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VOLUNTARY CHILDLESSNESS IN MODERN RUSSIA:  
SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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**Abstract**  
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Relevance of the research topic. The processes of globalization, intercultural interaction of various socio-demographic groups are accompanied by transformational changes in almost all spheres of social life. This is typical for all countries of the world community. The expression of such transformations is the emergence of new forms of family-marriage relations, which do not always correspond to traditional ones, reproduced from century to century. This form includes the phenomenon of voluntary childlessness, which is currently spreading not only in North America and Europe, but also in our country. Despite the fact that this phenomenon is very ambiguously perceived both by researchers involved in the problems of demography, family-marriage relations, parenthood, and by Russian citizens in the context of everyday life, voluntary childlessness deserves the attention of sociologists. This is due to the fact that it is necessary to have a clear and adequate idea of the prevalence of this phenomenon in Russian society, its assessments by representatives of various socio-demographic groups and, above all, by men and women of fertile age. The relevance of this study is due to the fact that voluntary childlessness is very ambiguously perceived in society, especially in the context of state family and demographic policies, one of the key tasks of which is to increase the birth rate, unconditional support for motherhood and childhood, families with children, large families. But, since voluntary childlessness as a phenomenon of modern society is an established reality, it is necessary to identify its level, those groups among which it finds popularity, and the trends of its distribution/sustainable reproduction.

Statistics and empirical studies indicate that the birth rate in Russia in the 1990s decreased significantly, which is determined by both the socio-economic crisis and value transformations, both at the level of social groups and individuals. In this regard, overcoming demographic challenges is a priority for modern Russia. One of the first steps in this direction was the introduction in 2007 of a federal maternity capital program, according to which a family that gave birth to a second child (or a third/fourth, if not received for the second) received from the state a subsidy of more than \$10 thousand (at the exchange rate at that time). As a result, in the summer of 2007, nine months after the announcement of the program, the birth rate in Russia increased by 10%, and in subsequent years this growth continued. However, since 2016, the birth rate has begun to fall again, primarily due to the birth of the first children.

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to negative shifts in the trajectory of demographic development in various regions and countries of the world, including Russia. These shifts not only affect population reproduction, but also lead to the exacerbation of many socio-economic problems. According to Rosstat, the natural decline in the population of Russia in January-November 2021 amounted to 945.1 thousand people. (1.28 million people were born, and 2.23 million people died). This is 370.3 thousand, or 64.4%, higher than the same period last year. As part of the demographic policy, the state is taking new steps to motivate Russian citizens of fertile age to give birth and raise children. Since 2021, the size



of maternal (family) capital has increased and amounted to 483,881,83 rubles per first child. At the same time, for families whose right to additional measures of state support arose in connection with the birth or adoption of the first child, at the birth of the second child, the amount of maternity capital from 2021 increases by 155 thousand 550 rubles. For families with a second child since January 1, 2020, the maternity capital amounted to 639,431,83 rubles. As the national project "Demography" is implemented in the Russian regions, the situation with the provision of children with places in preschool institutions is changing for the better. The availability of high-quality preschool education and the provision of places in children's institutions for children under the age of three is one of the priority tasks formulated by the President: "The Government of the Russian Federation, together with the executive bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, will have to fully solve the problem of the availability of preschool education by the end of 2023. By this time, 100% of children should be provided with places in kindergartens.

This is of particular importance due to the fact that the age of marriage is increasing: in 2019, the most popular category of age is 25-34, compared to 2002, where the most popular was category 18-24, as well as the "transfer" of the birth of children, especially the first-born, for a certain period, sometimes quite distant. In some cases, this is transformed into a choice of childless lifestyle. The results of the 2010 All-Russian Population Census showed that every sixth Russian woman who has reached the age of 30-34 is childless.

Thus, statistics indicate a decrease in natural population growth, a decrease in the number of marriages. In recent decades, there has been a transformation of family and family values through emancipation, changing gender roles and other factors. An increase in the individual-personal principle, the predominance of personal interests over public, value-rational choice - all this leads to the transformation of traditional family relations. One of the consequences of these changes is the spread of such a phenomenon as voluntary childlessness in society. At the same time, it is not necessary to discount the influence of foreign samples of family-marriage and parental relations broadcast via the Internet, foreign TV shows, etc. Obviously, this has a certain impact on Russian youth and middle-aged people who are active in their professional activities.

Research by VTsIOM, published in 2018, confirms the fact of an increase in the phenomenon of voluntary childlessness: 6% of Russians voluntarily refuse to have children, while in 2005 there were practically no as such.

According to a survey conducted in 2020 by NAFI (National Agency for Financial Research), almost half of Russians (46%) aged 18 to 45 do not want to have children (including those who already have children), citing an unstable financial situation or lack of such a desire.

Laboratory of Research on Demography and Migration of the Institute of Social Analysis and Forecasting of the RANEPa since the 2000s. conducts a longitudinal study "Man, Family, Society," one of the subjects of which is the attitude of Russians to parenthood. The results of the last wave of the survey,



presented at the end of 2020, showed a change in the share of childless Russians (aged 18 to 44 years) who do not want to have children: in 2015 there were 5% of them, in 2017 - already 10%, and in 2020 the share of voluntarily childless reached 22%.

Based on the research carried out, it was revealed that the cohort of voluntarily childless people is replenished mainly at the expense of two groups of the population: on the one hand, deprived Russians refuse to be parents (those with low incomes, lack of work, etc.), and on the other hand, "modernization forwards" from the largest cities. Characteristic features of the latter: higher education, lack of brothers and sisters (small environment from birth), negative attitude towards religion, greater inclusion in the digital environment.

Thus, it must be recognized that voluntary childlessness takes place in modern Russian society, but its essence, degree of prevalence are not determined, varieties are not identified, there is no sufficient information about the attitude of various socio-demographic groups to this phenomenon, and forecasts about its transformation are not presented. All this represents theoretical and practical problems, sociological research in this direction will make it possible to give an adequate assessment of the phenomenon of voluntary childlessness within the framework of Russian reality, the prospects for its transformation, to determine how the choice of a childless lifestyle creates problems for the implementation of state family and demographic policy.

Thus, the relevance of the study is due to the fact that this phenomenon is to a certain extent new for Russian society, but having popularity among a certain part of people of reproductive age, especially due to the socio-economic crisis, the revision of the system of traditional values by certain groups of people.

The object of the study is voluntary childlessness as a phenomenon of modern society.

The subject of the study is the essence and types of voluntary childlessness, their manifestations in modern Russian society, factors affecting their formation.

The purpose of the dissertation study is to identify the essence of voluntary childlessness, to give a typology of this phenomenon, to determine the determining factors and the tendency of development.

The object, subject and purpose of the dissertation research determined its tasks:

1. Analyze conceptual approaches to understanding voluntary childlessness as a phenomenon characteristic of modern society.
2. Determine the factors of voluntary choice of a childless lifestyle and their motivating importance.
3. Identify and analyze estimates of voluntary childlessness by representatives of significant socio-demographic groups (youth, men and women, people of fertile age, married couples), draw up a social portrait of adherents of this phenomenon.
4. Based on the analysis of respondents' opinions on voluntary childlessness and the reasons for its spread, to substantiate the influence of this phenomenon on



demographic processes, forms of family-marriage relations, the value of parenthood in modern Russian society.

The main hypothesis of the study

The voluntary choice of a childless lifestyle is widespread among the not very significant (in number) share of Russians, is due not so much to material and economic as to value-rational factors, is characteristic of people with a good education, successful in professional activities, possessing the quality of "responsible parents." When choosing childlessness, the gender component is expressed: this is primarily a female audience. On the part of society, there is a negative assessment of those who choose voluntary childlessness, but the proportion of those who tolerantly assess the supporters of this phenomenon is increasing. Forecasts of the further spread of voluntary childlessness in Russian society are not obvious, especially in connection with the active activities of the state in the field of family and demographic policy.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the dissertation work was the ideas and concepts presented in the works of sociologists, philosophers, economists, psychologists, which explore family-marriage relations, value orientations and attitudes, the essence and content of choosing a childless lifestyle.

The methodological basis of the study was chosen such approaches as: activity, on the basis of which an analysis of the process of choosing a childless lifestyle was carried out; axiological, which made it possible to identify group and personal grounds for value choice with the determination of the most significant values (career, comfort, health, family); structural and functional, on the basis of which factors determining childless lifestyle and their motivating role were identified; risky, the use of which made it possible to substantiate the idea that the desire to avoid various risks (both global nature and everyday life) plays a significant role in the orientation towards voluntary childlessness.

Empirical basis of the study:

1. N = 56 supporters of voluntary childlessness aged 18 to 47 years were interviewed using a qualitative semi-formalized interview (the average age of the respondents was 32 years): 20 men and 20 unmarried women and 8 voluntarily childless married couples were informants).

2. The study also used a mass questionnaire survey on a representative quota sample. The volume of the sample population of 1200 residents of the Sverdlovsk region aged 18 and over, by sex and place of residence (Yekaterinburg, large and large cities, small towns, city towns and rural settlements)

3. Monitoring of social networks, conducted from 2020 to 2022, in order to differentiate the number of age and gender of group participants.

4. Analysis of statistical data on the sex and age composition of the population of the Russian Federation, on fertility and mortality, on childhood, on divorce. Analysis of data from the 2010 All-Russian Population Census, as well as data from the Federal State Statistics Service of Rosstat, the Office of the Federal State Statistics Service for the Sverdlovsk Region (Sverdlovskstat).

Scientific novelty of the study:



1. Based on the analysis of concepts that reveal the essence, categories, factors of voluntary childlessness, the author's interpretation of the phenomenon under consideration is proposed as a value-rational choice by women, men, family couples of a childless lifestyle of refusing to give birth and raise children (both their own and adoptive) because of the desire to maintain the usual standard and quality of life, or because of aversion to the physiological process of giving birth to children and caring for them. These motives, having sensual-emotional grounds, are recognized at a rational level and lead people to voluntarily refuse to have children.

2. It is determined that in Russian society voluntary childlessness is precisely a social phenomenon, and not a movement (while American researchers consider it to be a movement), is not an ideology; representatives of voluntary abandonment of children do not form a social community with its inherent properties, such as: the community of goals, interests, joint activities provided by a system of norms and patterns that are shared by all members of the community, self-identification. Since the voluntarily childless do not have all these features, with the exception of self-identification, they are not a social community.

3. The groups of factors that have a motivating influence on the refusal of birth and upbringing of children, the choice of a childless lifestyle are highlighted, while it is justified that factors of socio-economic (including the level of education, the search for a suitable partner, childlessness under the influence of family circumstances), risky, psychological, urban, professional and career, worldview species can act as motivators prompting the choice of voluntary childlessness.

4. As a result of interviewing supporters of a childless lifestyle, the gender aspect of the value choice of voluntary childlessness is justified, manifested in the differences in value motivation between men and women. For men, the key values are professional activity and comfortable daily life, not burdened with concern for the family, children and wife, who should be engaged in caring for children and raising them, sacrificing the profession, career, income for a long time. When choosing a childless lifestyle, women prioritize the values of communication with a spouse (partner), their own physical health and psychological comfort (the birth and upbringing of children are accompanied by risks). A social portrait of persons choosing voluntary childlessness depending on marital status and gender differences has been compiled.

5. It has been proven that supporters of voluntary childlessness do not seek to promote their choice and are only inclined to a tolerant attitude towards it from others. As a result, one should not expect a significant increase in the popularity of voluntary childlessness in Russian society in the future, but at the same time changes in the quantitative parameters of this phenomenon may be influenced by other factors (active discussion on the Internet, on youth forums, etc.), which can also affect the prevalence of the studied phenomenon. At the same time, we revealed the already formed tendency that among representatives of various social groups that share traditional family values, tolerant attitude towards persons who consciously chose a childless lifestyle prevails.

Provisions for protection:



1. The result of the analysis of theoretical and foreign scientific sources was the definition of the essence of the investigated social phenomenon - voluntary childlessness. Currently, an extensive interpretation of it is widespread in the scientific literature, which does not allow identifying the essence of voluntary childlessness and distinguishing it from all types of situations of refusal to give birth and raise children, which may not be voluntary, but is determined by physiological, medical and other factors. The term childfree, used to refer to voluntary childlessness, makes it impossible to distinguish the phenomenon of voluntary choice of childless lifestyle from all types of situations of abandonment of children. We define the essence of voluntary childlessness as a conscious value-rational choice by women, men, partner couples, expressed in the rejection of children in the presence of all opportunities for their birth and upbringing because of the desire to maintain the usual standard and quality of life, or because of aversion to the physiological process of giving birth to children and caring for them. Such a choice represents a value-rational rejection of children, since they do not represent significant value for the person, family.

2. Based on the study, it was determined that there are no organized communities of voluntarily childless people in Russian society, but at the same time there are various informal groups on social networks. In scientific works, journalistic articles, an approach was formed that considers voluntary childlessness in Russia as a social movement, which, in our opinion, does not correspond to reality. Supporters of voluntary childlessness can only be qualified as a nominal group, that is, a group that has the same sign: the birth and upbringing of children is not a significant value for them, on the contrary, does not occupy a significant rating position in the system of personal values. The nominal group of supporters of voluntary childlessness is that they do not perform coordinated actions to achieve a common goal, in appropriate organizational forms, on the basis of a system of norms and rules shared by all. Adherents of voluntary childlessness only periodically communicate on the Internet. These characteristics allow you to define them not as a movement, ideology, social community with its inherent properties such as: commonality of goals, interests, joint activities provided by a system of norms and patterns, which are shared by all members of the community, self-identification, and conclude that voluntary childlessness is a social phenomenon, that is, a social phenomenon that exists in real life, the ideas and practices of which have followers, the manifestations of which are recorded by researchers, but at the same time not received in sociological knowledge of the systemic interpretation and understanding of the prospects for transformation.

3. In the course of the study, a set of factors determining the considered value choice was identified, their typology was carried out: socio-economic (including the level of education, the search for a suitable partner, childlessness under the influence of family circumstances), risky, psychological, urban, professional career, worldview. These groups of factors are identified on the basis of theoretical analysis and study of data from secondary and empirical studies obtained by the author. These factors can act as motivators for choosing voluntary childlessness.



4. Based on the data obtained from interviewing supporters of a childless lifestyle, it was revealed: for men, the key values are self-development, professional activity, career growth, comfortable daily life, communication with friends; caring for children, their upbringing is seen as the responsibilities of the wife. Women choosing childless lifestyles are guided by values such as their own health, avoiding the risks associated with birth and subsequent parenting, financial independence, self-development, stability in everyday life.

Our research and data allow us to create a social portrait of supporters of the value-rational choice of childlessness. The construction of a stratification profile of the social portrait of the voluntarily childless made it possible to identify significant differences in socio-demographic criteria. The basis of the axiological profile of the social portrait of the voluntarily childless will be the hierarchy of value orientations, which also affects the motivation for this lifestyle.

The social portrait was built on the basis of data obtained from the interview. But since the interview is a qualitative method and the results obtained during its application do not have such a degree of representativeness as a classical questionnaire, we cannot extrapolate the data obtained through the interview to the general population.

A man who chose voluntary childlessness

The average age is 30-32 years. Not in a relationship. Lives in a metropolis or in the largest city. He does not classify himself as a religious denomination. Meaningful values: material well-being, freedom and independence. Comes from a full family. He is either the only or oldest child. The following reasons for unwillingness to have children are named: the desire for freedom, independence and the lack of responsibility and responsibility for the child and family; unwillingness to jeopardize their material/financial well-being. Long search for a partner.

The woman who chose a childless lifestyle

The average age is 29-31 years. Is in a relationship, but not married. He has higher education. He lives in a city with a population of 500 thousand people. He does not classify himself as a religious denomination. He has a good position and a stable income. Rating of values: health, self-development, freedom and independence, love/relationships, career orientation, stability. He is the only or oldest child. The most commonly cited reasons for not wanting to have children are: fear for both their own health and that of their born children; career orientation; negative experiences related to children; the pursuit of freedom and independence; unwillingness to burden oneself; fear for the future.

Voluntarily childless family

Age of spouses with a difference of 0-5 years. Both have higher education. Do not classify themselves as a religious denomination. They live in a city with a population of 500 thousand people. There is no clear distribution of au pair responsibilities. Among the significant values are highlighted: self-development, material and emotional comfort.

5. It has been proven that supporters of voluntary childlessness do not seek to promote their choice and are only inclined to a tolerant attitude towards it from



others. As a result, one should not expect a significant increase in the popularity of voluntary childlessness in Russian society in the future, but at the same time changes in the quantitative parameters of this phenomenon may be influenced by other factors (active discussion on the Internet, on youth forums, etc.), which can also affect the prevalence of the studied phenomenon. At the same time, we revealed the already formed tendency that among representatives of various social groups that share traditional family values, tolerant attitude towards persons who consciously chose a childless lifestyle prevails.

The theoretical and practical significance of the study is that:

The results of empirical studies can be used to implement state family policy, to carry out measures to counter the dissemination of ideas about choosing a childless lifestyle among the younger generation, which will affect demographic processes; to form a tolerant attitude towards consistent adherents of various types of family values.

The results of the study can be used in teaching the courses "Sociology," "Sociology of the family," "Sociology of youth," "Demography," "Gender Sociology."

Compliance of the dissertation with the Passport of specialties of the Higher Attestation Commission

The dissertation study corresponds to the specialty 22.00.04 - Social structure, social institutions and processes. The dissertation work reveals the following areas of research:

P. 11. Social dynamics and adaptation of individual groups and layers in a transforming society.

P. 21. The role of social institutions in transforming the social structure of society.

P. 32. Family institution as a stratification factor in society.

The reliability of the research results is confirmed by the coverage of the required amount of scientific work on the topic of the dissertation, as well as the coincidence of a number of results of empirical research with theoretical developments of both domestic and foreign researchers.