

## Reproduction plans of young people<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Causes of fertility rate decline present one of the most burning questions of our time. In principle there are two main theories accounting for this change. The first one regards the cause mainly in economical factors, that is, in the fact that young people are not provided for economically and they can't afford to establish a family (or to have other children), even if they want to. The other theory claims that younger generations have a completely different value system as opposed to their parents. They postpone having a child because they pursue different activities during their youth (education, work carrier, own interests etc.). They plan to establish a family in older age, as they do in many Western European countries.

It can be assumed that behaviour of young generation is affected by both factors simultaneously. So far, however, not many researches dealing with this problem have been carried out. In a research directed at family and childlessness carried out in April by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CVVM) we have therefore decided to ask direct questions about why people do not want a child (or another child) or why they postpone its birth. Certain drawback is a fact that the sample group representative for the whole population of the Czech Republic contained relatively low number of respondents, who were related to these problems. Therefore we couldn't compare the research results according to sex, education and other characteristics, even though such a confrontation would be certainly interesting.

In our analysis we concentrate on the age group up to 34 years. Almost all of the older respondents have already accomplished their reproduction plans. In case of those who are still postponing having a child, there is a high probability that they will not manage to have it during their life (especially women).

### Number of planned offspring

In the group of people under survey between the ages 15 and 34, almost three thirds were without a child. 15 % of respondents had one child and 11 % of respondents had two children. Only less than 2 % of the questioned had three or more children. Respondents were asked how many children or how many other children they wanted to have during their life. In the following table you can see a hypothetic structure of number of children, as it would look like, if all the questioned carried out their reproduction plans.

Tab. 1 The structure of the number of already born and planned children according to sex of respondents (in %).

	Number of children*				
	None	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children
Women	5.2	14.5	66.9	11.0	2.3
Men	2.8	13.1	71.7	11.0	1.4

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 survey (Naše společnost 2004), research 04-04. (N = 172 for women, N = 145 for men). Note: \* sum of planned children and children who were already born.

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The sex of the respondents didn't play any role in the number of planned children. The number of answers was almost the same with both sexes (differences were statistically insignificant). The majority (more than 2/3) of respondents from fifteen to forty years old would like to have two children during their life.<sup>2</sup> The second largest group (on average approximately 14 %) is formed by people, who already have a child and who don't want another one, or those who don't have any children so far and plan to have only one child in the future. Roughly every tenth respondent wants to have a family with three children. People who don't want any children also appeared in the group. However, their representation was too small and therefore insufficient for further analysis. They were mostly teenagers, who are presumed to express a certain kind of demonstrative declaration that they will probably revise later in their lives.

With the birth of the first child, the perspective of total number of planned children changes. Whereas childless respondents claim in seventy-five percent of cases that they would like to have two children, those, who have already experienced birth and education of a child, partly reduce the number of planned offspring. They want to have another child less frequently (only one half of respondents with one child). Among the childless respondents, only thirteen out of a hundred plan to have only one child. Among the parents of one child, however, more than a third of the questioned do not plan to have another child. This indicates that preferences of people with "parental experience" partly shift to one-child families.

#### Age group from 15 to 24 years

Age and stages of life related with age – studies, starting work, gaining independence, etc. – play important role in deciding about establishing or enlarging a family. For further analysis of the causes of postponing the first or another child we have divided the group in two according to age: from 15 to 24 years and from 25 to 34 years. A more subtle division wasn't possible due to a low number of respondents under survey, who fall under group of "young" respondents. In the age group from fifteen to twenty-four years of age, only five respondents had children (three men and two women, 3 % relatively). Remaining 181 respondents (97 % relatively) were childless. None of the addressed men wanted to have a child (or another child) earlier than in one year. Among women, three were pregnant, two wanted to have a child within a year and the rest of them later. Although absolute majority of young respondents between the ages of 15 to 24 plan to have children during their life (85.5 %, 4.8 % don't want children, 9.7 % don't know so far), they postpone their birth into later age. The survey results therefore correspond with current demographic birth rate indicators, according to which the average age of mothers at birth oscillates around the age of 27 let and the most common age of mothers at birth is around 26 years.

The respondents who wanted to have a child later than within one year were presented with a list of possible reasons for postponing the birth of their child. They were asked to state with each of the statements whether it corresponded with their present situation.<sup>3</sup> The statements are arranged according to the acquired score of agreement. The situation given in the statements expresses respondents' reasons for planning the birth of their child in time exceeding one year.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Popularity of family with two children has a long tradition in the Czech Republic. It has been affirmed by the results of surveys that scrutinized respondents' opinion on ideal number of children in a family. The most frequent answer was unbeatably „two children“ (always more than 2/3 of respondents), both in a survey of STEM agency in 1996 and in surveys of CVVM carried out in years 2003 and 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Since the number of respondents between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four who already have a child was insignificant, in our interpreting of reasons for postponing the first child we can regard members of this age group as people who are so-far only planning to establish a family.

<sup>4</sup> Respondent could agree with arbitrary number of reasons at once.

Tab. 2 Reasons for postponement of child in age group from 15 to 24 years (in %) \*

I feel too young for having a child	91.7
My economical situation is not suitable for having a child	85.7
So far, my housing situation is not suitable for having a child	85.7
I study or my partner studies and we do not want to have a child when studying	66.7
So far I don't want to have less time for my work because of a child.	51.2
So far I don't want to have less time for my hobbies because of a child	48.8
My partner feels too young for a child.	46.4
I don't have a suitable partner.	46.4
So far my partner doesn't want to have a child.	45.2
So far I don't want to have a child because of different reason.	6.3
So far I am fully occupied by taking care of children who I already have.	2.4

Source: CVVM, Our Society survey 2004, research 04-04 (N = 84). Note:\* sum of answers certainly yes and rather yes (The sum of 100 % in every line is completed by summing up of answers “rather not”, “certainly not” and “doesn't know”).

Respondents were also asked to evaluate each statement individually and state to which extent it corresponded with their current situation. Their answers don't clarify, however, what is the main reason for postponing the birth of their child in further future. A considerable part of the questioned stated that they felt too young for starting a family. At the same time they stated they didn't have suitable economical and housing conditions. In the following step the questioned were therefore supposed to choose among the offered reasons only one that was most important for their current decision-making (Table 3). More than a half of respondents indicated their low age as the most important reason. The frequencies of answers signify that unsuitable economic and housing situation that was most mentioned most frequently, together with low age, by majority of respondents, do not present the main cause for postponing a child in this age group.<sup>5</sup> Typical respondents of scrutinized age group between fifteen and twenty-four years plans to have children during their life. They regard themselves to be too young for starting a family, they often still study or still looking for a partner and they pursue their own interests. At the same time they want to be in a suitable economic situation and have a place for living before having a child.

Tab. 3 Main reasons for postponement of child in the age group from 15 – 24 years (in %)

I feel too young for a child.	51.4
I study or my partner studies and we do not want to have a child when studying	18.6
I don't have a suitable partner	10.1
So far my economical situation is not suitable for a child.	7.1
So far my housing conditions are not suitable for a child.	7.1
So far I don't want to reduce the time I spent on my interests because of a child.	2.9
My partner feels too young for a child	1.4
So far I don't want to have less time I devote to my work because of a child.	1.4
Total	100

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 survey, research 04-04 (N = 70).

<sup>5</sup> The order of main reasons for postponing a child doesn't change even when we count only with respondents from the age group from 20 to 24 years.

### Age group from 25 to 34 years

The members of the age group from 25 to 34 years have differed substantially from the group analysed above both in their opinions and in their structure according to number of children. The share of the childless ones in this group is 48 %. From the total of 193 questioned, 28 % are parents of one child, 20 % are parents of two children and 4 % parents of three children. Approximately one third of the questioned certainly don't want to have a child in the future. Majority of them, however, are people who already have at least one child. Six out of ten respondents plan to have a child and 9 % are still undecided. The timing of having a child in this age group is also different from the age group from fifteen to twenty four years. Eleven respondents were pregnant at the time of the research (10 % out of these, who indicated that they wanted to have a child in the future). Another 20% (including both women and men) would like to conceive a child within twelve months. We asked those, who plan to have a child in time exceeding one year (60 %), for the reasons of their decision (tab. 4).

Tab. 4 Reasons for postponement of child in age group from 25 – 34 years (in %) \*

So far my economic situation is not suitable for having a child	56.9
So far my housing conditions are not suitable for having a child	55.4
I feel to young for having a child	33.8
So far I don't want to reduce the time I devote to my work because of a child	33.8
So far my partner doesn't want to have a child	33.8
My partner feels too young for having a child	23.1
So far I am fully occupied by my other children	21.9
I don't have a suitable partner	20.0
So far I don't want to have less time I devote to my interests because of a child	18.5
I study or my partner studies and we do not want to have a child when studying	15.4
So far I don't want to have a child because of some other reasons	5.6

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 survey, research 04-04 (N = 65). Note: \* sum of answers certainly yes and rather yes (The sum of 100 % in every line is completed by summing up of answers "rather not", "certainly not" and "doesn't know").

More than a half of respondents don't have suitable economic or housing conditions for the birth of a child in the time horizon of one year.<sup>6</sup> One third of the questioned still feel too young for having a child, they don't want to limit their work activities or their partner doesn't want a child. Roughly one fifth of respondents have a partner who is too young or they don't have a partner at all. The same number of the questioned is still fully occupied by taking care of children they already have. Another group of respondents (19 %) don't want to restrict the time they devote to their interests or they don't want to have children during their studies (15 %).

The summary of the most important reasons for postponement of child indicated by "older" respondents is very heterogeneous (tab. 5). No significant group has agreed on one statement.

<sup>6</sup> Due to a small number of this group (25 to 34 years) it is impossible to distinguish whether we deal with postponement of the first child or of another child.

Table 5 Main reasons for the postponement of a child in age group from 25 to 34 years (in %).

I don't have a suitable partner	14.3
So far my economic situation is not suitable for having a child	12.5
So far my housing conditions are not suitable for having a child	12.5
I feel to young for having a child	12.5
I study / my partner still studies and we don't want to have a child when studying	12.5
So far I don't want to have less time I devote to my work because of a child	10.7
So far I am fully occupied by my other children	8.8
My partner feels too young for a child.	5.4
So far I don't want to reduce the time I devote to my interests because of a child	3.6
So far I don't want to have a child because of health problems.	3.6
So far I don't want to have a child because of some other reasons	3.6
Total	100

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2004 survey, research 04-04 (N = 56).

The highest number of the respondents plans to conceive a child within a minimum time horizon of one year, because they still don't have a suitable partner. Almost the same number of respondents stated unsuitable economic and housing conditions, young age, studies and carrier as the main reason for postponement of child. The diversity of reasons for postponement of child is to a significant degree caused by fact, that the age group from twenty-five to forty years includes both parents with children and childless respondents, who are still studying. Such respondents do not necessarily have to differ in age. A student (for example twenty-seven years old) or someone of the same age, who has been working for several years already, regard their situation differently. Whether one feels to be too young for a child is a strictly subjective matter. It doesn't have to be connected only with age, but also with the stage of life in which respondents find themselves at the given moment. The dividing line between people, who declare their "youth" as a reason for their provisional childlessness and those who indicate different reasons cannot be established strictly by age. Whether the respondents already have a child or whether they are childless plays an important role in their decision when they will have a child (or another child). The fact that we don't know whether the respondents talk about their first child or about other children complicates the interpretation of the survey results. We have therefore decided to analyse the results for postponing reproduction according to number of children, without regard to respondent's age. From 79 childless respondents, 84 % want to have a child in the future, 5 % want to remain childless and 11 % are undecided. Almost one half (47 %) of those, who are childless so far, but want to have children in the future, want to have them in time exceeding one year. The main reasons for postponing childbirth in this group were youth (16 % of the questioned) and studies (7 % of the questioned). One twentieth of childless respondents don't have a suitable partner so far. Three people out of one hundred stated unsuitable economic or housing situation as the main obstacle for establishing a family right away.

More than a half (56 %) of those, who are already raising one child (out of total of 57), plan to have other children. A third of the questioned don't want to have another child to their only child. Remaining "childless" respondents are not decided yet about the total number of their children. The numbers of research participants, who had one child and didn't plan another, or who planned to have another child in more than a year, were so small, that it is not relevant to analyse their reasons.

Majority of parents of two children (83 % out of the total number of 41) do not plan another offspring - we have therefore asked them for reasons of their decision. The main and

practically the only reason is expressed by a statement, that they already have as many children as they wanted.<sup>7</sup>

### Conclusion

As the research indicates, the absolute majority of the questioned plan to start a family in the future. The biggest group of the questioned plans to have two children. The main shift from the previous period (e.g. the period up to the beginning of nineties) is a shift in what is regarded as suitable age for establishing a family. Majority of people up to the age of 24 agreed with the statement, that they were too young for having a child. Half of them mentioned their youth as the main reason for postponement of children. Every third respondent between the ages of 25 to 34 years also feels too young for having a child. In the last but one census in 1991 almost three thirds of 24-year-old women were mothers of at least one child. Men established families just a little bit later (the difference was roughly two years).

Other significant reasons for the postponement of a child mentioned by young respondents up to the age of 24 were unsuitable economic and housing conditions. Both reasons were mentioned identically by 85 % of respondents from this age group. However, respondents may regard these unsuitable conditions as a temporary situation related to the life stage, in which they currently find themselves – studies or the beginning of work carrier. This can be concluded from the fact that majority of them did not mention economical factors as the main reason.

Older respondents (from 25 to 34 years) have more various reasons for postponing having a child. It is also due to a bigger heterogeneity of this group from the socio-demographic point of view. In some cases, respondents talked about postponing birth of their second child. Their reasons are logically different from the reasons of those, who are only thinking about establishing a family. Among childless respondents who are over 25 years old often rank people with higher education and higher ambitions, but there are also people who are unsuccessful in life. Identical number of respondents indicated economical and housing conditions, absence of a suitable partner as well as studies and professional activities as the main reason for postponing birth of their children into higher age.

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<sup>7</sup> Only minimum respondents mentioned other reasons and at the same time none of these reasons was mentioned by more than one respondent.