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SOCIAL DIFFERENCES IN FERTILITY INTENTIONS AMONG CONTEMPORARY YOUNG GENERATIONS IN BULGARIA. RESULTS FROM EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY

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Abstract: *The aim of the study is to outline the similarities and differences in fertility intentions of contemporary young generations in Bulgaria. The analysis is focused on the people in reproductive age belonging to different social groups. Data from European Social Survey-2010 were used. This wave of the survey includes a question about fertility intentions in the near future (next three years). A descriptive analysis and logistic regression models of the similarities and differences in fertility intentions among the respondents from different social groups defined by gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, education and health status were applied. The results show that gender, age, ethnicity, education and place of residence have strong differentiating effect on individuals' intentions of having a child in the near future.*

Keywords: fertility intentions; fertility; reproduction; social differences.

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INTRODUCTION

In demographic research, two approaches have been applied in regard to fertility intentions. The first approach is focused on *the decision making process on the individual level* (Hoffman and Hoffman, 1973: 19-76; Quesnel-Vallée and Morgan, 2003: 497-525; Williams et al., 1999: 220-227; Philipov and Berghammer, 2007: 271-305; Kotzeva and Dimitrova, 2009: 67-88). Research on the reproductive decision making processes highlight three aspects: *the direction of fertility intentions, the desired number of children and the timing of the reproductive plans*. The first aspect refers to whether an individual/a couple intends to have (positive intention) or not to have (negative intention) a child. The second aspect refers to the number of children an individual/a couple would like to have. The third aspect refers to the time horizon in which an individual/a couple would like to have a child. This time horizon may be specified – in the course of the coming two or three years or in the distant future.

Within the second approach, the fertility intentions are considered as predictors of the *realised fertility at a macro-level* as a result of individuals' reproductive behaviours (Westoff, 1981: 51-74; Westoff, Mishler, and Kelly, 1957: 491-49; Bumpass and Westoff, 1969: 445-454; Schoen et al., 1999: 790-799; Hagewen and Morgan, 2005: 507-527; Testa and Grilli, 2006: 109-138). It is considered that in societies where family planning is widespread, intentions to have a child come as a result of conscious planning. However, studies register frequent overestimation or underestimation of the actual number of children that individuals/couples may have throughout their lifespans.

The literature has described the gap between an ideal, planned and real number of children as „fertility gap“ (Coleman, 1996; Goldstein, Lutz, and Testa, 2003: 479-496; Adsera, 2006: 75-95; Nishimura, 2012). In the case of Bulgaria, the ideal of the two child family model shows stability over the last decades in spite of the steep decrease of fertility (Zhekova, 2002; Belcheva, 2004; Kotzeva and Dimitrova, 2009: 67–88; Dimitrova, 2011: 257-283) [in Bulgarian].

Bumpass and Westoff (1969: 445-454) in their study of one-child couples in USA showed that the unrealised positive and negative intentions to have a child are in balance with the realized fertility plans. Morgan and Rackin (2010: 91-118) also show that couples in the United States relatively accurately predict the number of children they want and they have, with discrepancies between declared intentions and behaviour being balanced by the over- and underestimated births. This means that if individuals/couples may relatively accurately predict the number of children they would like to have in the future and the overestimated and underestimated number of births is compensated, then at a macro-level, their intentions might be used as a sufficiently accurate assessment of fertility.

In the context of the decreasing fertility rates throughout the European countries and their maintaining below the population replacement level, the *two-child model* still remains a dominating reproductive ideal. Even critics of the predictive power of reproductive intentions regarding the actual fertility emphasise the stability of the two-child model over time (Livi Bacci, 2001: 282-289). For some demographers (Chesnais, 1996: 729- 739; 2000: 126-136), the difference between reproductive behaviours

and ideals or the so-called 'fertility gap' is the basis for implementation of demographic policies aiming to help individuals/couples to realize their desired family size. According to Bongaarts (2001), the persistence of the two-child model as a reproductive ideal is a reason to expect that the periodic birth rate in European countries would possibly be higher in the future. Goldstein, Lutz and Testa (2003: 479-496) focus on the factors that influence the ideal number of children in German-speaking countries. Their study shows that the two-child model in these countries is beginning to change, with younger generations having a reproductive ideal below the level of population replacement (2.1 children per woman). According to Goldstein, Lutz and Testa (2003: 479-496), the persistently low fertility rates in the German-speaking countries bring about changes in the reproductive ideals of the younger generations towards lower fertility. According to the same authors, this has been an important change outlining a new phase in the demographic regime of the German-speaking societies. This new phase is characterised by a drop in the reproductive ideals below two children per woman as a result of the changes occurring in fertility rates.

Researchers claim that the ideal number of children in a family essentially reflects general attitudes in society (Livi Bacci, 2001: 282-289; Livi Bacci and De Santis, 2001). Westoff and Ryder (1977: 431-453) show that at the individual level, individuals cannot fully anticipate the future conditions in which they could realise their reproductive plans, which is why they may inaccurately predict the number of children they will actually have. According to Nambodiri (1983: 444-472), reproductive intentions change over individual's life course. Thus, the reproductive decisions become a conditional process that is highly contextually dependent on the individual situation. Monnier (1987: 819-842), following the theory of rational choice, argues that fertility intentions should be examined in relation to the order of births rather than in terms of general attitudes, as conditions and reproductive plans change after birth of each child.

Testa (2006), based on data retrieved from Eurobarometer, shows that in the EU Member States, the two-child model is the predominant reproductive ideal. Romania and Austria are the two countries where the average ideal family size is below the population replacement level. According to Testa (2006), the differences between the reproductive ideals and the actual behaviour are linked to the process of postponement of parenthood, lack of partner or absence of adequate housing, etc.

Régnier-Loilier and Vignoli (2011: 361-389) made an analysis of the link between fertility intentions and their realisation in France and Italy, showing that the discrepancies between the planned and actual behaviour are largely determined by *socio-economic factors* such as education, income, etc. Studies done by Thomson (1997: 343-354) and Berrington (2004: 9-19) also outline the importance of the economic factors (income and financial standing) for the realisation of fertility intentions. Testa and Toulemon (2006: 41-76) reveal that economic stability and housing circumstances stand out as a key determinant of fertility intentions and their realisation. The research of Westoff and Ryder (1977: 431-453), Monnier (1987: 819-842), Schoenetal (1999: 790-799), Symeonidou (2000: 335-352), Noack and Østby (2002:103-116), Toulemon and Testa (2005), Meggiolaro (2009: 107-125) emphasize that the negative reproductive intentions show a higher degree of coherence with the actual behaviour in comparison with the positive intentions. Other key factors influencing the realisation of