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THE RUSSIAN WOMEN' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LATE MOTHERHOOD POSSIBILITY



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Abstract. One of the natural fertility factors is the mother's age. The rapid reproductive medicine development allows women to become mothers even after the end of the reproductive period, although medical professionals emphasize the negative impact of late motherhood on the child and mother's health. The purpose of this article is to study the women' opinion regarding the age limit for the child birth and the prognosis of steps in the pregnancy event at a late reproductive age. The women' opinion is assessed on the basis of an all-Russian sociological survey conducted by the author in all federal districts of the country, where 831 childbearing age women were interviewed. The results of the study show that the majority of the surveyed women consider the age limit for the child birth to be 36-40 years old, the idea of this age increases with the woman's age, and it is higher in cities. Also in cities, women over 26 are more likely to be ready to have a baby if pregnancy occurs after 45, regardless of income level. This can be explained by the higher availability of reproductive medicine in cities.

Keywords: fertility; limit fertility age; late motherhood; women's opinion about the childbearing; older reproductive age.

JEL codes: J13, J11.

Introduction

The fertility process has a very tight relationship with the mother's age. There are several reasons for this phenomenon: medical reproduction problems at older ages; difficulties in maintaining a family by this age due to the high divorce level; "it is already too late to have

children” stereotypes. However, according to statistics, five Russian women over the age of 60 became mothers for the first time in 2019, two – in 2018.

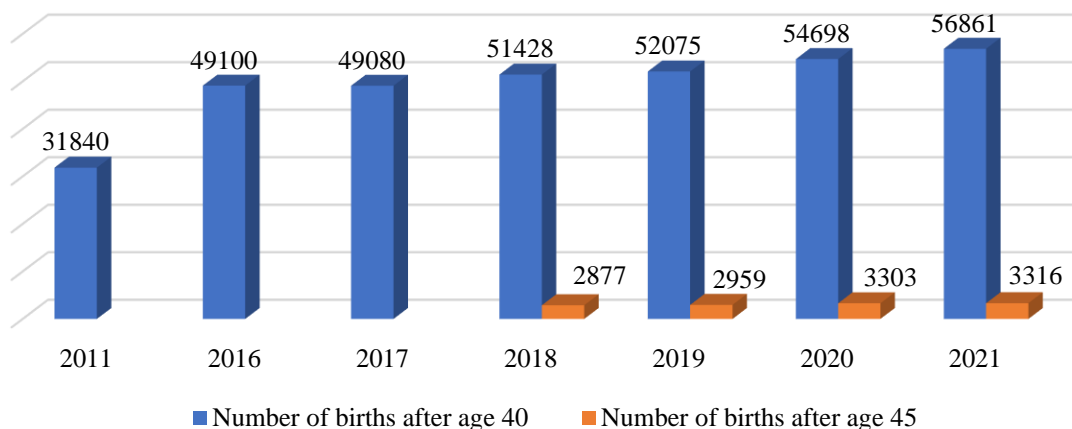
The conscious motherhood at a late reproductive age issues were previously considered by Russian scientists as a problem, a kind of deviant behavior [1], or as a miracle (for atheists – a fiction that has nothing to do with reality), described in the Bible, where we can read about Sarah's motherhood at the age of 90 (her husband Abraham was 100 at the Isaac's birthday), Elizabeth's (Baptist John's mother) at the age of over 70, Anna's (Virgin Mary's mother) at the age of 74, etc.

However, due to the Western European and American patterns of behavior penetration into Russian practice, the Russian women began to postpone the children birth, primarily the first child. Thus, from 1960 to 1994 in the USSR and Russia, as well as in other countries of the Soviet bloc, the average age of the first child birth was constantly decreasing, mothers were getting younger, and from 1994, when mothers were record-breaking young – 22.53 years, the average mothers' age at the first child birth increased in Russia up to 25.9 years. At the same time, the average mother's age is somewhat lower than in European and American countries, for example, in Spain it is 31.2 for the first child, in Switzerland – 31.1, in the Netherlands – 30 [2], but these postponing leads, firstly, to a reduction in the total fertility rate per woman, and secondly, to the births increase in the late reproductive age. The latest is also facilitated by the development of reproductive medicine, which allows to become parents at a fairly late age with the help of IVF procedures and/or surrogate motherhood. Thus, among the women-record-holders of motherhood by age, the majority used the reproductive medicine achievements, for example, Mangayamma Yaramati, who gave birth to twins in 2019 at the age of 74; Daljinder Kaur, who gave birth in 2016 at the age of 72; Rajo Devi Lohan, who gave birth in 2008 at the age of 70; Omkari Panwar, who gave birth to twins in 2008 at the age of 70, and others.

Scientists who study late motherhood note that in countries with low birth rates the number of first children' births after the age of 40 has been steadily increasing over the past 40 years [3]. The mother's age statistics in Russia has been collected since 1990, during this period the number of children born to women over the age of 40 has increased significantly (see Fig. 1).

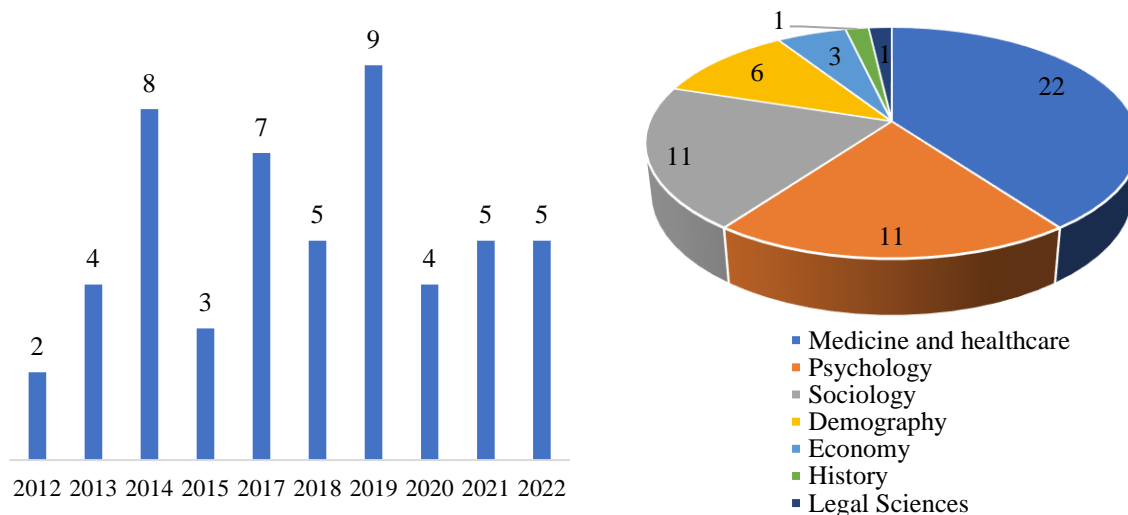
If medical scientists are more focused in their studies on the negative consequences of late motherhood for the women and children' health [4], [5], then sociologists and economists note that pregnancy and labour after 40 increase the women happiness level [6], increase her wages [7], allows women to “catch up” on the motherhood benefits missed in their youth [8].

Fig. 1: The number of children born to late reproductive age mothers, pers.¹



In general, it should be said that late motherhood becomes rarely the object of scientific research. Thus, in the largest Russian database of scientific publications eLibrary there are only 55 sources about late motherhood. Almost half of them are written in the field of medical sciences and explore the introducing pregnancy and labour to the late reproductive age women issues (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Publications' structure on the late motherhood by the years and topics in the eLibrary database, units²



We found only two of all the publications presented in the eLibrary, that study the women' attitude towards late motherhood. One of them is written on a small empirical material (interviews with 27 women in one subject of the Russian Federation) [9], which is insufficient for serious scientific conclusions about the women' attitude to late motherhood. The second considers the age

¹ Compiled by the author on the basis of Rosstat data: Vital Population Movement of the Russian Federation (Statistical Bulletin) for 2018-2021. URL: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/compendium>.

² Compiled by the author based on the study of the eLibrary database.

of 30 as late motherhood [10], which, in our opinion, is important for the first child birth, but is very good for the subsequent children birth.

The purpose of this article is to determine, on the basis of an all-Russian sociological survey conducted by the author, women's opinions about the age limit for birth a child and about planned future steps in course of pregnancy in late 40s.

Reproductive intentions, birth motivating forces and deterrents conscious is necessary for a balanced demographic policy aimed at increasing the birth rate [11]. Thus, there are serious studies of the deterrent fertility factors, among which there are revealed not only objective factors (spouse absence or the respondents and their spouses' health), environmental factors (lack of financial opportunities, housing difficulties, the need to pay loans, difficulties with the child's placement in a preschool educational organization, the need to complete education, etc.), but also subjective factors (the desire to live for oneself, uncertainty about the strength of marriage / partnership, difficulties in combining work and taking care about a child, etc.) [12, p.95].

1. Methods and data

The study of the Russian women' attitude towards late motherhood was carried out on the basis of a sociological study using the interview method and the original questionnaire developed by the author. The study was conducted in 2020 in all federal districts of the country, in total 850 people were interviewed, however, after culling, 831 questionnaires were taken into account. The sample was built according to the quota principle, quotas were determined by residence place (Regional capitals, town, village), age group and income level. The sampling error does not exceed 3.2% at a confidence interval of 95%. Two age groups were chosen: 15-26 years old and 27-49. This is explained by the fact that in the year of the study, the average mother's age at first child's birth period was 25.7, thus, mostly childless women are considered for the first age group, and women who had children – the second. Speaking about income level: it was determined on the basis of women' self-identification, they were asked to compare their income level with the average income in the locality where they live. We deliberately proposed to compare incomes with the average level in the residence locality, since, as a rule, the level and quality of life differ contrast.

2. Results

In accordance with the final annual Rosstat's demographic data, Russian women aged 40 years and older gave birth to 56.86 thousand children in 2021, which was the maximum value since 1990 for this age category (the entire period of available statistics). Since 2007, the number of labours to women aged 40 and over has increased annually by 8% in average, or 2.5 thousand

children. In 2021, the number of such babies increased by 3.6 times compared to 2007. Most often, these are not first-born, but second and third children, however, the age of first-born birth is getting higher and more confidently approaching 30 years. It turns out that every 25th woman in labor are already over 40 in Russia.

Table 1 presents an analysis of the women's opinions distribution about the age limit when they would like to give birth to a child.

Table 1: Women's answers distribution about the age limit at which they would like to give birth to a child, %³

Possible answer	General responses distribution	Locality type			Age, years		Income level	
		Regional capitals	Town	Village	15-26	27-49	Below the average	Intermediate and above
20-25 years	5.6	6.1	5.4	5.3	14.6	2.4	8.1	4.7
26-30 years	22.1	18.6	22.5	26.2	44.8	13.9	23.4	21.6
31-35 years	25.6	26.9	25.3	24.3	22.2	26.8	21.1	27.2
36-40 years	30.0	30.5	30.4	28.6	9.4	37.4	30.1	29.9
41-45 years	10.7	12.2	9.5	10.7	4.2	13.1	11.0	10.6
46-50, or older	1.7	2.5	1.3	1.5	0.5	2.2	1.9	1.7
Found it difficult to answer	4.2	3.3	5.6	3.4	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.2

As can be seen from the table, the age limit for child birthing conscious is closely related to the respondents' age, while territorial fluctuations in the age limit can also be seen. Thus, the highest age limits for a motherhood are set by residents of cities (regional capitals). The age of 41-45 years was named by 12% of the respondents, while in towns – only 9%, and the age of 46-50 and older was mentioned by 3% of the cities' residents, while in rural areas and in towns – for 1%. At the same time, 26% of rural respondents called the age limit 26-30 years, and in towns – 22%, in regional capitals – just 19%.

Another question is related to this: about intentions regarding actions in case pregnancy occurs after 45 years. This age was proposed, since today the childbearing at 40-45 is already usual in Russian society. This question was asked only to women of the age group 27-49, as the planning horizon is too far away for younger respondents. The answers to this question were distributed as follows (Table 2).

The analysis showed that the refusal to have a birth at the age of 45 is more typical for towns (40%) and rural areas (38%), while in cities only 32% of women refuse to give a birth.

³ Compiled by the author based on her own research results

Table 2: Women's answers distribution about the proposed course of action if pregnancy occurs after 45, %⁴

The selected predicted respondent's behavior	General responses distribution	Locality type			Income level	
		Regional capitals	Town	Village	Below the average	Intermediate and above
Give a birth anyway	16.1	17.2	13.9	18.2	20.0	14.9
Decision making considering the health	29.5	34.8	26.6	27.0	24.3	31.2
Decision making considering the financial and social standing	6.8	5.9	7.6	6.8	7.9	6.5
If there are already children by that time, then they will not give birth	2.7	3.9	1.3	3.4	3.6	2.4
Aren't going to give birth - too late	36.7	31.9	40.1	37.8	35.0	37.2
Pregnancy won't come	1.0	1.0	1.3	0.7	1.4	0.9
Found it difficult to answer	7.1	5.4	9.3	6.1	7.9	6.9

Answers about making a decision depending on financial and social status are slightly less differentiated: in towns 8%, in rural areas 7%, in cities 6%, but in cities the decision will depend on the parents' health to a greater extent (35 %, while in towns and rural areas – 27%). The answer about keeping the child in any case was distributed as follows: in rural areas – 18%, cities – 17%, towns – only 14%.

Discussion and conclusion

Thus, the survey showed that in cities women are more likely to postpone childbirth, which can be explained by a higher medical care level for obstetrics, developed infrastructure that provides availability of goods and services for children and mothers, higher wages, especially in regional capitals, as well as the retirement age increasing. However, postponing childbirth, combined with an increase in the interval between the first and second child, which increased from 22 months to more than 5.5 years between 1994 and 2019 [12], may lead to adverse demographic consequences of a significant reduction in fertility.

In the context of a decrease in the number of women in reproductive age due to a multiple decline in the birth rate in Russia during the 1990s, late motherhood can somewhat improve the situation with fertility, however, a policy aimed at increasing the birth rate should be designed, first of all, to encourage young women to childbearing while they are young. To this end, we propose to think about reducing the studying terms – to return to 10 years of schooling and 5 years studying at universities (instead of 4 years for bachelor's and 2 years for master's degree at present), and provide higher financial incentives for young mothers compared with late-born, for example, increase maternity capital by 50-100 thousand rubles to those families where a woman gave birth to her first child under the age of 25. To solve demographic problems, it is also necessary to change

⁴ Compiled by the author based on her own research results

the social mood of Russian society, that a woman must first get an education, make a career, provide herself financially, and only then think about motherhood.

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