

Influence of the Spouse on Reproductive Attitudes and Motives



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Abstract. As a micro-level factor, the spouses or partners influence each other's reproductive intentions, motives, and decisions. This article examines only two areas of influence from a possible spectrum, namely the impact of the nature of the relationship and the other spouse's position on having children. The empirical basis is the opinion poll "Demographic well-being of Russia", conducted in 2020 in 10 regions, including Moscow. Respondents, both officially married and being in cohabiting relationship, aged up to 49 years old inclusive (2,776 people) participated in the survey. According to the evaluations of relationships using the criteria of "cohesion", "conflicts", and "big quarrels and scandals", respondents were divided into three groups: the worst (12–16%), average (29–36%), and best (42–53%) evaluations. The most favorable relations are typical of families with a traditional power structure (husband is head of the family), joint management of income (husband and wife make decisions together), better living conditions, and younger age of the spouses. We found that an improvement in relationship estimates was accompanied by an increase in the proportion of those intending to have a child, while a deterioration

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in the estimates was accompanied by a decrease in the proportion of those intending to have a child. The groups with the most cohesive, conflict-free relationships are the most likely to have children in the coming years, and it increases if new family support measures are introduced. In postponing the birth of children of different order, as well as in planning their birth, the position of the other spouse or partner (the desire to postpone having a child or the intention to have one) is one of the most significant motives of reproductive behavior. The importance of motives is conditioned by both favorable and unfavorable relations in families. The results of the study actualize one of the directions of state socio-demographic and family policy – activities to harmonize marital and family relationships and to reduce the influence of a range of factors complicating these relationships, which can have a positive impact on the decision to have children.

Key words: reproductive attitudes, reproductive intentions, reproductive motives, reproductive decisions, marriage, marital relationships, marital conflicts, adverse relationships, favorable relationships.

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Introduction

Issues of reproductive behavior are a successfully developing area of research in both foreign and Russian science. The main factor actualizing the research is the real processes of fertility, characterized by low levels that do not ensure population replacement, a decrease in the number of children in a family, as well as an increase in the number of people who refuse to have children.

The main direction of the study is the search for factors influencing the reproductive behavior of the population and fertility, acting at different social levels. The works of scientists show how, at the micro level, gender, age, education, marital status, place of residence, income, living conditions and standard of living, ethnicity, religiosity, life values, work and some other characteristics of individuals determine their attitudes toward having children, motives for having and delaying having children (Arkhangel'skii, 2006; Arkhangel'skii et al., 2021; Arkhangel'skii et al., 2020; Rostovskaya et al., 2021; Makarentseva et al., 2021; Nazarova, Zelenskaya, 2017; Tyndik, 2012; Churilova, Zakharov, 2019).

Among the micro-level factors, reproductive intentions, motives, and decisions in couples are influenced by the spouse or partner. Individual

reproductive intentions regarding the birth of the first or subsequent child are adjusted not only by the standard of living, income, housing conditions, health status, and other life circumstances of the family, but also by the desire or unwillingness of the partner to have children in general or to have a certain number of them. Postponing the birth of a child may also be due to the partner's assessment of the current situation as unfavorable for having a child, the desire to wait with the birth. Partners can broadcast their attitudes in cohabitation, resulting in the couple's actual reproductive behavior. The nature of the relationship between spouses or partners, their perception them as favorable or unfavorable for the birth of children is significant and can have an impact. Conflicts and quarrels between spouses are a negative background for the life of the whole family, the birth and upbringing of children. Confidence in the strength of the marriage or, on the contrary, uncertainty, can adjust intentions, decisions and behavior.

Given that spouses influence each other's reproductive perceptions, plans, and decisions about having children, and ultimately the actual reproductive behavior of their couple, it becomes

an urgent task to analyze this influence and to consider it when making predictions and developing measures to stimulate fertility.

The first Russian studies of the influence of spouses on each other's reproductive attitudes and behavior began back in the 1970s. A review of studies prior to the early 2000s, conducted by V.N. Arkhangel'skii, led to the conclusion that "most of them showed a positive impact of marital stability, successful marital life on parenthood status and fertility rates" (Arkhangel'skii, 2006). However, there were works where there was no or opposite correlation with marital satisfaction and thoughts about divorce as an indicator of marital stability and well-being. The situation changed when the relationship of satisfaction was analyzed not with the total expected number of children, including those already born, but with the intention to have another child. In such a case, a higher estimate of marriage was accompanied by a higher expected number of more children (Arkhangel'skii, 2006).

Recent studies have also raised questions about the influence of the spouse. The relationship between reproductive behavior and marital status (registered marriage or cohabiting relationship), the order of marriages (first marriage and remarriages) has been shown. Postponement of childbearing due to uncertainty about the stability of marriage is much more common in cohabiting unions than in formal marriages (Sinelnikov, 2019). There is a steady increase in the contribution of remarried couples to fertility, especially in the birth of second and third children. Entering into a remarriage makes it possible to compensate for the birth deficit that occurs in individuals who are in a pre-divorce or post-divorce state. At the same time, the likelihood of having two or more children for a woman increases the possibility of entering into both a remarriage and cohabiting relationship (Zakharov et al., 2016).

In the course of studying how the combination of the spouses' nationalities affects the reproductive attitudes of one of them, we revealed the following:

due to the fact that Bashkirs in general have higher reproductive attitudes than other ethnic groups, the "Bashkir component" in an interethnic couple "works" to increase the orientation toward having children (Burkhanova, Mukhamadieva, 2020).

The qualitative data highlight three models that men and women follow when entering marriage and deciding on the number of children in the family. In the first model they focus on their own ideal model and do not take into account the orientation of the partner, which can create risks when discovering differences. In the second model, they agree on the model of marriage and the number of children in the development of family relationships, concede to each other. The third model: future spouses before marriage have the same ideas or agree on how to build a relationship and how many children there will be in their family. The authors made the assumption that women are more inclined than men to form an ideal family before marriage and strive to realize it when they get married (Baimurzina, Vasil'eva, 2021).

Another aspect of the spouse's influence was studied in a survey of mothers. We have found that both first-married couples and stepfamilies (remarried couples) are somewhat more likely to plan to have a second child if there is a high rate of "father involvement" in the upbringing of their already-born child¹. In first-married couples, spouses are also more likely to plan for a second child if the first child was expected and the husband was happy to have it. In addition, a positive correlation was found between plans for the birth of a second child and the feelings of "happiness-unhappiness" of the mothers interviewed. Since sensation is largely determined by the quality of the marital relationship, the connection can be interpreted as their influence on reproductive intentions (Gurko, 2014).

¹ Involvement was assessed on the basis of fathers' initiative and frequency of activities with the child in eight types of joint activities, and mothers' assessments of the time the father spends with the child.

A study conducted under the supervision of A.I. Antonov, based on a survey of both spouses, found that a significant proportion of couples had different attitudes toward the number of children (52.7% of couples had the ideal number of children, 43.8% the desired number and 72.2% the expected number) and identified socio-demographic factors contributing to the closeness and differences in reproductive attitudes (in the first case, the increased length of marriage and similar religious preferences, in the second, the increased age difference between the spouses and the presence of a formal marriage). In addition, the authors showed that the proximity of attitudes on the number of children is positively related to marital satisfaction².

The data from the study “Reproductive plans of the population-2017” (Gudkova, 2019) revealed the importance of the husband/wife’s position, his/her desire in the system of motives for having a second and third child. His or her desire ranks second or third in the overall hierarchy of reproductive motives. At the birth of the second child the motive is significant for 61.5% of men and 58% of women, and at the birth of the third child – for 48.5 and 48.4%, respectively. Almost half of men and women (44.4–49.9%) want to have a child because they want to strengthen their families. The influence of the factors restraining the birth of children – the desire of the husband/wife to wait with the birth of a child, as well as the uncertainty about the stability of the marriage – is not as large-scale. But they are still significant (35.5% of women and 41.8% of men; 32.2% of women and 27.1% of men).

For a comprehensive review of foreign studies on fertility factors at the micro level, see (Balbo et al., 2017). The authors showed that a great deal of attention has been paid to examining the influence in a married couple of the partner’s reproductive intentions, the nature of the marital relationship, the occupational gender segregation, and remarriages.

² Antonova A.I. (2021). Similarity and difference in the value orientations of husbands and wives based on the results of a simultaneous spouses’ survey. Moscow: Pero.

The most prominent works that describe decision-making models for having a child or several children in couples are studies in the USA (Miller et al., 2004), Sweden (Thomson, Hoem, 1998), Italy (Testa et al., 2012), etc. The American authors, based on the results of a series of studies, proposed a computational model that takes into account the degree to which a person accepts their partner’s desires and how the partner’s own and perceived desires are integrated when forming intentions, and how the intentions of both partners are realized in reproductive behavior. The value of Swedish and Italian work lies in the implementation of longitudinal studies of a quite large number of couples, as well as testing the influence of a similar set of factors on the decision to have a child. The factors are: the nature of the family responsibilities distribution, the ability of partners to negotiate with each other. A special place in all of these studies was given to assessing the impact of the partner’s disagreement on the birth of a child.

We found that when a couple disagrees about the expected birth of a child, the chances of one partner realizing his or her reproductive intentions decrease. Thus, according to the interpretation of M.R. Testa and her colleagues, people do not want to have a child without the consent of the partner, because procreation has long-term consequences for both partners.

With regard to the effect on procreation of stability/instability of the union and/or poor quality of the partnership, there are two opposite directions. Some studies find a negative relationship between the two: couples who have unstable relationships are less likely to have children (Myers, 1997; Thomson, Hoem, 1998). The conclusion of others is that an unstable union leads to earlier childbearing, as children are seen as a factor in reducing uncertainty and a way to strengthen the marriage.

There are also different results regarding the impact of the occupational gender segregation. What they have in common is that inequality in the

distribution of housework in favor of women has a negative impact on reproductive intentions and decisions.

Studies show that partners who already have children from previous unions are more likely to want and have a child together (Thomson, Hoem, 1998). According to some work, remarried couples have even higher fertility rates than full families with biological children because: 1) remarried couples are more motivated to have their biological children in order to strengthen the new relationship (Vikat et al., 1999); 2) the number of remarriage cases tends to grow (Guzzo, 2014). At the same time, the likelihood of having children in new relationships is significantly reduced if a woman already has two or more children (Thomson et al., 2014).

Thus, foreign researchers generally agree that partners (both women and men) as well as other family members can have a significant influence on the realization of a couple's reproductive attitudes. However, this influence may manifest itself differently in different countries and in different periods.

Research methodology

The theoretical model of influence and the research task. The influence of spouses on each other's reproductive attitudes and motives, as well as on decisions to have children, can be exercised primarily through the marital status of the couple. Formal marriage and unregistered relationships, first marriage and remarriage create different contexts and motivations for having children. Influence is also possible through the inherent demographic and social characteristics of spouses. Education, background, urban or rural residence, ethnic identity, and religion (level of religious commitment) are significant factors influencing individual attitudes and intentions. In a couple, it is the combination of these characteristics in the spouses that is important. The combination of a husband and wife's educational levels, nationality, social background, and place of residence prior to marriage can possibly adjust each other's attitudes

and decisions about having children together. The third direction of influence depends on the existing marital relations in the couple: the stability of the marriage and the nature of relations (favorable/unfavorable, the extent of conflict, satisfaction with the marriage, etc.). The fourth direction of influence can be connected with the division of household and educational activities in a couple, first of all, with the degree of the husband's involvement in housework and the process of raising children. The power structure of the couple (who is the head of the family, makes the major decisions, and manages the income) hypothetically also has an impact.

We should also talk about the system of life values inherent in spouses, in which the value of children and reproductive plans are embedded. Their mismatch can become a ground for negotiation and agreement with the possibility of different outcomes, including the marriage dissolution. The opinion of the spouse on the number of children in the family, the birth, postponement or refusal to have a child (reproductive position) can be both an incentive and a limitation of reproductive behavior.

The spouse can have a direct influence on reproductive attitudes and motives through their position (e.g., "husband/wife wanted/did not want to have a child", "husband/wife wanted/did not want to wait to have a child") and an indirect influence through established relationships, the power structure, household and socialization and educational work. The purpose of our article is to focus on some areas of influence from the possible spectrum, namely to identify the impact of the nature of marital relationships (or rather, their assessments) and the position of the spouse (in the interpretation of this position by the other spouse).

Sampling and method of data collection. The analysis presented below is based on the data obtained in 2020 in a survey of the Russian population conducted as part of the study "Demographic well-being of Russia", which covered 10 regions (the city of Moscow, the Vologda,

Volgograd, Ivanovo, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Sverdlovsk oblasts, Stavropol Krai, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Republic of Tatarstan). We used questionnaires and personal interviews to collect information. A description of the research methodology, the sample obtained, and the main results can be found in work (Rostovskaya et al., 2021).

The total sample of the survey is 5,616 people. The analysis presented in the article refers to respondents under the age of 49 inclusive, who are in a marital relationship. There are 2,776 people in the sample, of whom 86.5% are officially married and 13.5% are in cohabiting relationship. Men account for 48.6% and women for 51.4%. In their first marriage are 85.2% and 14.8% are remarried. Those who live in urban areas – 77.5%, in rural areas – 22.5%. Those who have one child – 32.1%, two – 40.5%, three or more – 10.7%, and have no children – 16.6%. Respondents who have children in the current marriage – 86.2%, those who have children from different marriages – 13.8%. The average number of children per respondent is 1.48. Age at the time of the survey: up to and including 25 years – 8.0%, 26–35 years – 36.7%, 36–45 years – 41.6% and 46–49 years – 13.7%. Those surveyed who consider themselves religious – 61.1%, not religious – 18.0%, and 20.9% hesitated to respond the question about faith.

Measurement and analysis methodology. Only one spouse in a couple was interviewed. The questionnaire contained questions that provided information about the nature of the relationship in the family. This is a question-evaluation of marital relations according to the criterion of “cohesion/disunity” on a five-point scale (1 – disunity, 5 – cohesion); a question about the presence of a problem of conflictual relations with a spouse (1 – “the problem is of almost no importance”, 5 – “the problem is of very great importance”); a question about whether there are big quarrels and scandals in the family (with a nominal scale converted in the

course of the analysis into a five-point scale, where 1 – no quarrels and scandals, 5 – frequent quarrels and scandals). We converted the five-point scales to three-position scales in order to analyze groups with different attitudes.

We measured reproductive attitudes toward the number of children by asking questions about the desired and expected (planned) number of children.

We tracked the influence of the other partner on reproductive attitudes by analyzing the correlation of their indicators with the indicators of marital (family) relations described above (descriptive statistics: frequency tables, averages); on reproductive motives – based on subjective assessments of the interviewed spouse regarding this influence. Empirical indicators reflecting influence (desire/unwillingness of the other spouse to have a child; desire to strengthen the marriage, the family) were included in the lists of responses to the five questions³: the reasons for the discrepancy between the desired and expected number of children (asked of respondents who want to have more children than they plan to have); the reasons for postponing the birth of a first-born or another child (asked of respondents who said they were going to have a child but were postponing the birth of a child); motives for having a second child (for respondents who already have or are going to have a second child); motives for having a third child (for respondents who already have or are going to have a third child). Note that the questions were formulated in such a way as to make it possible to trace the motives behind both the decisions already made regarding the birth of a child and the decisions to be made.

Main hypotheses:

1) people’s perception of their marital relationship as unfavorable (conflictual, disunited, with quarrels) reduces the orientation on the number of children, the intention to have another child, as well as the likelihood of having one;

³ The wording of the questions is given in the notes to the tables.

2) both favorable and unfavorable relationships determine the degree of importance of the spouse’s position on the issue of childbirth (unwillingness and/or desire to have children, a desire to postpone their birth).

The material is presented in the following order: first we look at assessments of the nature of marital relationships, then at reproductive attitudes about the number of children in groups with different types of relationships. Next, we analyze the place of the motives for having children associated with the position of the spouse in the overall system of motives and in groups with different types of marital relationships.

Results and discussion

Nature of marital relationships as assessed by respondents. About half of the respondents assessed their marital (family) relationships as favorable (Tab. 1). Respondents who consider their relationship with their husband (wife) to be very cohesive – 52.8%, completely conflict-free – 42.0%, and 47.8% indicate that there are almost never any big quarrels and scandals in their family.

The group with unfavorable relationships ranges from 12.2% (as measured by conflict) to 16.4% (as measured by the presence of big quarrels and scandals). The proportion of the middle group in which relations between spouses are partly cohesive, partly conflict-free, and quarrels and scandals are rare, ranges from 29.1% (cohesion) to 35.8% (quarrels and scandals).

Women in the socio-demographic groups assessed marital relations on average better on the criteria of cohesion and conflict (Tab. 2). Younger groups are better at assessing their relationships; as respondents get older, assessments of cohesion, conflict, quarrels, and scandals worsen. There is no clear direct correlation between the level of education, but respondents with higher and incomplete higher education were less likely to report big quarrels and scandals in the family or conflicts with their spouse. Rural residents have, on average, more cohesive relationships, but they are more likely to have conflicts in marital relationships, big family quarrels and scandals. We found no differences between religious and not religious people.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents in the entire sub-sample according to their assessments of marital relationships

Cohesion/disunity in the relationship with the spouse*		Conflictual relations with the spouse**		Big quarrels and scandals in the family***	
Group	%	Group	%	Group	%
Disunited (1–3 points)	13.6	Conflictual (4–5 points)	12.2	Often and occasionally (responses 1, 2)	16.4
Partly cohesive (4 point)	29.1	Partly conflictual (2–3 point)	31.4	Rarely (response 3)	35.8
Very cohesive (5 points)	52.8	Conflict-free (1 point)	42.0	No quarrels and scandals (responses 4, 5)	47.8
Hesitate to respond	4.5	Hesitate to respond	14.5	Hesitate to respond	0.0
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100
Average point	4.36	Average point	2.02	Average point****	2.29

* Question wording: “Try to rate your relationship with your spouse on a 5-point scale, where 1 means disunited and 5 means cohesive”.

** Question wording: “Do you and your family face the following problems: conflictual relationship with your spouse?” (Rate on a five-point scale, where 1 is “it is almost irrelevant” and 5 is “very important”)

*** Question wording: “Do you have big quarrels and scandals in your family?” (answers: 1 – “often”, 2 – “occasionally”, 3 – “rarely”, 4 – “almost never”, 5 – “used to be, now not”). This scale cannot be considered good enough, because the variants “rarely” and “occasionally” are poorly distinguished in terms of meaning. In addition, the answer options are not uniformly formed. The option “used to be, now there are no conflicts” evaluates the presence/absence of conflicts in time, during the married life, and the rest of the answer options refer to the present time.

**** We converted the nominal scale to a five-point straight scale in order to calculate the average point: “yes, often” – 5 points; “yes, occasionally” – 4 points; “rarely” – 3 points; “used to be, now there are no” – 2 points; “almost never happens” – 1 point.

Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

Table 2. Marital relationship assessments of socio-demographic groups, mean point on a five-point scale

Indicators for evaluating relationships	Across the sub-sample	Sex		Age, years old				Education*			Place of residence	
		male	female	up to 25	26–35	36–45	46–49	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	city	rural area
Cohesion/disunity	4.36	4.23	4.31	4.43	4.31	4.24	2.22	4.34	4.21	4.27	4.24	4.37
Conflicts	2.02	2.10	2.03	2.02	2.00	2.02	2.17	2.14	2.14	2.02	2.08	2.13
Big quarrels and scandals	2.29	2.29	2.28	2.23	2.16	2.41	2.38	2.32	2.36	2.27	2.31	2.34

* Group 1 – Education level: pre-vocational and lower; Group 2 – vocational secondary education; Group 3 – higher and incomplete higher education.
Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

The analysis of assessments of relationships in families with different power structures revealed that families with a traditional one (the husband is the head) are more cohesive, less conflictual, and have fewer cases of big quarrels and scandals (Tab. 3). Couples where the wife becomes the head have the most conflictual relationships and are more prone to the “big quarrels and scandals”. Perhaps such data can be explained through the connection

with the husband’s role as the main breadwinner and the economic situation of the family. In couples where the husband effectively fulfills the traditional role and income demands are met, his position as head of the family is recognized and family relationships are better.

This is partially confirmed by the connections of two indicators – assessments of relationships and assessments of family living conditions (Tab. 4).

Table 3. Assessments of marital relationships in families with different power structures, mean point on a five-point scale

Answers to the question “Who is the head of the family?”*	Across the sub-sample, %	Assessments of marital relationships		
		Cohesion/ disunity	Conflicts	Big quarrels and scandals
Husband	55.0	4.47	1.99	2.21
Wife	12.6	4.20	2.15	2.48
There is no the head of the family	16.5	4.27	2.02	2.32
Total**	100	4.36	2.02	2.29

* There were also options of “another family member” and “someone else” (3.3%), and “hesitate to respond” (12.6%).
** Taking into account the options given in the previous paragraph.
Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

Table 4. Assessments of marital relationships depending on assessments of living conditions, mean point on a five-point scale

Assessments of marital relationships	Across the sub-sample, %	Assessments of family living conditions*		
		Low (1–4 points)	Medium (5–7 points)	High (8–10 points)
Cohesion/disunity	4.36	3.84	4.23	4.61
Conflicts	2.02	2.58	2.00	1.86
Big quarrels and scandals	2.29	2.76	2.35	2.08
Proportion a group, %	100	10.01	45.8	44.1

* The question wording is: “If you use a rating scale of 1 to 10 for your family’s overall living conditions, how would you rate your living conditions”.
Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

The group with very good living conditions (rated at 8–10 points) also stands out with the best assessments of marital relations (cohesion/disunity – 4.61 points; conflicts – 1.86 points; quarrels and scandals – 2.08 points). In the other two groups, with poor (1–4 points) and average living conditions (5–7 points) average estimates of attitudes are lower, there is a direct positive correlation with all attitude indicators.

Similar trends in the distribution of average estimates are found in families with different models of family budget management (Tab. 5). Joint budget management is most common in the couples studied (more than two-thirds of families). Less common is the practice of managing by only one spouse, wife or husband (in total, every fifth to sixth couple). Even rarer is so-called separate management (one in eleven couples), where husband and wife manage their own income, but may pool it for major family expenditures or agree on which household expenses each spouse is responsible for.

Couples where both spouses manage the family budget jointly have the most cohesive, not so conflictual and almost quarrels- or scandals-free relationship. Couples with separate budget management are characterized by the most disunited relationships, with female management – the most conflictual, and with male management – with big quarrels and scandals in the family.

Assessments of the relationship nature with the spouse and reproductive attitudes about the number of children and the intention to have a child. The analysis of the relationship between attitudes about the number of children and assessments of the relationship between spouses on the scale “cohesive/disunited” showed that the factor that we denote as “the nature of marital relations” partially influences the formation of the desire to have children and plans for their birth (Tab. 6). The group in which spouses described their relationship as very cohesive had the highest rates

Table 5. Assessments of marital relationships in families with different models of budget distribution, mean point on a five-point scale

Answers to the question “Who manages family income and expenses?”	Across the sub- sample, %	Assessments of marital relationships		
		Cohesion/ disunity	Conflicts	Big quarrels and scandals
Joint	73.0	4.48	1.93	2.20
Husband	9.5	4.09	2.21	2.57
Wife	7.9	4.13	2.33	2.55
Separate	9.0	3.95	2.14	2.52
Total	100*	4.36	2.02	2.29

* The amount is 100% including other responses (0.6%).
Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

Table 6. Average desired and expected number of children as a function of marital relationship assessments

	Total	Disunity/ cohesion *			Conflictual marital relations **			Quarrels and scandals ***		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Desired	2.47	2.43	2.50	2.52	2.50	2.46	2.48	2.46	2.56	2.40
Expected	2.06	2.02	1.98	2.13	2.05	2.06	2.06	2.06	2.10	2.00

Note: The first groups have the worst assessments, the second groups have average assessments, and the third groups have the best assessments.
* Group 1 – “disconnected”, Group 2 – “partly cohesive”; Group 3 – “very cohesive”.
** Group 1 – “conflictual”, Group 2 – “partially conflictual”, Group 3 – “non-conflictual”.
*** Group 1 – “occasionally”, Group 2 – “rarely”, Group 3 – “there are no quarrels and scandals”.
Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

of desired and expected number of children, while the other two groups with the worst relationship assessments had lower numbers of children. The dependence of the average desired and expected numbers of children on conflict assessments is not so obvious: we cannot say that a worsening of assessments consistently leads to a decrease and vice versa.

Partly unexpected data were obtained for married couples who differed according to the “quarrels and scandals” criterion. In the group with no quarrels and scandals there were the lowest reproductive attitudes, in the group where quarrels and scandals are rare – the highest attitudes, the group where quarrels and scandals happen often occupies an intermediate position according to the indicators (see Tab. 6). The explanation may lie in the wording of the question. According to which, the respondent was supposed to assess relationships in the family as a whole, not just marital relationships. The subjects of acute conflict in the family are not only husbands and wives, but also children and members of the extended family. And there is another explanation: it is a testimony that couples with an unfavorable family environment consider the birth of a child as a way to stabilize and improve the situation.

Previously, researchers obtained unexpected and close to the above-described data on the relationship between some indicators of marital relations and the desired and expected number of children

(Arkhangel’skii, 2006), concluding that “the current assessment of marriage probably has more influence not on the total (including those already born) expected number of children, but on how many children one intends to have in the future”. Therefore, we tested the links of relationship assessments with intentions to have not *any total number* of children, but *one more* child (of any order: the first if there are no children, or one more if there is a child or children). In this case, we found a direct positive correlation: a deterioration in the assessments of attitudes on all criteria entails a decrease in the proportion of those who intend to have a child, while an improvement in the assessments is accompanied by an increase (Tab. 7). All of this speaks well for the fact that it is the negative family atmosphere with quarrels and scandals, disunited, conflictual relations of spouses that is determinative or, at least, among the determinative reasons for refusing to have a child.

The intention to have one more child is more pronounced in families where the husband is the head (31.4% intend to have a child, 42.9% do not intend to have a child, 19.4% hesitate to respond), and in couples where there is no head (27.4% intend to have a child, 50.7% do not intend to have a child, 21.9% hesitate to respond). Couples where the head is the wife are strongly inferior to these two groups (17.9% intend to have a child, 58.7% do not intend to have a child, and 23.5% hesitate to respond).

Table 7. Intention to have the first and/or another child* depending on the assessment of the marital relationship, %

Response option	Total	Disunity/cohesion			Conflictual marital relations			Quarrels and scandals		
		Group1	Group2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Yes	28.4	21.0	25.2	32.5	25.1	30.4	38.0	20.3	28.1	31.2
No	49.7	54.3	52.8	46.5	57.9	50.9	44.6	61.4	49.9	47.0
Hesitate to respond	21.9	24.7	22.0	21.0	17.0	18.7	24.6	18.3	22.5	21.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

* The question wording is “Are you going to have a child, your first if you don’t have children, or subsequent one?” The first groups have the worst assessments, the second groups have average assessments, and the third groups have the best assessments. For detailed group designations, see the note to Tab. 6. Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

The influence of the spouse's position toward having children on the family's reproductive motives. As noted above, the survey showed a difference between the desired and expected number of children: on average, respondents plan to have fewer children than they would like. The main reasons for this, which have a high degree of significance (5 points), are socio-economic: insecurity about the future, financial difficulties, housing difficulties, unemployment and inability to look after the child when a woman goes back at work. These reasons in the overall sample are important ("very hindering" and "hindering" from planning to have the desired number of children) for almost every second respondent. The other spouse's influence was at the very bottom of the list: only 6.9% pointed to the reluctance of their husband/wife to have as many children as the respondent would like (Tab. 8).

Much more strongly the position of the spouse affects the motivation to postpone the birth of a child and the motivation to have a second and a third children. The answer "husband/wife wants to wait with the birth of a child for now" was among the five most significant reasons for postponing the birth (2.93 points, 19.5% chose 5 points) along with such reasons as the need to invest in a child

born ("Raising a child is quite difficult, requires a lot of effort and time"); assessment of the current job as not paying enough to have a child ("I need to find a better-paying job"); desire to live freely, without caring about a child ("I want at least some time to live for myself"); lack of material conditions for the birth and upbringing of a child ("So far, material opportunities do not allow").

Among the motives for having a second child, "a strong desire of the spouse" was one of the first five significant (mean – 3.18 points, 3rd place, 30.0% chose 5 points) along with the desire to give an already-born child a brother/sister ("so that the already-born child does not feel lonely"), the desire to have a child of a different sex, to have a baby again, and to strengthen the family. A strong desire of the spouse is also among the six most significant motives for having a third child (average – 2.45 points, 6th place, 17.5% chose 5 points).

Thus, the births of a second and a third children (realized reproductive decisions), as well as future plans for their births, are largely determined by the position of the spouse.

In order to understand the importance and consideration of the spouse's position on having a child in couples with favorable and unfavorable

Table 8. Responses about the influence of the spouse's position on decisions to have children, over the entire subsample

Response option	Average on a five-point scale	Place in the hierarchy of all responses by mean point	% who chose 5 points
If you would like to have more children than you intend to have, what and to what extent would prevent you personally from having the desired number of children?*			
Husband/wife unwillingness	2.10	16	6.9
To what extent is your desire to delay having a baby related to the following reasons?***			
The husband (wife) wants to wait with the birth of the child for now	2.93	5	19.5
To what extent was or could the birth of your second child (if you don't have one yet, but intend to have one) be due to the following reasons?****			
Strong desire of the spouse to have a second child	3.18	3	30.0
To what extent was or could the birth of your third child (if you don't have one yet, but intend to have one) be due to the following reasons?****			
Strong desire of the spouse to have a third child	2.45	6	17.5
* The question included assessment of the importance for the respondent of 20 reasons.			
** The question included an assessment of the importance of 18 motives.			
*** The question included an assessment of the importance of 14 motives.			
**** The question included an assessment of the importance of 13 motives.			
Source: The study "Demographic well-being of Russia", 2020.			

relationships, we calculated average assessments of the importance of motives for postponing childbirth and motives for having a second and a third child in groups with different characteristics of marital relationships. We obtained interesting results confirming the tested hypothesis about the influence of the nature of marital relations on reproductive motives. The motive “husband/wife wants to wait with the birth of a child” is most significant among respondents who assess the relationship with their spouse as cohesive, without big quarrels and scandals, which is evidence in favor of the desire of spouses in such couples to consider the opinion of the other partner and make coordinated decisions. This motive also has the highest significance for those who rated the problem of conflicts with their husband/wife as very important for their couple (compared to those who said it was partially important and completely unimportant). In this case the postponement of the birth of a child is clearly due to a not very favorable relationship.

The spouse’s strong desire to have a second child as a birth motive is most significant for respondents with medium and low assessments of

conflict in marital relations, for very cohesive spouses, and for families in which big quarrels and scandals rarely occur or do not occur at all. In the rationale for having a third child, the motive “strong desire of the spouse” is similarly related to the “nature of the marital relationship” on two criteria (“marital conflicts”, “big quarrels and scandals”). Disunited spouses demonstrate the highest importance of this motive. Perhaps it indicates that the third child is often seen as intended to strengthen the marriage⁴.

In the survey, respondents were asked to estimate the likelihood of having their first or subsequent child in the next 3–4 years in two situations: if no new additional state measures of family support were introduced, and if such measures were introduced. According to the answers to the question it is possible to make a forecast of the birth rate in the short term. The probability that the couple will have a child in the absence of any new support measures is very low – 2.91 points out of 10 (*Tab. 9*). One in two (50.2%) assessed the probability as zero; only one in ten (10.6%) was absolutely certain (10 points) that they would have

Table 9. Assessments of the probability of having a child in the next 3–4 years* as a function of marital relationship assessments, average point on a 10-point scale

State measures to support families	Total	Disunity/cohesion			Conflictual marital relations			Quarrels and scandals		
		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Without new measures	2.91	2.24	2.49	3.29	2.98	3.04	2.97	2.12	2.94	3.04
With new measures	3.83	3.32	3.82	4.05	3.72	3.92	4.10	2.93	4.05	3.97

* The question wording is: “Assess your probability of having a child in the next 3–4 years (the first if you have no children, or another child) if: a) there are no new additional measures to support families; b) if there are any additional measures to support families in addition to those currently in force”. The rating was given on a 10-point scale, where 0 means “we will not have a child”, 10 means “we will almost certainly have a child”.

The first groups have the worst assessments, the second groups have average assessments, and the third groups have the best assessments.

For detailed group designations, see the note to Tab. 6.

Source: The study “Demographic well-being of Russia”, 2020.

⁴ The list of answers to the question about the motives for having a third child did not include the response option “desire to strengthen marriage, family”. This motive was included in the list of 14 answer options to the question about the motives for having a second child. As noted above, it was among the five most significant motives.

a child. In the situation where new measures are introduced, the probability of having children is also low, but it is already 3.83 points. At the same time, 43.4% have a zero probability, and 17.6% are absolutely sure (10 points) that they will definitely have a child.

Despite low overall probability estimates for having children in the absence of new state measures to support families, there is still a marked upward trend in the probability with improving estimates of attitudes across all criteria. An even more pronounced increase in probability is observed in responses to the question about the possibility of having a child if new measures of family support are introduced. It is particularly consistent across assessments of cohesion/disunity (3.32, 3.82, and 4.05 points) and conflictual marital relationships (3.72, 3.92, and 4.10 points). Thus, in the near term, it is families with more favorable marital and family relationships that are most likely to decide on having children.

Conclusions and research directions

The study of various aspects of the spouse's influence on the reproductive behavior of a married couple is an urgent task. It aims to consider the reproductive behavior of people in a marital relationship as a group behavior. Most of the available data suggest that there is such an influence. However, there are also results indicating that the links are not so unambiguous, not always a direct positive correlation can be detected. Many questions remain to be raised in future research, including questions of methodology regarding measurement and the selection of adequate variables.

Our analysis tested two hypotheses about the relationship between assessments of the nature of marital relationships and reproductive attitudes, intentions, and motives. The first hypothesis was partially confirmed. Cohesive couples, in conflict-free relationships, are more likely to report intentions to have a child, more likely to give a positive prognosis for having a child in the next 3–4 years, especially if new measures of assistance

to families with children are introduced. Families with more favorable relationships are most likely to decide on having children. Disunity, and conflict in the relationship entail lower rates, couples with such a relationship are less likely to assess their prospects for having a child in the coming years and are much less likely than others to intend to have another child.

Regarding the second hypothesis, we note that there is no unambiguous and direct correlation between the position of the other spouse on having children and the nature of the marital relationship. The obtained data also indicate that the traditional power structure in marital relations (the husband is the head of the family) not only remains widespread (at least at the level of statements that a man performs this role), but is also positively associated with reproductive intentions.

Our options are limited by the lack of other variables in the set of tools that allow tracking the influence of the spouse in different ways. Variables that speak to the gender division of household responsibilities, the involvement of husbands in housework and especially in child rearing, the socio-demographic characteristics of husband and wife, new indicators of the nature of marital relationships that have been used before (such as thoughts of divorce) and not used (such as indicators of domestic violence, emotional and psychological and behavioral reactions to having children), collecting information from or about both spouses would help provide a comprehensive assessment. It is in these directions that further analysis is possible, which will bring new results and the possibility of comparing them with existing ones.

The conclusions obtained support the importance of activities aimed at harmonizing marital and family relationships (for example, the development of psychological counseling services for couples), reducing the influence of social and socio-economic factors in postponing having children and further developing socio-demographic policy measures.

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