

Realization of fertility intentions in Russia

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Short abstract (300 words max)

A large body of literature exists that examines the fertility desires of individuals. However, this type of research often draws on cross-sectional data only. Thus, there is only little knowledge under which conditions people realize their fertility intentions. This paper draws on newly available data from the first two waves of the Russian Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). It investigated whether persons who stated that they have a positive intention in wave 1 (2004) realized these intentions until the second wave (2007). The Russian context seems ideal to study the realization of fertility intentions. Russian society has been exposed to severe economic uncertainties since the collapse of communism. This enables us to focus on how uncertainties hinder respondents to realize their positive intentions. More specifically we address the following research questions: How large is the share of respondents who realized their positive fertility intentions from wave 1 to wave 2? Which are the inhibiting factors that prevent people from having children? Are these economic uncertainties or rather uncertainties in other domains of the life course? First descriptive findings indicate that only 25 percent of those who reported positive fertility intentions in wave 1 had a child within three years (until wave 2). We also find parity specific differences. Compared to first children, second children are less likely to be realized. We also find that economic factors inhibit the transition to the second child.

Key words: Fertility intentions, Fertility behavior, Economic uncertainty, Panel data, Russia

Extended abstract

The life of Russian citizens was highly affected by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and economic reforms that followed. The collapse of state-owned enterprises and the resulting privatization undermined greatly the working life. On the macro-level the welfare regime was weakened by the economic crisis, subsequent higher unemployment and difficulties in making ends meet. As one of the responses to the crisis, the new Russian government postulated the ideology of “bringing the woman back home” so that she could fulfill her desires to become a mother. The extended maternity leave and occupational segregation led to the emergence of a new household model, two-earner families with men considered to be the primary breadwinners and women seen as secondary earners (Teplova 2007, Pailhé 2009). In respect to the fertility development, Russia sticks out in cross-national comparison. Like other post-communist countries, Russia has experienced a drop in total fertility after the demise of the communist system. However, compared to other countries, Russian women remained quite young at first parenthood. But their second birth rates dropped substantially. Comparing to other countries this is seen as a critical turning point in the Russian context (Billingsley 2011).

Taking into consideration the background of fertility decline and the uncertain economic context of Russia, this paper tries to answer two research questions. Firstly, we investigate to what extent individuals realize their stated positive fertility intentions. Secondly, we analyze how economic factors, like unemployment, inhibit a realization of positive fertility intentions. We use longitudinal data from the Russian Generations and Gender Survey (GGS). The GGS provides a good opportunity to investigate the realization of fertility intentions. It contains detailed information about the following aspects: Intentions to have a child in a short- and long-term perspective, desired and ideal number of children, and general information about the children. Respondent’s education and activity on the labor market, as well as those of the partner together with housing conditions and economic difficulties in the household are also covered. Our analyses refer to individual’s fertility intentions and their subsequent behavior within a time frame of three years. The intentions variable is constructed from the question “Do you intend to have a(nother) child in the next 3 years?” with possible answer categories: “Definitely yes”, “maybe yes”, “maybe not” and “definitely not”. Childbearing behavior is operationalized in this investigation as the number of additional births between 2004 and 2007.

First results show that the share of persons who intended to have a child within the 3 years' time window and successfully realized this intention does not exceed 25 percent (see Table 1). This suggests that there are significant obstacles that prevent people from realizing their positive childbearing intentions. The analysis, however, also shows that there is a substantial share of respondents who did not have any positive fertility intentions, but who nevertheless had a (further) child by the time of second interview.

Table 1: Realization of Fertility Intentions

Short-term intentions* / Long-term intentions*	Realization of fertility intentions		
	Child not born	Child born	Total
Positive short-term fertility intentions (n=575)	75,7%	24,3%	100,0%
	23,6%**	7,6%	31,2%
Negative short-term fertility intentions, but positive in general (n=306)	90,3%	9,7%	100,0%
	12,5 %	1,4%	13,9%
Uncertain short-term fertility intentions, but positive in general (n=288)	85,7%	14,3%	100,0%
	11,8%	2,0%	13,8%
Negative long-term fertility intentions (n=948)	94,4%	5,6%	100,0%
	38,9%	2,3%	41,2%
Total (n=2117)	(n=2117)	(n=322)	(n=2439)
	86,8%	13,2%	100,0%

Source: Russian GGS 1 and 2 waves; own calculations. Note: * "Short-term" intentions refer to the 3-years perspective; "Long-term" intentions are operationalized through to the question "If not for the next 3 years, would you possibly want to have a(nother) child", which was asked directly after the one about 3-years fertility intentions and referred only to those who answered "maybe not" and "definitely not"; ** in percent from total (2124)

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