



## TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD: NEW INSIGHTS INTO SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF CHILDBEARING

Mirjana BOBIĆ \*

*The paper deals with socio-psychological costs of (first) childbearing, considering this as important hurdle for transition to higher parities, especially to second and third ones. In addition to the second demographic transition, new paradigms tackle micro aspects of parenthood thus highlighting individual and parental well-being/happiness and experiences around a first baby as preconditions for (next) childbearing along with work-, family-, leisure-, friendly policies. We used both the macro and micro theoretical perspectives in order to explore our research data. We deployed the complementary method: the survey (N=1560) among women in Serbia in 2017 which was the supplementary to previously conducted qualitative one (interviews with 30 couples in Belgrade) in 2013/4. On both occasions we dealt with the topic related to the process of transition from partnership to parenthood. Results have shown high socio-psychological costs of women/mothers and the asymmetry in gender roles at the start of childbearing. This is explained by persisting patriarchal ideology in both private and public sphere, which is even strengthened after the onset of social transition and demise of state socialism (repatriarchalization). Such behavioural pattern is not only incompatible with professional demands when it comes to women's employment, but as such is also demonstrated to be a strong barrier for further childbearing. We propose policy measures that are directed towards stronger inclusion of men/fathers into private sphere (transformation of gender roles) from the very beginning of parenthood and around household, which should be combined with other family policies (work family reconciliation), social policies targeted to the increased employment, quality of life, etc.*

**Key words:** socio-psychological costs of childbearing, partnership, transformation of gender roles, Serbia, family policy.

### Introduction

It is widely documented that by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century half of the world population has been living in countries with below replacement fertility (UN, 2017; Vobecká *et al.*, 2013; EC, 2006). Low level of national fertility, coined also under 'Crisis of Motherhood', has been reported as a consequence of persistently low birth rates under conditions of decreased mortality and prolonged longevity in advanced

\* The Institute of Sociology and Social Research, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade (Serbia); email: mirjana.bobic@gmail.com

market economies (USA, Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, Japan, Europe) also including states in post-socialistic transformation, such as Serbia (Newman, 2008; Nikitović *et al.*, 2015; Rašević, 2015; Frejka, Gietel-Basten, 2016; Stankuniene, Maslauskaitė, 2008; Höhn *et al.*, 2008). ‘Crisis of motherhood’ is widespread in developed societies where policies, institutions and business are still dominated by men who preserve traditional ‘motherhood’ ideology and liberal feminism (Newman, 2008: 18).

Novel research explored changes in parity progression as a component of fertility decline by looking into generational shifts in completed fertility, among 32 countries of Europe, North America, Australia and East Asia (Zeman *et al.*, 2018). Data referring to national censuses carried out in 2011 and big surveys and registers have showed that cohorts born around 1940 had completed fertility rates of 1.9–2.5 children/women in most European countries and Japan, whereas in USA, New Zealand and Australia they had been higher, 2.5–2.7 (Zeman *et al.*, 2018). The decline is however evidenced among succeeding, younger cohorts, born from 1955 onwards. Among women born in between 1940 and 1950 the fall was related to reduction of third and higher parities. However, already among these generations decrease in first parity was taking place in German speaking countries (Western Germany, Switzerland) and in Netherlands. Among cohorts in Southern, Eastern and Central Europe from 1955 and 1970 fertility continued to decline and younger generations who were in prime reproductive ages around the 1990s have been facing high socio-economic and political instability as a result of transformation into market economies (followed by raised unemployment, vast impoverishment, high costs of housing, emigration of the youth, etc.). Globally speaking, main distinctions in between world regions are identified as follows: 1) Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), with fertility falling due to the curbing of second births, with addition of German speaking countries, South Europe (Italy, Spain) and East Asia, where it had come up as a result of fall of first births. In CEE states bearing of at least one child was culturally conditioned by strong pro-family norms, unlike German speaking ones where childlessness was vastly accepted; 2) when it comes to Northern, Western Europe, USA, Australia and New Zealand generations born in 1940 were at the peak of reproduction around post WWII ‘baby boom’ period, and thus had large families. Descending cohorts have abandoned high parity and shifted to lower levels but stabilized their completed fertility at around 1.75 or even increased it later on. Greatest portions of women born around 1960 with large families were found again in Northern, Western Europe, USA and Australia among low educated women. Higher educated ones, with university degree, were identified as forerunners of second demographic transition and not only have they refrained from higher order

births, but also vastly postponed childbearing, because of incompatibility of family with high employment rates, professionalism, career aspirations, salient opportunity costs, etc. (Zeman *et al.*, 2018).

Completed fertility in Northern and Western Europe has neither further nor starker fallen thanks to individual changes and institutional support, such as: gender equality, work and family friendly policies which eased off private and public domains' mismatch (generous financial aid, child-care facilities, parental leaves, etc.) (Zeman *et al.*, 2018). German speaking countries and Southern European ones sustained traditionalistic values and attitudes toward mother/caregivers vs. fathers/earners reflected in referent expectancies for women to stay at home for the wellbeing of children. Lack of appropriate public support for working mothers contributed largely to rise of culture of 'child-free lifestyle' in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. In Italy family is still seen as a main provider of care for women and couples with children with heavy relying on grandparents and insufficient adjustment of care facilities with working hours of parents.

Similar analysis of completed fertility rates has been undertaken in Serbia (without Kosovo and Metohija) on the basis of census data from 2011 (Rašević, 2015). Exploration of fertility of 33 generations born in between 1930-1962 has reported that none had given birth to more than two children. Eldest cohort (born in 1930) which exited reproductive ages in 2011 had approximately 1.85 children while fertility of succeeding ones (1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941) was even lower – 1.75 children/woman. Youngest generation which at the time of census 2011 has come to the end of reproduction period was born in 1962 and gave birth to approximately 1.82 children per woman. These results revealed that Serbia (without Kosovo and Metohija) has witnessed low fertility very early in the twentieth century, not only in terms of insufficient childbearing, but also its long-term persistence at the level of 1.8 children/woman. The reasons can be found in belated but accelerated socialistic modernization after WWII, industrialization and urbanization, rural to urban migrations and transformation of families, massive entry of women into work force with full time employment, lack of economic incentives for those who opted for large families and inadequate political response, liberalization of abortion, vast secularization, double burden of employed mothers, slow but continuous increase in personal consumption and incompatibility of work and family. Like in other CEE countries, in Serbia too, being then the part of ex-Yugoslavia, before its collapse in 1991, family had been posited as a terminal life value and major goal which explains why childbearing had not declined even further (Rašević, 1995: 76).

Also, alike other socialistic countries, female emancipation in Serbia had been achieved only partly and in public sphere (in employment and educa-

tion), without any great progress in political sphere and dominant cultural norms. Quasi emancipation of women in socialism differed vastly from gender emancipation in ‘old’ Europe. In socialism, structural emancipation of women has been interwoven with patriarchal gender identities all of which had contributed to transition to ‘masculine democracies’ after the breakdown in the 1990s (Stankuniene, Maslauskaitė, 2008).

The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction we resort to theoretical consideration on new insights on low fertility. The latter presupposes not only socio-psychological costs of transition from coupledom to parenthood, but also distribution of tasks and responsibilities around house and a child, all of which are deemed significant for decision making on further parities. Data are partly driven from international researches and primarily from recent representative fieldwork on “Culture of Childbearing — Reproductive Strategies of Women in Serbia Today” carried out in 2017. After the discussion of main findings in light of presented conceptual model, there comes a conclusion which elaborates some political response aimed at reducing socio psychological costs and alleviation of ‘Crisis of Motherhood’.

### **Theoretical considerations**

Today, demographers stress a critical moment of transition from a first to a second child and the newest research evidence discloses reasons mirrored in experiences of ‘first baby stage’ as an important side of low completed fertility. Although this may look as private affairs, it is deeply structurally embedded and thus have political implications. Secondly, when it comes to employment, today globalized market economies pose high demand on (highly educated) women to take part in paid professional jobs and therefore work – family incompatibility poses a strong hurdle for embarking on motherhood. Closely related to this is the third dimension – males’ engagement in private sphere in terms of sharing of responsibilities around children, care work in general and also the housework. In this paper we will try to cast some more light onto these dimensions explaining persistently low motivation (for prolonged) fertility.

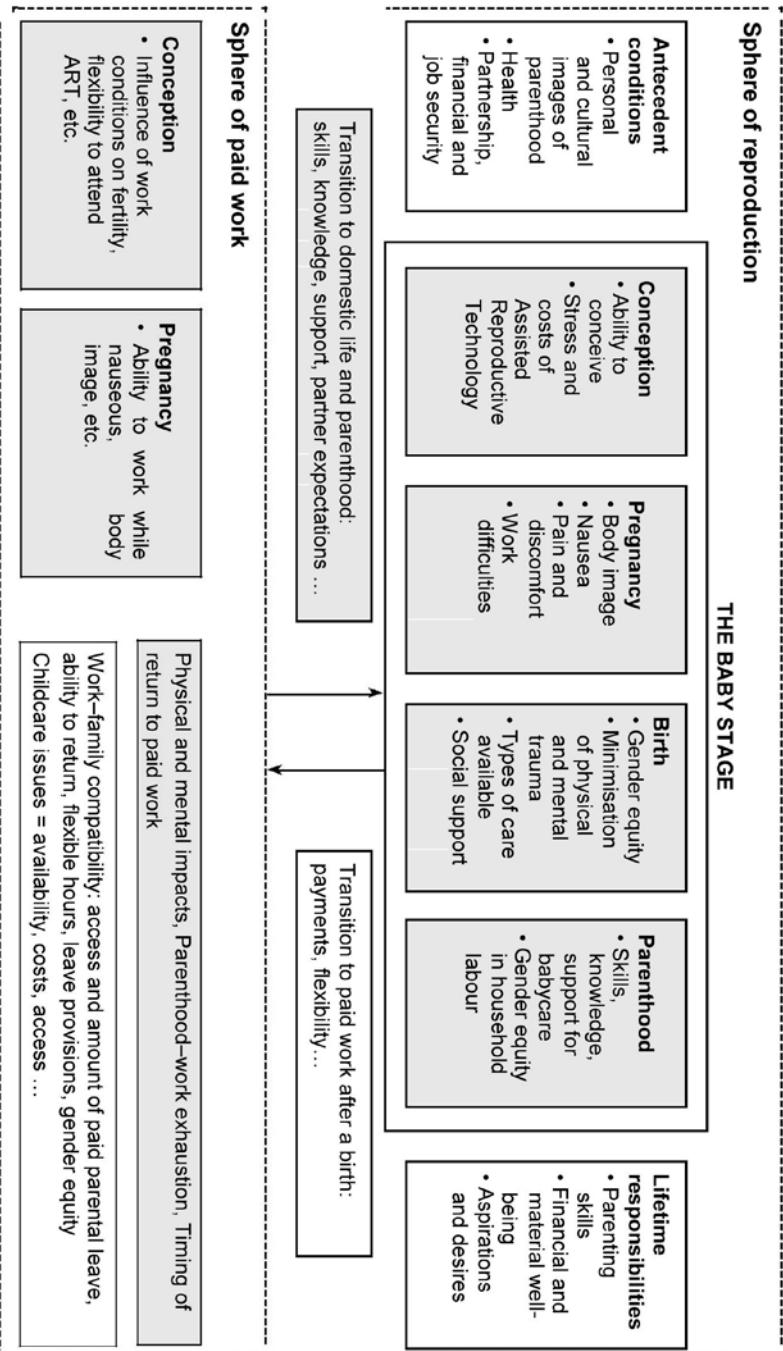
Gender issues, especially gender symmetry as an important societal precondition of changed fertility behaviour (low and delayed) and marital/partnership one (diversification of unions) have been given strong emphasis in second demographic transition theory (SDT) (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Furthermore, several social and demographic determinants have brought about second demographic transition and shrinking of families (EC, 2006: 1) rise of individualism; 2) increased share of women in paid work; 3) low level of desired and actual fertility altogether with its vast postponement; 4) decrease of quantum of live births due to stopping at parity one or two

(Rašević, 2015; Frejka, 2008; Đurđev, 2004). Low fertility also comes out because of: fall in fecundity due to delay of pregnancies and rise of secondary infertility; high economic and opportunity costs of raising children; increased divorce and union dissolution; pluralization of life styles, personal freedoms, multiplication of chances and choices, reflexive biographies and expansion diversified of styles for self-realization outside family.

Apart from upper insights and referring well elaborated findings, recent research in developed countries has pointed out to hitherto underreported aspects of low fertility, like parental experiences around early childbearing (up to 1-3 years after birth, depending on the number and spanning of children). Wellbeing of parents and partners after the first child is considered to be tightly related to willingness to progress to higher parities. This is connected to wider paradigm of *socio-psychological costs of children* and is linked to emotional, personal and relationship changes, but also individual evaluation of overall quality of life after this familial change. Socio-psychological cost of childbearing presupposes personal feelings of self-sacrifice and losses of, predominantly, females/mothers, i.e. investments of resources, time, energy, emotions and activities, as well as so called opportunity costs (Blagojević, 1997). These costs are not financial, but yet they do exert a strong burden on mothers/parents and may be conducive for stopping further childbirths. The fact is that partners undergo huge social stress once they become parents and need to make a lot of adjustments in their everyday lives. This is frequently followed by high expectations to be a perfect parent ('intensive parenting') which might lead to disappointments, marital conflicts, breakdowns and separations.

Socio-psychological costs of parenthood are reported to be as crucial as issues related to: work family reconciliation, return to workforce, financial costs of children, etc (Newman, 2008; Margolis, Myrskylä, 2014). Therefore, some women opt to give up further childbearing unless they find another, more suitable partner (Newman, 2008; Paar, 2010). Not infrequently women/mothers undergo postnatal depression, face permanent tiredness, exhaustion, sleep deprivation and anxiety as a result of enduring baby's crying, feeding, etc., as well as social isolation and lack of time for themselves. Males might be spending more time at work and concomitantly take insufficient part around a newborn, a household and in support to wives/mothers. Socio-emotional effects of transition to parenthood are related to physical and emotional costs of conception, pregnancy (nausea, changes in body shape, etc.) and experiences during delivery (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The location and omission of parenting influences in policy and debate on low fertility (Newman, 2008:17)



Parents' happiness/wellbeing surrounding the first birth has therefore been acknowledged as a determinant of further parity progression in vast majority of recent papers and journals on low fertility (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2011; 2014; 2015; Kohler, Mencarini, 2016; Aassve *et al.*, 2016) and supported by using gross evidence of both representative, quantitative analysis and qualitative studies (Newman, 2008). In short, authors resort to Second demographic transition paradigm (SDT) (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Lutz *et al.*, 2007) when explaining changing family behaviour in industrialized countries reflected in retreat from marriage, decline and postponement of unions, rise of cohabitations and extramarital births, thus decomposition and separation of childbearing/childrearing from partnership/marriage. They accentuated women's increased work force participation, enhanced career prospects, prolonged education and 'gender revolution' in public and private spheres as main drivers of demographic and family changes (Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015). Some of the authors pose one crucial dilemma — not only why fertility is low today, but why it is not even lower (Kohler, Mencarini, 2016).

Thus, as we could learn, the SDT as a grand theory is supplemented with new paradigms, tackling subtle interpersonal processes, everyday lives of couples and nuclear families, all of which had been stranded left in former research and policy. Additionally, it should be accentuated that second wave feminism is also 'blamed' for a sort of blindness on uncompleted 'gender revolution' in private sphere, because of its predominant orientation towards women's entry into public sphere (education and work force). To the contrary, for middle class women it is a 'second shift' (baby care, household chores, etc.), that cast greater burden even when compared to job and career ones (Newman, 2008), insofar that women report jobs to be more as a 'pull' and children and home as a 'push' factor.

Figure 1 brings about concise but very detailed insight into the complex and multidimensional 'baby stage' where apparently spheres of reproduction and paid work are in tight communication and exchange. 'Locations' which have been underrepresented or omitted in policy and debate on low fertility are highlighted (shaded areas) (Newman, 2008: 17).

As is quite evident 'baby stage' encompasses plethora of phases, preconditions, transitions, challenges, responsibilities, skills and knowledge, aspirations, relationships and hardships. We shall be focusing on gender equity in two shaded locations: at birth and parenthood. This will be subsumed under paradigm of 'partnership happiness/wellbeing' as a precondition for (further) childbearing inasmuch as data obtained from domestic surveys and qualitative researches allow us to elaborate on.

Couple's happiness and wellbeing are growing before first baby comes and immediately after that and then gradually decline (Margolis, Myrskylä,

2014). This stage is treated as union formation followed by frequent sexual activity and strong mutual affections of partners. Bearing up to two children boosts parents' happiness and especially so for couples and women who had postponed it. A pattern is elaborated on a vast longitudinal study of British (n=2,689; 1991-2008) and German populations (n=4,513; 1984-2009). Socio-demographic factors modify this behaviour in such a way that those who are better off (and older), supposedly in possession of more resources (human and social capital, affluence, etc.), do experience more happiness compared to lower strata and younger people. Delayed parenthood does not necessarily mean neither childlessness nor few children, but still might bring about happier couples who will be 'catching up' with two or more offspring. Conversely, reports on third parity births demonstrate less of couples' satisfaction which explains its low quantum and tempo effects in the context of second demographic transition (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2014). Young couples reflect higher degree of unhappiness compared to their childfree counterparts whereas older ones express equal or even higher wellbeing as their childfree peers (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2011).

Authors point out that under conditions of childbearing based on personal choice and free will in SDT it is trajectories leading to life satisfaction and happiness around (first or previous) parenthood which are seen as an important driver of low fertility (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2014; 2015). Bad experiences with first baby may affect further parities because people tend to avoid deterioration of their achieved lifestyle (well-being/happiness). Paradigm of parents' happiness as a precondition for further births is deemed to be of relevance for demographic understanding of missing higher order births (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2014: 1860; Kohler, Mencarini, 2016). As a result, series of studies analysing a relationship between happiness and childbearing have been published recently (Aasve *et al.*, 2016; Margolis, Myrskylä, 2011; 2015).

Partners' happiness<sup>1</sup> is mediated by socioeconomic characteristics: education, gender, parity, marital status and social settings. Lower education and social status are linked to less wellbeing, more hardships and more frequent post-natal depression. Being an older mother usually presupposes belonging to higher stratum with high activity rates, career orientation, and stronger financial and other social resources. When it comes to gender it is mothers who are more affected by conception, pregnancy, delivery, afterbirth depression and 'baby stage' exhaustion. Mothers still remain

<sup>1</sup> Happiness or well/being is researched in British and German studies through the following question "How satisfied are you with your life, all things considered?" with responses ranging from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied) (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2014: 1848).



profound caregivers whose work is not properly recognized and treated as 'doing nothing' or 'not a serious job' at home) (Newman, 2008: 20; 27) because of yet incomplete 'gender revolution' (lack of gender equity at home) (Newman, 2008; Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015). As to union type and social context – parental happiness is dependent on whether: a parent/mother is single, coupled or divorced, has an extramarital children, is employed or not, has social support through informal networks, is surrounded by work friendly climate, enjoys beneficial social services and political support.

Political implications of addressing this sort of inhibitors for raising fertility are related to enhanced support of mothers/women and fathers/men around partnership and parenting (counselling and self-help groups of citizens), acquisition of knowledge about multiple challenges in early childbearing, baby care, support of local community and neighbourhood, building children and parents friendly environments at work and in a wider society, along with financial incentives and means of overcoming work and family mismatches (McDonald, 2002).

'Gender revolution' denotes changes in gender relationships in both public and private spheres (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2015: 207). This is a new and powerful theoretical insight allowing for understanding of both decline and recent reversals in fertility (Margolis, Myrskylä, 2015). First half of gender revolution took part with growing employment of women from 1960s, which was not followed by immediate reconceptualization of the private sphere. To the contrary, women were added second shift with their human resources enormously put under constraint (Blagojević Hughson, 2014). Such developments contributed to family decline and postponement of unions and childbearing. It was only with globalization and urge for two salaries in developed nations that men have been pressed to gradually change their attitudes and behaviour at home. Second part of 'gender revolution' refers to increased sharing of home responsibilities by men/husbands which has been vastly reported nowadays (in some 13 EU countries and in USA) and especially ever since 2010, after Great Recession, with rising shares of females' breadwinning model and/or two earners families (Lappegård *et al.*, 2015; 2017). Structural conditions that brought about new configurations of caretaking/breadwinning are connected to globalization of service economy, prolonged longevity, shrinking families as a result of fewer children, higher education of women along with state policies facilitating easier work family reconciliation (childcare, parental leaves, financial support, etc.). Because of increased divorces and marital instability women have to be able to sustain themselves without a partner. Today countries with highest women employment rates have highest fertility rates and not another way around

(Lappegård *et al.*, 2015; 2017). Extended working hours, enhanced economic power, and negotiation capacity of more resourceful and thus powerful women contribute to undermining of division of public vs private sphere and gendered performance therein. Considering men, they do take increasingly part in activities primarily around children and to a lesser extent in housework in the context of higher job insecurity, unemployment and demands on women to take up full time positions. Strong incentive to undermine previously established unequal division of labour at home was enacted in those states which introduced paid paternal leave ('daddy quota') which was not exchangeable with mothers' leave. This was the case in Scandinavia and Western Europe, but also in some of US states. New, younger generations of males emerged wishing to share 'intensive parenting' and other daily tasks such as meals preparing, doing work for minors, shopping, etc. Authors who researched these shifts proved slow, stalled, but yet ongoing second part of gender revolution in developed countries (USA, Britain, Sweden, etc.) and this might be conducive to happier couples and strengthened families therefore opening up prospects of increased fertility in times to come (Lappegård *et al.*, 2017). Marital satisfaction and stability are closely linked to overall organization of private sphere, both house- and family- work. Inasmuch as women are stouter in advocating for gender equity they would be more akin to feel less satisfied if the privacy is still gendered. On the contrary when traditional ideology of male breadwinning and female housekeeping prevails women are more likely to accept unfair division of tasks and to report being satisfied ('fairness paradox') (Lappegård *et al.*, 2015; 2017).

## Data and methods

In previous paragraphs we have laid down informed theory which in a part inspired our recent fieldwork "Culture of Childbearing — Reproductive Strategies of Women in Serbia Today" carried out in 2017 by the Institute for Sociological Research, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. The survey covered all regions and counties of Serbia (including northern part of Kosovo). Female population (n=1,560), being the subject of the research, was divided almost equally among 3 major age groups: 31.4% (18-29), 37.5% (30-45), and 31.1% (46-60).<sup>2</sup> Since the experience of

<sup>2</sup> Due to the specificity of the survey which tackled many aspects of intimacy, bodily experiences, trauma and violence, the sample was designed as a combination of partly representative one (as to the type of settlement), and partly purposeful ('snow ball'). Therefore, majority of respondents were recruited from Belgrade metropolitan region (35.2%), then from Central and Western Serbia (22.7%), Southern and Eastern Serbia (22.2%), Vojvodina (17%) and the least from northern Kosovo (2.9%). As to education, most of respondents had a 4-year secondary education or high school (48.2%) and tertiary education (32.6%), while 8.4% of them had a 3-year secondary school, 6.2% master or PhD, and 4.7% (un)completed elementary school. As to childbearing, 39.3% have one child, 49.9% two, 9.3% three and 1.5% more than 3 children.

childbearing, union formation and ‘early baby stage’ were at the focus of our research, we did not include younger and older cohorts. Younger ones were excluded due to lack of such experiences (rare births) in the state with very low and delayed fertility (TFR-1.46) (RZS, 2016), while the older ones were not considered due to possible distortion of their memories on the subject (Sekulić *et al.*, 2017). This fieldwork was preceded by one qualitative research of couples with new-borns and/or small children in Belgrade (‘Politics of Parenthood’) carried out in 2013/14, also by the Institute for sociological research, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. The latter was aimed at exploring divergent ways of couples’ passage into parenthood and the process of overcoming major family and personal change with 3 main phases: preparatory, childbearing and ‘early baby’ ones. The sample included 30 couples (60 men and women altogether) selected through snowball technique controlling for their age and education. Recruited couples fell equally into following age categories: 18-29, 30-39 and 40-55, with each group further differentiated into 3 major subgroups in line with their level of education: primary, secondary and tertiary (Bobić, Stanojević, 2014a; 2014b; Bobić, Lazić, 2015).

By way of undertaking these two complementary fieldworks and combining their outcomes with similar ones conducted locally and recently we gained a lot of results and interpretations related to: women’s reflection on this transition, its most critical moments, decision making process, preparations for parenting and coping strategies applied. Furthermore, we were also able to analyse and compare evidence on gendered division of tasks and responsibilities at home, at the beginning of parenting in both researches. Value orientations analyses was crucial in exploring: main drivers of gendered behaviour including also a satisfaction thereabout (‘fairness paradox’) under prevailingly patriarchal ideology and everyday performance. Secondly, we also considered structural constraints: the living standards of female respondents from 2017 are reported to be very low: unemployment was high as well as precariousness (part time jobs, low paid and without a contract, without fulfilment of basic human rights, etc.), especially with younger cohorts (Sekulić *et al.*, 2017). These bleak living conditions are conducive for preserving of patriarchy, parochial political views, lack of democratic and liberal viewpoints, including equality, pluralism, pro-activism and “open future” (Sekulić *et al.*, 2017).

In order to support main findings on persistently gendered parenting and incompleteness of ‘second half’ of gender revolution which have their demographic and political repercussions, we shall be recalling some of our earlier researches (mainly from 2010). Not only is the ‘gender revolution’ stalled even among younger cohorts (18-29) but re-traditionalization (revitalization of patriarchal views around family life) has also been

proved which is both structurally and ideationally conditioned. This is reported ever since the last decade of the twentieth century and is related to massive pauperization and social exclusion of majority of citizens in the process of post socialistic transition, concomitant demise of social state and inefficient social services, all of which led to strengthened pro-familism (stark reliance on familial resources and social capital). Furthermore, status of Serbia as the state at European semi-periphery (Blagojević Hughson, 2013), combined with enforced public patriarchy, active role of the Orthodox Church in public discourse, etc., brought about perseverance of masculine authorities and massive social inequalities.

## Results

The level of fertility has been somewhat higher in our sample compared to total population of the country which is due to its research design aimed at analysing women's experiences and practice of childbearing and partnership. Therefore, as many as 49.4% of female respondents reported to have two children, less only one (38.8%) with the lowest portion with three and more (10.7%). Majority of women reported to have been satisfied with the accomplished family size (61.2%), yet not small share has not (38.6%). When asked on the desired number of children, clear majority (86.6%) claimed either three (45.1%) or two (41.5%). Despite that only one out of three women (29%) has been planning further childbearing whereas more than half have not (53.3%). Some 17.4% opted for spontaneity meaning that if they become pregnant they will be giving a birth.

We also explored whether fulfilment of some of the conditions would lead to next childbearing. More than half of respondents would not have additional child regardless of any changes (51.5%), and only one out of five (21.7%) would, provided improving of their economic conditions. Other facilitators have been quite scarcely opted for as preconditions for further childbearing: better health in general (5.6%), marital happiness (4.2%), reconciliation of motherhood and other life domains (2.1%), promotion of generous family planning policy (1.7%), etc. These findings express apparently a kind of 'demographic depression' most probably overlapping with prolonged socio-economic, political hardships in the country and overwhelmingly presented feeling of helplessness. In addition, this gloominess is the outcome of huge emigration of youth (Bobić, Vesković-Andelković, 2017) and consequently ageing and shrinking of cohorts in reproductive ages.

For the sake of getting a clear and straightforward presentation of results, they will be further presented under separate subheadings: family planning, meaning of childbearing and gendered division of tasks at home.

## Family planning

When planned pregnancies were cross tabulated with type of residence it came out that those living in urban and suburban settings were more inclined to plan their first baby (54.8%) compared to those living in rural ones (23.3%). Cross tabular examination showed that strongest statistical linkage has been expressed when including following independent variables: age, marital status and total household revenues.<sup>3</sup> Middle aged women (30-45) were planning first pregnancy more often – 82.6%, compared to younger and older cohorts – 75.5% and 75.1%. One out of four younger and older respondents reported on unplanned pregnancies – 24.9% and 24.5% respectively. Since one out of five married women has not planned conception, there comes out that marriage is apparently strongly related to transition into parenthood.<sup>4</sup> The sum of total revenues of a household is positively linked to decision making on childbearing both with first born and all subsequent ones.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, vast majority of women achieve desired family size irrespectively of material wellbeing, which is probably related to strong pro-familistic ideology in CEE and Southern European countries discussed above. Although globally speaking, family planning was widespread in our sample, it was still more prevalent among women coming from higher income families. In fact, with the rise of income, childbirth planning is on the increase and vice versa. As many as 80.4% of women living in households with highest revenues (more than 900 euros monthly) planned their first conception compared to 69.1% of poorest ones (with less than 300 euros per month). One in three pregnancies among poorest respondents (less than 300 euros) has not been planned whatsoever (30.9%). Unplanned children are more common amidst single mothers (41.9%) and, supposedly extramarital ones, living without a partner, since the overall share of cohabitations in the country is as low as 3.8% (Stanković, 2015).

Second parity was somewhat less planned – 68.8%, with those coming from the cluster of moderate level resources being mostly rational (1,200-1,500 euros per month) – 77.1%. Middle aged women (30-45) turned out to be more reflexive – 42.0%, compared to their elder (46-60) and young counterparts – both 19.8%. Considering education, as expected, women with highest degrees have been mostly reflexive – 74.4%, including also those living in urban centres – 72.2%.

<sup>3</sup> Chi square=11.438, df=2, p=0.003, Cramer's V=0.086.

<sup>4</sup> Chi square=13.30, df=4, Cramer's V=0.93.

<sup>5</sup> Chi square=14.071, df=5, p=0.015, Cramer's V=0.097

It was highly desirable that husband takes part in both decision-making on the first child – 76.2% as well as on higher parities – 63%.<sup>6</sup> Still, 15% of babies had been conceived spontaneously and one out of 9 women made it as a personal resolution, irrespectively of males/husbands. This outcome is related to age and education. Younger cohorts (18-29) are more likely to rely on mutual views – 67.9%, while the elder (46-60) are least likely – 56.4%.<sup>7</sup> Higher educated women were mostly prone to consensus – 67.6%, followed by women with secondary education – 60%.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the stronger the human capital the more mutuality among partners. This is probably due to high opportunity costs especially with better educated women and hence their need for stronger reliance on a partner and wider social networks of immediate kin and friends during pregnancy, at the early baby stage and throughout child's socialization.

### Meaning of childbearing

Childbearing is evidently a terminal value for vast majority of females in Serbia today. As many as 88.9% and 83.0%, respectively, claimed that 'wish to have children' and 'to have my own family' were of utmost importance in their lives. Not only is patriarchal ideology at stake here (which emphasizes reproduction and females' principal role and responsibility of sociobiological reproduction of the family, the nation and the state), but also the inner socio-psychological meaning of becoming a parent. Entering into unions is one of the main markers of transition into adulthood and it is highly socially approved both in Serbia and other Mediterranean countries with marriage being hardly a value *per se* because of its instrumental, intrinsic value – producing of offspring. Therefore, our respondents claim that marriage without children is not worthwhile. Parenthood is a core family value and placed in front of partnership. Latter does not represent separate life goal like in advanced industrialized societies where parenting comes as a result of happiness/wellbeing in partnership, and both partnering and parenting are parts of a self-actualization and individualization projects. Furthermore, parenting in advanced economies is time framed whatsoever (for around 20 years after which children are leaving home). To the contrary, in Serbia as in Italy and other Southern European cultures, parenting is a lifelong project, presupposing self-sacrificing of personal time, resources, energy, emotions and life strategies, all of which are directed at 'his king child' (Blagojević, 1997; Blagojević Hughson, 2013; 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Chi square=19.976, df=10, p=0.03, Cramer's V=0.08.

<sup>7</sup> Chi square=19.976, df=10, p=0.03, Cramer's V=0.08.

<sup>8</sup> Chi square=41.703, df=10, p=0.00, Cramer's V=0.12.

The equal portion of couples either do or do not prepare for the arrival of baby and 'early baby stage' (30% respectively). Those who are pro-active here are also very much talking to a partner/husband and gather and exchange information mutually, using also experts' resources, handbooks, media and other people experiences. This is especially true among better educated women and couples, living in urban areas and those from upper social strata.

In reference to upper adopted theoretical paradigm we have examined the relevance women put down to marital satisfaction and (first) childbearing as precondition for next parities. More than half of all respondents (56.7%) claimed that 'early baby stage' had had an impact for further childbearing. As many as one out of five women (18.3%) strongly emphasized positive experiences with first baby being conducive to next ones, thus making altogether 2/3 of the whole sample and, therefore, proving for high relevance of this stage (75.0%). Statistically significant links were reported with age<sup>9</sup> and residential status (size of a place women live in).<sup>10</sup>

Middle age respondents (30-45) most frequently opted for the answer "I felt satisfied in my marriage and wanted more children with my husband" – 60%, followed by elderly (46-60) – 55.1%, and finally, youngsters (18-29) – 52.9%. Positive experiences with previous child was highlighted by every fifth younger respondent (20.6%). One out of eight women from oldest age group reported that first baby stage had not had an impact (12.9%) and one out of ten younger and middle-aged ones (10.9% respectively). The option 'having a baby meant a possible way to separate myself from parents and leave them' was very rare (only around 1%). This is to be understood in the context of kinship-based solidarity among Serbia citizens, as well as great housing challenges, as a result of their shortages, high costs, and lack of social housing for youth. Latter is also to be looked in when addressing widespread practice of extended family households (24%) ever since the onset of transition, reflected in practice of young couples and families living with parents, and/or relatives. Namely, every fourth woman reported that her family had been pressed to stay with parents or siblings because they could not afford living on their own. This outcome boosts one of the main theses on recycling of traditionalism and patriarchy due to prevailing structural and institutional barriers (see: Milić *et al.*, 2010), which has a clear negative demographic effect in terms of putting fertility on halt, despite overwhelmingly presented preferences for children.

<sup>9</sup> Chi square=18.353, df=10, p=0.49, Kramer's V=0.94.

<sup>10</sup> Chi square=38.005, df=15, p=0.001, Cramer's V=0.111.

### Gendered division of tasks at home – ‘fairness paradox’

In line with informed theory which we deployed here, we explored the division of tasks once mother and baby arrive home. The main question was to what extent women do rely on their husbands at this early baby stage.

Table 1.  
Housework distribution at an early baby stage (%)

Who did what?	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Bathed baby	46.7	7.8	36.5	8.4	0.3	0.2	99.8
Put baby asleep	65.0	3.0	30.2	1.4	0	0.1	99.7
Changed diapers	66.0	0.9	31.9	0.7	0.1	0.2	99.7
Woke up in night-time when baby cried	59.3	3.4	36.0	0.8	0	0	99.6
Took baby out	41.0	4.0	51.3	2.4	0.1	0.6	99.4
Took to doctor for a check up	36.5	2.6	60.5	0.3	0	0	99.8
Ironed baby’s clothing	80.1	1.1	7.9	9.3	0.1	0.5	99.0
Cleaned apartment	67.8	2.4	20.9	7.2	1.0	0.4	99.6
Cooked	69.9	1.5	10.2	17.3	0.1	0.6	99.6
Created baby’s photo album	60.8	7.0	28.1	1.5	0	0.9	98.2
<i>Legend:</i> 1-women/mother/respondent; 2-husband; 3-equally respondent/female and her husband; 4-female’s mother or husband’s mother or kin; 5-paid service; 6-someone else. <i>Note:</i> Total is less than 100% due to few missing cases. <i>Source:</i> Author’s own calculations.							

Table 1 brings taxonomy of main activities around baby and household and their distribution among partners. As could be clearly seen from empirically gathered data, the biggest burden is shouldered by women, even though mothers are expected to have been recovering after 9 months of pregnancy and labour. Vast majority of activities are carried out by women, be it for baby or household. This is already approved in our previous qualitative research (Bobić, Stanojević, 2014a; 2014b) and in other domestic sociological researches of early parenting (Tomanović *et al.*, 2016). Starting from an early baby stage, gendered division of tasks resumes throughout family life course (table 2). As is clearly shown, on average, men do not participate in chores and other activities, except for slightly higher engagement in everyday shopping. There are however some shared tasks, such as daily shopping and assisting minors.

Apparent ‘unfairness’ in terms of huge reliance on women’s resources is a constant feature of family life in Serbia, which has been recurring (graph 2).



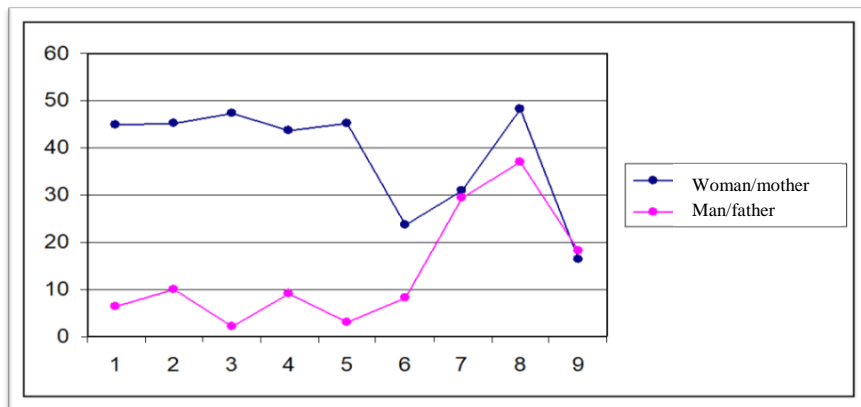
Table 2.  
Distribution of core tasks at home (%)

Tasks	Wife	Husband	Together	Someone else	Total
Cooking	78.2	1.1	10.0	10.7	100.0
Washing (cloths)	88.8	1.0	6.3	3.9	100.0
Dish washing	74.5	1.9	17.3	6.3	100.0
Cleaning	72.4	1.7	20.4	5.5	100.0
Everyday shopping	37.6	15.7	43.2	3.5	100.0
Meeting children’s needs on a daily base	58.0	2.3	38.6	1.2	100.0

Source: Author’s own calculations.

These results stem from a representative survey carried out in 2010 among population at local communities in Serbia (n=1,950) (Bobić, 2012).<sup>11</sup>

Figure 2.  
Division of tasks at home, local communities in Serbia, 2010 (%)



Legend: 1-cooking; 2-dishwashing; 3-washing up; 4-cleaning; 5-ironing; 6-tyding child’s room; 7-everyday shopping; 8-escorting of a child to a kindergarten or school; 9-assisting with child’s school tasks; 10-care of minors; 11-care of sick and elderly.  
Source: Bobić, 2012.

Despite this obviously gendered practice, as many as 63.6% of women in 2017 claimed that distribution of tasks in their home was ‘fair’, whereas one out of three expressed moderate or strong dissatisfaction (31.2%) and as few as 5.3% were undecided. Yet this ‘fairness paradox’ (Ruppner *et*

<sup>11</sup> However, it did not encompass respondents living in families only because its purpose was aimed at exploring of statements of citizens in Serbia on various social issues, such as gender equality, ecology and European integration.

*al.*, 2017) has not come as a surprise for us when it comes to Serbia today. Distributive justice at home has yet not taken place among majority of respondents, most likely as an outcome of prevailing values also including socialisation in traditional families with pronounced gender asymmetry (Bobić, 2017). This is not to say that some shifts have not been occurring with more educated, active, urban and middle-aged women and their partners, holding more of egalitarian attitudes. Changing practice has increasingly been documented as a result of men's more active role in fathering and to a lesser extent in chores (Stanojević, 2015). These 'new fathers' are reported to be usually younger, better educated, middle class, urban professionals, advocating for egalitarian views and practice around family as well as in public domain (Evertsson *et al.*, 2018).

### **Toward conclusion**

Our research has indicated several points which have clear policy implications. Firstly, socio-psychological cost of childbearing in today Serbia is very high. Women/mothers are main caregivers, but they are also expected to share provider's role with men, which is inherited from former socialistic system. Motherhood is exhaustive because women are expected to embark on a parenthood as a lifelong project, investing all their resources, time and energy, affection and emotions for the sake of 'his/her king child' and husband, with increasing portion of care to be delivered to elderly in an ageing population. Such an outlook of one's biography is not only corny, outdated and traditional, but is highly conflictual with other domains of lives in an information based, globalized world where young people are presented with many chances and choices of an open future. Delayed entry into unions, i.e. low and ageing fertility and nuptiality are thus rational response to societal risks and unpredictable turns of life. Therefore, as is reported in the latest census 2011 in Serbia, one out of three women has been exiting reproductive ages without giving birth. These are, on average, single women (unmarried and non-cohabiting), living in urban settlements, with completed tertiary education, economically active and employed (Rašević, 2015).

Secondly, patriarchal ideology is still vastly shaping everyday lives of both women and men, putting enormous strain on both parties. Women can hardly reconcile work and family, they are pressed to give up large families, whereas men face 'crisis of masculinity' in terms of limited capability to provide for their families as a result of frequent sacks, high unemployment, low living standards and precariousness, all of which are consequences of long term economic and social restructuring and massive social exclusion for vast groups of population at the semi-periphery (Hughson, 2017).

Marriage and fertility rates are falling, and divorces are rare, as well as cohabitations with extramarital births being at moderate level (Stanković, 2015). However, this is not a result of personal choice, but, instead, hurdles to get to realize one's basic preferences around children and family. Thus, Serbian population is predominantly opting for nuclear family and unions are to be assessed as rather stable, thus laying a solid ground for potential interventions to increase fertility under conditions of: 1) stronger transformation of private sphere towards egalitarianism and fairer share of parenthood, care work and household chores; 2) generous family and population policies which are apparently needed for the sake of support of those who wish to realize themselves as parents; 3) enhancing of quality of everyday life.

The last two points go beyond the scope of this paper and demand entirely new discussion. Therefore, we will resort to the first one which is more related to our overall topic. It tackles stronger inclusion of men/fathers in both care work and household, therefore leading to happier couples and higher parity eventually. 'Daddy quota' (paid paternity leaves of varying length, but usually a short term up to 4 weeks) (Davaki, 2016)<sup>12</sup> is a solidly conceived political response to counter gender imbalances in early parenthood stage, strengthening bonds between both fathers and children and couples. Policies such as gender-neutral parental leaves, like those in Sweden, then right to reduced working hours for parents, high quality, available and affordable childcare facilities, contribute to gender equality in (early) parenting and new fatherhood (Evertsson *et al.*, 2018). Promotion of family friendly work environment, especially for men, popularization of family, parenthood and 'new fatherhood' in education system, social media, with youth, etc., are important policy measures aimed at increased fertility. Counselling about marital crisis during the transition to parenthood and throughout life course has also been highlighted as an important resource of support for young families, strengthening their competence, especially at local communities since challenges related to parenting and partnership are reported as sources of unhappiness, conflicts and instability and therefore need to be given more attention in practice. Socialization of household tasks through services aimed to alleviate enormous burden of housework as well personal assistance for minors and majors at home would also be highly beneficial, particularly when arranged and funded by local communities.

<sup>12</sup> EU states differ in schemes of leaves from work for parents, mothers and fathers. In 2017 the most extensive paternal leave was in Slovenia – 7 weeks with tendency to be shortened (EPRC, 2014). On varying schemes of a 'daddy quota' more information can be gained in: COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2009).

Finally, there is a whole set of measures aimed at work family balance which are partly overlapping with reducing socio-psychological costs and are of utmost importance for facilitating higher parities and couples' overall happiness/wellbeing. Last but not least, there comes improvement of living standards in Serbia (more and better paid jobs, enhanced work conditions, stable employment and work contracts, fulfilment of employees' human rights, professional promotion routes, better quality housing, health, education, cultural consumption, environmental protection, etc.). Our survey acknowledged vast impoverishment of women in Serbia today, which means actual bleak economic power in both public and private sphere and low negotiation potential for changing gendered performance in everyday lives with a strong effect onto reproduction and further childbearing.

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*Mirjana Bobić\**

## O sociopsihološkoj ceni rađanja – novi uvidi

### *R e z i m e*

Rad se bavi do sada nedovoljno analiziranom stranom niskog fertiliteta u istraživanjima i politikama prema stanovništvu, porodicama i deci, tzv. sociopsihološkom cenom (prvog) rađanja. Reč je o ličnoj percepciji individualnog i roditeljskog blagostanja/sreće i evaluaciji iskustava rađanja prvog ili prethodnog deteta, kao važnim preduslovima za rađanje sledećeg, odnosno višeg reda. Smatra se da ova cena, ako je visoka, predstavlja značajnu prepreku rađanja više dece, posebno drugog i trećeg pariteta. U pokušaju da osvetlimo tu dimenziju objašnjenja nedovoljnog rađanja u savremenim, industrijalizovanim populacijama, u ovom tekstu ćemo ostaviti po strani druge, velike i značajne aspekte materinstva/roditeljstva, kao što su: medicinska i psihološka cena začeća, trudnoće, porođaja, kao i drugi „troškovi” povezani sa ekonomskom cenom roditeljstva, zatim, oportunitetni, pitanja sekundarnog steriliteta, reproduktivnog zdravlja, itd. Ostavljamo po strani i razmatranje jedne velike sfere koja ima velikog uticaja na donošenje odluke o rađanju: usklađivanje rada i roditeljstva, koja se preklapa sa sociopsihološkom cenom rađanja.

U radu se polazi od nesumnjivog značaja teorije druge demografske tranzicije (DDT), koja je pružila solidan okvir za razumevanje i istraživanje niskog fertiliteta od druge polovine 20. veka pa do danas. Njeni su proponenti uspeali da povežu različite demografske, socijalne, ekonomske, kulturne, geografske, nacionalne i političke kontekste i da ukažu na bitne pokretače savremenih populacionih promena u industrijalizovanom svetu, kao što su globalizacija i individualizacija, sa reperkusijama na režimima braćnosti i rađanja. Ova je teorija, međutim, pružila i prilično sumorna predviđanja u odnosu na mogućnost revitalizovanja (već veoma niskog) fertiliteta u bliskoj i daljoj budućnosti. Značaj sociopsihološke dimenzije se naglašava uporedo ili u vezi sa delovanjem politika namenjenih balansiranju rada, porodice i dokolice. Ovi novi uvidi u fenomen niskog fertiliteta bi, smatraju zagovornici, mogli da budu osnova za optimističnije poglede na buduću stabilnost porodice i čak izvesno rehabilitovanje rađanja.

Prethodno navedena teorijska razmatranja su nam poslužila da osvetlimo reproduktivna i partnerska iskustva, stavove i strategije, pozivajući se na empirijska istraživanja, kako strana, tako i domaća. Nasuprot stranim nalazima, domaća istraživanja, recimo poslednje sprovedeno na reprezentativnom uzorku žena 2017, kao i komplementarna, kvalitativna i kvantitativna ispitivanja roditeljstva i partnerstva iz prethodnih godina, pokazala su da je u našoj sredini i dalje prisutna ideologija intenzivnog majčinstva i nuklearne porodice, da je roditeljstvo terminalna vrednost i marker odraslosti, da je brak instrumentalizovan, jer brak bez dece nema puno smisla za naše stanovništvo, kao i da je rodna asimetrija kako na početku roditeljstva, tako i kasnije u toku zajedničkog života, istrajna, normalna i opšteprihvaćena. Paradoksalno, ali samo na prvi pogled, žene izražavaju lično

\* Institut za sociološka istraživanja, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Beograd (Srbija); email: mirjana.bobic@gmail.com.



zadovoljstvo ovakvim stanjem stvari, iako rađaju manje dece nego što žele, odlazu brak i roditeljstvo do 30. godine i kasnije, sve više njih izlaze iz reproduktivnog perioda bez dece i izvan unija, protivno ličnim opredeljenjima, sve više emigriraju. Kada se konačno udaju, rađaju nešto više od jednog deteta u proseku iako žele troje. Dakle, odustaju od daljeg rađanja, maksimalno su opterećene privatnom sferom, a dele ulogu hranioca sa mužem/partnerom, jer su plate i standard stanovništva veoma niski, a siromaštvo veliko. Dominantna patrijarhalna ideologija sužava sve lične izbore i u porodici i izvan nje, proizvodeći negativne demografske i društveno razvojne efekte, iako pledira u njihovu korist. S obzirom na pogubne demografske i socijalne efekte, u vidu veoma niskog fertiliteta, poodmaklog starenja i sve intenzivnije emigracije mladih, dakle, masovnu depopulaciju koja je zahvatila Srbiju, smatramo da je neophodna transformacija privatne sfere, kao i popravljjanje kvaliteta života u svakodnevicu (životnog standarda i stila), demokratizacija društva, poštovanje prava na lične izbore (pa i reproduktivne) i primena sveobuhvatnih mera podrške roditeljima, porodici i deci.

**Ključne reči:** *sociopsihološka cena rađanja, partnerstvo, transformacija rodni uloga, Srbija, politike prema porodici*