

**What Is So Scary About Having Children?
A Mixed-Methods Study on Voluntary Childlessness in Poland**

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore motives of Polish women, who consciously decide to remain childless and who are very strongly oriented against motherhood. While childlessness is not a new phenomenon, its nature has changed over the last decades. Nowadays, in the developed societies, an increasing number of men and women consciously choose to have no offspring (Rowland, 2007) and childbearing has become a deliberate choice rather than a natural developmental stage (Miller, 1983; Morgan & King, 2001). The question on whether people want to have children and the topic of voluntary childlessness have become highly relevant.

We address the issue of childlessness in Poland, where the level of childlessness has been increasing considerably in recent cohorts. Among women born in 1945-1955, 8% remained childless and this share increased to over 15% for those born in 1965 (Frejka, 2008). Matysiak (2014) estimated that around 17% in the cohort of 1970 had never born a child and Sobotka (2004) forecasted a further increase of childlessness up to 22-25% for women born in 1975. And even though it appears that the majority of childless women in Poland have no children involuntarily (due to a lack of partner, medical problems or economic limitations), some of the nulliparous Poles declare that they have never wanted to have any children (Mynarska, Matysiak, & Rybińska, 2014). With this study we wish to advance our knowledge on these women.

We apply a mixed-methods approach to gain insights into motives of women who consciously chose to remain childless. We focus on nulliparous women, aged (around) 30-40, as this is the age when (in

most cases) the final decision for or against having children needs to be made. First, we employ the Polish version of the Warren Miller's Childbearing Questionnaire (CBQ, Miller, 1995; Mynarska & Rytel, 2014) to investigate what motives constitute a definite anti-natal position (a strong desire to remain childless). Next, we analyse a set of in-depth interviews with women, who scored very low on the childbearing motivation scale (CBQ). The qualitative findings corroborate and illustrate our statistical results and allow for an in-depth understanding of motives that lead to childlessness.

Method and Sample

The Polish version of the Miller's Childbearing Questionnaire (CBQ) was administered to 470 childless women aged 25-45. In the investigations presented here, we limited our sample to women aged 30-40 thus our analytic sample consists of 345 respondents. In the questionnaire, they were asked to evaluate to what extent various consequences of having a child are desirable or undesirable for them. They evaluated 35 potentially positive and 29 potentially negative consequences (positive and negative motives or values and costs of children). An exploratory Principal Components analysis was used to identify dimensions of positive and negative motives. Next, we used the revealed dimensions and investigated which of them are most important for a desire to have a child. Regression methods were used to find the strongest determinants of an anti-natal position of young women.

In the next step, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 55 childless women (aged 30-43), characterized by different levels of childbearing motivation, as measured by the Childbearing Questionnaire. For the purpose of this paper, we analyse 20 interviews with women with the lowest scores. We use the bottom-up (open) coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to reconstruct their key arguments against having children.

Preliminary results

In the quantitative part of our study, we identified several dimensions of childbearing motives. Among positive motives, we identified (1) an emotional-affective dimension, (2) an instrumental dimension and (3) a dimension related to fulfilling mother's role. Among negative motives (fears related to parenthood), we identified five dimensions: (1) burden, time and energy necessary for children; (2) a risk of having an unhappy or ill child, (3) stress for a couple, (4) a fear of failing as a parent and (5) worries related to raising children. Importantly, regression model showed that anti-natal position of women is associated with low scores in all positive dimensions and with a high score

in only one negative dimension: the one related to perceiving children as burdensome and putting high demands on mother's time and energy. The effects of other negative dimensions turned out insignificant or very low.

The preliminary findings from the qualitative study revealed similar arguments against having children, supporting our statistical results. The women, who were strongly oriented towards childlessness argued that they see no emotional benefits of having children and they shared a negative image of experiences with an infant.

"In general, for me, being with such a small baby it is not satisfactory. A life with an infant. Because this is mainly about feeding, changing diapers, making sure it does not cry. And for a few years – this is just a hard work with no bigger satisfaction." (Ewelina, 39, single)

As for instrumental values, the women argued that having a child for instrumental reasons, for instance to secure one's old age, is—in their opinion—a very wrong motivation. They also did not believe old age security can really be secured by parenthood.

"Comments, such as 'Who will help you with a glass of water when you are old?' I reply: I will hire a nurse. I have an aunt, who has three daughters and they are all abroad. So she has children and they will not help her with a glass of water in her old age. If I were to treat a child as an insurance policy... I think such reason [for having a child] is pathetic." (Renata, 39, LAT)

Finally, women feared that having a child would be a too heavy burden for them. In particular, they explained that time and energy needed for a child would make them quit their current life and change them to a too great extent.

"My life would change a lot and I would not like it, I think. I prefer my current life-style and I would not want to change it (...) Having children – that's responsibility and everything else has to be subordinate to a child." (Jagna, 42, married)

"The life I'm living now, I would have to quit it. I would have to quit being me." (Ewelina, 39, single)

All these motives and other arguments of our childless respondents will be explored in depth in the paper. We will also discuss a usefulness of the Childbearing Questionnaire for assessing the extent to which a woman's childlessness is really desired.

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