

## THE PRESTIGE OF PARENTING BY PARENTS' ASSESSMENT: EVIDENCE FROM RUSSIA

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### Abstract

In Russia, the unattractiveness of family lifestyle has been increasing recently. Parenting is considered as a source of social risk and inequality that questions its prestige and significance as a social achievement. This paper is aimed at identifying the factors that correlate with the parents' assessment of parenting prestige.

We have interviewed 500 parents living in the Ural region. We have used a correlation analysis to reveal the relationship between content of parental motivation and system of respondents' values and non-parametric criteria to compare the groups of respondents.

We arrived at the following conclusions: 1) the prestige of parenting in Russia is low; 2) the assessment of children's role in the hierarchy of values and the respondents' understanding of how children influence the social status of parents are related to a type of parental motivation; 3) an attitude of parents' social environment to the presence of children is not related to parents' assessment of parenting prestige.

The conclusions show a need to promote the idea of parents' high social status, the prestige of parenting as a kind of labour, advantages of family lifestyle in the Russian society and positive image of parenting among youth.

**Key words:** prestige of parenting, motivation of parenting, parental labour, reproductive motivation.

**JEL Code:** J11, J12, J13.

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### Introduction

Parenting is a social, psychological, legal, economic, and medical phenomenon. The social aspects of parenting are linked to the attitude of society towards this phenomenon. This attitude can be positive, neutral or negative.

The society's positive attitude towards the phenomenon of parenting is constructive and most effective for the development of the country's human capital. Ideally, it is accompanied by the pro-natalist state policy, which manifests itself at all levels and in all areas. In this model, education system, cultural sphere, business, and tax system contribute to the development of the parenting motivation. In particular, employers help optimize the combination of professional and parental labour of their employees. The tax system provides significant bonuses for taxpayers with children, and with an increase in the number of children these bonuses increase, as well. In the sphere of consumption, there are various possibilities for reducing the unit costs of a service / product, provided that they are purchased for a family. State information policy is built to promote the ideas of a quality parenting. As a result, potential parents have a clear idea of the need for having children, the importance of a "parental career" to enhance their status in society. For example, this attitude is implemented at all levels and in all areas of society in Sweden and Israel (Barak-Brandes, 2017; Evertsson et. al., 2018; Preis et al., 2018).

Neutral attitudes to the phenomenon of parenting can develop in countries where the state pursues a policy of limited influence on the family and demographic sphere. The government distances itself from radical measures of regulation of private and reproductive life of population. Thus, a tolerant attitude towards different forms of family life organization prevails in society. In this model, the presence of children does not facilitate the achievement of a certain social status, but it also does not interfere with it. In such countries, economic support measures for families with children are limited or targeted. For example, only the initial stages of parental labour are encouraged (giving birth to a child); child benefits are so limited that they do not cover real parental needs; payments are made only to families that meet certain economic criteria, etc. The attitude of society towards parents is not different from the attitude towards people without children. Russia and most European countries are examples of such countries.

The model of a negative attitude towards parenting and children is not openly applied in any country. However, there are countries that have a demographic policy aimed at reducing the birth rate. These include China, India, and some African countries. In such cases, the society even condemns the presence of a certain number of children; various sanctions may follow their birth. Due to the ongoing demographic policy, a controversial and conflicting attitude to parenting is formed among the population. As a result, parenting becomes a source of social risk.

These types of attitudes toward parenting in society do not exist in their “pure” forms, they are most often combined. The most common factors that affect this process are as follows:

1) The increase of the “price” of parenting in developed countries that began in the 1970s (Becker, 1962). This price is reflected in the increase of time, material and labour costs for the care, upbringing and development of children. In turn, this gradually led to the consideration of the presence/absence of children in the family as a vector of not only economic, but also social inequality; parents in this hierarchy are clearly below childless people (Trappe, 2000);

2) No condemnation of people who chose voluntary childlessness as a life strategy. It should be noted that at the end of the 20th century, people who consciously and voluntarily refused to implement parental labour and family life were subject to public condemnation (Callan, 1983; Kopper & Smith, 2001). Economic sanctions for childlessness existed in the Soviet Union (Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of November 21, 1941). Today, the voluntary renunciation of parenting does not carry any consequences and does not affect the status of a person in society.

The effect of these groups of factors may lead to the fact that the current neutral attitude of society towards parenting in some countries may change to a negative one in the future. It may happen, for example, because of the lack of a targeted state information policy. Thirty years ago, children were one of the indicators of social success (Callan, 1983), but today, the prestige of parenting is significantly lower in many advanced economies. One can consider parenting not as a social achievement, but – on the contrary – as a failure, as the impossibility of self-realization in other areas, to the extent that the birth of children is associated with irresponsible indulgence in biological instincts (Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017). The *childfree* ideology is increasingly spreading and becoming almost the norm. It is realized, at least, in the growth of the number of postponed births and the increase in the age of having the first child (“temporary childlessness”) (Koropecj-Cox et. al., 2018). Russia, like many other countries with negative demographic forecasts, potentially has similar risks (Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 2018).

The purpose of this article is to identify the factors that correlate with the assessment of the prestige of parenting among parents. We attempt to analyze whether the presence of children affects the social status, as well as to identify the factors that are associated with the assessment of the prestige of parenting.

## 1 Data and methods

In 2017-2018 we conducted a sociological survey of 500 parents living in the Ural region of Russia. The selection of respondents was carried out using a random sample, with the control of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The questions were focused on the identification of the level of prestige of parental status, support from the social environment, the role of children in the system of life values, as well as on the identification of types of parenting motivation.

The prestige of parental status was measured by the question of how much children influence the position of the respondent parents in society. A wide range of answers was offered: from the opinion that “having children greatly reduces my status in comparison with childless people from my social environment” to the answer “having children gives me a tangible superiority over childless people from my social environment”.

We considered help and support of the social environment of parents in caring for a child as a kind of societal approval of parenting, on the one hand. On the other hand, it was viewed as an evaluation of parenting as a life achievement and a means of increasing self-assessment of the prestige of parenting. The amount of help and support of the social environment (friends, relatives, loved ones) in parenting was measured on a scale from “my environment does not support me in parenting and does not provide any help with children” to “my environment fully supports and helps me with children, I can always rely on them if I need help with children”. The use of predominantly ordinal scales gave us the opportunity to attribute scores to the respondents' answers, which we subsequently analyzed with non-parametric criteria.

The role of children in the system of life values was studied through a question in which the respondent was asked to choose one of the two positions. The first position reflected one of the existing opinions in Russian society that children consume lives and a great deal of their parents' time; parents never belong to themselves, they always act in the interests of the family and children. The second opinion reflected the opposite point of view, which is that children are not the main part of life; time can be arranged so as not to infringe upon one's interests; a child is not an obstacle to career and personal life, but an independent person.

We analyzed the answers in the context of the structure of parental labour motivation (see more in our previous work (Voroshilova, 2018)). In particular, we identified physiological, social motives and motives of personal growth in the structure of parenting motivation. Cases of a person having several different motives were attributed to the “mixed” types of motivation

(unlike “pure” types, where only one group of motives is represented). Correlation analysis was used to identify the relationship between the content of parental motivation and the value system of the respondents. Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric criteria were used to compare groups of respondents.

## 2 Results

The main results of our study are as follows.

1. The prestige of parenting in Russian society is quite low.

Less than a third of respondents believe that parenting improves the social status of a member of society. These respondents feel respect from others due to the fact that they are parents. More than a half – 54% of respondents – believes that having children is in no way associated with the social status of parents. 28% believe that their social status is higher than that of childless people. 12% found it difficult to answer this question. The main indicators of descriptive statistics on the self-assessment of the prestige of parenting are presented in Tab.1.

**Tab. 1: Descriptive statistics on the self-assessment of the prestige of parenting**

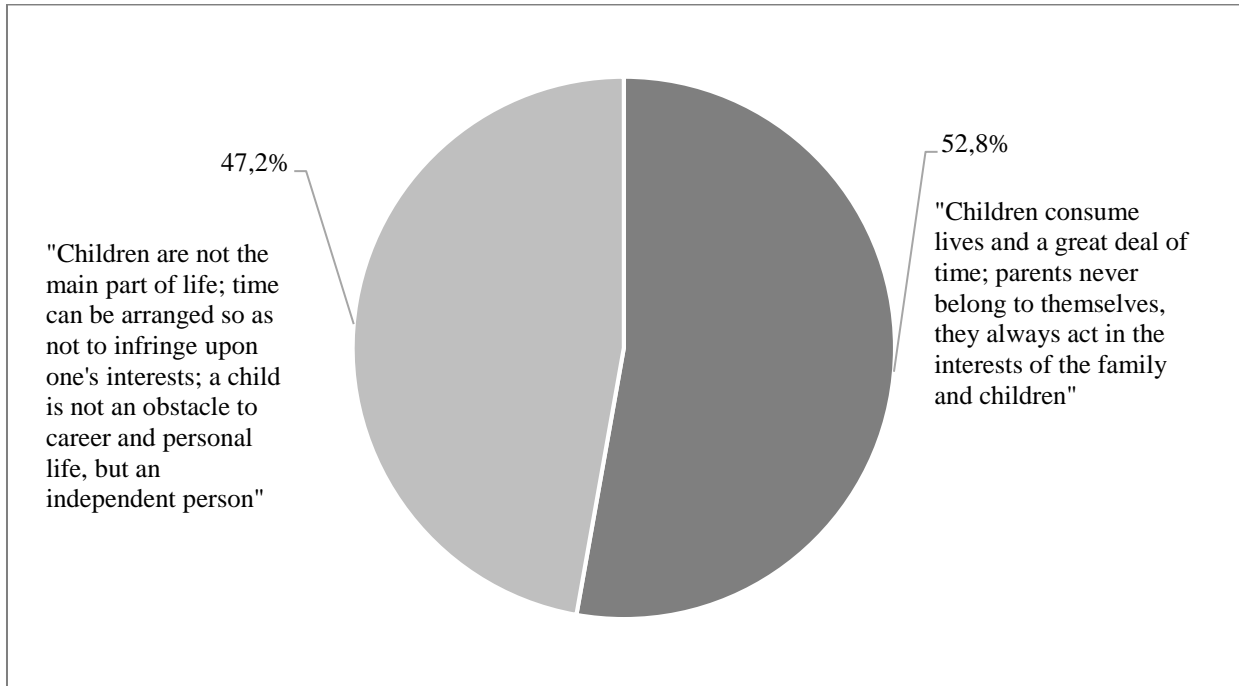
| Indicators | Values                                                                                                         |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mode       | 3 («having children does not affect my social status»)                                                         |
| Median     | 3 («having children does not affect my social status»)                                                         |
| Minimum    | 1 («having children greatly reduces my status in comparison with childless people from my social environment») |
| Maximum    | 5 («having children gives me a tangible superiority over childless people from my social environment»)         |

Source: author's calculation

2. The assessment of the role of children in the life of the respondent parents is clearly differentiated.

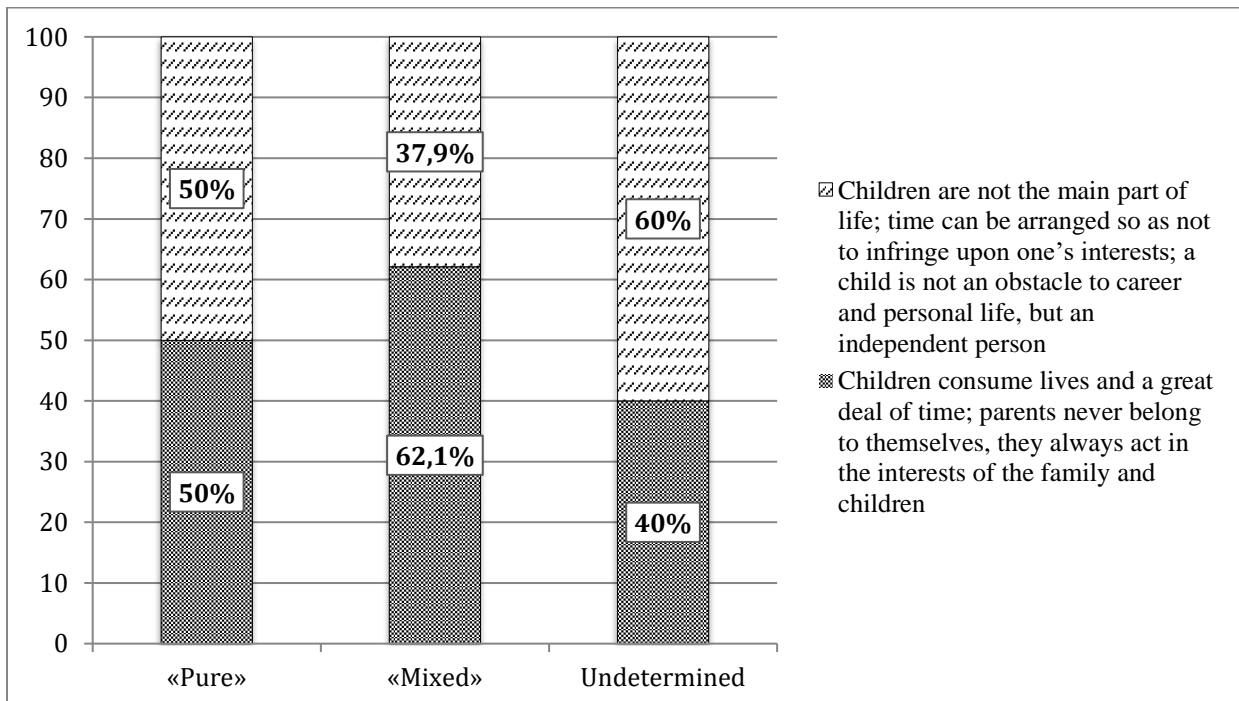
Interestingly, the two extreme positions were selected approximately by the same number of respondents (Fig. 1). The distribution of respondents' opinions on the role of children in their lives in groups of respondents with different types of parenting motivation is presented in Fig. 2.

**Fig. 1: Distribution of answers to the question about the role of children in the life of parents, %**



Source: author's calculation

**Fig. 2: Distribution of answers about the role of children in life among respondents with different types of parental motivation, %**



Source: author's calculation

Note that the modal response of respondents with “mixed” types of motivation was “children consume lives and a great deal of time; parents never belong to themselves, they always act in the interests of the family and children”, while respondents with an undetermined type of motivation were more likely to share a different opinion. Approximately half of the respondents in each group with a “pure” motivation type consider children to be the most important part of life, while the other half of respondents has the opposite opinion.

3. The respondents' perception of the influence of children on the social status of parents is related to the type of their parenting motivation.

It is revealed that ideas about a higher social status of parents, high value of children in the hierarchy of life values are more common among respondents with a social type of parenting motivation. The average assessment of the prestige level among them is 3.8 out of 5 points, while people who do not have a social motive in the structure of their motivation estimated the prestige of parenting at 3.3 points. The estimated significance of differences is shown in Tab. 2.

**Tab. 2: Differences in the self-assessment of prestige of parenting in groups of respondents**

| Groups of respondents                                                                               | Statistical criteria used to compare groups | Criterion value | df | Asymptotic significance |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|----|-------------------------|
| With social parenting motivation / without social parenting motivation                              | Mann–Whitney U test                         | 2927,0          | 1  | 0,045                   |
| With a different level of the social environment's support in the realization of parental functions | Kruskal-Wallis test                         | 5,125           | 4  | 0,275                   |

Source: author's calculation

More than half of respondents with a social motive for the parenting prestige admitted that having children, in their opinion, significantly increases their social status. At the same time, a group of respondents without a social motive for the parenting prestige in the structure of their motivation most often chose the answer that children do not affect the social status of a person.

4. The actual attitude of the parents' social environment to the presence children is not associated with the parents' self-assessment of the prestige of parenting.

We identified three groups of respondents. A third (36%) of the respondents noted that people provide them with feasible help with children, the help they actually notice. Another

third of the respondents (33%) said that people's attitude to their children is neutral, but sometimes they can help. A large group (a quarter of the respondents) answered that people from their environment fully support and help them with children; parents can always rely on their help. It is odd, that the parents' assessment of the prestige of parenting is not related to the actual level of support and assistance with children they receive from their environment (Tab. 2).

### **3 Discussion**

We assume that the relationship between the assessment of the parenting prestige and the structure of parental motivation is bilateral. Motivation for parenting may increase when parenting is a socially-approved life strategy in society. The approval of parenting by a significant social group can serve as an external stimulus for the formation of an internal motive to earn this respect. The opposite situation is also possible: there is a stereotype among parents that a priori implies the approval of their parental labour by the society. In such a situation, the desire to feel respect for being a parent pushes people to look for it and to find it in the assessments of others.

We did not find a significant correlation between the social environment's support of parenting and the self-assessment of the prestige of parenting. Those who feel that parenting is not duly approved by the social environment, however, can receive all kinds of help. And vice versa – the idea of respect from others does not guarantee the presence of the environment's active support of parental activities. In general, the analysis of opinions showed that the majority of the respondents receive significant help from their social environment with performing parental functions, regardless of the respondents' perceptions about the influence of parenting on their social status and the assessments of those around them.

It should be noted that we consider the prestige of parenting as a complex phenomenon, consisting of economic, organizational, informational components in a specific cultural context. The prestige of parenting and children is the most important cultural value, and support from the social environment is a social practice that helps to realize this value. In our opinion, these two aspects – cultural and social – are interrelated. Awareness of the prestige of parenting (shared cultural value) and support of reproductive intent by the social environment (social aspect) can be significant for the formation of reproductive attitudes.



## Conclusion

Our study showed that the prestige of parenting in Russian society is rather low. The respondents' perception of the prestige of parenting is related to their type of parental motivation, but it is not related to the support that parents receive from their social environment. We assume that the relationship between the assessment of the parenting prestige and the structure of parental motivation is bilateral. Motivation for parenting may increase when parenting is a socially-approved life strategy in society. The opposite is also possible: there is a stereotype among parents that a priori implies the approval of their parental labour by the society.

The obtained results demonstrate that the idea of a high status of parents, the prestige of parenting as a type of labour, the benefits of a parent's lifestyle, and a positive parenting image among youth need a special promotion in Russian society. In our opinion, this understanding of the phenomenon of parenting should be the basis for improvement of the Russian information policy in the demographic sphere.

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