THE ATTITUDES OF RUSSIAN CITIZENS TOWARD THE
CHILDFREE SUBCULTURE

Abstract:
The paper is devoted to the childfree phenomenon, its history and nature in various cultures. The study deals with the social attitude of Russian citizens towards the Childfree phenomenon based on the research of the scholars at Kuban State University, attended by N=247 respondents (M=45, F=202). The participants were presented with a questionnaire “Your Attitude to Childfree Subculture” consisting of 11 questions to determine the respondents’ basic understanding of the childfree, their views on childless / childfree families, positive or negative opinions of parenting as well as their motives, goals and preferences in life.
The results of the study showed that Russian citizens do not adhere to this ideology, but they are loyal to their proponents.
Keywords: childfree subculture, ideology, citizens, attitude, childless, gender beliefs, parenthood, perceptions.
Today many citizens live without children. These people voluntarily refuse to have children to due to their moral attitudes or principles. Why is the trend so popular? Does it affect the development of society as a whole? Does the Russian society stigmatize childfree people?

Women without children are not anomalies, the latest census data shows. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, in 2014, 47.6 percent of women aged from 15 to 44 year old never had children [1]. This represents the highest percentage of childless women since the bureau started tracking data in 1976. The census data is backed up by data from the National Center for Health Statistics. According to a recent report, in 2013 there were just 62.9 births for every 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the U.S. — an all-time low record. As Mic Senior Editor Elizabeth Plank argues “for many women, not having kids may simply be the most rational choice. Given the economic fallout of the 2008 recession, the gender wage gap that just won’t quit, the sheer cost of raising a child, and the double duty demands put on women both professionally and domestically, are we really surprised that greater numbers of women are simply opting out of childrearing?” [1].

In Sweden, for instance, childfree women reject and resist pronatalist understandings that conflate being a woman with being a mother. However, instead of explaining their childlessness by external factors, the interviewed women created a positive feminine identity separated from motherhood with reference to their ‘silent bodies’, i.e. bodies without a biological urge to reproduce. The strong value that the idea of a ‘silent body’ is assigned in the naturally childfree position is related to parenting norms in the present Swedish society. These norms involve an emphasis on the fact that a child not necessarily needs to be planned, but must be much longed for: ‘Either you want to [have children], and long for it or it’s a crime against the child’ [2, c. 381].

Women who choose to remain childfree are a relatively new and growing cohort in industrialized countries due to the advent of contraception, an increase in
workforce participation, and a reduced power differential between the sexes. A survey of 7,448 Australian women aged from 22 to 27 years revealed that 9.1% of them desire to remain childfree. The most recent national figures on voluntary childlessness revealed that 8% of women were voluntarily childless and predicted that, if expected fertility rates for 2000 continued into the future, 24% of women who have not yet reached the end of their reproductive years would be without children [3, c. 3].

In Italy, childless women achieve great success. As expected, these women are strongly characterized by rejecting traditional norms and adopting nonconformist behavior. They are less bound by religious affiliation, the institution of marriage, and strong partnership commitments. They also come from small families. They are well-educated full-time working women, with little leisure time, who find sources of fulfillment other than motherhood, and who, in some cases, consider a child as an obstacle to personal achievement. This is confirmed by the fact that women who never tried to have children would have not been swayed from their position even by generous family-friendly policies. They are not characterized by any particular economic status at the beginning of the union (in contrast to findings elsewhere in the literature, where voluntarily childless women tend to belong to high social classes) [4, c. 66].

The public interest in the childfree choice is due in part to shifts in childbearing patterns over the past four decades, which suggest that more adults are increasingly opting out of parenthood. In the 2000s, nearly twice as many American women aged 40–44 were childless than were so in the 1970s. Data from the National Survey of Family Growth show that in 2006–2010, 15% of women and 24% of men remained childless by the time they reached age 40. Today, approximately 15% of women aged 40–44 are childless. While these figures do not distinguish voluntary from involuntary childlessness, it seems likely that we can attribute at least some portion of the change to voluntary childlessness. One estimate is that 44% of childless women between 40 and 44 are voluntarily so [5,
Childlessness has become an increasingly prominent part of the adult life course among populations of more affluent nations. Young adults wait longer before having children, and more are remaining permanently childless. In the United States, the average age of first-time mothers has reached an all-time high of over 25 years, and about one fifth of women between the ages of 40 and 44 years were childless in 2008 compared to only 10% in 1976. In the past two decades, however, childlessness has declined among the most educated women but increased for women with lower education levels, leading to some convergence in levels of childlessness across education and racial-ethnic groups. Public acceptance of childlessness has also grown, though 38% of Americans in 2009 responded that growing rates of childlessness were “bad for society” and the vast majority of young adults still expected to become parents [5, c. 1].

The researchers found that low-income, racially diverse, noncustodial fathers, while not necessarily planning fatherhood, tend to consider it as a desirable role, the one that can bring increased social respectability. Just as motives for becoming a parent can come from an individual/internal and/or cultural/external locus, so too can motives for non-parenthood. The explanations for increasing rates of childlessness focus on key social changes such as the feminist movement of the 1970s, an increased reproductive choice, and for White and middle-class women, increasing labor force participation. These explanations are supported by findings that childfree women are more likely than those, who are not childfree, to have professional and managerial occupations and that they have more work experience in general than those who are not childfree [6, c. 2].

The census of 2003 in the USA showed a record number of childless individuals is 44% of women aged from 15 to 44 years old. The National Centre of Statistics of Public Health Services asserts, that the percentage of American women of copulative age defining themselves as “willingly childless”, quickly grew: from 2,4% in 1982 to 4,3% in 1990 and 6,6% in 1995 [7, c. 4]. People
become incomprehensible to the public when their aspiration go beyond this traditional range of priorities. People who adhere and actively promote other life priorities, such as “career instead of giving birth” or “complete rejection of childbirth” are called the “others” in the society, since any deviation from the usual rules, the mismatch in some established standards is perceived by us as “other”, or “alien”.

In Russia, the childfree subculture appeared in 2004, as a virtual community, which numbered only 500 people. Russian “childfree”, in contrast to the American ones state that the childfree is not an organization, a movement or a political project. They do not participate in street actions; they do not distribute campaign materials or symbols; they are not engaged in any form of propaganda pleading to join them. They call themselves ‘community’, the existence of which can be found only in a virtual environment where they exchange their views, practical advice, for example, methods of reliable contraception, and complain freely on constant discrimination and psychological pressure of the society. They explain their wish not to have children, above all, by the lack of economic stability in the country, considering that the birth of a child is associated with financial difficulties, job loss, lack of career development, additional costs associated with the child’s upbringing [8, c. 925-932].

In our study, we conducted a survey to investigate the social attitudes of Russian citizens toward the childfree subculture. The study involved 247 respondents (45 men and 202 women) aged from 25 to 45 years old.

The participants were presented with a questionnaire “Your Attitude to Childfree Subculture” consisting of 11 questions to determine the respondents’ basic understanding of the childfree, their views on childless / childfree families, positive or negative opinions of parenting as well as their motives, goals and preferences in life (Table 1).
Table 1 - The questionnaire “Your Attitude to Childfree Subculture”

1. How do you feel about children?
2. Select the appropriate statement:
   1) I have children.
   2) I have no children, but I plan to have them.
   3) I have no children, and I do not want to have them.
3. At what age do you think it is necessary to have a child?
4. Assess responsibility that should be borne by parents for raising their child.
5. How much time will you need to raise a child?
6. Are you ready to have a baby now?
7. In your opinion, people, who refuse to have a child, do so because:
   1) Career is important for them.
   2) They are afraid of responsibility.
   3) They do not like children.
8. Have you heard about the childfree subculture?
9. What do you think about people who do not want to have children?
10. What is the most important thing for you in life?
    1) Family (based on responsibility and parenting)
    2) Career (self-development)
    3) Love (strong feelings for a partner and a sense of freedom)
11. Do you really want to have children? If not, explain your choice.

As this study shows, 119 interviewees have children, 119 are currently childless, but want to have children; nine respondents refuse to have children (Figure 1).

![Attitudes towards the upbringing of children](image)

**Fig. 1 - Children's upbringing**

One of the respondents explains his choice by referring to his childhood hardships, even though now at the age of forty-one he has a permanent job and a high salary. Therefore, his choice is connected with moral principles, which push him to loneliness. Out of eight female respondents, only three women prefer a career. One of the female interviewees is a creative person who claims that for her
motherhood is associated with vocation. ‘The upbringing of a child requires a talent and qualities’ that she does not possess; therefore, she does not see herself as a mother. The remaining five female respondents prefer a free life: they want to live for themselves, travel, develop professionally and enjoy a life in which there is no commitment or responsibility for anyone. One of the female respondents says that raising children today is very expensive. Thus, the research found out that the childfree ideology is considered a new trend in Russia: 23% of the respondents know nothing about it (Fig. 2).

![Pie Chart](image)

**Fig. 2 - The awareness of the childfree subculture**

The results of the research have shown that those people who refuse to have children are good to them in general. The responsibility that parents bear for raising a child is at a high level (Fig.3).

![Bar Chart](image)

**Fig. 3 - The level of parents’ responsibility**
The time that goes into raising a child is average. Most people understand the choice of the childfree, but refuse to support the concept (Fig. 4).

**How do you treat people who refuse to have children?**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tr>
<td>Positively, I am one of them</td>
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<tr>
<td>I understand these people, but I do not follow this concept</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negatively, I can not understand the people who made this choice</td>
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**Fig. 4 - The attitudes of Russian citizens to the proponents of the childfree subculture**

The results of the study have shown that the childfree subculture is a new trend for Russians, unlike the US citizens. Many respondents have not heard about this ideology, which came to us from abroad. Most interviewees do not support this trend, but they are loyal to the subculture, since their attitude has been formed by their adherence to the old traditions and rules. The level of children's upbringing in Russia proves to be very high. The majority of the respondents think that it is necessary to have a child after thirty years. The report that at this age a person acquires experience and stable earnings. Most respondents believe that people do not have children because they are afraid of responsibility. The main choice for Russian citizens is a family, rather than a career growth or a free life, therefore, this trend has not been accepted by the Russian society yet.

**References:**

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