed to counter the spread of the single-child family. While one in ten women in Russia born in the beginning of the century gave birth to one child only, more than one in three women born in the 1960s had only one child. (Ivanov, Vichnevsky and Zakharov 2006). Thus one propaganda poster from 1968 declared that *Odin rebenok – khorosho, dva – luchshe!* [One child is good, two is better!]. The first of the two pictures in this poster showed two parents kissing a single, screaming child. The next picture showed two happy parents being kissed by their two devoted children, apparently a boy and a girl.

In lamenting the single child, Soviet propaganda resonated with citizen ideals, although it did not stop fertility rates from falling. Soviet propaganda also praised mothers in families with many children (*mnogodetnye sem'i*), where “many” was defined as either three, five or above, depending on the context. However, such family sizes were not perceived as a realistic goal and had little effect on people’s reproductive behavior. Interestingly, Zakharov (2008: 912-915) claims that the ideal of a three- or four-child family “evidently did not exist historically as a mass social norm, neither in traditional society nor in the course of the demographic transition, nor even more so after the transition” in the postwar period.

The two-child family also rooted itself among members of the Soviet medical profession. One woman we interviewed, a mother of three, recalled how her gynecologist had suggested sterilization as a way of family planning after the birth of her second child in 1993. The thought that she and her husband would maybe like to have more children than two had evidently not crossed this doctor’s mind.

Early first births

While Russian women’s childbearing ideals today are not very high, they coexist with a demographic reality of even lower birth rates (Bodrova 2002). In the beginning of this century, the total fertility rate for St Petersburg was around 1.2 children on average per

woman (Rotkirch and Kesseli 2008 and 2010). True, fertility rates are recovering, but for the whole country the actual fertility rate is expected to be at most 1.6 children among women who are now in their reproductive age (Zakharov 2008: 948).

Until recently, Russians have also become parents at comparatively young ages. For several centuries, Russia and other Eastern European countries have had earlier family formation than Western Europe (Therborn 2004, *Fertility and family issues* 2004). Even as women's education grew higher during late socialism women did not postpone childbearing; on the contrary people became parents at slightly younger ages on average. (Zakharov 1999.) Motherhood was highly valued and relatively few people remained childless.

Well into this millennium Russian fertility behavior can thus be characterized as universal and early (Kesseli 2008). The mean age of a Russian woman at the birth of her first child was 23 in 1980 and younger than that in the 1990s, reaching 24 years only in the last decade. Zakharov (2007) ironically calls this the "golden age" of Russian matrimonial relations, which was characterized by early marriages lacking family planning skills, the low use of adequate contraception, and the high importance placed on marriage and motherhood (see also Zakharov 2008; Perelli-Harris 2005).

Structural reasons also contribute to the tradition of early births. Russians finish professional education earlier than in many Western countries, and their traditional reliance on grandparental assistance may lead them to favor childbearing while the older generations are not too old to provide care and assistance. Perelli-Harris (2005: 68) also perceptively notes that while Western women postpone childbearing until their financial situation is more stable, many women in the Eastern European transitional economies of the 1980s and 1990s could not be sure that the economic situation would improve later. This interpretation would be in line with with evidence from several other countries indicating that in situations of long-term insecurity and risk, women opt for earlier rather than later reproduction (Nettle 2011). While there are signs that Russians as well are postponing their first births to somewhat older ages, the pattern of early fertility continues to constitute a huge difference compared to most other European countries.⁴

Figure 1 shows at which ages Petersburg women give birth to their first, second and third child. In Figure 1a, we see that until 2003, most women had their first child when they were

20—24 years old. There was also a growing trend of becoming a mother at 25—29-years. Compared to the 1990s, there was a slight increase in women having a first child in their early thirties. There are thus signs of the so-called second demographic transition related to a postponement of first births. However, very few first children were born to mothers older than that.

The second child was typically born to St Petersburg women in their late twenties (Figure 1b). We see how this event became rarer from 1989 to 2003. The number of 25–29-year old women who had a second child fell from 4 to about 2 percent in that age group and yearly. Finally, Figure 1c shows the very low occurrence of three children in all age groups. Social policy studies indicate that these families are also usually very poor and in need of much social assistance (Bezrukova 2007).

Figure 1a: Age of women at the birth of their first child, 1/1000 women in each age group

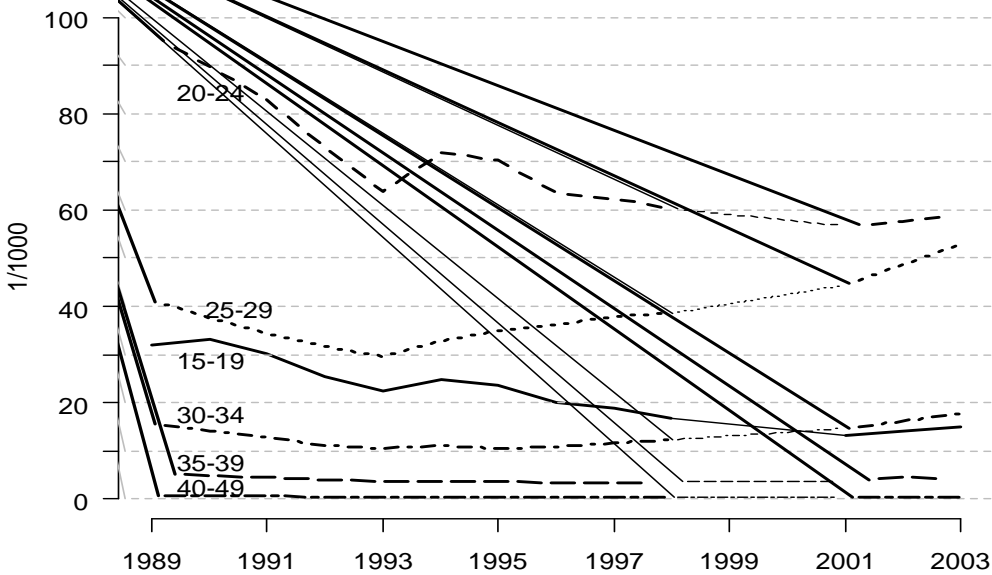


Figure 1b: Age of women at the birth of their second child, 1/1000 women in each age group

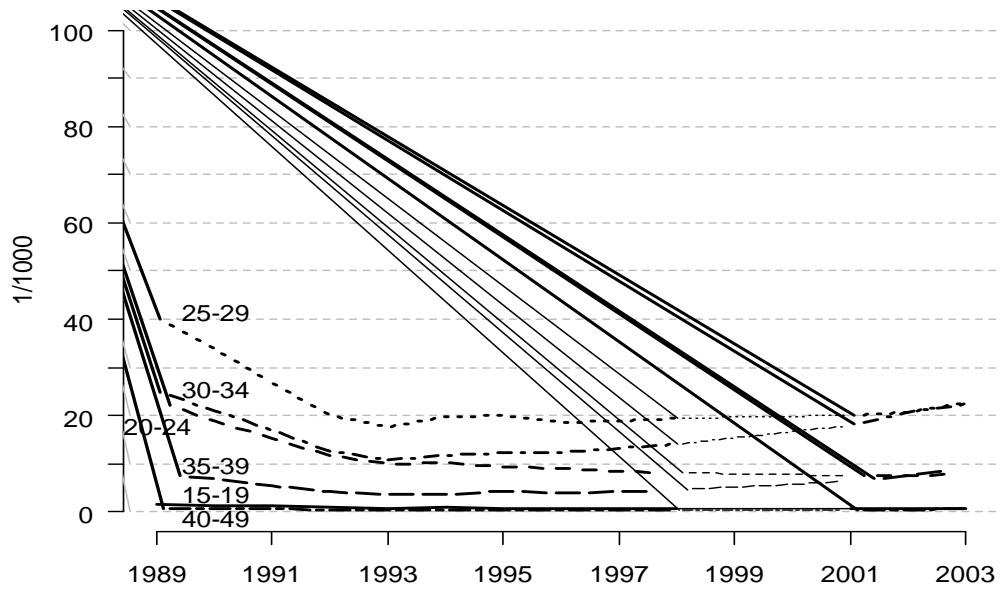
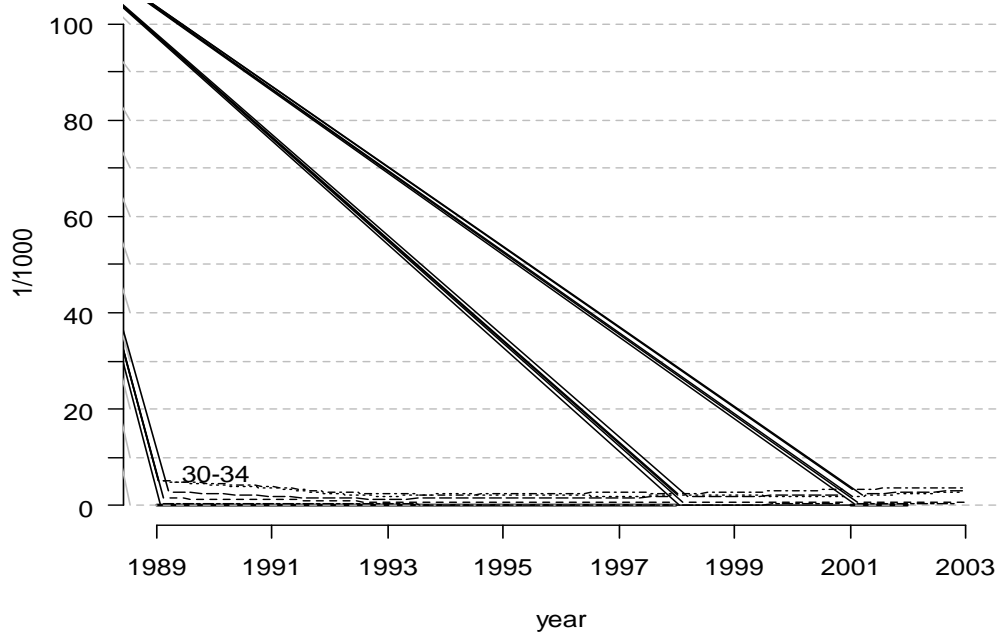


Figure 1c: Age of women at the birth of their third child, 1/1000 women in each age group



Sources: Kesseli’s calculations based on data specified in Materials and methods.

The second child – a careful decision

In today’s St Petersburg, access to contraceptives has improved compared with Soviet times (Regushevskaya et al. 2009; Perelman and McKee 2009.) But once a couple moves in together, pregnancy is often seen as a desirable and possible event (Meilakhs 2008). Indeed, our respondents often laughed at the question of planning when discussing their first child. Becoming a parent for the first time was seen as something that “just happened” (Rotkirch and Kesseli 2008 and 2010).

What about a possible second child? According to survey results, every second mother of one child was planning to have a second child (Table 2). The highest probability of planning for another child was among 25–29-year old mothers, who also most often end up giving birth to second children (Figure 1b above).

Table 2. Number of children in relation to childbearing intentions, 24—39-year old women in St Petersburg in 2004, N=800

N of children	Childbearing intentions		Sum	N
	Does not intend or is not sure	Intends to have another child		
0	25.7	74.3	100	397
1	65.3	34.7	100	300
2	91.1	8.9	100	90
3+	84.6	15.4	100	13
Sum	48.9	51.1	100	800

Source: Ikonen 2009.

Unlike the first child, a second child was not typically described as a romantic and quasi-automatic event in our in-depth interviews. Indeed, the arguments for having or not having the second child were dramatically different from those regarding the first. Deciding whether to have another child, women considered three main types of reasons: economic arguments, the question of health, and their personal degree of independence. Let us look at these more closely.

When analyzing the arguments presented by women themselves, one should keep in mind the gap between declared intentions and actual behavior. Childbearing intentions may change

over time: children are often planned “one at a time” or not planned at all. A respondent who says she wants one more child may not succeed or may change her mind, or may indeed have a second child and then also a third. The motivations a respondent ascribes to her reproductive choices may also differ depending both on whom she is talking to and from which life situation she judges her earlier actions and future plans.

Economic reasons for postponing the second child

When the interviewer asked whether economic considerations were involved when having the first child, the answer could be simple: “There weren’t any.” However, there was no such answer regarding the second child in our in-depth interviews.

“If the first child was really the fruit of love, it was all, all done for love. ... The second child ... well, it is reasonable and it ought to be done, but first you have to manage to do everything. When that time arrives I don’t know.” (24-year old mother with two-year-old child.)

Obviously, having a spouse or a suitable partner was often a requirement for having the next child. If the husband was around he tended to support the idea of a second child — reluctant males were not mentioned in these interviews.

Some respondents said that they could choose to have a second child even without a stable partner if they “really” wanted more children. Thus the presence of a committed spouse was not necessarily the main criterion. For instance, the potential father was not even mentioned (albeit not directly asked about, either) in the following quote by a divorced woman:

– And have you thought about another child, you’re still so young?
– Of course, of course I’ve thought about it but ... right now it is just such a catastrophe, what should I do, how will I have the time with everything, a-ah ... I don’t know yet how that would all happen.” (24-year-old economist, single mother of a 6-year-old child.)

One respondent, a 25-year-old married woman with one child, summarized the gap between ideals and behavior as follows: “Theoretically I’m ready for it, but in practice not at all.”

Respondents also mentioned the need to move to a bigger apartment or to finish ongoing household repairs as reasons for postponing the second child. Thus at least on the level of conscious and articulated childbearing intentions, socioeconomic factors played a crucial role for the decision to have more than one child. For middle class respondents, acquiring a higher

and more stable social and economic status often preceded having more children. One respondent, an economist herself, succinctly formulated this constellation, referring to the poverty of families with small children:

“Because at the moment our zone of social misery is simply families with two children. That’s a fact. That means that you can fall directly from the middle classes to the very lowest class, just because you had two more children.” (32-year-old economist, mother of a 3-year-old child.)

In logistic regression analysis of the survey data a better economic position proved to have some, if not a very big effect on fertility intentions. Respondents who had more living space and those who very seldom had problems in paying their bills were more often planning to have a second child (Ikonen 2009, see also Maleva and Sinyavskaya 2006)..

Health concerns

As a second reason for hesitating to have a second child several respondents expressed fears of childbirth and the effects of their first pregnancy and delivery on their own health. This is an interesting finding, considering that our respondents mainly belonged to the middle and upper middle classes and were generally healthy, active and resourceful women who should not be in the zone of high health risks.

”– Wouldn’t you like to have a second child?

– I would, if it kind of would appear by itself...

– Ah... how do you mean, by itself?

– Well, I really don’t want to give birth. To me it was extremely unpleasant to have a baby.

– Was your labor painful?

– Yes, horrible. A nightmare. I wouldn’t wish it on anyone.” (30 year old mother, gave birth when she was 23 years old in 1997.)

Fears of delivery are common in many countries. As Russian women give birth younger than many other Europeans, they often have physiologically easier births. However, the general situation of reproductive health and health services is far from ideal in Russia and there is a widespread distrust of health care providers (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2009; Belozeroва 2002).

Some respondents discussed at length the need to improve their general health before even attempting the next pregnancy.

”– Are you planning to have a second child?

– I am! I’m going to have a second little child!

– When are you planning it?

– I’m planning to give birth all the time. I’m planning to, but my health doesn’t really permit it yet. [With the first child] I didn’t feel well at all. It was a difficult pregnancy and a rather difficult delivery. Although that child is now grown, I still bear the consequences. And I just feel very uncertain because I would like to bring up a healthy child. Therefore I’m trying to improve my own health a little, have a little bit of rest, gather my strength and...” (25-year-old woman, mother to a 4-year old child.)

The quotation above showed a concern for both the mother’s and the child’s health and a wish to minimize risks by making the “right” preparations. The following respondent solved her health problems and successfully had a second child, but only after long-term preparations and arrangements.

“We’d planned the second child for one to three years. So for three years prior to that month, I was doing different kinds of purifications. I mean all those things: the stomach, the kidneys, and the liver. ... With the first I had problems with constant diathesis and other things. I didn’t want to have that with the second. ... And made big efforts with my health, I lost weight. That is, I was already focused and preparing.” (Born 1968, had children in 1990 and 1998.)

Interestingly, some Petersburg doctors advocate a similar view, according to which pregnancy planning includes medical tests and health examinations (Larivaara 2011). There seems to be a clear discrepancy between the spontaneous, often unplanned majority of (first) births and the massive and medicalized planning advocated by some professionals and lay people alike.

Maternal independence and strength

Apart from economic and health concerns, St Petersburg women also often expressed doubts about their own psychological and personal strength in relation to a possible second child. Especially educated women who had stopped working voiced this kind of uncertainty. Taking care of the first born, they felt, had already created a big break in their intellectual and social

life. Such respondents had “sat at home enough” and deplored that their “brains were going sour.” One woman felt that several years had been lost:

“Of course I would like my child to grow up a little bit faster (smiling), to become more independent, so I could go out to work (laughs). Yes. Because seven years have been wiped out of my life. (Laughs). Simply wiped out with black ink.” (38-year-old housewife.)

“It’s perfectly possible to stay home with the child until he goes to school, send him off to school, then have a second child and again sit at home with him until school, and so on. But that’s not my way. I get irritated all the time. I want to rely on myself. I need to have a little control over myself. Therefore, when three years had already passed, and with a higher education – that does leave a certain mark, with time you come to feel that your brain is going sour. After three years it really does go sour. I didn’t want that. I really wanted to go to work.” (28-year-old biologist and mother of one, married.)

The need to “rely on myself” and “have a little control over myself,” as in the latter quotation above, appeared to be a crucial factor for many mothers of one child. The traditionally low level of child care provided by Russian fathers and the quasi-automatic way a mother gets full-time custody in case of divorce contribute to this emphasis on the woman’s own strength and resources. As Zhanna Kravchenko (2008) has argued in her comparison of Russian and Swedish family policies, the lower involvement of Russian men in household chores and child care compared with Sweden is due both to the prevailing gender ideology and policies and to prevailing attitudes. Many Russian women feel that they can do things more effectively and reliably themselves.

However, about every second Petersburg mother did plan to have two or even three children (Table 2 above). In the in-depth interviews, these choices were often explained by positive examples from their own family and the family of their husband.

“Well, additionally I am accustomed to the fact that in all our families there were no less than two children. Two, three children, four. Therefore, I naturally aim at a minimum of two children in the family.” (30 year-old woman without children.)

In a previous study, subjective well-being and social entrepreneurship was related to having a second child (Perelli-Harris 2006, see also Golovlianitsyna 2007). Our respondent’s emphasis on their personal characteristics and social situation appear to be in line with this finding.

Having a second child was connected with strong coping skills and an ability to “count exclusively on my own strength.”

Conclusion

The majority of women in contemporary St Petersburg consists of mothers with one child only. Both in Soviet times and in contemporary Russia, becoming a mother is an integral part of Russian female identity, a final step to socially prescribed adulthood and femininity. In addition to socioeconomic and life course factors, this cultural ideal partly explains why Russian women still enter parenthood earlier than in many other European countries.

However, having many children is not part of normative Russian femininity. The two-child norm that rooted itself in the 1960s remains the ideal family size also among young women. In our survey from two St Petersburg city districts in 2004, three of four 18—24 year old women said two children in a family was their general ideal and almost two of three women held this to be their personal ideal as well. But whereas the first child is often perceived as a self-evident part of the life course of Russian women, the second child is subject to careful timing and planning. Reproductive decision-making in St Petersburg is thus typically focused on a possible second child, and not, for instance, on the first or the third child.

Our in-depth interviews showed how for many women, the second child is theoretically welcome at some stage, but first “everything else” has to be in order. This kind of delay and planning is often behind the postponement of first births in contemporary Western Europe. Decision making regarding a second child in Russia thus resembles the process in many other European countries. Petersburg women typically have their second child when they are in their late twenties. In this age group only a few percent considered one child to be the ideal number for a family in general, while a much bigger proportion — one woman out of four — regarded one child as the ideal number for themselves.

A sensible aim for family-friendly policies is-- within reasonable limits--to support people , in having as few or as many children as they wish to have. In this regard Russia’s current situation appears promising. At first glance,, at least, it should be relatively easy to encourage people who are already parents to have the second child they long for. President Vladimir Putin’s family policy as first presented at the State of the Nation Address in 2006 introduced economic measures calculated precisely to stimulate the birth of the second child (Kuzmina

2007; Rotkirch et al. 2007). The President's focus thus appears to have been in tune with the doubts and hesitations among ordinary people described in this chapter.

Younger women favored families with more than one child to a larger extent than older women did. Along with the postponement effect due to rising ages at first birth, this positive attitude may be one factor contributing to the slight recovery of fertility rates that is now taking place in Russia. Nevertheless, economic, health and social concerns complicate people's implementation of their fertility ideals and intentions, and respondents outline clear obstacles in the way of having second and third children. Based on our results, two policy aspects can be stressed. First, health-related concerns even among healthy and resourceful women stress the need for improving reproductive health services, especially related to the psychological and physical experiences of the first birth (see also eg Belozeroва 2002; Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2009; Larivaara 2011). Second, women's concerns about the effects of an additional child on their economic status and personal independence indicate that many perceive the daily hassles of motherhood as too exhausting. Taking into account the high demands of the contemporary Russian labor market, this is especially true of highly educated women. Both official ideology and lay values still assume almost exclusive female decision making in child-bearing and -rearing (Kravchenko 2008; Rotkirch et al. 2007). More practically involved fathers and shared parenthood would alleviate the exhaustion and the isolation experienced by many mothers. Family-friendly social policies should ensure reasonable working hours. Parental leaves and sick leaves are followed in all areas of working life. As many middle-class women spend several years away from the labor market taking care of their children, policies could also aim at supporting more flexible combinations of wage work and child care.

Only rarely did female interview respondents explicitly discuss their partners when presenting reasons to have or not to have more children. The father of the existing first child or the potential second child was almost invisible in women's deliberations concerning more children. This may stem from the absence of direct questions concerning partners in most interviews. However, the fact that they did not include their partners spontaneously is interesting in itself. A husband or partner was mentioned as a romantic partner for the first child and as a socio-economic guarantor for the second, but his wishes, attitudes, and practical support in child-care are not something these respondents elaborated on. We were left with the impression that many women guarded themselves against possible social, economic and family crises and wanted to be sure they could manage as single parents or as sole providers.

This impression would merit further study by specifically asking about marital relations and also interviewing men.

Notes

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² This corpus of interviews is analyzed in the Russian anthology *Novyi byt* (Zdravomyslova, Temkina and Rotkirch 2007).

³ On the population level, Russia had ceased to replace itself already in the 1930s. The average number of children who survived until the age of 20 fell below 2.1 for women born 1906—1910, dropped to 1.75 for women born in 1916—1920, almost reached 2 for women born 1931—1935 and is today around 1.50. (Zakharov 2008: 959.)

⁴ To compare, among the children of women born in 1960--61 in the Nordic countries, 30—40 percent were born to mothers younger than 26 years old. In Russia the same figure was 70 percent, and in many countries of the former Eastern bloc it was even higher (Zakharov 2008, 965).

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