

# Particularities of the Reproductive Behavior of Student Youth from Large and Small Families

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**Abstract.** The foundation of society – the family – is undergoing significant transformations with clear signs of crisis changes. The functions of the family are being reviewed, but the importance of the basic function – reproductive – remains undeniable.

The accelerating intergenerational continuity gap is changing the determinants of reproductive behavior, inherent both to an individual, married couples and the population as a whole.

In contrast to the small family type of reproductive behavior, characterized by a pronounced predominance of abortive and contraceptive attitudes, the large family type of reproductive behavior assumes complete domination of procreation attitudes.

It is revealed that according to the research, life experience of the parent family is of great importance and affects the views of the vast majority of Russian youth, including students [1].

Since the reproductive attitudes of people with higher education often differ from those of other social groups, a detailed consideration of a state of determinants of the large family or small family types of reproductive behavior of student youth is required.

The paper reveals the basic theoretical aspects of reproductive behavior, presents the research results of the main determinants of reproductive behavior of the student youth from large and small families: visions of a marriage age and a birth of a first child age, number of children in a family, the gender of a firstborn, the necessity for cohabitation, the probability of extramarital birth, etc.

## 1. Introduction

The demographic situation in the country is the most important factor in solving key socio-economic problems. Despite the positive trends observed in Russia in recent years, low birth rates continue to pose one of the most serious threats to the country's national security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The birth rates observed these days are lower than necessary to ensure the simple reproduction of the population. Reduction in the number of large families, forgotten family traditions, the increase in the number of civil marriages, country-wide dominance of small families, and late marriages deprive Russia of demographic prospects [2].

The institution of the family is undergoing significant changes both in Russia and throughout the world. The crisis of the family is the result of the transformation of the basic values and functions of the family in society [3].

A lot of attention was paid to the study of family problems by sociological methods both in soviet period and in post-perestroika period [4].

The family is the foundation of society, the basis for the preservation and reproduction of the population, the primary bearer of national identity, the protector of basic public values, the educator of

the younger generation. The family performs many roles in society: educational, spiritual, social, household and domestic, recreational, psychotherapeutic, sexual, emotional, etc. However, the primary role of the family is the reproductive role [4].

There are gradual weakening of the effect of commonality and acceleration of the intergenerational continuity gap in the modern Russian family. The continuity in reproductive behavior does not remain an exception either [5].

Reproductive (proactive, generative) behavior is an integral system of actions, relationships and mental states of a person aimed at the birth or refusal of the birth of a child of any sequence, within marriage and out of marriage. It is a kind of behavior of a person, which is considered in the overall context of person's value orientations, attitudes, needs, etc., and also in the context of the social normative environment, in which an individual resides. Reproductive behavior is inherent not only to an individual, but also to married couples and the population as a whole.

This type of demographic behavior, inherent not only to an individual, but also to groups of the population and the population as a whole, is caused by:

- a combination of behavioral acts and decisions directly aimed at the birth of a child or reproductive behavior;
- contraceptive behavior, i.e. actions to prevent conception;
- abortive behavior, i.e. actions to prevent unwanted births.

The need for children is formed mainly under the influence of socialization conditions, past life experience, values and attitudes of behavior that existed in the parent family, the norms of reproductive behavior of previous generations.

The large family type of reproductive behavior assumes complete domination of procreation attitudes. The medium-size family type of reproductive behavior is intermediate and is characterized by an increase in the role of abortive and contraceptive attitudes in the determination of reproductive behavior. The small family type of reproductive behavior is characterized by a pronounced predominance of abortive and contraceptive attitudes.

All three types of reproductive behavior are formed by relatively independent attitudes and are aimed at the implementation of the full reproductive cycle – from the moment of making a decision on the conception of a child to its birth. These attitudes are influenced by the current living conditions of the individual, a family, which create conditions for varying degrees of satisfaction of the need for children.

In this regard, the questions of a study of life orientations and values of different groups of the population, in particular, the particularities of reproductive behavior of young people from large families and small families that have become dominant, are of particular relevance.

## **2. Problem statement**

It is worth noting that the impact of the same factors on individuals and families, which belong to different social groups, is not constant and is not identical. The reason lies in the subjective assessment of socio-economic parameters of human livelihood.

According to the results of the large-scale study, the reproductive attitudes of people with higher or incomplete higher education often differ from those of other social groups. For example, women with higher or incomplete higher education often believe that the first marriage must be registered. They have lower average desired number of children. Men with a high level of education do not have such principles regarding the registration of the first marriage, but they want more children [1].

The implementation of reproductive attitudes and reproductive behavior begins at a young age, including during a study in the university. Student youth is a socio-demographic group, united by age, conditions of activities and life, which is characterized by psychophysiological particularities of the period of physiological, mental and social maturation [1].

Student youth plays a special role in the formation of the reproductive potential of any country. The complexity and particularities of the study of this socio-demographic group lies in the processes of

active axiological dynamics, which have a strong influence on the values, consciousness and behavior of youth, including reproductive behavior [6].

In addition, the desire and need for higher education, often combined with the start of labor activity, together with other factors can also affect reproductive behavior [1].

### **3. Research questions**

The study of reproductive attitudes of student youth is of particular interest in terms of forecasting birth rate trends and stability of population reproduction [5].

Students indicate the following factors influencing their choice of reproductive behavior model [1]:

- socio-psychological (beliefs, opinions of close people, limited time for decision-making, unplanned pregnancy and attitude about abortion, the presence of a decent partner, socio-psychological maturity, confidence in the future);
- socio-demographic (age, structure and example of parent family);
- economic (availability of housing, level of material prosperity);
- institutional (public values, traditions, State support, influence of religion, media propaganda);
- religiosity;
- state of health.

Thus, the reproductive behavior of student youth is largely influenced by factors, the state of which predetermines the social circle and society as a whole [1].

Lack of life experience, the contradictory nature of the information flow in the media and on the Internet largely affect the choices made by students in relation to family, marriage and motherhood (fatherhood) [1].

The low level of students' awareness about the basic issues of planning and creation of a family, birth of children and care for their health is often accompanied by the early start of an active and risky sexual life. Even if there is an authority and a positive example of parents, most young people are looking for information about sexual relationships, sometimes get a negative and painful experience.

There are three types of student youth grouped by the immediate social circle [1]:

1. respecting traditional family values, trying (or willing) to follow these values;
2. respecting traditional family values, but not being able or willing to follow them. This group of students is the most numerous;
3. not respecting and not following traditional values in relation to marriage and family.

Students from the third group (about 10%) refuse to marry, do not plan the birth and raising children, rarely think about the morality of relations between the sexes, abortion or child abandonment.

### **4. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the features of reproductive behavior of youth of the Pskov region, representing small and large families.

### **5. Research methods**

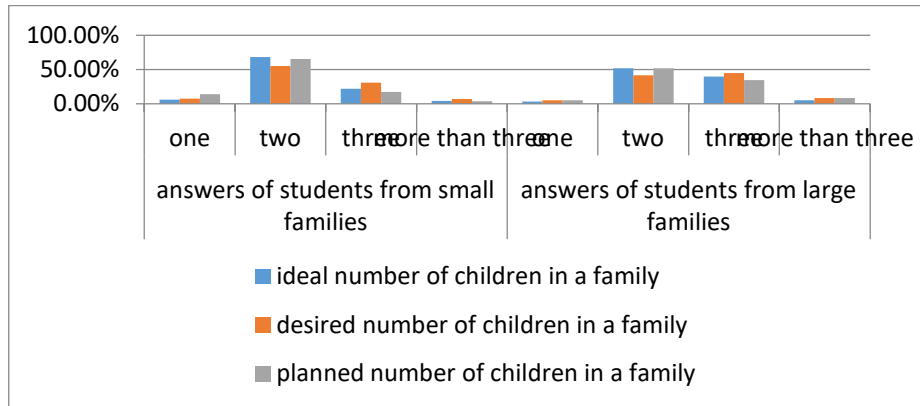
The authors conducted a survey of students of Pskov State University.

To do this, a questionnaire was formulated after searching for literature to identify relevant content. The content structure as well as the questions have been designed to minimize the risk of prejudgement [7].

473 students of all forms of education, studying in a variety of specialties and areas of training, aged from 17 to 30, 3% of which were married and only 1% of which had children, were interviewed.

According to Russian studies, reproductive attitudes in relation to the desired age of marriage or marital status are often connected with the number of children in the parent family. The same correlation is observed in the desired number of children in one's own family. Only children very rarely want to have two or more children. [1]

To the question "What do You think is the ideal/desired/planned number of children in a family?" respondents answered differently (Fig. 1).

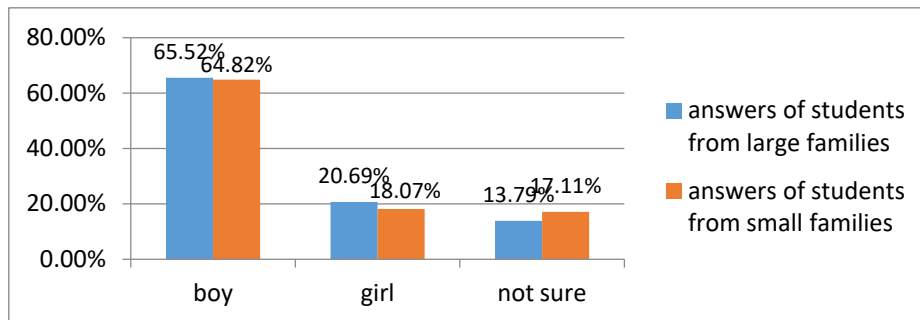


**Figure 1.** The views of the respondents on the ideal/desired/planned number of children in a family.

In determining the ideal, desired and planned number of children in a family, students from small families prefer two children in a greater degree, and three or more children in a far lesser degree. The difference in preferences ranges from 24.5% to 48.1%. Students from large families also prefer two children in a greater degree, and three or more children in a lesser degree. However, the difference in preferences is less obvious – from 3.5% to 17.2%. It is obvious that students from large families have more pronounced reproductive attitude towards large families.

According to the Russian studies, half of the young people admit the possibility of divorce if there are any children. Half of the young women are ready to create a single-parent family. Third of young people agree with the right of women to extramarital birth of a child and its independent upbringing. From third to two thirds of students believe that the firstborn child should be born in the first or second year of marriage, mainly at the age of 20-25 years [1].

To the question “Who would You like to have as a firstborn: a boy or a girl?” students from small and large families responded almost identically, preferring the birth of a boy (Fig. 2).

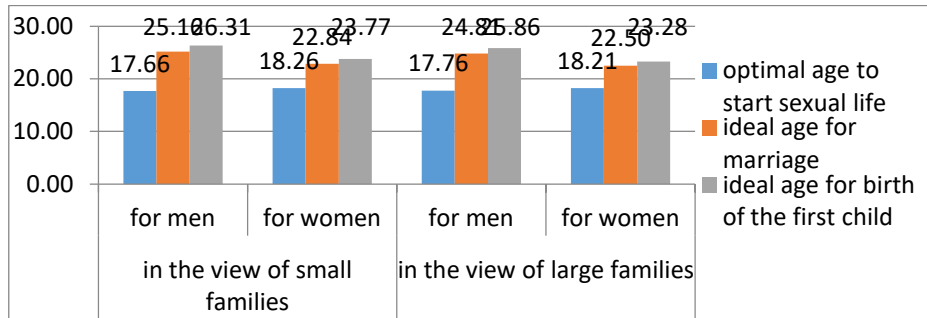


**Figure 2.** The views of the respondents on the gender of a firstborn.

The early start of sexual life and possible negative consequences, associated with this, have long become not only Russian, but also the global problem. Surveys show that that teenagers have sex for the first time at more and more younger age. Every fourth girl had her first sexual intercourse at the age of 14 or under [9].

On the other hand, fertility declines with age (especially for women over 35 and men over 50). Reproductive aging has a negative impact on pregnancy outcomes for mothers and their children, increases the risk of chromosomal abnormalities, neurodegenerative diseases and birth defects in the offspring [10].

The views of the respondents on the optimal age to start sexual life, ideal age for marriage and birth of the first child is estimated by respondents for both genders differently (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** The views of the respondents on the optimal/ideal age for the events, which characterize the reproductive behavior of men and women.

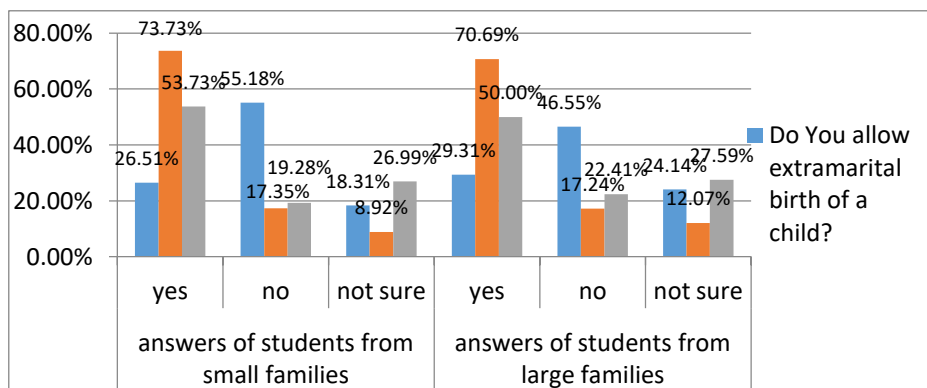
According to all respondents, women should start sexual life later than men, and the age of marriage and the birth of the first child for women should be inferior to the same indicators for men.

However, students from small families advocate for an earlier start of sexual life, and, at the same time, a later marriage and the birth of the first child.

Some studies show an increase in the popularity of cohabitation (unregistered marriage) among youth. In Russia, this trend was revealed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As early as the 1980's, sociologists found that every fifth married couple conceived a child before marriage registration. Student or university subculture (equality, tolerant attitude to male and female qualities, social activity, independence in choosing a model of behavior, etc.) only reinforces these forms of reproductive behavior [5].

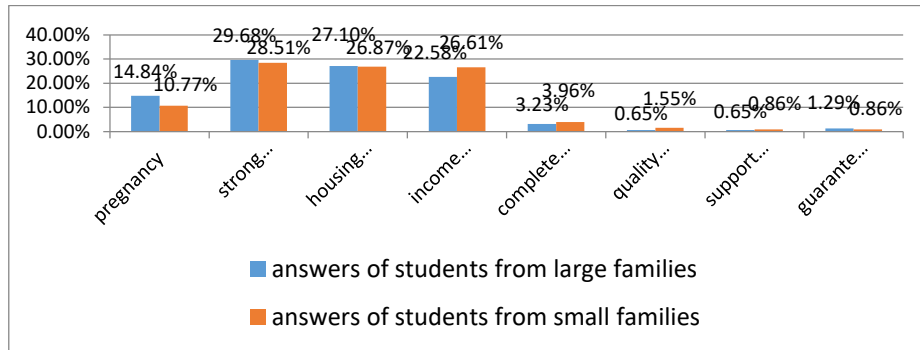
The results of earlier studies show that students, who aim for a strong family in marriage and find cohabitation unacceptable, dream of having more children (an average of 2.32) than those, who are loyal to cohabitation (an average of 1.87) [1].

There are more representatives of small families among students, who consider cohabitation necessary for marriage. But there are more students from large families among those, who allow divorce for any reason and extramarital birth (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4.** The views of the respondents on the admissibility of divorce, extramarital birth and the need for cohabitation.

For the respondents, the most important factors for the decision on a childbirth are strong relationships, housing availability and income stability. Less important factors are pregnancy and completed education. And the interviewed students do not take into account such factors as guarantees of subsequent employment, support from the State and quality services of perinatal centers (Fig. 5).

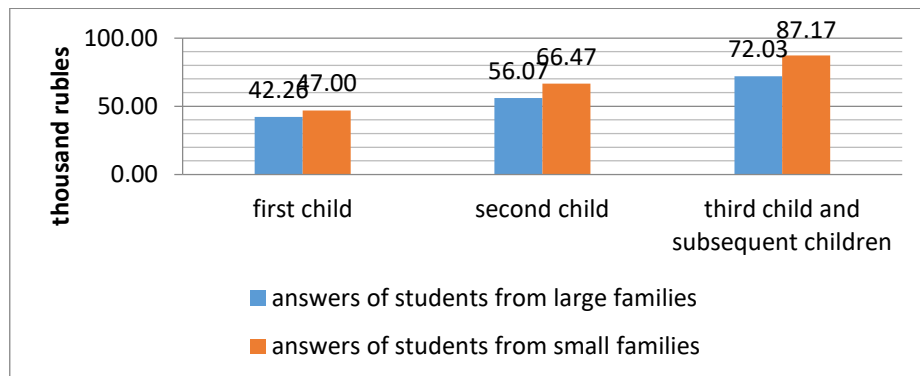


**Figure 5.** The views of the respondents on the importance of a number of factors, sufficient to make a decision on a childbirth.

The points of view of the interviewed students of both groups are generally the same. The exception is a slightly more significant factor “pregnancy” and a slightly less significant factor “income stability” for students from large families.

The parents’ decision to give birth to another child is based on social responsibility for the future of their children. When living standards are low, it is the responsible attitude of parents that becomes an obstacle to increasing the birth rate. Maybe that is why single-child families predominate in Russia: according to the All-Russian census, there were 675 single-child, 267 two-child and 58 multi-child families out of 1000 Russian families with children [11].

As for the size of the stable income, it, in the view of the interviewed students, should be as follows (Fig. 6):



**Figure 6.** The views of the respondents on total size of a monthly income of the family, sufficient to make a decision on a childbirth.

It is obvious that the views of students from large families, formed by experience, are more modest than the views of students from small families, which are formed without the experience in raising the third and subsequent children.

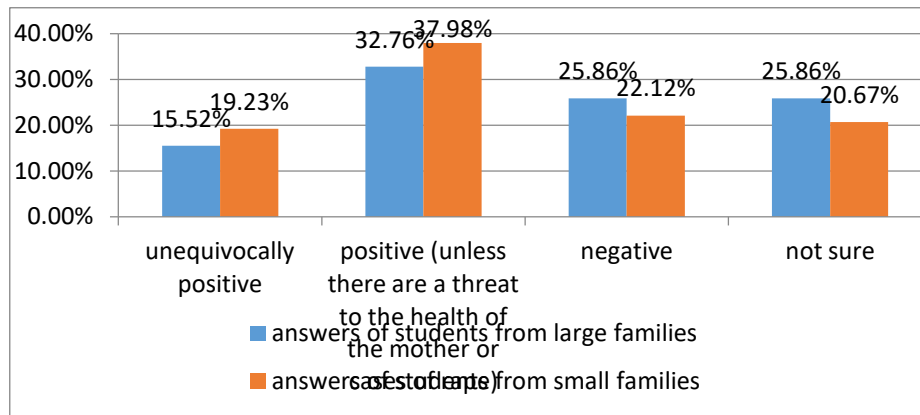
According to some studies, attitudes toward abortion are strongly influenced by education, religion and some other characteristics. Despite the fact that opinions about abortion are extremely complex and contextual, most people to some extent or mainly still advocate for abortion [12].

The attitude of students toward abortion is largely determined by their knowledge and depends on the study of the relevant subjects. Students’ attitudes toward abortion are also influenced by religious affiliation, level of religious commitment, sexual experience and even political affiliation [13].

It is revealed that young people with higher education, who have accurate information about abortion, support the position in favor of abortion more often than those who are misinformed [14].

The results of studies indicate a high level of sexual activity of student youth, as well as a low level of contraceptive use and a negative attitude towards modern methods of contraception. Maybe that is why, despite the disapproval of abortion, abortion is still very common, [15].

Students were also asked several questions about their abortive and contraceptive attitudes. Students from large families have a better attitude to the prohibition of abortion, even if it is an abortion for medical reasons or in cases of rape (Fig. 7).



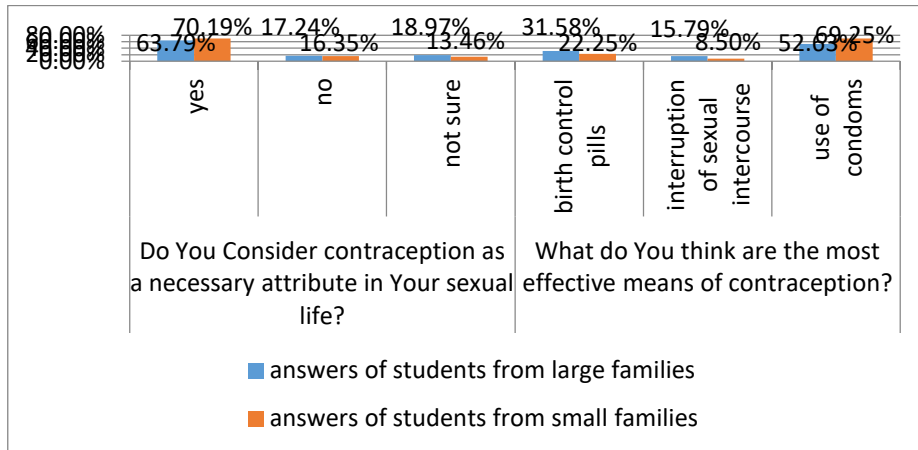
**Figure 7.** The views of the respondents on prohibition of abortion.

One of the features of modern societies is the increase of sexual activity of youth. Undoubtedly, it leaves a mark on the dominant model of reproductive behavior of student youth in society. According to the research, almost 80% of the interviewed students used a condom during the first sexual intercourse. However, more than half of students (51.6%), who have sexual relations, do not use contraception [16].

Unlike many low-and middle-income countries, student youth in Russia do not face problems with accessibility of contraception and its use, which can lead to adverse health consequences in the early stages of pregnancy and childbirth [17].

The choice of a specific method of contraception by a couple is significantly influenced by the acceptance of contraceptive methods by a man. Consequently, the involvement of men in the decision-making process about contraception improves reproductive health. According to some studies, the most commonly used methods are condoms and combined oral contraceptives. When choosing a method of contraception, young men consider the most important such characteristics as partner satisfaction, lack of influence on fertility and libido [18].

To the question “Do You Consider contraception as a necessary attribute in Your sexual life?” a significant part of the respondents of both groups answered positively. About a third of the respondents gave negative answers or found it difficult to answer (Fig. 8).



**Figure 8.** The views of the respondents on the most effective means of contraception.

According to the respondents, the most effective means of contraception are condoms and birth control pills. All this suggests a strong contraceptive attitude of modern youth.

It is important to keep in mind that in the context of the demographic crisis, the use of assisted reproductive technologies becomes relevant. The researchers established a correlation between the level of education, age, marital status and awareness of young people about assisted reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization, intracytoplasmic sperm injection and surrogacy) [19].

**6. Findings**

Thus, let's summarize the study results of the particularities of the reproductive behavior of student youth from large and small families:

1.The views of students from large and small families on the ideal, desired and expected (planned) number of children in the family are different. Despite the dominance in both interviewed groups of two children attitudes, large family reproductive attitude of students from large families are much more pronounced.

2.Giving preference to earlier start of sexual life and later marriage, students from small families plan to implement the reproductive attitude to the birth of a boy (65% of the respondents would like to have the firstborn boy) later than students from large families. To some extent, this may be due to the less modest views of students from small families on the minimum sufficient level of material wealth necessary to make a decision on the birth of a child.

3.According to students from small families, marriage and the birth of the first child must be preceded by cohabitation. This group of respondents allows extramarital birth and divorce for any reason to a lesser extent than students from large families.

4.For students from large families, “pregnancy” has a greater importance, and “income stability” has less importance among the factors that determine a decision-making on a childbirth than for students from small families. And it is students from small families that have a worse attitude to the prohibition of abortion.

5.All respondents have a strong attitude towards the use of contraception and against the use of abortion.

**7. Conclusion**

The aging of the population, the inversion of the age pyramid, the increase in the age of birth of the firstborn, the decline in birth rates have an increasingly serious influence on the economic prospects of the development of societies, and, therefore, deserve special attention in demographic studies [10].

Student youth plays a special role in the formation of the reproductive potential of any country. However, the study of the particularities of the reproductive behavior of this socio-demographic group faces certain difficulties. These difficulties are caused not only by the fact that knowledge of



reproductive behavior is largely related to the age and marital status of students, but also by their abilities [20]. The particularities of reproductive behavior of student youth are largely predetermined by the large or small family type of their parent families.

To study these particularities, a survey of students of Pskov State University was conducted. The data was collected through a questionnaire. 473 suitable for use copies were returned out of 1000 distributed copies of questionnaire, which is 47% [21].

The obtained results confirm the data of the previous studies: reproductive attitudes of student youth regarding childbearing correlate with the size of the parent family.

More and more early age of a start of sexual life, later age of marriage and birth of the child are the reproductive attitude of students from small families, which account for 67,5% of families with children in Russia.

The popularity of cohabitation as a necessary stage of premarital relations among student youth remains at a high level and enhances by the university subculture.

In general, student youth have an understanding of social responsibility for the fate of their children. However, the views of students from large families on total size of a monthly income of the family, sufficient to make a decision on a childbirth, are more modest.

Students' answers to the questions about their abortive and contraceptive attitudes confirm the results of the similar studies conducted among youth: the majority of students support the position in favor of abortion. Although students from large families are less categorical.

Regardless of small or large family type of the parent family, student youth have a strong contraceptive attitude.

Large families have played and continue to play a huge role in the reproductive processes of the Russian population. Obviously, the basic reproductive attitudes of young people will be adjusted, and possibly reconsidered in the course of marital cohabitation. However, given the fact that more than two thirds of children are born in young families, it would be a mistake not to take into account the results of such studies in the development of scientifically based federal and regional social and demographic programs aimed at stimulating the birth rate.

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