

YOUNG RESEARCHERS

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Influence of Reproductive Behavior of the Population of the Komi Republic on the Functioning of the Institute of Parenthood*



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Abstract. The paper studies the peculiarities of reproductive behavior of the Komi Republic residents. It describes the dynamics of quantitative indicators of fertility, analyzes the qualitative characteristics of reproductive behavior of the Komi Republic residents and determines the nature of their influence on the state of the institute of parenthood. The article gives the definitions of “reproductive behavior”, “parenthood” and establishes their relationship. The aim of the research is to identify the processes and phenomena that characterize the qualitative aspects of reproductive behavior, which could have an adverse impact on the functioning of the institute of parenthood; the study also aims to develop recommendations for the minimization of the negative phenomena. To achieve the objectives of the study based on statistical data, the author analyzes the demographic processes and phenomena that are characteristic of the Komi Republic and that have an adverse effect on the functioning of the institute of parenthood, and makes an attempt to establish cause-effect relations between these phenomena. The study has found that the number of children born to teenage mothers is decreasing; however, the level of underage motherhood in Russia remains above the national average. The paper points out hypothetical reasons why underage girls become

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mothers. An adverse impact on the functioning of the institute of parenthood is provided by a significant number of incomplete, mainly maternal, families with underage children. Their share increases due to a high level of out-of-wedlock births, divorce rates of families in the early stages of marriage, significant mortality in working age men. The author raises the issues of paternal deprivation, division of biological and de facto parenthood, describes the phenomenon of the spreading of common-law marriages. The paper analyzes the potential of out-of-wedlock births based on the data on the proportion of births registered at the request of both parents or the mother only. The research findings show that, despite the improvement in the quantitative indicators of fertility in recent years, some qualitative characteristics of reproductive behavior of the population of the Komi Republic require optimization. Taking into account regional specifics, the author proposes the measures necessary to reduce the level and prevalence of demographic processes and phenomena that can negatively affect the functioning of the institute of parenthood.

Key words: reproductive behavior; underage motherhood; out-of-wedlock births; divorce rate; gender imbalance; institute of parenthood; demographic policy objectives.

Since the beginning of the 2000s the fertility processes in the Komi Republic have been characterized by the upward trend. On the one hand, the positive changes were caused by the improved age structure of childbearing populations. Numerous generations born in 1980–1986 and having relatively high reproductive standards are of active reproductive age nowadays. On the other hand, there was the following reason: stabilization of the socio-economic situation in the country, strongly contrasting with the crisis, which lasted during the 1990s. Since the mid 2000 we can observe another factor, crucial for improving the demographic situation in the country and in the Komi Republic. Within the framework of the state demographic policy it is introduction of birth rate incentives, that is provision of families with 2 children with maternity (family) capital certificates at the federal level and with 3 or more children – at the regional level since 2011.

The intensification of political initiatives led to significant changes in the calendar of births: the postponed childbearing intentions of women of older reproductive age were realized and the number of births among younger generations increased. As a result, in the republic in 2011 natural population decline was replaced by natural growth. Already in 2012 there were 14 births per 1,000 population, whereas under the Concept for demographic development of the Komi Republic the increase in the birth rate should be not less than the 13.2 births per 1,000 population by 2015 [10]. However, the main indicators of fertility in the Komi Republic are above the national average. So, in 2013 the total fertility rate amounted to 14.2‰, which was by 7.6% higher than the national average. The differentiation of the total fertility rate between the republican and all-Russian level has been also growing since 2011 in favor of the republic. In 2013 in Russia 1.71 children

accounted for 1 woman of reproductive age throughout the childbearing period, in Komi – 1.97, i.e., the difference amounted to 15.2%. Of course, the quantitative increase in the birth rate, its intensity and the realization of postponed childbearing intentions occupy an important place in solving the problem of preservation of the Northern territories.

However, the deeper look at fertility as a process of new generation reproduction involves the analysis of qualitative aspects of fertility. In a narrow sense reproductive behavior means “a system of actions, relations and mental states of a personality connected with the birth or non-birth of children of any order, in or out of wedlock” [14, pp. 384-386], in a broad sense – this concept includes “care of children, their upbringing and training and adults’ acquisition of new social and psychological characteristics” [5, p. 369]. In other words, the latter definition of the term “reproductive behavior” focuses on parenthood as well. This reveals not only the importance of reproduction of new generations, expressed in the quantitative aspects of fertility, but also parents’ involvement in the upbringing and development of children as their natural obligation after the child’s birth.

In a broad sense parenting is a “complex social formation, a structural element of society, fulfilling specific functions and interacting with society as a whole and its individual elements. Parenthood can be described as a set of subjects, diverse, multifaceted relations, events, processes

and social practices, which is formed and supported by society and constantly renewed in life activities of people adopting social norms and integrating into society. In the framework of parenthood they realize roles of fathers, mothers, parents, children, sons, daughters, etc., each role has its own social, legal and economic status” [15, p. 43].

According to E.M. Lushchenko and S.I. Nekrasov, “parenting is a complex social phenomenon, unique both for an individual and society as a whole. Being, on the one hand, a necessary condition for the reproduction of its future generations and, on the other hand, an element of the personality sphere, parenthood is one of the most important values of culture. In communication with parents, joint activity with them a child learns the first concepts about world, society, becomes familiar with human culture and acquires individual traits that gradually form a unique personality. Sociality is mainly presented by parents” [12, p. 124]. Becoming parents, spouses acquire a number of responsibilities in relation to it. The country’s main document, regulating family relationships – the Family Code of the Russian Federation – stipulates that “parents have the right and the obligation to raise their children. Parents are responsible for the upbringing and the development of their children. They are obliged to care about health, physical, mental, spiritual and moral development of their children” [18].

Under broad definition of reproductive behavior, this article is focused on identifying

the processes and phenomena that characterize the qualitative aspects of reproductive behavior of the population (they can have an adverse affect on the operation of parenthood in the Komi Republic) and elaborating practical recommendations. The achievement of this goal requires implementation of the tasks, such as analysis of dynamics of the processes and phenomena that characterize the qualitative aspect of implementation of reproductive behavior of the population, determination of impact of these demographic processes on parenthood functioning and study of researchers' views and opinions on this topic.

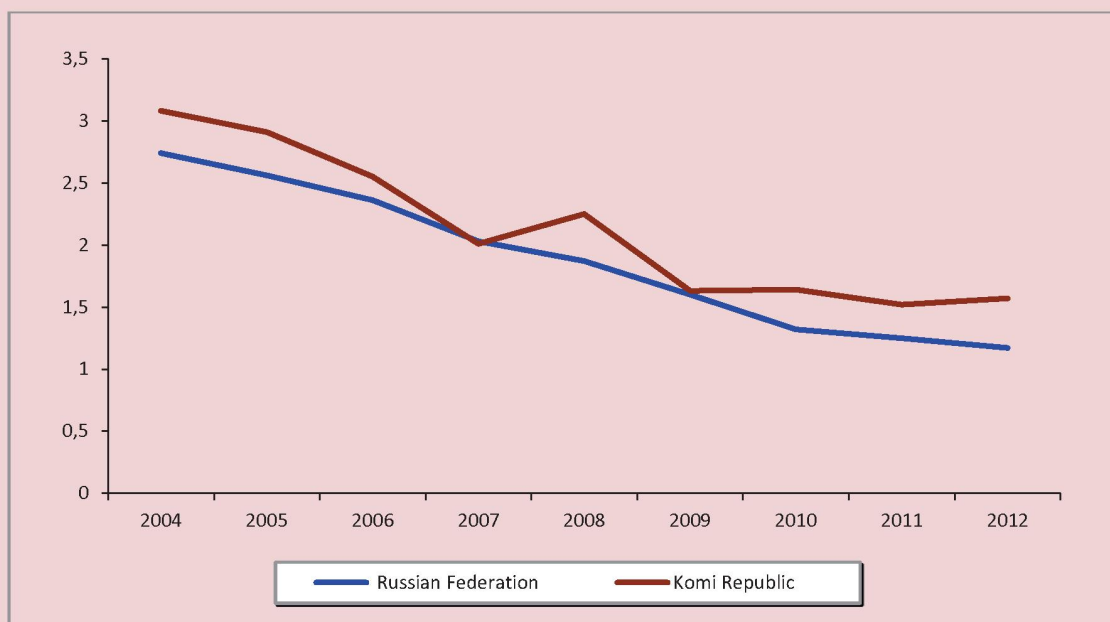
It is difficult to overestimate the relevance of such research, as the federal laws aimed at improving pro-family and demographic policy lay emphasis on the implementation of measures to "create conditions for family well-being, responsible parenting, raise parental authority in family and society and maintain social stability of every family" [9], "strengthen the institution of the family, revive and preserve spiritual and moral traditions of family relations" [11]. The Concept for RF state family policy up to 2025 proclaims the following traditional family values: value of marriage, understood as a union of a man and a woman, based on state registration in the civil registry office, aimed at creating a family, birth and (or) joint upbringing of children, based on care and respect for each other, children and parents, characterized by voluntariness, stability and joint life, associated with mutual desire of spouses and all family members for its preservation" [9].

The analysis of statistical data concerning the qualitative aspects of reproductive behavior indicates the presence of a number of problematic phenomena in this area. Thus, according to the available data, despite the recent positive trend in underage motherhood, pregnancy of girls under 17 years remains above the national average (*fig. 1*).

We can distinguish several hypothetical causes of childbearing among girls under age. First, pregnancy of girls of junior and senior teenage age is a result of irresponsible attitude of adults. Teenager's parents form the perception of childbearing as a step that requires full responsibility and awareness, primarily by their own example and conversations on the subject. If both components are satisfied, there is practically no risk of young motherhood. Second, early sexual activity among adolescents can be caused by the desire to experience feeling of love. The longing to be grown-up and loved can be very obtrusive in the mind of a teenage girl; in such circumstances the denial of sexual relations becomes difficult and even undesirable, as a minor girl shows interest in this aspect of human relationships. As a result, due to regular sexual activity an adolescent girl has welcome or unwanted, unplanned pregnancy.

Third, due to sexual permissiveness and emancipation promoted in the media early, sexual relationships are often perceived as an ideal, a norm among teenagers and young people, and the broadcasted slogan "to try everything as early as possible" often does not imply any responsibility for the

Figure 1. Share of live births to mothers aged 17 and younger in the general structure of births in the Russian Federation and the Komi Republic, 2004–2012, in % to the total number of births



Calculated by: *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii. 2005–2013* [Demographic Yearbook of Russia. 2005–2013]. Available at: http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1137674209312.

consequences. A number of authors also express the significance of mass media impact on the formation of norms of reproductive behavior of the younger generation. So, E.I. Zritneva notes that in modern conditions “mass media products has sexual content on purpose, forms casual attitude to sexual relations. As a result, every year thousands of underage girls give birth to children out of wedlock and join the ranks of incomplete, often dysfunctional families” [7, p. 150]. In the framework of the sociological analysis of the birth rate in Russia E.S. Smetanina writes that “children, especially teenagers,

absorb values represented in the media on a subconscious level and perceive them as a norm. That is why parents, and to some extent the society should protect the younger generation from harmful effects” [20, p. 111]. It should be emphasized that, despite the list of hypothetical reasons that contribute to the dynamics of underage motherhood, it is necessary study this phenomenon more deeply, using sociological methods to obtain more complete knowledge about cause-effect relationships in this sphere.

Analyzing underage motherhood in terms of its impact on parenthood, we should

emphasize that young mothers, especially those who have become pregnant in early adolescence, often face many diverse problems. First, a young mother is challenged to provide a baby with all necessary things for its life and development. Now not only a young mother, but also her child is dependent either on her parents – if the child is born in the family, or the state – if the child was born to a teen without parental care. Second, a teenage girl, expecting a child, can experience psychological pressure and discomfort because of the misunderstanding and condemnation of her parents, peers and teachers. Thus, a girl can conceal her pregnancy or find it difficult to carry a child.

Third, the socialization aspect of young mothers is also at a low level. As a child, who has not passed all stages of her own socialization, an adolescent mother often does not have necessary social and intrapersonal experiences, knowledge, abilities and skills that she could inculcate in a growing child. Often a minor mother has to raise a child without a husband. The problem arises not due to the fact that about 80% of the pregnant girls are not married – this can be changed in the future, if a father recognizes a child, but due to the fact that babies born to young mothers are registered at the request of one mother. So, in 2013 these births accounted for 60% of the births to adolescents out of wedlock, or 46.4% of the total number of births to young mothers [6, p. 18]. However, despite the above reasons of young pregnancy and the factors affecting juvenile

motherhood, the decision of a young girl to continue her pregnancy is very valuable. She can succeed in her role of a mother due to the help of her parents, close environment and public services, especially in the early stages after the baby is born.

The significant proportion of single-parent, mostly maternal families in the overall family structure of the Komi Republic entails distribution of paternal deprivation among children and separation of biological and factual paternity. There are several causes of the spread of single-parent families in the Komi Republic. The first is a high illegitimate birth rate. The estimated dynamics of the illegitimate birth rate shows its growth since the first half of the 1980s. Only since the second half of the 2000s the rate has begun to decrease gradually. In comparison with the maximum value of the illegitimate birth rate, observed in the Komi Republic in 2005, by 2013 the share of illegitimate births had decreased from 42.3% to 31.9% in the republic as a whole, from 38.7 to 27.6% among urban population and from 53.5 to 42.9% among rural. The fact that the peak of illegitimate births occurred in the first half of the 2000s can be associated with the beginning of birth rate growth. The population, constraining the realization of their reproductive plans in the difficult 1990s, started active implementation of childbearing intentions, including out of wedlock.

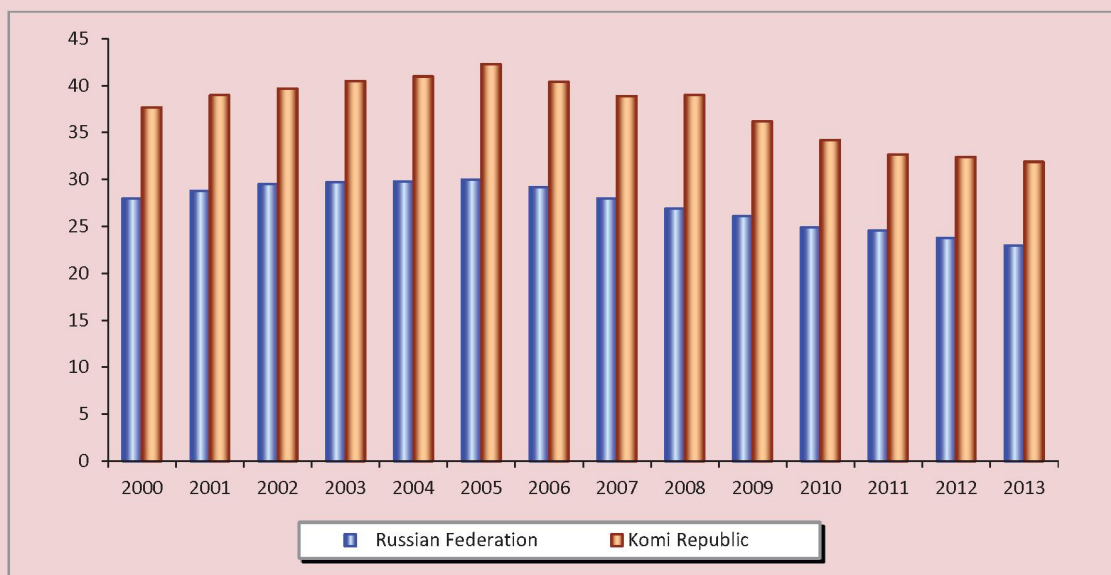
However, positive developments in this indicator do not downgrade the relevance of the illegitimate birth problem in the republic,

especially if we compare its level with the all-Russian. Of course, this problem is critical not only in the Komi Republic, but in the country as a whole, if we consider it in the long-term dynamics. The share of non-marital births in the overall fertility structure both in Russia and the Komi Republic reached its maximum in 2005 in comparison with 1990: at the national level – by 2.05 times (from 14.6 to 30.0%) and in the Komi Republic – by 2.55 times (from 16.6 to 42.3%) [16, p. 12; 4; 17, p. 7; 2, p. 46]. Since 2005 this indicator had gradually decreasing and in 2013 the percentage of non-marital births in the Russian Federation

amounted to 23.0, in the Komi Republic – 31.9. As you can see, despite the general downward trend, the problem of illegitimate births in the Komi Republic is acute in the 21st century: since the 2000s the illegitimate birth rate in the republic has been annually exceeding the national average by 1.4 times (fig. 2).

The 2002 and 2010 All-Russian census data also indicate a significant rise in the proportion of unregistered marriages during the intercensal period. So, if in 2002 of the total number of families only 14.1% had not registered their marriage officially, in 2010 this figure

Figure 2. Dynamics of the illegitimate birth share in the total birth structure in the Russian Federation and in the Komi Republic, in 2000–2013, %



Sources: *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Rossii. 2002–2014* [Demographic Yearbook of Russia. 2002–2014]. Available at: http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1137674209312; *Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Respubliki Komi. 2014: stat. sbornik* [Demographic Yearbook of the Komi Republic. 2014: Statistics Collection]. *Komistat* [Regional Office of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation in the Komi Republic]. Syktyvkar, 2014, p. 46.

increased to 19.8%; in other words, almost every fifth family in the republic did not register their marriage [8, p. 49]. The spread of non-marital unions in the Komi Republic was another factor hindering the achievement of the national level by illegitimate births indicator.

The analysis of the illegitimate birth structure by birth order shows that in the republic in 2013 of 3972 children born out of wedlock the first births (52%) and the second (34%) make up the majority. Women of active marriage and reproductive ages make the main contribution to the age structure of illegitimate births. So, in 2013 of all children born out of wedlock 27.0% were born to women aged 20–24, 29.2% – women aged 25–29, 19.1% – aged 30–34. E.S. Mitrofanova interprets the fact that the illegitimate birth structure is dominated by births of low order, realized mainly by women of active marriage and reproductive ages as follows: “Since the last decades of the 20th century accidental pregnancy has ceased to serve as a sufficient reason for marriage, and the attitude to premarital sexual behavior has changed [13, p. 522]. S.I. Golod also believes that “the consistency with which to a relatively greater extent the maternal model is reproduced, undoubtedly, points to the liberalization of public opinion towards a having a child out of wedlock” [1, p. 118].

In terms of the wide distribution of illegitimate births the identification of socializing potential of the families with these children through the analysis of the share of

births registered by both parents or a single mother becomes extremely important. It is favorable that the Komi Republic in 1995–2013 was characterized by illegitimate births registered at the request of both parents. Their share is even higher than in Russia, where since the 1970s births registered at the request of a mother have been dominating. So, at the national level in 2012 of all the illegitimate births 47.5% were registered at the request of both parents, in 2013 – 50.2%. At the same time, in the Komi Republic the share of jointly registered illegitimate births amounted to 56.7% in 2012 and 59.2 % in 2013.

The prevalence of births registered by both parents, of course, is a positive characteristic of illegitimate births in the Komi Republic, as in this case a “father officially recognizes a child and assumes certain parental responsibilities. Most of these births can be interpreted either as ones in de facto marital unions with both parents, with some of them being registered later, or as ones in visiting families where a child will experience a father’s influence to some degree during the process of his/her socialization” [17, p. 57]. In terms of socializing potential births registered at the request of a mother are most unfavorable. In the Komi Republic its rate had been characterized by the upward trend since 2003 and the downward trend since 2008, reaching 1621 birth or 13% of all births in 2013. The problem is that a father does not recognize a baby or he does not know about a child. However, the absence of a male parent

in child's life can either be eliminated if a woman marries, or extended throughout the entire period of child's personality formation if a woman lives alone.

The structure of family patterns in the Komi Republic is also being transformed due to the gender imbalance of the population structure caused by the high mortality of men of working age. At the beginning of 2014 in the Komi Republic 47.3% of men accounted for 52.8% of women. Until 2009 the preponderance of women over men started with the age group 40–44, since 2010 – the age group 35–39. Up to a certain age men prevail in the total population due to the predominance of boys in the birth structure, which in principle is a biologically determined fact. In 2000–2013 in the Komi Republic the number of boys born exceeded the number of girls born by 2–8%.

However, immediately after birth the share of boys begins to decrease steadily, since almost in all ages the male mortality rate is higher than the female. The indicators of mortality of men of working age are particularly significant; hence, the age group 35–39 experiences transformation of gender proportions. So, in 2013 “of all the deaths 35% accounted for people of working ages (2012 – 37%), of them 81% – for men” [6, p. 35]. This is, in general, coincides with the national situation: in 2013 the death rate of men of working age comprised 79.6%. In the same year, in the Komi Republic in comparison with Russia as a whole the structure of death causes has a “lower mortality rate from diseases of

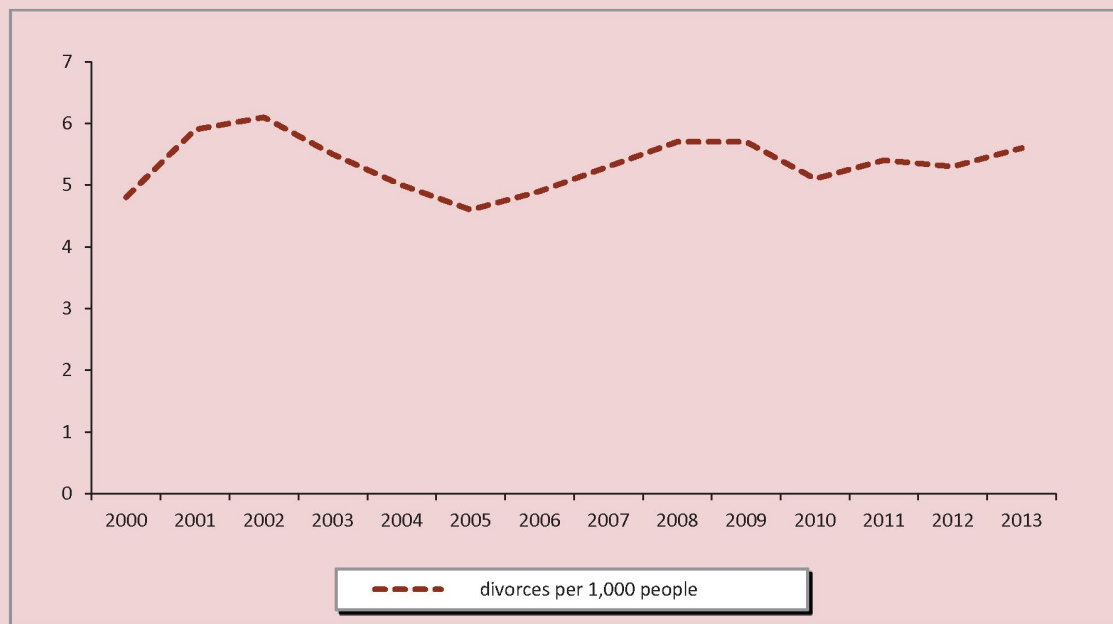
the circulatory system, respiratory system, neoplasms, certain infectious and parasitic diseases and a higher rate from diseases of the digestive system and external causes” [6, p. 35].

It should be noted that in the republic, unlike the country as a whole, only in 2011 the external causes naturally ranged the third in the structure of death causes. The abuse of alcohol and its surrogates in the Komi Republic still has a much more significant impact on the overall mortality rate than in Russia as a whole. In 2013 accidental alcohol poisoning in the structure of external death causes amounted to 17% in the republic and 6% in Russia [6, p. 36]. The fact that the significant share in the structure of mortality of working age men belongs to external causes, means that to reduce mortality in this population group it is necessary to promote a healthy lifestyle.

The share of incomplete families is increasing in the Komi Republic due to divorces. In general, in 2000–2013 their rate was fairly stable, except for a slight increase in one direction or another in different years (*fig. 3*).

However, the divorce rate structure by marriage duration is very alarming. People divorce at an early stage of family formation. In 2013, of all the dissolved marriages “42% accounted for marriages that had not survived the difficult period of family development (up to 5 years)” [6, p. 67]. Unfortunately, it is statistically impossible to measure the break-off of officially unregistered marriages.

Figure 3. Dynamics of the general divorce rate in the Komi Republic, 2000–2013



Source: Demograficheskii ezhegodnik Respubliki Komi. 2014: stat. sbornik [Demographic Yearbook of the Komi Republic. 2014: Statistics Collection]. *Komistat* [Regional Office of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation in the Komi Republic]. Syktyvkar, 2014, p. 107.

Surely, their rate is higher than the rate of termination of officially registered ones. First, the very form of cohabitation without marriage initially involves a low level of personal responsibility for strengthening and preserving families. Second, it is quite simple to split up, as there is no necessity to apply for public services. It also contributes to the realization of a hasty decision to discontinue a relationship.

The collapse of almost half of couples in the period of family formation suggests that young people at the time of marriage are “not ready for serious relations, difficulties of an adaptation period in the marriage

and construction of a lasting harmonious relationship, not focused on preservation of a family, its strengthening and resolution of conflicts through compromise. The psychologists say that today the youth has no will and ability to perform duties of a family person, is characterized by a poorly developed sense of responsibility, but a highly developed desire for getting pleasure. Hence, there is a hedonistic attitude to marriage when people expect it to be pleasant and split up easily when addressing problems” [7, p. 149]. Undoubtedly, early divorces affect the functioning of parenthood, as during the first years of family formation children

are born and after divorce they grow up in the family with one biological parent, in the overwhelming number of cases – with the mother.

Of course, in the future the functions of a father can be fulfilled by a non-biological father, as, according to the statistics, about one-third of the marriages recorded in the Komi Republic in recent years are remarriages. There is another widespread form of cohabitation, such as an unregistered union. However, remarriages also have some difficulties, namely accepting family members (including children from a previous marriage) by new spouses; transfer of past unsuccessful experience to a newly created relationship; formation of relations with children of a new spouse (usually by a stepfather), which are not always happy and confidential.

However, the value of having a father involved in the child's life is difficult to overestimate. In addition to the traditional role of a "breadwinner" and a family protector from external threats, a father, actively participating in the child's life, performs a number of important socio-psychological functions: formation of pro-social behavior in the child; ensuring the state of psychological comfort; discipline and social control; formation of responsibility and autonomy; effect on the child's sexual identity. The lack of a father involved in the life and development of the child has a negative impact both on the formation of his/her personality and attitudes in the sphere of demographic behavior. In conditions when in the family the child

is brought up by a mother and the social institutions of upbringing and education also wear a female face, it often becomes very difficult to gain sufficient experience for the formation of a responsible attitude to parenthood.

Thus, we can conclude that a number of phenomena and processes characterizing qualitative aspects of reproductive behavior of the population in the Komi Republic have a negative impact on the functioning of parenthood and are detrimental to the preservation of traditional family values, enshrined at the state level in the Concept of family policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025. Due to the high level of illegitimate births in the Komi Republic, especially in the rural areas, the gender imbalance in the population structure due to the high mortality of men of working age and the spread of divorces among couples in the early stages of family formation, children, as a rule, are forced to grow up with a single mother, experiencing paternally deprivation, or in full families, but not with a biological father. The family or social services should pay special attention to young mothers performing their parent roles. Their number in the Komi Republic exceeds the national average. The causes of pregnancy among adolescent girls require a separate study. The analysis of features of reproductive behavior of the republic's population shows that children cease to be a deterrent to family preservation, the importance of officially registered marriages is declining, as evidenced

by the fact that pregnancy is not always a sufficient basis for marriage, the gap between matrimonial and reproductive behavior is growing and the link between biological and actual parenthood is breaking.

The identified problems serve as an urge to step up measures of family and demographic policy, directed on their solution, such as.

1. Increasing contraceptive culture and literacy of sexual behavior of population to reduce risks of unwanted pregnancy. It possible to implement these measures by means of production of booklets on the topic and their distribution in places of concentration of the youth and among women from the social risk group; advising women on how to avoid an unwanted pregnancy in antenatal clinics.

2. Promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing smoking, alcohol and drug abuse as factors negatively influencing the health of population and born generations and the mortality rate of men, including of able-bodied age, in the media, medical and educational institutions, enterprises, in the framework of social responsibility of managers.

3. Constant monitoring of the causes of irresponsible parenting, divorce rates of the population, births to unmarried and teenage mothers in the region to build a clearly defined and methodologically sound program, offering measures to address the identified problems and meeting the challenges of modern time and taking into account regional specificities.

4. Raising the share of TV programs with the participation of specialists-theorists, researchers of the institution of the family,

other professionals interacting with families and strong families, ready to share information about traditional family values, parental functions and importance to involve both family members in the education of their children, so that the letter can develop and socialize successfully.

5. Expanding the practice of wide-scale cultural and creative activities to increase significance of family values and parenthood. There is a vivid example of this direction – the all-Russian short film festival “Family of Russia: conducted in Russia since 2004. The great attention is paid there to “poetization of the institution of the family; strengthening of traditional family values; creation of an online resource of films and photographs devoted to family wellbeing and parent success” [19]. Such events should be held throughout Russia and the short films-participants of the festival – broadcasted on central Russian TV channels, in educational institutions, analyzed and discussed among young people; psychologists (specialists in social work) should be invited to such meetings.

6. Since the Komi Republic is a subject characterized by a large number of institutions of secondary and higher professional education, the conduct of annual events aimed at discussing the functioning of the institution of the family and parenthood among the youth can become a vector of this direction implementation (for example, the Forum “Conscious parenthood”).

7. Carrying out guidance work with residents on strengthening the conviction that

marital conflicts and crises are part of the family relationship development, but not a reason for divorce (except for extreme cases: alcoholism, drug addiction of one of the spouses, child abuse, various forms of discrimination and violence).

8. Dissemination of the information among young people that when married a mother and her child are to the greatest degree protected by the state.

9. Expanding the practice of letters of gratitude for merits in the upbringing of children: for good grades, creative achievements, development of various forms of

family leisure, etc. in pre-school, school and higher educational institutions, creative, children and work teams.

10. Although the process to promote traditional family values is actively supported by the state and the media, the family certainly remains an initial institute to transfer values. The family should teach children the basic purpose of a woman (birth and upbringing of children, maintaining the home) and a man (be responsible for his family, morally strong in life circumstances, be able to make decisions that will have the best impact on the lives of families and children).

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