

CHILDFREE IN RUSSIA: MOTIVATIONS AND SOCIAL CONFLICTS

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the problem of spreading of childfree ideology actively promoting voluntary refusal of childbearing in modern Russian society. The study aims to reveal the reasons of why young men and women stay off childbearing. Besides, the sharpest radical manifestation called “child-hate” – the hatred and aggression towards children and everything connected with motherhood, bearing and upbringing children is pointed out. The content analysis of forums where child-haters try to reason their position is done. It is stated that such anti-reproductive orientations are often connected with age features of the followers of this ideology; they are not stable and can be changed by education and upbringing among other things. Some sociology investigations concerning matrimonial behavior and value orientations were also analyzed. It was stated that childfree ideology cannot seriously affect the demographic situation in Russia. However, it is necessary to continue the research of childfree movements and all trends concerning voluntary childlessness because some phenomena as, for example, childhate can be really dangerous for society.

Keywords: Family, childfree, voluntary childlessness, childhate, ideology, social consequences, demographic situation, Russia, youth.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of the ideology of “voluntary childlessness” which has come from the West as a social phenomenon in Russia is quite a new topic. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the researchers has begun to touch the subject of the procreation refusal as a part of broader research on issues of marriage, family and motherhood. So, at first as part of sociological studies, articles on changes in the reproductive population of Russia as a whole and in certain regions and the reasons for these changes appear (Lalayants I., Judin A.A., Shpilev D.A., Novoselova E.N., Antonov A., Grudina T., Grigoryeva N., Duprat-Kushtanina V., Sharova M., Filonenko V.I., Magranov A.S., Ponedelkov A.V. etc.), then works devoted to the spread of surrogacy as alternatives to childbearing come (Samoilova V.V., Chernysheva Yu.A). Since 2006, scientists publish series of scientific and popular scientific articles devoted to voluntary childlessness, in which the authors describe the phenomenon “childfree” neutrally as fashionable trend, or talk about it as a socially dangerous phenomenon (E. Rodina, M. Kulikov, A. Kustarev, E.N. Novoselova, S.Yu. Lutoshkina).

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The issue of voluntary childlessness has become topical in Russia and actively discussed only in the last decade, perhaps because of the universal informatization and globalization of the society, new possibilities of communication (Ivanov, 2002). But people with a similar outlook have always been existed in our society (Huber, 2008). Among the people who knowingly waive childbirth we notice a lot of people of creative professions. Many actors, dancers, artists refuse in favor of procreation, dedicating their entire life to work and creativity. G.B. Shaw, a distinguished English dramatist, is known for his statements about the birth of children, "Youth is a wonderful thing. What crime is to waste it on children!" Christopher Walken, an American actor, declared his position in life: "I'm too selfish to have children. In addition, my wife has enough worries with me". Maya Plisetskaya, a talented Russian ballet dancer, when asked why she does not have children, replied: "There are a lot of women with children but Maya Plisetskaya is the only one" (Rodina, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

As part of the three-year project conducted by our team, we make the analyses of the existing results of sociological research of the "childfree" phenomenon containing the statistical data on the number of "childfree" in various countries, including Russia, as well as information on the particular characteristics of the behavior of supporters of this movement, their motivational orientations and value orientations. We gather quantitative indicators from a variety of online resources and foreign researchers' articles in leading journals of famous publishers. Description of the qualitative characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation is carried out on the basis of empirical data in the form of articles, notes, stories, and comments of representatives of the "childfree" movement placed in the public domain in the pages of the online forums, social networks and virtual communities, created by "childfree for childfree".

Particular attention is paid to the history of a particular representatives of the movement in which they describe in detail the so-called "path of becoming childfree" giving specific reasons and arguments in favor of the choice made (such stories are especially characteristic of the American non-parents community representatives). Based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the "childfree" phenomenon we systematize and generalize information about it, as well as evaluate the role of external and internal factors affecting the decision on voluntary childlessness. We evaluate how in reality the absence of children in the family may have an impact on the success and well-being of the individual, as well as his self-esteem and identity in modern society. To make our work successful we compare the data obtained during the survey and interviews of parents and non-parents in the process of virtual communication in social networks and online forums.

RESULTS

Who and why became childfree?

Childfree first associations were formed in the USA and in Europe in the 1980-1990s (Blackstone and Stewart, 2012). In the beginning of the 21st century this ideology began to take popularity in Russia. Today we can meet the representatives of the community of so-called non-parents in the media and global network (Michailov, 2008; Baeva and Romanova, 2015; Romanova et al., 2013), they are willing to talk about the reasons for their choice not to have children and sometimes they are actively involved in the promotion of ideology of voluntary childlessness in order to gain as many adherents as possible. Sometimes we can see manifestations of radical forms of childfree – “childhate”. The representatives of this trend not only refuse having children, they are persuaded in the correctness of their choice and try to persuade the others, but also to express their active hostility and even hatred to children, pregnant women, and all that is connected with children and their upbringing.

Such hostility often occurs in young people mostly because of their intolerance to children’s behavior, for example, their noisy behavior, untidy appearance etc. We must notice that such hostility lasts till they become 25-30 years old, so the young men and women who call themselves “childfree” at this age can hardly be called true or belief childfree. This belief in the conscious of their choice not to have children is formed between the age of 30 to 35 years and the causes of such decision can be very different (Dryagalov et al., 2016). Very often childfree explain their choice by lack of parental instincts as well as other vital values. Some people are afraid of the responsibility connected with raising a child, some do not want to waste time on a child, preferring hobby, career promotion, communicating with friends, travel, etc. Some young people explain their reluctance of having children by their fear to experience financial difficulties that inevitably arise with the appearance of the child (Mcquillan et al., 2012).

Someone refers to more global causes such as overcrowding the planet, environmental issues, war, disease and so on, asking “*what is the point to have a child, if the world is full of such terrible things?*” Many childfree explain their choice by several factors. Here, for example, the statement of one of the representatives of the voluntarily childless movement:

“Those who can not think rationally give birth, those whose instinct of reproduction is stronger than the voice of reason, because sane people (especially women) will not do, and by the way the planet suffers from overpopulation ... it is interesting to me if someone thinks about it giving birth??? I am sincerely sorry for these tattered, greasy mothers left by their husbands (and if not quit he will do it soon because it is so battered, furiously, sleepy wives are unpleasant ... and if

he does not leave her, he will bear the burden all his life and will try to pretend to be an exemplary father, with regular stepping out, for what could be the sex if we have a child... and if neither one thing nor the other, then I feel sorry for both). I wonder by narrowness of their interests (porridge, snot, temperature) and leisure activities (walks and hikes with strollers for diapers), wonder how they put up with financial, family, social difficulties” [http://nat42.ru/index.php ? topic = 1242.0]

As we can see, in addition to a variety of reasons, representatives of childfree often believe those who hold traditional family values are much less intellectual and spiritually developed, they emphasize the limitations of their interests and outlook, stressing thus a certain elitism of their own position.

Often the motive for the voluntary refusal of childbirth lies in negative memories of the childhood. Here are comments of some young people:

“I hate myself in childhood. I simply despise meself. My testosterone hormone was playing, and I was aggressive, I did not need anything but sex: sex, stupidity and aggression, sex, stupidity and aggression. ...

I was punk and was wearing punk attributes, strolling about dumps. I liked fighting. I hated myself. I was a little blunt and freak moron. I beat the children (peers), I played the anti-social games, once I almost set fire to the barn. Now there is the question to people, why do we need give birth???” [http://childfree.mybb.ru/viewtopic.php?id=1574]

“Antisocial adolescent pathetic loser, which is concerned only with sex and beer, who can not say even two words in high school and I was given satisfactory marks only out of pity. I hate myself in childhood. I did not like family. I resented them. I was in a teenage gang, there was nothing criminal, and we just organized minor street crimes and were not ashamed of that. If you do not want such a misfortune to your parents do not give birth.” http://childfree.mybb.ru/viewtopic.php?id=1574]

As we can see from the above explanation, the young people recall their behavior in childhood, namely, all the negative aspects of that time, considering that the same is waiting for their own children if they are born. Apparently, when reasoning young people believe that otherwise they would not be able to raise their child, because they themselves were brought up in a not the best way. Thus, negative emotions preserved since childhood are added by fear of being a bad parent, reluctance to take responsibility for the upbringing of their child, the uncertainty that it is possible in principle.

The famous American TV host Oprah Winfrey (62 years old) commented her unwillingness to have children as follows: “Nobody cares about me when I was a child, and I myself do not know how to do it ... Once I had to look after the 4-year-old child all day. I was so tired and it was just a lot of stress for me, I felt true happiness only when the baby’s mother arrived. That’s when I finally decided that I will not have children” (Markova, 2011).

Thus, the motives of childfree are mostly diverse. These motives often contradict rather than complement each other. Some choose their own comfort and independence, while stressing the fact that the world is not good and safe for their unborn child, others say about their unhappy childhood, while not willing to make efforts to bear a child and make him happy. Often these motivations are explained as a form of political protest (Jenkins and Klandermans, 1995) or a kind of counterculture (Mindolina, 2006). It is interesting that there are a lot of ideological childfree among those women who have children but regret their motherhood (Göbel, 2016). At the same time, however, many of today's childfree admit that it's quite possible that they will regret their choice and suffer from loneliness in their declining years (Hager, 2006).

Childhate

If the movement of "childfree", those who consciously made a choice for themselves in favor of the rejection of fertility, perhaps, may not represent a significant threat to the demographic situation in Russia, as evidenced by a number of studies related to the matrimonial behavior and value youth settings, the real concern is the community of so-called "childhate", people who are not just indifferent to other people's children and do not want to have their own, but those who are experiencing feelings of hatred to children, and directly or indirectly expresses aggression to people with children, and children themselves. This is the sharpest, even the radical manifestation of the "childfree" when the appearance of their own offspring is not only denied, but also hatred and open aggression towards everything connected with maternity, birth and upbringing of children is manifested.

The study, funded by the Russian Foundation for Humanities "The family and social parasites", conducts content analysis of forums and social networks that communicate with adherents of ideologies "childfree" and "childhate" in order to assess the extent of this phenomenon and of forecasting the possible consequences of a dissemination of such ideas in society, in particular among the Russian youth. Here are just some of the statements of young people answering in a social network the question "*Why do you hate or even dislike children?*" [https://vk.com/topic-43700340_28263065].

Among the most adequate arguments of "childhate" representatives are the following:

1. Pain of childbirth.
2. Loss of freedom.
3. Loss of normal sexual life.
4. Financial costs.
5. Sleepless nights.

6. Confusion and stench in the apartment.
7. Children always spoil things.
8. When they grow up they will tank up and steal money from you.
9. When they grow up they will pass you in a nursing home.
10. Planet is so overcrowded...

We see that first of all childhate-women and childhate-girls have the fear of physical pain associated with childbirth, then follows the whole series of disadvantages associated with the change in their traditional way of life and family life, as well as the fear that the children as the result will be ungrateful and at an older age will be unable to meet the expectations of their parents.

Another set of arguments is as follows:

1. It is not possible to relax properly.
2. In our world, there are some professions where women are more successful than men, so as not to stay behind – “no children”!
3. Constant yelling and screaming are annoying.
4. It is cheaper to have a pet (a dog or a cat).
5. You can take a child from the shelter and already older, if it has so much urge.
6. The loss of figure.

For the reasons previously stated a need to build a career is added, and for women, as the participant of the forum points out, it is more difficult due to the competition with the men.

The following commentary contains no objective reasons, but only expresses irritation and even aggression of the forum participants in relation to children:

Because a “KING” or a “QUEEN” settles here and you now an appendage of the eternally dissatisfied and shouting “His Majesty”. What’s up with that he or she hurts animals, spits, beats you?! “This-is-a-child” He does not break bones to an animal, and indeed, the animal is not a human, even more tormented, “the child is small”!

Finally, here is one of the most aggressive statements with respect to the prospects of motherhood corresponding to the above mentioned issue:

1. Because children are egotists who will never appreciate the sacrifices for them.
2. Always yelling, always they need something, which makes everyone trouble ...
3. Scary and disgusting.
4. They take away valuable time which will never return on their primitive needs .

5. Everything is done for these stinking little bastards at the expense of sensible people.
6. They are no social benefits, only some losses.
7. Anyway I am sick and tired of those fucking mothers with their baby carriages in transport, in the street, in shops; their geeks should be always given a place, what the hell should I do it after work, when this moron rested all day??? And their mothers are grouped and only talk about the fact what their stupid offspring ate and how and how many times had a crap with their money, and consider themselves above the rest, because they gave birth to one of the billions of bastards, who first shits in his pants and screams and then will be covered with acne and will pull out of them even more money.

In this argumentation we do not see really adequate explanations for the feelings of hostility towards children; we notice only the open unwarranted contempt and aggression towards the mothers and children. We see that the motives associated with hostility to children are very diverse, but most of them boil down to a misunderstanding of the meaning of having children and unwarranted annoyance and aggression (Venediktova, 2006). Such arguments can hardly be called balanced and decisive in the decision to voluntarily renounce the birth of the child, in addition, some studies show that such opinions are often unstable and change with age (Kamzina and Samykina, 2014). This is due to the age characteristics of those who positioned themselves as supporters of childfree or childhate. As a rule, these are young people who are characterized by variability, inconsistency, categorical and escapism. It is important to understand, however, that this category of modern society, in spite of its complexity and instability, is the carrier of the society development.

In this regard, the currently existing state measures of socio-economic support of motherhood, which are aimed at existing family and motivation of parental labor, in fact are powerless, as the plans of young people are not initially aimed at having children. The solution as many scientists see and as noted earlier is the axiological factor which involves active work with young people at an age when reproductive attitudes are formed, goals and plans for life are built. However, this is a complex and contradictory process, which is associated with a number of constraints on the external and internal factors, ranging from fashion trends and the influence of Western culture, and ending with the elementary reluctance of the young people to absorb “pro-family values” which seem to them sometimes outdated (Merz and Liefbroer, 2012).

Childfree and demography

It is of vital importance to follow the problem within the frameworks of demography aspect as the majority of social, political and economical problems can be caused by demography problems and challenges (Diehl, 2014)

We can judge how important is the view of adherents of voluntary childlessness in today's society basing on the results of opinion polls concerning matrimonial behavior of citizens. Thus, the Levada Center in the period from 1991 till 2015 conducted a survey on the topic "How many children, including those you already have, you would like to have if you had all the necessary conditions for this?" After analyzing the answers, we can conclude that two children is the most optimal amount for a family, this confirmed 49% of the population in 2015. Even in the most difficult 1990th this question was answered "No" only by 2 % of respondents (in 2003 – 10%). In the same study the respondents were asked the question of how women are willing to combine work, family and children, and whether they are ready to sacrifice careers for the sake of the children. The result showed that the most common opinion was that for the sake of children women can leave work temporarily and then, after their children are 3 years old they may continue their career.

Another study concerning the opinion of Russians about how many children should be in the family and why people have children was presented by Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) in 2014. 1600 people were interviewed in 130 settlements of 42 regions and republics of Russia. According to the survey, every second Russian (53%) believes that the family should have two children, besides, 38% of respondents reported that they have 2 children. This view is equally shared by both men (52%), 18 to 24-year-old young people (54%) and women (53%), respondents aged over 60 (50%), as well as one child parents (52%) and those who have no children (55%). More than a quarter of Russians (28%) believe that couples should have three children, but according to the latest data, in real life only 8% of respondents carried out their wish. Only 1% of respondents suggested that the family can exist without children (Sulakshin and Kravchenko, 2014)

According to one-third of Russians (36%), people have children, primarily for procreation. Caring for children is the meaning of life – this is the opinion of 19% of respondents. Another 14% of respondents see the children as the main purpose of marriage. Other (9%) believe that children should become support for their parents in their old age. Children for 6% of respondents are just happiness. A third of respondents (31%) have no idea why people do not have children. Those who expressed an opinion on this issue especially lamented the lack of finances (18%). "Only egotists do not want to have children" – that is the opinion of 14% of respondents. Every tenth Russian admits that the reason for the refusal of procreation may be in poor health (10%) and the inability to have children (9%). 7% believe that we should respect the personal choice (not to have children). "Fear of responsibility does not allow people to decide on what to give birth to a child" – 6% of respondents believed. So the situation hasn't seriously changed in recent ten years (Ryazantsev, 2005).

Thus, we see that it is too early to sound the alarm about the “childfree” ideology which is widespread in our country. Perhaps the fashion trend or movement, numbering today thousands of people could not seriously affect the demographic situation in Russia as a whole. People who do not want to have children for one or another reason have always been and today they are also part of our society.

DISCUSSION

Refusing childbirth the representatives of childfree often consider themselves as a special caste, qualitatively different from the others by their exclusivity. By choosing a way of life without children, and receiving many benefits of the social plan: career opportunities, travel, self-development, childfree pretend thus to a certain exclusivity of their position compared with other members of society (Romanova et al., 2016). Flaunting it, they consider it possible to turn the idea of high morality and the need for family and procreation, claiming that having children in modern conditions is a crime. Creating a complete family, in their opinion, is a relic of the past that prevents living a life full of sensual pleasures, satisfying all their desires and whims. The most radical adherents of this ideology call complete families with children “childing cattle”, believing that the birth of a child is an end in itself, rather than a step towards the formation of the individual, family and society. The contradiction that lies, on the one hand, in a desire to “get everything in life”, and on the other – in the condemnation of procreation as a “lower manifestation of human existence”, points to spontaneity and fuzzy validity of the philosophy of “voluntary childlessness”. However, this does not prevent the adherents of voluntary refusal of childbirth to promote the idea of “freedom from the children” through social networks, the media and other active operations.

CONCLUSION

The results of sociological studies show that the situation in the system of marriage and family relations and values is not so deplorable. The Russian society is still dominated by traditional norms of behavior. These facts are certainly encouraging and confirm that the vector of the state policy and the public bodies’ activities is selected correctly. More efforts in this direction are to be made. It does not mean, however, that the idea of voluntary childlessness can be ignored, and the propagation of conscientious objection to birth can be let off. The proponents of the “childfree” ideology skillfully operate weighty arguments in favor of abandoning the role of parents, they are able to formulate the reasons why you should not have children, they have unlimited access to a large number of information channels and the same access have modern young people whose value systems are only at the formation stage.

The ideology of childfree often becomes interesting for young people whose attitudes and beliefs are not yet fully formed, whose concept of the family and family values are built not only within their own family of origin, but also under the pressure of the media, popular culture, subcultures and social opinion. It often happens that the views on family values and traditions of a young man, which not yet fully took shape and became strong, can be destroyed by a “beautiful story” of a representative of the “voluntarily childless” movement who has told about how good is not to have children, how high you can climb the career ladder and enjoy your life. Unconscious pursuit of such a “free life” can result in failure to affect the fate of a man who at an older age will start to regret the choice made in his youth. That is why it is important to continue to study various aspects of the ideology of childfree, to monitor the process of its spread in the community and to observe the changes in public opinion on family, marriage and birth of children.

The information about voluntary childlessness should be available in the scientific literature and in the media, on the condition that it will be reliable and objective, and will reveal the positive side of a conscious choice being childless, which are successfully appealed by the representatives of “childfree” movement themselves and the negative consequences of such a choice.

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