

Reproductive Behavior of Modern Rural Youth

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of a study of the reproductive behavior of rural youth on the example of the Republic of Kalmykia. In recent years, there has been a decrease in the fertility rate among the rural population in the republic. The research method is conducting in-depth semi-formalised interviews in three district centres of the republic (N=30). The interviews made it possible to identify the expected number of children, the age when they plan to have a child, to analyse the factors affecting reproductive behavior, as well as the impact of new measures of state support for families with children and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the desire to have a child.

The analysis of the conducted interviews showed a rather serious approach of modern rural youth to the birth of a child. Young people understand that difficult conditions in rural areas can significantly affect a child's health and quality of life. The lack of work, the inability to get the desired level of income, the poor state of the healthcare sector and other social rural infrastructure leads to a decrease in the number of children they would like to have in the family; to the fact that more and more often young people postpone the birth of a child to a later date.

Keywords: *Reproductive behavior, The expected number of children, Rural youth, in-depth interviews, Republic of Kalmykia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Kalmykia is one of the national regions of the Russian Federation. The title population - Kalmyks - more than 50% (2010) of the total population. Kalmykia is the only region in the European part of the country whose inhabitants profess Buddhism. The region has agrarian specifics; more than half of the population lives in rural areas.

Kalmykia is one of the few regions of Russia where high natural population growth has been observed over the past decades, primarily due to a high fertility rate.

The purpose of the article is to study the reproductive attitudes of rural youth of Kalmykia. The research method is conducting in-depth semi-formalised interviews. The interviews were conducted in August 2021 (N=30) in three district centres of the republic (Iki-Burul village, Priyutnoye village, Sadovoye village). The respondents are 18 to 30 years old and do not have children, 15 men, 15 women.

To achieve the goal of the study, the authors set the following tasks: to identify the expected number of children, to identify the age when they plan to have a child, to analyse factors affecting reproductive behavior, as well as the impact of new measures of state support for families with children and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the desire to have a child.

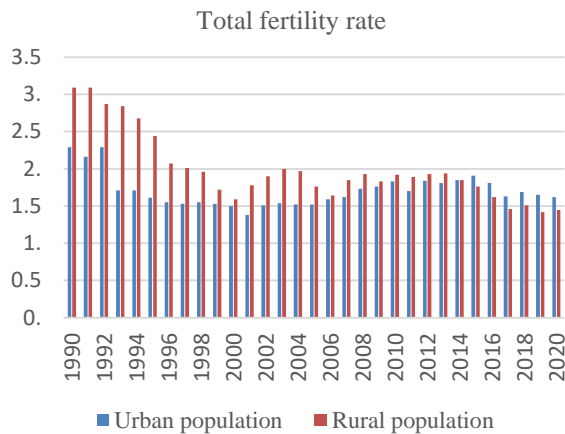
2. REDUCTION OF THE FERTILITY RATE IN RURAL AREAS

In the republic, the rural population exceeds the urban population and is about 54% (2020), while the share of the rural population in Kalmykia is decreasing every year. Historically, a large family with 5 or more children was acceptable for the village of Kalmykia. The modern rural family has gradually moved to the model of a one-two-child family, more typical of urban areas.

One of the most striking indicators of the reproductive behavior of the population is the total

fertility rate, which shows how many children one woman gave birth to on average during the entire reproductive period.

Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the total fertility rate in the context of urban and rural populations for the period from 1990 to 2020. We have observed a steady decline in the indicator during the period under review in



rural areas.

Figure 1 The total fertility rate of the urban and rural population of the Republic of Kalmykia.

3. REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR: APPROACHES TO THE DEFINITION

V.A. Litovka, analysing theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of reproductive behavior, notes that interest among domestic sociologists and demographers in this problem began to appear in the 70s of the 20th century. There are various definitions of the concept of "reproductive behavior". V.A. Borisov notes that reproductive behavior is part of demographic behavior and is defined as a system of actions and relationships mediating the birth or rejection of the childbirth of any order, in marriage or out of marriage. A.I. Antonov defines reproductive behavior as "a system of actions and relationships mediating the birth of a certain number of children in the family (as well as out of marriage)" [1, p. 287]. A.G. Vishnevsky understood

reproductive behavior as intra-family birth control [1, p. 288].

L.A. Belyaeva, M.A. Belyaeva define reproductive behavior as a system of actions and relationships aimed at regulating an individual's fertility to meet the needs associated with the presence or absence of children within the existing biological, social and cultural conditions [2, p. 99].

In Western literature, reproductive behavior is a consequence of the rational choice of people [3], but recently, with the accumulation of empirical data, there is a growing understanding that there are deeply psychological, social and economic factors that cannot be directly related to a rational model of choosing reproductive goals [4]. Researchers in other countries also note that reproductive behavior and related strategies can be very flexible, which is associated with the life cycle stages of an individual who may reconsider his goals and attitude to family and the desire to have children [5, 6].

The analysis of reproductive behavior in Kalmykia was carried out by B.B. Nushaeva, N.V. Badmaeva, B.V. Idzhaeva, et al. [7, 8].

3.1. The expected number of children that respondents plan to have.

The "expected" number of children is the number of children that the respondent "plans" to have in his family by the end of the reproductive period [9, p. 97].

According to Table 1, it can be seen that most of the female respondents (60%) would like to have three children, 26% of respondents said they want to have two children, 7% of respondents - one child. For female respondents, the child mustn't be left alone in the future so that he has close relatives. Explaining the desire to have three children, the respondent girls noted the following: "so that they can communicate with each other in the future, support...", "when two or better three, they will have more fun in childhood, and when they are older, they will support each other...", "if there is one child, then his children will then have no aunts, uncles, cousins or sisters..."

Table 1. How many children would you like to have in your family?

Number of children	Men, %	Women, %
1	53	7
2	33	26
3	7	60
4 or more	7	7

Young people mostly want to have fewer children than girls — one or two, only two respondents indicated that they want to have three and four children, respectively. Justifying the desire to have no more than two children, young people talk about the need to "really look at their situation and assess their capabilities"; they also talk about the difficulties of today, especially living in rural areas: "everything is expensive now, especially various children's goods...", "there is practically no medical care in villages, I always had to go to the city with my parents..."

3.2. The optimal age for the birth of children.

The analysis of the interview results showed that the respondents consider the optimal age for the birth of children: for a girl — 20-24 years, for a man - 23-27 years (Table 2). At the same time, respondents note that the age of birth of the first child is "delayed". Many people associate the age of birth with modern youth later getting married.

One of the respondents notes: "...already the age, the grooms, the brides have aged if they were married before 25 years, and now I notice that the bride can be thirty, thirty-five even...", "now there are a lot of those who are over 30-35 (years), they are only getting married for the first time, although, for example, as they say, they could potentially be 5-10 years later, grandfathers, grandmothers..."

3.3. Factors affecting reproductive behavior

When deciding on the first child's birth, such factors as financial situation, availability of housing, and stable work are of the most significant importance for the respondents.

One of the respondents notes the following: "first of all, everyone will look at their condition, whether there is an apartment, whether there is a car, in general, whether there is a permanent job, a permanent income, since if you have a child, then there will be expenses for sure, for birth, for maintenance, and this is also all money<...>, it results in a large penny, and it seems to me that most look at their financial condition".

Table 2. The optimal age for the birth of children?

Age, years old	Men, %	Women, %
18-19	-	-
20-24	20	40
25-29	40	33
30-34	33	27
35 and older	7	-

Summarising the respondents' answers, it is possible to describe the following favourable conditions under which they decide to have their first child: the salary level, according to respondents, should be at least 40 thousand rubles (the average monthly accrued salary of one employee in Kalmykia in 2021 is 32887.4 rubles [10]), one of the parents should have a permanent job, in rural areas the family should live in a private house with an area of at least 100 sq.m. At the same time, 40 thousand rubles of income, as one of the interviewees noted, is the amount for which "you cannot live straight, but at least exist normally, so average..."

Also, almost all respondents noted that the social infrastructure of the villages they live in leaves much to be desired. In the villages, there is one kindergarten, where there is a large queue. There are no maternity hospitals in the villages, you can get registered for pregnancy in the village, but most of the tests need to be taken in the city (Elista), there are children's polyclinics, but there are no narrow specialists there, so you also need to go to the capital of the republic if necessary. Schools are working in all the villages, and additional blocks have even been built somewhere.

Thus, the main factors for rural youth are material conditions and the state of the social infrastructure of rural settlements.

4. THE IMPACT OF STATE SUPPORT MEASURES FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Respondents note that to receive various benefits, it is necessary to prove that you need help, while if the income does not exceed the required minimum, then benefits are denied. Respondents are also outraged by the small amount of one of the support measures: "I know that in my childhood when I was little, we received 50 or 100 rubles a month for children, I am already 35, and I know that people receive almost the same amount now, well, it's ridiculous to receive 200 rubles a month for a child".

One of the interviewees replied that various state payments would not be needed if there were high salaries: "in European countries, children are not paid anything,

but parents have such incomes that do not need payment from the state and again in such bureaucratic red tape, filling out all sorts of paperwork, collecting all the evidence of their income." There were also opposing opinions: "...I believe that the state should support children, everyone sees what salaries and many parents are out of work, or so, for example, the wife is watching the children, the husband is somewhere working, but he does not have a stable income. I believe that the state should support everyone from 0 to 18 (years old), regardless of salary; please help with our rich resources, forests, which is unclear where they go. Well, this should help children, I think, without dividing by age: from 8 (years), from 3 (years), or anything else. Not these 200 rubles, take them away, make a normal amount".

As for one of the new measures to support fertility - maternity capital for the first child's birth, some respondents did not know about this innovation. It is also interesting to note that when answering the question of whether this measure will affect the decision to have a child, most of the respondents gave a negative answer, motivating him with the fact that in the future, there will still be significant expenses for the child and, in general, a lot more needs to be prepared for this process: "...this is, of course, good, but it's not enough for later and in any case, you need to invest", "it will be good if additional money, but you will need to prepare your own in advance...", "you will get this money, and then how? I believe that the amount is insufficient...".

In this section, we see that the respondents have a fairly conscious approach to the birth of a child in general; they need a prepared material base for the birth of a child.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the desire to have a child. For the second year, the whole world has been living in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic; the respondents' opinion was divided on whether the pandemic is a reason to postpone the birth of a child. Some respondents noted that if a person has a desire and his health allows him, he should not postpone the birth of a child. They also stated that if a girl or a young man is already approaching the age (35 years and older), then the pandemic will not affect their desire to have a child: "...my sister, 35 years old, wants to give birth faster, she has a business, an apartment, everything is already there, the age is suitable, so coronavirus or not, wants everything!".

Another part of respondents believes that the birth of a child during a pandemic should be delayed: "...a child who, if only born, is a weak organism that has not yet adapted to the environment. If there is a pandemic, there is a very high risk of getting sick, for his parents to get sick. And, after all, quarantine is a restriction; there is no way to go out normally, walk normally, go to the same hospital normally, where there is usually a large crowd of people, and, of course, there is also a risk of catching

something there. Well, because of the danger of the child's illness, as it were. This is also the reason not to have..."; "...I also believe that the pandemic affects, there are a lot of girls among my friends who were offered an abortion at a fairly late date, but what a consequence. They [pregnant girls] were sick with coronavirus; they were on a ventilator, they would not have survived...".

In this case, we see that, after all, the pandemic largely affects the desire to give birth to a child since there are quite a lot of risks both for the child himself and for the pregnant girl.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the conducted interviews showed a rather serious approach of modern rural youth to the birth of a child. Young people understand that difficult conditions in rural areas can significantly affect a child's health and quality of life. The lack of work, the inability to get the desired level of income, the poor state of the healthcare sector and other social rural infrastructure leads to a decrease in the number of children they would like to have in the family; to the fact that more and more often young people postpone the birth of a child to a later date.

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