

## ***FERTILITY***

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### **EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSITION TO FIRST AND SECOND BIRTH AMONG WOMEN IN BULGARIA**

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**Abstract:** *The aim of the study is to explore the social differences in the transition to first and second birth of women in reproductive age in Bulgaria. The influence of different socio-demographic characteristics of women such as age, education, ethnicity, family status is tested by the means of event history analysis. The results of the transition to first and second birth reveal that the effect of education is negative – highly educated women have lower transition rates to parenthood compared to lowly educated women. Women with Bulgarian ethnic origin have lower transition rates compared to women from ethnic minorities. There is significant process of postponement of the transition to parenthood which is most pronounced among highly educated women with Bulgarian ethnic origin.*

**Keywords:** fertility; first birth; second birth; event history analysis.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the period since the end of socialism in Bulgaria profound changes in the demographic development have taken place. The economic hardships in the initial period of the transition to democracy and market economy as well as the relaxed state control on personal lives had a strong impact on the individuals' fertility behaviours. The sharp decrease of the TFR recorded since the early 1990s featured the end of the two child family model as previously dominating compositional characteristic of the Bulgarian family. The drop to the Bulgarian TFR from a stable level of approximately 2 children per woman prevailing during the socialist times to the "lowest low fertility level"<sup>1</sup> (Kohler, Billari and Ortega, 2002: 641-680) since the mid-1990s was facilitated by two processes - *postponement of family formation and parenthood* and *decline in the overall fertility levels especially due to decreasing number of second and higher order births* (Dimitrova 2012: 34-52). The first trend of postponement of parenthood can be grasped by the fast increase of the mean age at first birth. It increased from a relatively stable level of 22 years prevailing until the early 1990s to 27 years in 2018.

The second trend of fertility decline by birth order is discussed in details by Koytcheva and Philipov (2008). Comparison between the observed and the adjusted TFR for the first and the second order births shows that postponement plays a significant role for the decline in the first order TFR, whereas the quantum effects are the main cause for the recent fluctuations in the TFR for second order births. This means that in the period after 1990 the main factor for the sharp drop in the quantum of fertility was associated with the decrease of the first and second order births combined with a trend of postponement of the transition to parenthood.

The changes of parity distributions across generations of women can also shed light on fertility dynamics in Bulgaria. The detail analysis of the demographic trends in the country provided by Koytcheva and Philipov (2008) reveals a moderate increase in the levels of childlessness across female cohorts. For instance, until the year 2001 the percentage of childless women in the cohorts born in the period 1960–1965 was approximately 10% which is almost two times higher than the levels of childlessness observed among the generations born after mid-1940s and during the 1950s. In comparative international perspective, however, this percentage reveals that Bulgaria is still far from the levels of voluntary childlessness (15-20%) observed among some Western European countries (Germany and Austria for example) (Sobotka, 2004). Additionally, the relatively low, although increasing levels of permanent childlessness indicate also that the disappearance of the universal first birth model is recently still in early phase.

In regard to the higher order fertility Frejka points out that in Bulgaria "the share of the two-child family was unusually high among the cohorts of the 1950s and early 1960s, 55 percent and higher" (Frejka, 2008: 57). It exceeded the levels in the majority of the central and eastern European countries (e.g. Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Lithuania).

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<sup>1</sup> TFR below 1.3 children per woman.

The profound changes in fertility models since the end of the former regime in Bulgaria have been extensively explored in the recent literature that addresses the demographic situation in the country. Some authors claim that one of the main reasons for the recent fertility decline in the country was related with the economic deprivation and the negative implications that anomie had on the personal behaviours concerning family formation and parenthood (Philipov, Speder and Billari, 2005).

In her comprehensive study on the transformations in fertility and family dynamics in the country, Koytcheva (2006) shows that the timing and pace of fertility changes are not similar for the different social groups in the Bulgarian society. Existing social differentials continue to diversify the progression of the new trends across various social strata. For example, nowadays the early start of reproduction (20-23 years) and the higher order fertility are most frequent among women from the Roma and the Turkish ethnic groups. Thus, still prevailing differences in fertility behaviours of the major ethnic communities (Bulgarians, Turkish and Roma) make uneven the spread of the new behavioural models associated with delayed entry into motherhood and reduced higher order fertility.

In this study we focus on the social determinants that influence the transition to first and second birth in Bulgaria. We choose to study these processes since from the above description of the general fertility trends in the country follows that the most pronounced changes are mainly due to transformations in the reproductive patterns concerning first and second order births among different social groups of women. The analyses of fertility intentions and behaviours show that there are significant differences dependent on age, family status, education and ethnicity (Dimitrova and Kotzeva, 2018: 363-380; Kaloyanov, 2011; Zhekova, 2008; Belcheva, 2004: 31-44). In order to examine the actual behavioural changes, individual level data have been used that record the reproductive pathways of women in the recent Bulgarian society.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE, METHOD AND VARIABLES**

In the period March/April 2018, a national representative survey of the population aged 18-50 (women) and 18-55 years old (men) "Attitudes towards fertility, family policies and vulnerable groups" was conducted. The study covers two main thematic areas: birth-rate attitudes and behaviours, family policies and attitudes towards vulnerable communities - healthcare, education and housing policies<sup>2</sup>. The sample size of the survey includes 1,506 people at age 18-50 (women) and 18-55 (men). Men who participated in the survey are 42% (630) and women - 58% (876). The mean age of the sample is 38 years (standard deviation  $\pm$  10 years). The design of the survey allows for application of event history analysis in order to

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<sup>2</sup> The study is part of the project "Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in Bulgaria" coordinated by the Institute for Population and Human Studies – BAS.