

Socio-demographic differences of fertility intentions in Lithuania

Introduction

During the last two decades the fertility pattern of Lithuania has been undergoing essential changes. In the early 1990s fertility in Lithuania started lowering and within a few years dropped drastically to the lowest low level. A consistent increase of fertility rates which has been observed since 2005 and which, to this day, does not allow Lithuania to escape the range of the lowest low fertility, should be basically associated with the fertility postponement process. The fertility changes of Lithuania are most similar to those of the other Central and Eastern European countries which, in addition to the various specific factors – economic, social and transformational-period, were affected the strongest by the factors which in Western Europe had initiated the changes several decades earlier and which had been included into the theoretical framework of the second demographic transition explaining the formation mechanism of the new fertility pattern. Disclosure of fertility attitudes is highly instrumental in foreseeing further fertility changes. The presentation aims to investigate fertility intentions and their sociodemographic differences in Lithuania in the context of low fertility and the changing economic situation.

Methods and data

For disclosure of changes in Lithuanian fertility intentions the research uses the data from the surveys conducted within the last fifteen years: *Fertility and Family Surveys* (conducted in Lithuania in 1994–1995), first and second waves of *Gender and Generations Surveys* (conducted in Lithuania in 2006 and 2009), *Population Policy Acceptance Study* (conducted in Lithuania in 2001) and national survey *Needs of Family Policy*. For the analysis the data of answers to identical questions on the desired and intended number of children and on fertility intentions within the next three years are used. For evaluation of changes on the intended number of children the data of the 1994-1995 and 2010 surveys and on the desired number of children, the 2001, 2006, 2009 and 2010 surveys have been used. A descriptive and logistic regression analysis has been applied for the appraisal of changes in sociodemographic fertility intentions.

Results

The findings of the surveys conducted around the last fifteen years (1994-2010) show that not only fertility has decreased in Lithuania but fertility intentions have been shifting towards decline, too. During the fifteen years since the mid-1990s the mean desired number of children among the 18-49 year-olds (both men and women) who already have and/or desire to have children has fallen from 2.09 (in 1994-1995) to 1.99 (in 2010), while among the total population of this age the change is from 1.84 to 1.81.

The number of intended children which at the turn of this century was still close to the replacement level, has fallen, within the decade, far below two children: among the 18-49 year-olds the mean desired number of children has fallen from 1.91 in 2001 to 1.75 in 2010.

Differences between fertility intentions of men and women are considerable. Although the development trend of fertility intentions of men and women is similar, the rates and the change trajectory are considerably different: intended fertility rates of men which had been higher in 2001, were falling consistently and to a larger extent over the period of 2001-2010 (2001, 2006, 2009 and 2010 survey data), whereas among women they were slowly moving, with slight fluctuations, towards decline and according to the data of the last survey (2010) are higher than those of men: for

18-49 years men the mean intended number of children has declined from 1.96 to 1.68, and for women – from 1.87 to 1.81.

The 2006, 2009 and 2010 survey data enable to make an analysis of the differences and changes in the fertility intentions, i.e. mean intended to have number of children, of different socio-demographic and socio-economic groups within the context of the unstable macroeconomic development.

The 2006 survey data reflected the fertility attitudes preconditioned by the economic upswing: feeling of economic stability and prosperity, hopes for making long-term plans favourable for family planning, whereas the 2009 data reflected a clash with a threat of economic recession, and the 2010 – actual negative consequences of the economic crisis at the national, family and individual levels.

A descriptive and logistic regression analysis performed shows correlation between fertility intentions and age, education, employment status and residence. With the change of the macroeconomic situation the strength of the factors was also changing which resulted in different impact on the fertility intentions of various sociodemographic groups.

An evaluation of fertility intentions in the context of macroeconomic fluctuations has revealed an unmistakable reaction of the youngest men and women to economic difficulties: mean number of intended to have children of the men aged 20-29 years decreased from 1.97 in 2006 to 1.84 in 2009 and as low as to 1.67 in 2010, of women - correspondingly from 2.07 to 2.05 and even to 1.78.

The highest fertility intentions are observed among the men (notably men) and women with university education. According to the 2006, 2009 and 2010 survey data fertility intentions of men with higher education are not affected even by economic fluctuations – they are steadily oriented to an average family of two children. Meanwhile the men with lower education who during the periods of economic instability usually face uncertainty on the labour market and in assuring the family wellbeing, have lower fertility intentions, thus during economic downturn they favour an even smaller number of children.

According to the 2006 data the indicators of fertility intentions among women with different education were actually equal (mean number of intended to have children – 1.92-1.93). During the period of economic downturn fertility intentions of women were also experiencing a shift toward decrease, but the variation depended on education: the fertility intentions of women with university and secondary education were decreasing, while those of lower than secondary educated even rose.

Findings on differentiation of fertility intentions by employment status confirm that men and women response to economic instability and unemployment differently, particularly in the societies with firm standards of traditional gender roles (Kreyenfeld, 2005). Fertility intentions of men who have a job are higher than of women, irrespective of the economic situation in the country. The personal factors which ensure their economic stability, employment and income from employment, are highly important in making childbearing plans. However, during hardship periods, these are adjusted significantly: the mean number of intended to have children of employed men was 1.93 in 2006, 1.75 in 2010. Vague prospects for the future make them be more cautious in planning a family. Meanwhile unemployed men have considerably smaller childbearing plans, irrespective of the overall macroeconomic situation: the findings of the Lithuanian survey evidence that for men losing a job is a factor of paramount importance which adjusts the fertility behaviour and intentions (Phaile, Solaz, 2012).

The fertility intentions of working women are lower than of men and are considerably less affected by the macroeconomic situation, and with the unemployed, they have a totally different model from that of men: first, they are considerably higher; second, even in the context of economic

fluctuations they have a different trajectory of the change – oscillation with no expressed decrease trend.

The differences in fertility intentions by residence and changes thereof in the context of fluctuating economic development demonstrate, first, great dependence of intentions on the type of residence, its economic dynamism, the social infrastructure provided and a chance to ensure the children's and family wellbeing therein. Second, this reveals sub-populations by the type of residence affected the most severely by the recent economic instability. Vilnius, capital of Lithuania stands out, conspicuously, by the highest fertility intention indicators. The mean number of intended to have children both among men and women, according to the data of the surveys under analysis which provide information on the periods of economic upswing and downturn, is the largest in Vilnius and actually is on replacement level (2.02-2.19). Even during the years of the most intensive economic decline the indicator equalled 2 in Vilnius. In all other residential areas fertility intentions of both men and women were much lower and besides, during the economic recession they were subject to a much stronger adjustment.

An analysis of logistic regression was performed in order to distance away from the structural changes and to appraise the factors which may encourage 20-39 years men and women with no children for intention of having two or more children.

The analysis of logistic regression revealed a considerably large difference of impact factors on fertility intentions by gender. The intentions of men with no children to have two and more children are much more susceptible to economic factors than of women and this is most evident during the period of economic downturn.

During an economic downturn an evident dependence of childless men's intention to have more than one child on the economic wellbeing of the family is revealed. The ones with the income enabling comfortable living in comparison with the ones who state that the income permits them just basic living or hard living, during the 2009 survey expressed an intention to have two and more children twice and a half times more frequently. Also, among these men became evident dependence of their intention to have more than one child on their residence. During the economic upswing (2006) the men residing in Vilnius were singled out much more frequently (nearly four times, and with a high level of reliability) by the intention to have more than two children. Although during the years of decline (2009) these intentions were voiced less frequently, nevertheless, the difference by residence remained significant.

Within the context of economic fluctuation the correlation of fertility intentions of men with no children and education was changing importantly. During the economic upswing (2006), correlation of fertility intentions of men with no children to have more than one child and education was not observed, while during recession (2009), among lower-educated such intentions were recorded steadily and were significantly lower (more than twice lower than among university graduates).

Among the women who do not have children yet, a strong and consistent correlation between fertility intentions to have more than one child and residence has been observed. According to the 2006 survey, the residents of Vilnius, to compare with village and small town residents stated more than five times more frequently an intention to have two and more children, and in 2009 – more than twice more frequently.

During economic downturn (2009), observed fertility intentions of secondary-educated women with no children to have two and more children were twice as low as those of women with university education.

A short-term fertility intention (three years) analysis has shown a small number of firmly determined to have a child within the next three years. Such intentions were expressed slightly more

frequently by the women aged 25-39 years. During economic decline such intentions became even more infrequent. In 2009, only 13-15 per cent of 25-39 year-old women stated a firm (*definitely yes*) intention to have children within the next three years. A high portion of respondents express uncertainty (answers *probably yes, probably no*) about having children within the next three years, and during the recession period this portion increased even more.

The analysis of logistic regression performed has revealed the greatest correlation of the fertility intentions to have children within the next three years with age and education. Men and women with higher education express much more positive short-term fertility intentions than the respondents with other educational background. A worsened macroeconomic situation increases the differences of fertility intentions by education even more: the gap between the university-educated from the lower-educated by the positive short-term fertility intentions becomes wider still.

Conclusions

Within the last twenty years, a greatly lowered and persisting low fertility has been accompanied by declining fertility intentions, which already are well below the replacement level and are strongly differentiated by socio-demographic groups. By fertility intentions, subpopulations with a lower and strongly economic fluctuation-susceptible level are revealed, which include low-educated men, unemployed men and village and small town residents. Childbearing intentions of men living in the capital are high and remain practically stable within the context of macroeconomic fluctuations. Differences of women fertility intentions by sociodemographic groups are smaller and their reaction to macro-economic changes is rather controversial.

References

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