

FERTILITY

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FAMILY VALUES AND FAMILY POLICY PRIORITIES IN BULGARIA

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Abstract: *This paper aims at presenting national representative survey data on people's attitudes toward family values with a special focus on the data from the 2018 survey "Attitudes toward fertility, family policies and vulnerable communities". The grounds of family policy with a special emphasis on positive parenting support policy are outlined in the second part of the paper. Directions to effective family policy in Bulgaria are discussed; part of them are family and family life rehabilitation against its alternatives: free-of-family-life and free-of-children-life.*

Keywords: family; family values; family policy; positive parenting support policy; family life alternatives.

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The family is the most stable institution in human society called to fulfil human aspirations for companionship, belonging, security and mutual love. Radical socio-economic and personal changes seem to be the least likely to undermine the stability of the family over time, although as the family historian J. Goody states (Goody, 2005), it is not just reactive to social change, but creates the conditions for these changes itself. On the other hand, we are witnessing how in modern global societies, family, seen as a stable union of partners, parents and children, is gradually losing its precise conventional outlines and is modifying into an array of multifaceted forms. The development of family unites in itself the contrary tendencies of radical transformation and long-lasting stability (Schneider, 2012). In his book “New Family Values” American psychologist A. Solomon (Solomon, 2018) claims that while in the 1960s, three quarters of American children lived in families with two heterosexual parents in their first marriage; today less than half of them live in such families. The conventional family is divided into multiple families, these including families with partners of the same sex, families with more than two parents, adoptive families, foster families, families established by the methods of assisted reproduction, single-parent families (optional or owed to some circumstances), families which do not want to have children, recomposed families upon the first, second, etc., marriage/cohabitation of the partners, polyamorous families in which the partners/spouses have other partners by mutual consent, etc. Quite obviously, not all family practices can be described as they develop much faster than the research works that may cover them. The pluralisation of family models is a general trend in modern societies varying in its pace across the different cultures.

Over the last decades, the Bulgarian society has also experienced an increase in the diversity of family models, differing those models from the conventional family model with two parents in their first marriage and child/children. Statistical data shows that the trends in the years following 1990 mostly display a change in the form of the family institution, with an increase of cohabitations (6.6% (2001) and 13.7% (2011) spouses in cohabitation without a wedlock) in parallel with marital unions decrease (81.1% (2001) and 71.6% (2011) spouses in marriage), an increase of single-parent families (12.2% (2001) and 14.7% (2011) of one parent with a child/children); an increase in the separated families, an increase in the number of families with one child at the expense of the two-child families (46.5% in 1992 and 59.2% in 2011 spouses with a single child) (NSI. Semeystva, Prebroyavane [Families, Census] 2011).

The main thesis we defend in this article is that in the context of pluralisation of family models and occurrence of non-conventional family forms, an effective family policy should correspond to the changes in people’s attitudes to family values and models of family life, by using its instruments and measures, by stimulating both family sceptics and those willing to create families and raise children.

We set the following tasks in this article:

- To present data from representative national surveys studying people’s attitudes towards family values: family as a necessity for a full life, children as a condition for life fulfilment and family welfare, the number of children and the quality of care based on which we would present the tendencies in people’s attitudes towards family and children;

- To outline the main principles of family policy emphasizing the family-oriented approach and positive parenthood;
- To discuss the guidelines for the development of effective family policy in Bulgaria.

DYNAMICS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS FAMILY VALUES

Do people's attitudes towards family and values it correlates to change? We will outline the dynamics in the attitudes towards family values by using data from three national representative surveys with large data samples: "Generations and Gender Survey" (GGS)¹, first wave 2004 (N = 12886)²; second wave 2007 (N = 9364); "Attitudes towards fertility, family policy and vulnerable communities" 2018 (N = 1506)³. We present the questions, which were similarly asked in all three surveys and this enables us to outline the tendencies in public opinion for a period of 15 years. These questions refer to family as an existential value, motherhood as a value for the fulfilment of a woman, fatherhood as a value for the fulfilment of a man, single parenthood/motherhood as an acceptable model, the correlation between the number of children and the quality of childcare.

Family as an existential value

The data presented in Figure 1 indicates that almost half of those surveyed rely on the family as a condition for a full life, one third of the respondents reject the mandatory character of the family for a full life, and 19% express a hesitant opinion.

Considered by the educational status of the respondents, the attitudes do not have much differentiation except for the slight predominance of those hesitant in the group of persons with primary and lower education compared to the group of persons with higher education and the group of persons with secondary education (statistical significance $p = 0.05$). Considered by age groups (18–30 years, 31–44 years, 45–55 years), the number of those who hesitated to express strong support or rejection of the family was higher among the respondents from the youngest age group than those who gave this answer in the other two groups ($p = 0.02$). The data in Figure 2 shows that the attitudes expressed by those surveyed to the value of family life reveal differentiation depending upon the settlement ($p = 0.01$). While village residents expressed a more positive attitude, the large city (over 150,000 inhabitants) and small town

¹ The international survey "Generations and Gender Survey Program" was initiated by the UN Economic Commission. Leading academic institutions in Europe prepared the toolbox of the survey. In Bulgaria, the survey was conducted longitudinally in two waves, 2004 and 2007, with the financial support of the Max Planck International Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany.

² Out of the whole sample of respondents aged 18–79, 8000 were the respondents in reproductive age, i.e. 18–44 years.

³ National representative survey conducted in March–April 2018 within the project "Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria" and funded by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. The sample includes women aged 18–50 and men aged 18–55.