

SOCIOLOGICAL PORTRAIT OF URAL REGION'S WOMEN INSENSITIVE TO PRO-NATALIST POLICY MEASURES

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Abstract

Pro-natalist policy measures Russia implements these days are primarily economic in nature. However, according to some demographers, the effectiveness of these measures is controversial. Our study aims to identify characteristics of the women potentially insensitive to pro-natalist policy measures in Russia and to present their portrait based on these characteristics. We studied how women perceive obstacles when balancing professional and parental labour, how they assess influence children exert on their career, and women's opinions on the ideal number of children.

The results are the following: 45.5% of the women are considered insensitive to pro-natalist policy measures; they demonstrate specific perception of objective and subjective obstacles when balancing professional and parental labour, as well as of the influence children exert on their career, and an ideal number of children: they attach less importance to objective obstacles, related to working schedules of mothers employed; they assess the children's influence on the effectiveness of professional labour and career more negatively; they denoted a lower ideal number of children.

Considering the results obtained may contribute to broadening a set of demographic policy measures and improving their targeted implementation.

Key words: pro-natalist policy measures, women insensitive to pro-natalist policy measures, balancing professional and parental labour

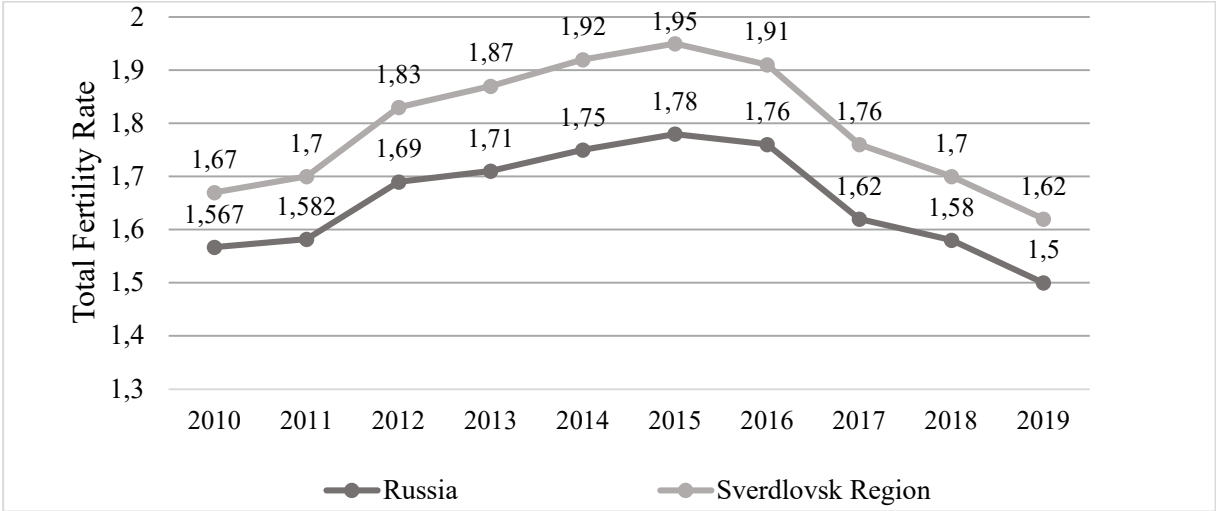
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Introduction

Russia is now implementing a set of measures aimed at improving the birth rate; they are mostly of economic nature and involve granting benefits within a certain period. However, demographers more often criticise these mechanisms. According to official statistics, the demographic trends in Russia are still negative. In 2019, a total fertility rate in Russia was 1.50

(Fig. 1), which is 0.28 lower than in 2015. The rate dynamics in the region we study – Sverdlovsk Region – follows the countrywide tendency; however, over the past 10 years, the regional rates were 0.10-0.17 higher than national ones.

Fig. 1: Total Fertility Rate Dynamics in Russia and Sverdlovsk Region



Source: Data on Total Fertility Rate

Additionally, the country faces a steady tendency for higher childbearing age (Table 1). A woman in Sverdlovsk Region on average gives birth to the first child at 27 and to the second one at 31. The average countrywide childbearing age is lower (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Average Age of Mother in Sverdlovsk Region in 2019

Average Age of Mother	Average, Years	Median, Years	Mode, Years
In General	29.8	30	31
When Giving Birth to the First Child	26.9	27	27
When Giving Birth to the Second Child	30.5	31	31
When Giving Birth to the Third Child	32.5	33	31
When Giving Birth to the Fourth Child	33.4	33	34
When Giving Birth to the Fifth and Subsequent Child	34.3	34	32

Source: Authors’ Calculations Based on Data on Live Births by Age of Mother

Many researchers call into question the effectiveness of economic measures in demographic policy. Some scholars note that these measures contribute to reducing the opportunity costs of having and taking care of a child (Olivetti et al., 2017; Stanczyk, 2019). Others deny the fact that such policy may be efficient – it does not lead to the increase in births, but only incentivise more early planning events (D’Addio et al., 2005; Ekert-Jaffé et al., 2002). Furthermore, when deciding on having a child, financial well-being is not often considered a determinant. Russian and foreign scholars believe that among factors impacting the

reproductive behaviour of a woman we can distinguish not only income, but also employment security, availability of childcare services, the level of education, personal motives, and such like (Elizarov et al., 2015; Bellani, 2020; Impicciatore et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2016). Higher family income does not necessarily lead to the higher number of children (Poylio et al., 2019). According to Becker and Lewis, this additional income may be used for increasing the quality of children – that is for developing their human capital (Becker et al., 1973). We believe the number of children is now increasingly rarely considered a determinant of human well-being. The crucial role belongs to other motives of success in life – psychological, reputational, motives of social value. The focus shifts to developing the human capital of an individual and to his or her self-realisation in society. In this context, economic measures of demographic policy may not have a considerable impact on certain social groups.

Our study aims to assess how pervasive the category of reproductive-age women potentially insensitive to pro-natalist policy economic measures in Russia is, to identify their characteristic features, and to develop their portrait based on these features.

1 Data and Methods

We surveyed women who have children and work for different enterprises in Sverdlovsk region (N=191). The sample was calculated based on data from the 2010 Census in Russia and by Sverdlovsk Region Federal State Statistics Service on the employment in the region. In the sample population, we retained the proportions by gender and age that were in the general population.

We studied how women perceive obstacles when balancing professional and parental labour, how they assess the influence children exert on their career, and women's opinions on the ideal number of children. The questionnaire included the following groups of questions:

1. On assessing the organisational and stimulative elements of professional and parental labour;
2. On identifying the obstacles when balancing professional and parental labour;
3. On respondents' reproductive plans.

For our analysis, we used SPSS 21.0. We carried out the following statistical procedures: frequency analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, cross-tabulation analysis, column proportion comparison (based on the z-test). In order to select the group of respondents we are interested in, we used the distribution of answers to the control question of the questionnaire – the question of assessing the possible influence of income on the decision to have a child.

2 Results

We obtained the following results:

1. 45.5% of the reproductive-age women surveyed said that higher income would not encourage them to have a child (Table 2). Russia is primarily implementing economic measures of demographic policy aimed at improving financial well-being of families with children; therefore, we suppose the effectiveness of such measures is questionable for nearly half of the women employed.

Tab. 2: Distribution of Respondents' Answers on How Higher Income in Their Family Would Affect Their Deciding to Have a Child, %

Options	With Children
We would agree to have a child	31.7
We would prefer to delay having a child	2.6
We would prefer not to have children	3.7
It would not exert any influence	45.5
Not sure	16.4
Total	100.0

Source: Survey Data

2. The respondents insensitive to economic demographic measures (the second group in Table 3) attach less importance to objective obstacles related to working schedules of the mothers employed. These women less often mention that specificity of their job (e.g., weekly working hours, the starting and finishing time of the working day, leave period) do not allow them to take care of the children.

Tab. 3: Distribution of Respondents' Answers on Whether Specificity of Their Job Allow Them to Take Care of the Children, %

Does Specificity of Your Job Allow You to Take Care of the Children?	Specificity of Job					
	Weekly Working Hours		Starting and Finishing Time of Working Day		Leave Period	
	Respondents Sensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Insensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Sensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Insensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Sensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Insensitive to Economic Measures
No	32.9	10.6	29.0	16.7	14.3	5.9
Probably Not	15.7	17.6	17.4	21.4	14.3	9.4
Not sure	12.9	11.8	13.0	15.5	12.9	8.2
Probably Yes	15.7	25.9	20.3	23.8	17.1	22.4
Yes	22.9	34.1	20.3	22.6	41.4	54.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey Data

3. The women insensitive to pro-natalist policy measures less often face subjective obstacles, which interfere with their balancing professional and parental labour. Among such obstacles, we distinguish employers' and colleagues' negative stereotypes on employees with children. These women were exposed to the infringement of their worker rights to a lesser degree (Table 4).

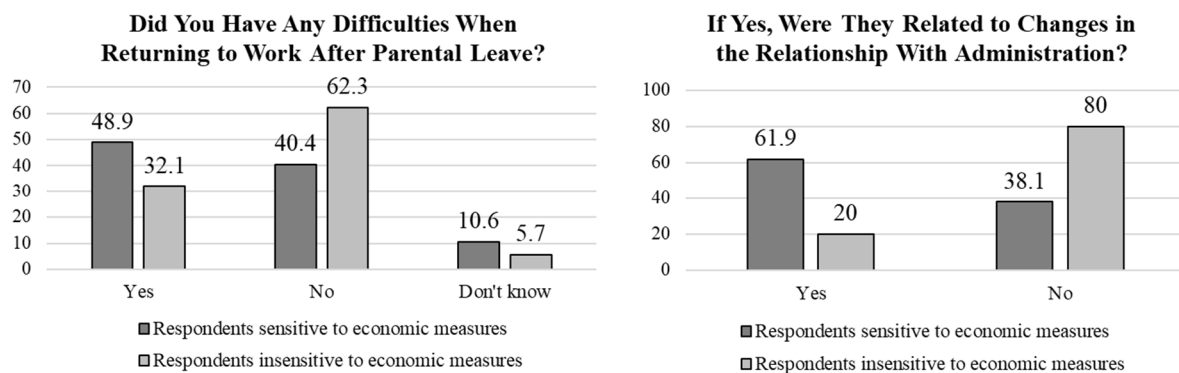
Tab. 4: Work-Related Situations Respondents Faced, %

Situations	Respondents Sensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Insensitive to Economic Measures	All Respondents
Demotion	12.9	6.0	10.2
Enforced Non-Paid Leave	32.9	19.0	24.6
Overtime Work	55.7	40.5	46.8
Unjustified Dismissal	8.7	4.8	9.1

Source: Survey Data

4. Half of the respondents (48.2%) sensitive to pro-natalist policy measures mentioned that they had difficulties when returning to work after parental leave. Among the women insensitive to pro-natalist policy measures, less than a third of the respondents (32.1%) experienced such difficulties. The latter much more rarely associated these difficulties with changes in the relationship with administration (Fig. 2).

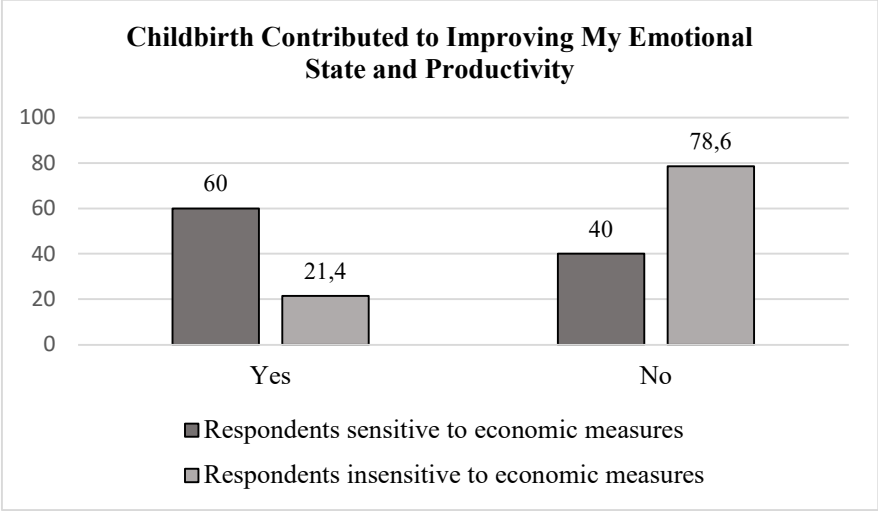
Fig. 2: Distribution of Respondents' Answers on Whether They Had Difficulties When Returning to Work after Parental Leave, %



Source: Survey Data

5. The women insensitive to economic demographic measures assess the influence their children exert on the effectiveness of their professional labour and their career pursuits more negatively. The great majority of these respondents noted that childbirth did not contribute to improving their emotional condition and productivity at work (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Distribution of Respondents' Answers on How Their Children Influence Career, %



Source: Survey Data

6. We found considerable differences in the ideal number of children between the women in the first and those of the second group. As opposed to the respondents sensitive to economic measures, those insensitive to them more often mentioned the fact that if both parents work, the family should have two children (58.1% versus 40.3%). Additionally, they less often noted that they are going to have three or more children (Table 5). In general, the women insensitive to economic measures share lower ideal and expected numbers of children.

Tab. 5: Distribution of Respondents' Answers on the Ideal Number of Children, %

Number of Children	How Many Children Should Family Have if Both Parents Work?		How Many Children Are You Going to Have?	
	Respondents Sensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Insensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Sensitive to Economic Measures	Respondents Insensitive to Economic Measures
One	2.8	3.5	2.8	14.0
Two	40.3	58.1	41.7	51.2
Three	33.3	18.6	36.1	23.3
More	11.1	1.2	13.9	3.5
Not a single	1.4	1.2	5.6	8.1
Not sure	11.1	17.4	2.8	14.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey Data

3 Discussion

As the results obtained suggest, the women insensitive to economic demographic measures possess certain characteristic features; they lie in the specific perception of objective obstacles when balancing professional and parental labour.

Two groups of the respondents, importantly, did not have any considerable differences in the income and number of children. Consequently, peculiarities of the respondents insensitive to economic measures should be associated with other reasons. We believe these differences may be due to the following factors:

1) the women employed primarily have motives of non-economic nature. The mothers surveyed are most likely to be satisfied with the number of children they have; therefore, they are more interested not in the quantity of children, but in their “quality”. As a result, the crucial role for these women belongs not to fertility support, but to parenting support – that is to measures for developing the human capital of the child, his or her financial well-being in the long term.

2) The women insensitive to economic demographic measures attach great importance to career and professional self-realisation. They are more likely to prioritise work rather than parenting. In turn, being committed to work may be due to the fact that objective obstacles, which usually interfere with their balancing professional and parental labour, are less significant for these women. In addition, this very factor explains why they are more negative about the impact their children have on the effectiveness of their professional labour. In this context, a greater incentive for increasing birth rate may be expanding public childcare services by the state (e.g., increasing the number of kindergartens, providing an opportunity to attend kindergarten from infancy, public babysitters).

Conclusion

Our study yielded the following major results: a significant share of the mothers employed may be considered insensitive to pro-natalist policy measures; they demonstrate specific perception of objective and subjective obstacles when balancing professional and parental labour, as well as of the influence children exert on their career, and the ideal number of children: they attach less importance to objective obstacles, related to working schedules of the mothers employed; they assess the children’s influence on the effectiveness of professional labour and career more negatively; they denoted a lower ideal number of children. The results obtained allow forecasting how effective demographic policy measures in Russia will be; they demonstrate that economic fertility incentives are ineffective for a greater number of reproductive-age women. Considering these results may contribute to broadening a set of demographic policy measures and improving their targeted implementation.

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