

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR PARENTAL LABOUR AS A NEW FOCUS OF THE RUSSIAN DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY

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Abstract

Russia is experiencing a range of demographic problems. It requires new approaches to regulating demographic processes. One of these approaches today could be incentivizing future quantity and quality of the population through a better understanding of the nature of parental labour.

The paper presents the results of theoretical and empirical analysis of the labour-like nature of the parenting process. Official Russian statistics and the results of surveys of current and future parents are analysed.

Our research showed that even future parents have a clear understanding that parenting is work that requires many different types of expenditures. Rapidly changing parental labour technologies stimulate parents to continually develop new parental competencies – new knowledge and skills as regards medicine, education, culture, sport and so on.

Our results show that the process of having, raising, educating and developing children has all characteristics of labour. There is a particular set of competencies that is relevant to human resources for parental labour. We propose shifting the focus of demographic policy to recognise as the labour-like nature of parenting and the need to implement a special kind of human resource management as its core idea, in order to increase the effectiveness of parental labour.

Key words: parental labour, human resources, labour, parental competencies

JEL Code: J13, J24

Introduction

Russia is experiencing a range of demographic problems. The deformation of the population age structure and the anticipated decline in the number of working-age people, low fertility and reduced probability of the birth of the first child, an economic crisis and low social norms for having children – all of this requires new approaches to regulating demographic processes. One

of these approaches today could be incentivizing future quantity and quality of the population through a better understanding of the nature of parental labour. We proceed from the fact that activities involved in birthing, raising, educating and developing children by a family amount to parental labour.

The ideas that lead us to considering parenting as a special kind of labour can be found in works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They both pointed out the dual nature of the way social life is reproduced and the two interconnected and equally significant kinds of reproduction: the reproduction of material life and the reproduction of life itself (Marx & Engels, 1955).

It can be said that Engels was the first to describe the subject of parental labour: ‘If a woman carries out her duties in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties... The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife’ (Engels, 1972). He also described the key characteristics of parental labour: it is unpaid, far from prestigious, and hard to combine with professional labour. Engels contrasted work in the family and work in the sphere of social production. Due to the perceived ‘inferiority’ of parental labour, economic studies of labour formerly limited themselves only to the sphere of paid labour. As a result, parental labour was excluded from the national economy and neglected by labour economics and demography.

Modern researchers consider various aspects of domestic work, most of which is associated with childcare. For instance, there are studies of the division of labour between parents (Dominguez-Folgueras, 2015; Gershuny & Robinson, 1988); gender inequality in this sphere and its determinants (Evertsson, 2014; Pollmann-Schult, 2017); time spent on domestic work and childcare (Neilson & Jeffrey, 2014; Usdansky & Parker, 2011); and so on. There are also studies discussing parenting skills, parenting knowledge and parent training (for example, Stevens, 1984).

At the same time only a few studies tried to analyze parental labour - its organization, motivation, stimulation, self-identification of parents, and the factors that make it more intensive. Meanwhile, if we understand the nature of this labour and its connection with the downward demographic trends, we could improve the conditions for such activity and thus obtain its higher quantitative and qualitative results.

1 Data and Methods

In order to demonstrate the labour-like nature of the parenting proces, we conducted the following empirical research in 2016:

1. We surveyed Bachelor's and Master's students of the Ural Federal University (Ekaterinburg, Russia) as potential parents (stratified sampling; a sampling error less than 3%; a sample size of 400 people). We asked students whether they associated parenting with labour or not;

2. We surveyed inhabitants of Ekaterinburg who have children of pre-school and school age (that is, people who are currently engaged in parental labour). Our research included the following:

2.1. A sample survey to estimate how energy-consuming parental duties are (two-stage stratified sampling according to district, age, and gender; a sampling error less than 5 %; a sample size of 1,370 people);

2.2. Surveys of parents of pre-schoolers aged 5-7 from three kindergartens in Sverdlovsk region (two-staged sampling: random selection of kindergartens followed by cluster sampling of kindergarten groups; an overall sample size of 216 people). We sought to find out which parental functions were associated with specific stages of parenting;

3. We studied the pre-school system of education in Russia and used the official statistics to analyse enrolment of pre-schoolers in extra-curricular activities and additional educational programmes.

The data were processed through IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0.

2 Results

Our findings can be summarised in the following results.

1. The vast majority of students (90.4 %) consider parenting as labour. At the same time, we found significant differences in the answers of male and female respondents (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Distribution by gender. The question asked: 'Is parenting labour or not?'

Is parenting labour or not?	Total	Male	Female
Yes	90.4	76.6	94.2
No	9.6	23.4	5.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: data of the survey

The chi-square test of independence indicated that the respondents' gender was related to their answers to this question: $\chi^2(1, N = 354) = 21.498$, $\phi(\phi) = .246$, $p < .001$.

A third of the students we surveyed believe that the most challenging stage of parenting is the period when a child is under one year old. A little more than one fifth said that parents face most challenges when their children are 14-17 years old. The stages of parenting sorted by how frequently they were chosen as the most challenging are shown in Table 2.

Tab. 2: Opinions of respondents about the most challenging stage of parenting

Which period in a child's life is the most difficult for the parent?	% of respondents
When the child is under 1 year old	31.1
Between 14 and 17 years old	22.0
Between 1 and 6 years old	20.3
Preparation for parenting, pregnancy, and birth	19.2
Between 7 and 14 years old	7.1
Above 17 years old	0.3
Total	100.0

Source: data of the survey

We have not found any significant differences between the answers of male and female respondents. There were, however, differences between the groups of respondents who are planning to become parents in the nearest (within the next 3 years) and more distant (in 3 years or more) future (see Table 3).

Tab. 3: Distribution by the period of planned parenting

Which period in a child's life is the most difficult for the parent?	When are you planning to become a parent?	
	Within 3 years	Within 3 years
Preparation for parenting, pregnancy, and birth	25.9	16.2
When the child is under 1 year old	22.2	34.2
Between 1 and 6 years old	18.5	22.2
Between 7 and 13 years old	3.7	8.5
Between 14 and 17 years old	29.6	18.4
Above 17 years old	0.0	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: data of the survey

The chi-square test of independence indicated that the answers to this question were related to the period when respondents plan to become parents: $\chi^2(5, N = 315) = 12.034$,

Cramer's $V = .195$, $p < .05$. In particular, those who want to have a baby in the nearest future see the stage of preparation for parenting as more complicated than those respondents who are planning to become parents in the more distant future.

2. Our survey of parents of pre-school and school children has demonstrated that from 20.4 to 33.5% of respondents on a daily basis take their children to kindergartens, schools, and then to after-school activities and courses by car. The number of those who use public transport for these purposes is also significant (see Table 4).

Tab. 4: Transportation of children to kindergartens, schools and institutions of additional education

Transport modes	Children's educational institutions			
	Kindergartens	Schools	Children's clubs and development centres	Sports clubs
On foot	59.3	66.7	53.5	42.3
By car	33.7	20.4	26.9	33.5
By public transport	6.8	12.7	18.9	22.8
Other	0.2	0.2	0.7	1.4
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: data of the survey

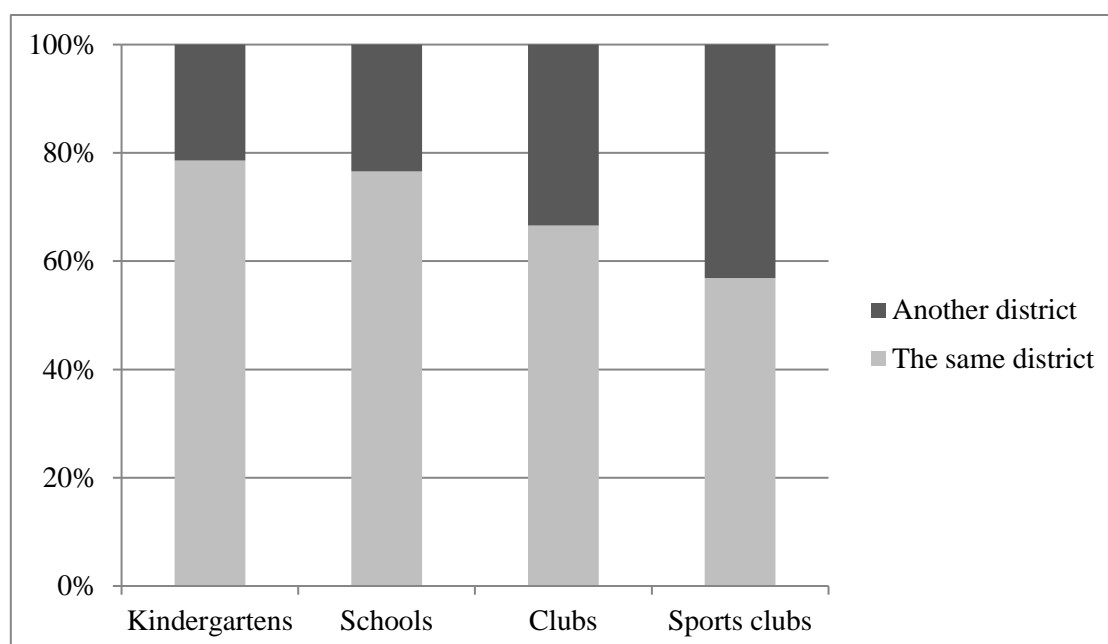
At the same time, places where children study are often located outside their residential districts. The percentage of parents who have to take their children to other city districts varies from 21.4 % (kindergartens) to 43.1 % (sports clubs) (Figure 1).

3. Our survey of parents of pre-school children brought to light specific aspects of parental labour at this stage of parenting. Table 5 shows how frequently our respondents chose specific types of games they organize for their children. Their answers reveal parental labour targeted at the development of children's creative, physical and other skills.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of colds among children. These data can indirectly show the frequency of other functions of parental labour such as nursing care.

4. Our analysis of the Russian supplementary education system has shown that the number of such institutions has grown considerably since 2000 (Table 6). In the last five years, their number and the number of children enrolled in their programmes have increased almost twice. In the overall number of children aged 5-18, the share of children studying at

Fig. 1: Proximity of children's after-school activities



Source: data of the survey

Tab. 5: Types of games parents regularly organise for their preschoolers (%)

Types of games	% of respondents
Role-playing games	22.2
Drama games	44.4
Pretend (make-believe) games	25.0
Educational games	5.6
Rule-based games (physical and board games)	2.8
Total	100.0

Source: data of the survey

these institutions has grown almost 2.4 times.

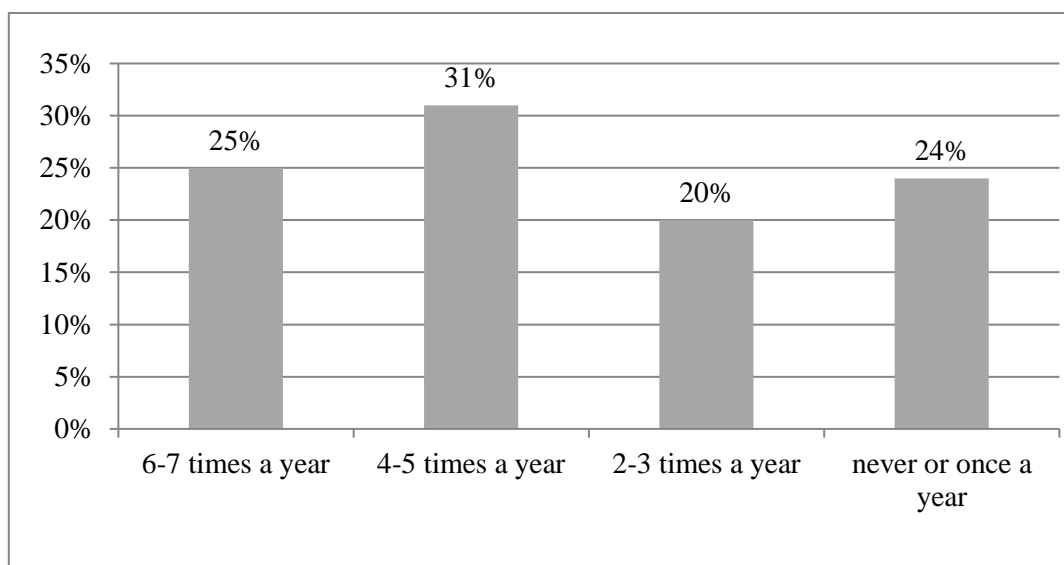
3 Discussions

Our research results demonstrate that childbirth and childcare share the following characteristics with other types of labour:

1) awareness: according to our results, even potential parents are aware of the fact that parenting implies labour;

2) energy expenditure: for example, parents have to spend time taking children to extra-curricular activities, especially to other districts;

Fig. 2: Frequency of colds among respondents' children



Source: data of the survey

Tab. 6: Children's supplementary education in Russia

Indicators	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	Growth rate in 2000-2015	Average growth rate in 2000-2015
Number of institutions of supplementary education for children	8699	8876	8531	7902	8386	10462	15081	1.733	1.096
Number of children in the system of supplementary education, ths. people	7906	8444	8083	7853	7977	8882	16754	2.119	1.133
Percentage of children enrolled in after-school programs, %	34	46	54	54	55	59	80	2.362	1.154

Source: Data on Organizations, 2015; Education in Russian Federation, 2014; authors' calculations

3) goal orientation: the network of supplementary educational institutions is expanding and the number of children enrolled in their programmes is growing, which indicates that parents seek to develop their children's creative, physical, and cognitive abilities.

Obviously, parental labour also has other features characteristic of labour, that is, creation, legitimacy, and public utility.

Being a special kind of labour, it requires parents to have a set of specific 'professional qualities' and competencies. We believe that the range of parents' 'professional qualities' includes the following:

- love for children, that is, altruistic motives underlying parental behaviour based on the desire to help and selflessness to the extent of self-sacrifice;
- ability to work independently, that is, to set targets and choose methods of their realisation, to take personal responsibility for the results obtained;
- communicative skills, that is, the ability to establish and maintain communication inside and outside the family, the ability to handle conflicts and to forgive;
- ability to work with large volumes of data, which includes analysis of diverse and sometimes contradictory information and decision-making based on this analysis;
- stress resistance, that is, the ability to deal with emergencies, attention to detail, and the ability to combine reproductive labour with other activities;
- sufficient physical development, that is, being physically capable of giving birth and raising a healthy child;
- creativity, which includes problem-solving skills, the ability to see the root of the problem, to resist stereotypes, and the ability to generate new original ideas;
- empathy, or the ability to understand the child's emotional state, basic knowledge of developmental psychology, the ability to provide the child with psychological support, and the ability to understand the child's outlook and inner world.

We believe that there is a particular set of competencies that is relevant to human resources for the parental labour. This set includes four groups of competencies:

- 1) special competencies, that is, the ability of a potential or future parent to realise the functions of parental labour independently and responsibly;
- 2) social competencies, or sufficient knowledge of the social and economic sphere and social relations, the ability to set goals and choose adequate and socially acceptable means of achieving them, willingness to accept personal responsibility for the consequences of one's behaviour;
- 3) informational competencies, or the ability of a parent to collect, process, and analyse information from different sources and through different channels, the ability to distinguish between the main and secondary information flows, the ability to apply the acquired information in the current situation;
- 4) communicative competencies, that is, the ability to establish effective communication with the child, family, and external institutions (health care system, education system, and so on).

Conclusion

While demographic forecasts are becoming more and more pessimistic, the replacement of the population is likely to depend more on increasing volumes of parental labour. Our study has shown that parental labour is highly intensive. Even potential parents have a clear understanding of the fact that parenting requires a lot of labour as well as financial, temporal, and emotional resources. The rapidly changing parental labour technologies stimulate parents to continually develop new parental competencies: new knowledge and skills as regards medicine, psychology, education, culture, sport and so on.

Parental labour is a complex activity which is extremely important for the country's economy. However, Russian society attaches different significance to parental and professional labour. We propose shifting the focus of demographic policy to recognise as the labour-like nature of parenting and the need to implement a special kind of human resource management as its core idea, in order to increase the effectiveness of parental labour. It is possible to apply HR management principles to parental labour for the following reasons: firstly, this kind of labour usually brings satisfaction to those who are engaged in it; secondly, the majority of such 'workers' are independent and responsible enough to realise parental labour; and, finally, the targets of individual parental labour generally coincide with society's targets in developing high quality human capital. In our opinion, the revised state demographic policy should place the main emphasis on the value of parental labour and incentivise parents to develop the whole range of their 'professional' competencies, which can be done through the system of higher education.

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