



DOES THE EDUCATION OF MOTHERS AFFECT THEIR EXPERIENCE OF MOTHERHOOD AND PARENTHOOD? SELECTED ASPECTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to assess how mothers' education affects their experience of motherhood and parenthood. The selected topic is based on the theoretical views of selected authors who deal with the issue of motivation and experience of maternity and parental leave. The core of the paper is an evaluation of primary research aimed at the motivation and perception of maternity and parental leave in relation to the degree of education achieved by women mothers. The sub-objectives of the research were to analyse and evaluate the motivational factors for mothers' return to the labour market and the related concerns about the loss of professional skills and competences. The contribution of the article is the comparison of theoretical background with the results of primary research, which are significantly complementary and thus expand the knowledge from the Czech environment.

Keywords

Motherhood, Number of Children, First-Time Mother, Parenthood, State Social Support, Education

I. Introduction

The topic of motherhood and parenthood in contemporary post-modern society is the subject of many research studies, articles and publications by domestic and foreign authors. Motherhood represents an important phase in a woman's life, characterised by new and particularly significant changes and challenges that mothers face, not only in physical and emotional terms but also in economic and social terms. The education of these women mothers is a key attribute which, on the one hand, influences their decision on motherhood as such and, on the other, is reflected in their attitudes and approach to themselves.

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The aim of this article is to evaluate how mothers' education affects their experience of motherhood and parenthood in the Czech Republic. The presented attitudes of the respondents-mothers towards each other are actually confronted depending on their level of education, which is categorized into three key groups for the sake. The information is based on primary research conduct through a questionnaire survey and ex post analysis of the data obtained. The research conducted in 2022 and involved 470 women. The factors that influence women's decision to start a family can be divided into economic, institutional, educational and social. These factors resonate with the type of social policy of the state as well as with the position of men and women in the labour market. In developed countries, there is a desire for gender balance in important positions in both the public and private sectors. This requires qualification prerequisites and professional competences that are associated with a higher level of education. In the Czech Republic, there is primary, secondary and tertiary education. For women whose aim is a professional career linked to higher education and who seek a subsequent career in a job, the age at which they can start a family, particularly planning for first motherhood and the number of children, is a significant constraint. This is also related to the motivational factors of contemporary women mothers and their experience of maternity and parental leave in relation to their achieved education. These general views are further confronted in the text with the results of primary research.

On the theoretical level, the article is based on a standard literature search subordinated to the problem under study. In our case, the differences in women's views on motherhood and parenthood related to the level of education are emphasized. The empirical part is devoted to the analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey and the socio-economic implications arising from it. The conclusion is supported by an inductive summary of the key findings and a critical discussion between the views emerging from other studies and the results of the primary research is incorporated.

In the Czech Republic the amount of the maternity benefit is 70% of the reduced daily assessment base per calendar day (Czech Social Security Administration, 2021). According to Article 195 of the Labour Code of the Czech Republic, in connection with childbirth and care of the newborn child, the employee is entitled to 28 weeks of maternity; if she gives birth to two or more children at the same time, she is entitled to 37 weeks. She shall normally take maternity leave from the beginning of the sixth week before the expected date of childbirth, but not earlier than the beginning of the eighth week before that date. According to Section 196 of Act No. 262/2006 Coll., the Labour Code, the employer is obliged to grant parental leave to the employee at their request to deepen the care of the child. Parental leave shall be granted to the mother of the child after maternity leave and to the father from the birth of the child, to the extent requested by them, but no longer than until the child reaches the age of 3 years. A parent is entitled to a parental benefit if he or she personally cares for the youngest child in the family for a full day and properly for the entire calendar month until the total amount of CZK 300 000 is exhausted, but no longer than until the child is 4 years old. If the youngest child in the family are two or more children born at the same time, the parent is entitled up to the total amount of CZK 450 000. When applying, the parent also chooses the monthly amount of the parental benefit. As

parental allowance can be taken for one year longer than parental leave, an employer may find that an employee requests to extend parental leave up to the child's fourth birthday after the child reaches the age of three. Given the statutory maximum length of parental leave, this is in effect a request for unpaid leave. However, the employer does not have to grant the employee's request for unpaid leave until the child reaches the age of four and may ask the employee to either start work or terminate the employment relationship after the end of the parental leave (Pirklová, 2018).

Parental allowance/parental leave as an institution is subject to legal changes, just as the organization of the pre-school system is subject to various demographic changes. The specificity of parental leave in the Czech Republic is the choice of the length of parental leave and thus the amount of the parental allowance. The length of parental leave in the Czech Republic, which can be as long as 4 years, is increasingly debated. This benefit may be controversial in its length due to the difficulty for mothers to return to the labour market and retain their jobs and professional competencies (Duda et al., 2023). Scholars have argued that too long periods of paid parental leave might act as work-reducing policy in that they hinder women's labour market entry while short leaves have positive effects on labour market participation and wages (Makay, 2023). Women working while on parental leave are only slightly affected by the loss of qualifications and professional competencies than those who stayed at home throughout the parental leave, this was confirmed with a difference of 2% between the two groups (Turečková et al. 2023, unprinted).

There are many authors who deal with the specifics of parental leave in the Czech Republic. Bartáková and Plasová (2007) explore the mechanisms of decision-making of highly qualified women in relation to their labour market re-entry after parental leave, Šťastná (2019) deals with changes in the parental benefit scheme in the Czech Republic and their potential impact on reproductive behaviour. Author argues that the option to increase the monthly amount of the parental benefit together with the flexibility of its use has contributed to the closer spacing of births, most notably among more educated women.

II. Literature Overview

Adserà (2017) reports that according to labour market data, it is increasingly difficult for men and women with low or medium levels of education to get a "good" job. In many developed countries, the number of young people returning to (or staying in) their parents' homes is increasing. Many young people cannot become independent or have children unless there are two incomes in the household. Women in stable, high-income partnerships should therefore find it easier to realise their personal goals, including the desire to have children, compared to women who are not in such partnerships. Data from 2011 in the USA show that 66% of all mothers had a college degree; of these, 54% were married and had a college degree and 12% were single and had a college degree. In the same year, 19% of mothers had a high school education or a lower education and were married, and 15% of mothers had a high school education or a lower education and were single.

Snickers and Van der Brink (2019) point to the complex relationships between childcare, education and work. This Dutch study examines how young mothers navigate the norms

and structures of education and employment. The analysis highlighted structural constraints (e.g. irregular working hours in so-called “women’s jobs”, lack of maternity leave at school, etc.) and norms (e.g. finishing higher education and finding a good job versus primary education). According to Boden, Fergusson and Horwood (2008), early motherhood was associated with higher rates of mental health disorders, lower level of education, higher levels of welfare dependency, lower rates of labour market participation and lower income. The results show that early motherhood puts young women at risk of lower educational achievement and poorer economic conditions. Maslowsky, Stritzel, and Gershoff (2021) point out that women who give birth as teenagers have lower levels of education compared to women who give birth aged 20 or over. According to Moore and Waite (1977), data on the education and childbirth experiences of approximately 5,000 young women under the age of 20 were collected between 1968 and 1972. The data show that childbearing among women under the age of 20 is significantly related to lower level of education. The younger a woman is when her first child is born, the less schooling she has received. This negative impact on educational goals is due to 1) the costs of childcare, 2) the need to work, and 3) pressure from friends and family to stay at home with the child.

A study by Klerman and Leibowitz (1994) in the USA in 1979–1988 showed that women with better market skills (higher expected wages, of older age, higher education) were more likely to have a job and to work compared to other new mothers. Thus, most working women who had a one-year-old child returned to work within three months of giving birth. Also according to Ulker and Guven (2011) in Australia mothers with higher wages in their pre-birth employment and mothers with higher education levels tend to return to the labour market earlier than their lower wage and less educated counterparts. According to Blau and Kahn (2017), women’s low earnings can reduce and affect their planned number of children, especially when faced with high childcare costs. Lundberg and Pollak (2014) argue that highly educated individuals prefer to have children while married as they want to ensure that their partner is committed to investing in children. Moreover, as Esping-Andersen (2014) notes in their paper gender roles evolve and change faster for individuals who have higher education than for those with lower education. Thus, a husband with higher education is more likely to support his wife in combining career with family rather than a husband with lower education.

According to Adserà (2017), women should not work exclusively in the protected public sector (as was initially the case in the pioneering Nordic countries) or in highly regulated industries in order to combine work and family. Public policy should level the playing field for women in a broader sense. Testa (2014) finds that in European countries where a relatively large share of women are highly educated, the gap between desired and realized fertility is relatively small. This is likely because these countries have favourable labour market conditions and a strong welfare state. This trend is also mentioned by Van Bavel (2012).

According to a study by Gamundi (2019) in Spain, education became inversely related to first parenthood, with a negative effect in the case of unemployment or lack of job security. De Wit and Rajulton (1992) examined factors associated with the timing of first

birth in Canada. They focus primarily on the role of women's level of education and how education affects the timing of first birth. According to the results of the research, education has a major positive effect on the timing of childbirth for women of all age groups. Wu and MacNeill (2002) focus on the effect of education and occupation on delaying entry into motherhood, with more and more women in much of the developed world delaying their entry into motherhood. In this study Wu and MacNeill (2002) examine the determinants of first-births among women who were childless at the age of 30 and older, and test a number of hypotheses that may explain this phenomenon. They are concerned primarily with the effects of education and employment, they also include a number of other explanatory variables that may have impact upon delayed childbearing. The results suggest that both school enrolment and employment tend to reduce the odds of a woman becoming a mother, while level of education increases the likelihood. D'Albis, Greulich and Pontherie (2017) point out, that educated and economically active women certainly postpone first childbirth in comparison to women who are less educated and who are not working. According to Myrskylä, Barclay and Goisis (2017) currently older mothers tend to have higher education and smaller families than their younger peers.

The diffusion of fertility control involved in the demographic transitions has been associated with the expansion of mass education and, more specifically, with the growth in women's participation in these expanded education systems (Basu, 2002; Cleland, 2002; Caldwell, 1980; Rindfuss et al., 1980). As a result, a negative relationship between the level of education and women's fertility – the so-called negative educational gradient in fertility – emerged and became a steady feature of post-transitional populations: the more educated the women are, the fewer children they are expected to have (James et al., 2012). More educated women were more likely to remain childless, delay childbearing and have fewer children than less educated women. This negative educational gradient in fertility appeared to be remarkably pervasive, despite specific differences across countries or regions, institutional contexts and periods (Requena, 2022). The negative educational gradient was thought to affect both the timing and quantity of fertility (Rindfuss et al., 1996). Another comparative study of 25 European countries (Merz and Liefbroer, 2017) found that negative educational gradients in complete fertility were weakest in Nordic and post-Soviet countries and strongest in Mediterranean and post-communist countries; still, in all these settings the gradient appears to have been reduced among later cohorts.

III. Research Methodology and Data

The input data for the presented research on the differences in mothers' experiences and attitudes towards motherhood and parenthood in the context of their level of education is based on a questionnaire survey conducted in May and June 2022 in the Moravian-Silesian Region in the Czech Republic, which was attended by 470 respondents – mothers. The complete questionnaire survey covered a wide range of areas of women's motivation and attitudes towards motherhood and parenthood across several generations. However, for the purposes of our analysis, only some relevant responses and combinations of responses were selected with reference to the aim of the specific research. The implementation of the

pilot research was preceded by a one-month pre-survey to ensure appropriate formulation of questions and their relevance to the desired findings. The questionnaire was both online and physical, and it was addressed only to women with one or more children, i.e. mothers. Thus, the research described below and the conclusions drawn from it work with primary data that have been standardly converted into relative terms. The specific absolute and relative numbers of responses in each of the areas analysed were determined into three categories according to the age of the respondents. The first group consists of women with primary and secondary education without a high school diploma, 84 of whom took part in the survey, i.e. 18% of the total number of women interviewed. The second group was made up of women with secondary education with a high school diploma, of whom 189 (40%) were interviewed, and the last, third group was made up of 197 (42%) mothers with higher vocational or university education.

We should add at this point that the system of education in the Czech Republic is regulated by the Education Act, specifically Act No.561/2004 Coll., the Act on Pre-School, Primary, Secondary, Higher Vocational and Other Education (hereinafter referred to as the “Education Act”). Primary education is conditional on fulfilling compulsory school attendance, which is compulsory for nine school years, but no longer than until the end of the school year in which the pupil reaches the age of 17. Secondary education is provided by general and vocational secondary schools. The age of pupils is usually between 15 and 18/19 years. Graduates of secondary education receive a vocational certificate or a high school diploma. In the Czech Republic, tertiary education allows graduates with high school diplomas (age 19 and over) to further improve their qualifications in various specialisations by studying at higher vocational schools (higher vocational education) or at universities. University education can then be divided into three basic levels: bachelor, master and doctorate (PhD) (European Commission, 2023). According to the ISCED international classification, the educational groups in the Czech Republic can be divided as follows: (1) primary and secondary education without a high school diploma: levels 2 and 3 without the possibility of progressing to level 4; (2) secondary education with high school diploma: level 3 with progression to level 4 and 5, and finally (3) higher vocational education (level 4) and university education (level 5 and 6) (Czech Statistical Office, 2014). All the information on which our analysis, confrontation of results and discussion will be based is grounded on the data presented in Table 1, which are already calculated for the three categories of mothers we have identified in the 13 selected relevant categories (domains), to best reflect the stated scientific purpose for writing this article, which is to analyze, identify and define differences in mothers’ experiences and attitudes towards motherhood and parenthood based on their highest educational attainment. The last column of the table shows how the values in each category change as education increases; this is then discussed specifically in the analytical-empirical section in the next chapter.

Table 1: Number of respondents' answers in selected areas (2022, n=470)

Category	Answer options	Primary education and secondary education without high school diploma		Secondary education with high school diploma		Higher vocational and university education		Change in values (in relation to education growth)
		abs.	in %	abs.	in %	abs.	in %	
		84	18	189	40	197	42	
Number of children	1	23	27	73	39	79	40	↑
	2	41	49	91	48	82	42	↓
	3	10	12	16	8	31	16	→
	4 and more	10	12	9	5	5	2	↓
Marital status at the time of the birth of the first child	married	37	44	113	60	131	66	↑
	single	46	55	75	39	64	32	↓
	divorced/widowed	1	1	1	1	2	2	→
Children with only one spouse/partner	yes	67	80	172	91	186	94	↑
	no	17	20	17	9	11	6	↓
Age at the time of birth of the first child	under 20 years of age	30	36	17	9	5	3	↓
	21–25 years old	40	48	106	56	54	27	↓
	26–30 years old	10	12	48	25	105	53	↑
	31–35 years old	1	1	16	9	30	15	↑
	over 36 years old	3	3	2	1	3	2	→
Motivation for first motherhood	we wished for a child	52	62	148	78	160	81	↑
	no motivation, the baby was unplanned	22	26	32	17	24	12	↓
	other	10	12	9	5	13	7	→
Personal satisfaction with first motherhood	yes	74	88	155	82	156	79	↓
	no	10	12	34	18	41	21	↑
Working while on parental leave	yes	26	31	64	34	90	46	↑
	no	58	69	125	66	107	54	↓

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Category		Answer options	Primary education and secondary education without high school diploma		Secondary education with high school diploma		Higher vocational and university education		Change in values (in relation to education growth)
Number of women respondents			abs.	in %	abs.	in %	abs.	in %	
			84	18	189	40	197	42	
Reduced qualifications due to maternity/parenthood	yes		16	19	53	28	64	32	↑
	no		68	81	136	72	133	68	↓
Agree with the statement	my husband/partner and I are sufficiently financially secure		32	38	96	51	127	64	↑
	I am a single mother, financially secure		0	0	3	1,5	5	2	→
	we have a problem with financing the family, so we use social support		8	9	7	4	6	3	↓
	it's harder to finance the family, but the family (parents) helped us)		5	6	16	8	7	4	↓
	we can/I can manage family finances, but we have to cut our expenses		35	42	64	34	51	26	↓
	financing the family is a big problem (financial hardship, frequent loans)		4	5	3	1,5	1	1	↓
Entitlement to social support	yes		36	43	75	40	91	46	→
	no		48	57	114	60	106	54	→
Financial help from the family during the first motherhood	yes		37	44	79	42	61	31	↓
	no		47	56	110	58	136	69	↑
Agreed statement with greater involvement of the mother in the upbringing of the child	yes		40	48	101	53	99	50	→
	no		44	52	88	47	98	50	→

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Category	Answer options	Primary education and secondary education without high school diploma		Secondary education with high school diploma		Higher vocational and university education		Change in values (in relation to education growth)
		abs.	<i>in %</i>	abs.	<i>in %</i>	abs.	<i>in %</i>	
Number of women respondents		84	18	189	40	197	42	
Agreed that the husband/partner can handle two days of care for a young child	yes	53	63	135	71	157	80	↑
	no	27	32	51	27	35	18	↓
	no husband/partner	4	5	3	2	5	2	→

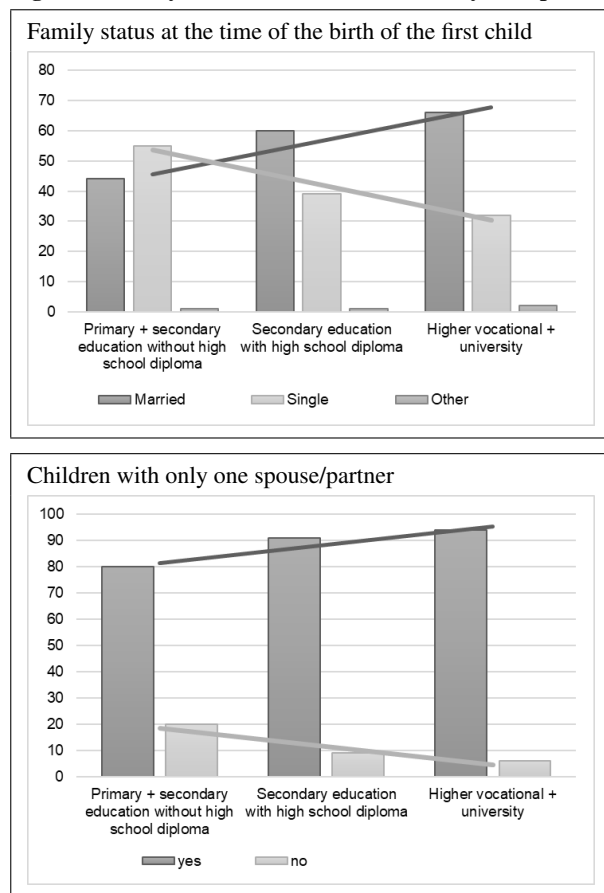
Source: own (2022)

IV. Analytical-empirical part: categorization of women’s attitudes when returning from parental leave to regular work in relation to their level of education

The first area that was examined in relation to mothers’ education concerns the number of children the respondents had at the time of the research. Given the fact that many of the women interviewed may potentially have additional children, this category is taken as merely informative and no relevant conclusions can be drawn from it. In very general terms, it can perhaps only be stated that more educated women have fewer children than women with lower education.

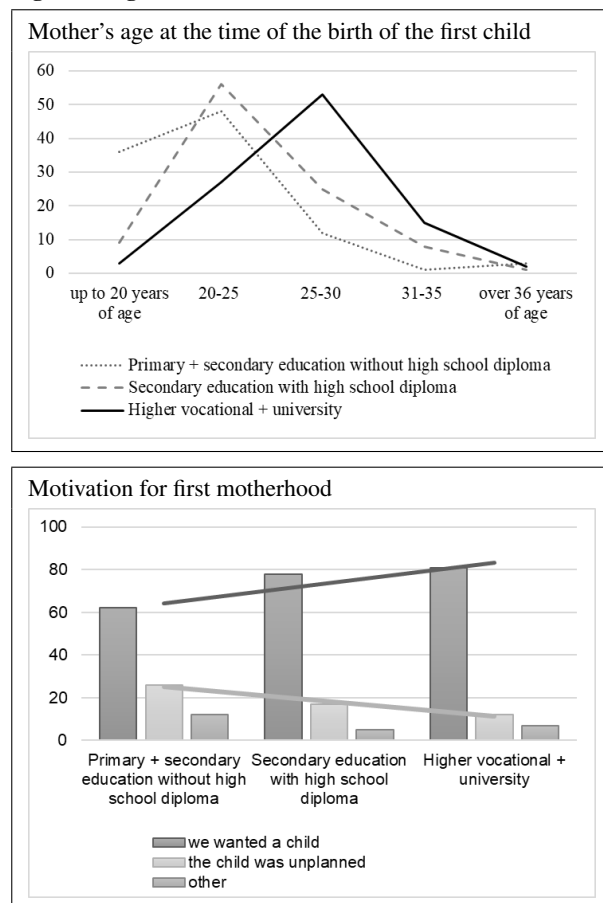
The level of education of the respondents in our research is also influenced by the marital status at the time of the birth of their first child. More educated mothers were more likely to be married, and conversely, women with lower education were more likely to be single. A similar logical analogy can be identified in response to the question of having children with one permanent partner or husband. More educated women responded more in the affirmative. In contrast, 20% of women with primary or secondary education without a high school diploma have children with multiple men, compared to only 6% of female college graduates (see Figure 1). In both cases, this is a causality generally accepted and expected in our society. The answer “other” refers to women having a different status (divorced, widow, etc.).

Figure 1: Family status and children with only one spouse/partner (n=470; in %; + trend)



Source: own (2022)

Another conclusion from our research is that with increasing levels of education, the age of first-time mothers also increased. While 84% of the women in the first education group were under 25 years of age at the time of the birth of their first child, female university students tended to have their first child between the ages of 26 and 30, and 17% of them even later. Regarding the motivation for first motherhood, a link to the findings already analyzed can be identified, where, with increasing education of mothers, the planning for first motherhood increased (see Figure 2) and vice versa. The option labelled “other” summarises other main motivations than the two mentioned above.

Figure 2: Age at birth of first child and motivation for first motherhood (n=470; in %; + trend)

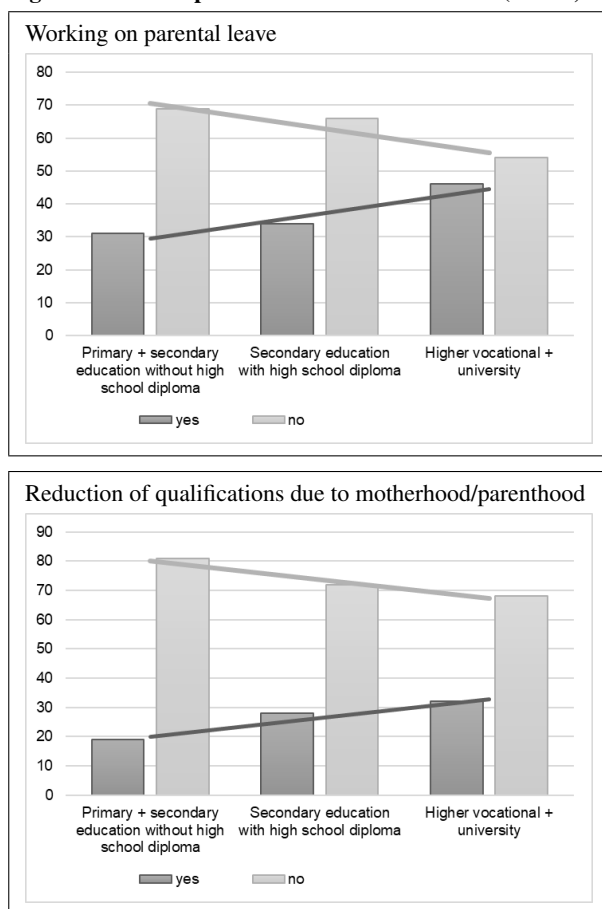
Source: own (2022)

The sixth question analysed concerned whether the women felt personally – internally satisfied in relation to their first motherhood, i.e. whether their first motherhood fulfilled their positive expectations in general. In the responses in relation to the respondents' level of education, it can be argued that less educated women were more satisfied, but this was not a significant difference (there was only a 9% difference between the first and third groups of women).

The other two questions focused on the mothers' work experience. The first asked women whether they had worked while on parental leave (although they did not have to) and the second asked whether they perceived a decline in their work competencies and qualifications related to their time on maternity and parental leave (see Figure 3). While only 31% of women with primary education or women with secondary education without a high school diploma worked while on parental leave, the figure was 46% for university

and college graduates. In the case of objective and subjective loss of work experience and competences due to motherhood and parenthood, the situation is similar, i.e. women who are more educated suffer more from this feeling and reality, although in the case of the most educated group of female respondents it was only 32% of them. There is a factual link to the need or necessity to work during parental leave, where perhaps because of the fear of losing work skills and experience, mothers with a university degree work in nearly half of the cases, even though they do not have to due to the nature of the social system in the Czech Republic. The second logical explanation is that this is due to the sheer demands of the employment of this group of women and the requirements of their work performance.

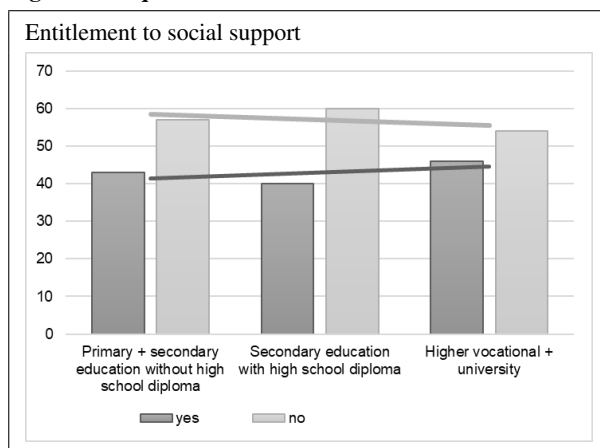
Figure 3: Work experience of first-time mothers (n=470; in %; + trend)

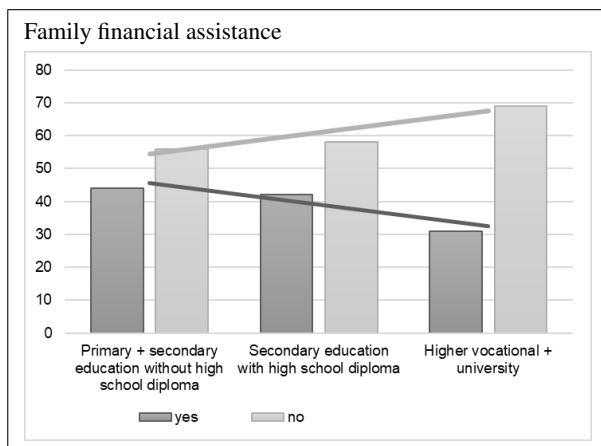


Source: own (2022)

The other three areas examined concerned the financial security of the respondents during their motherhood and parenthood. These were analysed in questions 9 to 11. In the first of these, the respondents were asked to choose the most appropriate statement with which they could identify. The data analysis (see Table 1) shows that as the level of education increases, the financial self-sufficiency and security of women and their families also increase. 66% of the female respondents with a university degree or higher vocational education are fully satisfied financially, while another 26% manage to finance their family but have to make the required adjustments. The reverse is true for women with primary education or secondary education without a high school diploma, where only 38% of women in this group are fully financially secure and another 42% have to limit themselves in financing their needs. Interestingly, the level of education of the female respondents is in no way related to the legal entitlement to social support, i.e. it is used to a similar extent by all women, i.e. even those who consider themselves financially secure. On the other hand, the answers above show that social support is not as crucial for them as it is for less educated female respondents. The situation is somewhat different in the case of financial assistance from close family, especially parents during the period when the woman was a first-time mother and on maternity leave. In this case, the family was more involved financially for mothers with primary education or an apprenticeship, by 13% more than for the group of women with the highest possible level of education (see Figure 4).

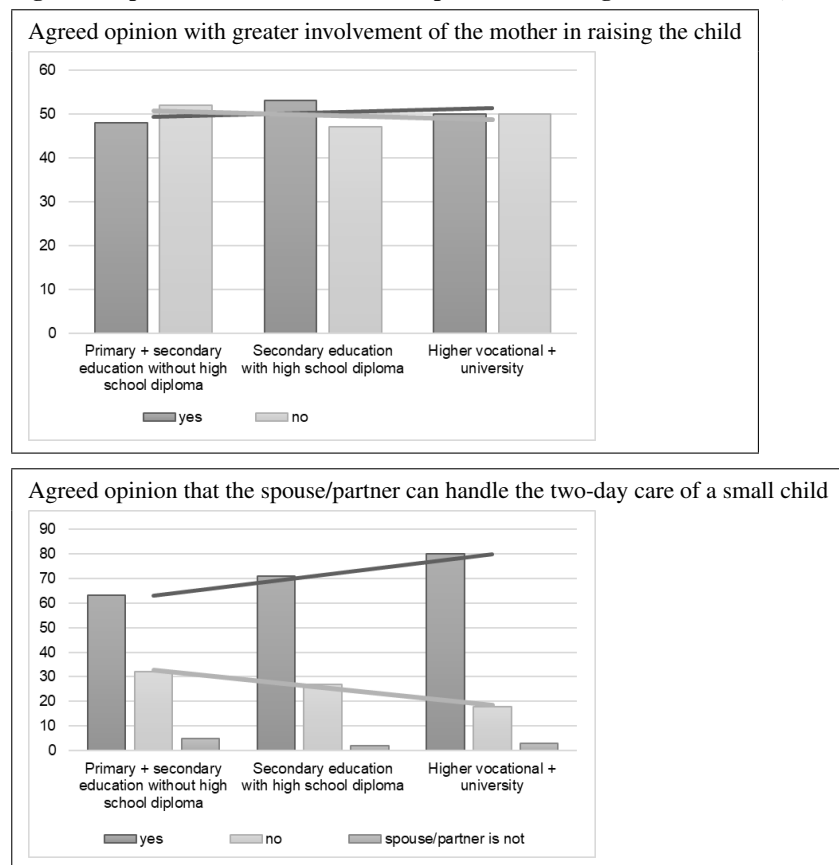
Figure 4: Request for financial assistance for first-time motherhood (n=470; in %; + trend)





Source: own (2022)

The final finding relates to views on the status and involvement of parents in the upbringing of children. The first of these questions, to which the female respondents answered precisely, was, “Do you hold the view that the upbringing of young children and their care is naturally the responsibility of the mother/woman and therefore the mother/woman should be more involved in their upbringing?” and the second: “Do you think that your spouse/partner could take care of a child under 2 years old for two days all by himself?”. The level of education did not influence the first question. Approximately 50% of all women across educational levels said that they agree that childcare is natural to the woman-mother and therefore it is natural that she is more involved in their upbringing and is the main initiator of their care. On the other hand, there is a second half of female respondents who do not feel this way. The difference of opinion in the context of education emerged in the last question analysed, where in families with a more educated mother, the father of the child was also a much more independent parent. In the family of the most educated women, 80% of the fathers are able, from the point of view of their partners, to take care of a small child, provided that the child is no older than two years and the time spent solely caring for the child by the father must last two days. In the first group of women, “only” 63% of fathers are supposed to be able to do this (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Opinions on the involvement of parents in raising children (n=470; in %; + trend)

Source: own (2022)

If we summarise the above findings based loosely on our primary research and identifying differences in women-mothers' attitudes and experiences of their own motherhood and parenthood in the context of their educational level, then there is no significant difference between women with primary education and those with a university degree (i.e. up to 10% agreement) in the sense of fulfilment and inner satisfaction associated with first motherhood, in the area of entitlement to state social support and in the view that bringing up and caring for a child is in 50% primarily the mother's domain because it is so natural, while 50% of female respondents across different educational backgrounds do not think so. Compared to female respondents with a lower level of education, university graduates and women with higher vocational education have more committed husbands when it comes to taking care of young children, they use less financial help from close family, their own family is financially well provided for, these women also work more often during parental leave and feel more the loss of work competences and experience that is related to their

parental leave. Women with university and higher vocational education are more likely to be married and are older at the time of their first motherhood, have their children mostly with the same partner, and their motherhood is generally more planned and wanted.

V. Discussion

A review of the theoretical background and the results of our research show that they coincide in many aspects. It can be concluded that the level of education of women – mothers significantly influences the motivation for motherhood and parenthood, planning for the number of children, the age of first-time mothers, as well as work activities during parenthood and return to the labour market.

The results showed that the level of education obtained also influences the family relationship that mothers had at the time of the birth of their first child. Women with higher levels of education were more likely to be married than women with lower levels of education. This is also related to the views of female respondents with higher education who wanted to have their first child already married. This result is consistent with the view of Lundberg and Pollak (2014) who argue that highly educated individuals prefer to have children when married as they want to ensure that their partner is committed to investing in the family. Of course, the social status of female mothers and the values that go along with the decision to have a child in a marital union are also important here.

A similar logical analogy can be identified in response to the research question on whether they have children with one permanent partner or husband. Here again, the percentage of women with higher levels of education who have children with one partner/husband is significantly higher. Only 6% of the women-mothers interviewed with a university degree had children with multiple partners. Regarding women with a lower level of education, 20% of the total female respondents answered that they had children with multiple partners. Another conclusion from our research is that with an increasing level of education, the age of first-time mothers also increased. While 84% of women in the first education group were under 25 years of age at the time of the birth of their first child, a higher percentage of women with higher levels of education had their first child between the ages of 26 and 30, and 17% had their first child even later. Also, in the motivation for first motherhood a link to the findings already analysed can be identified, where with an increasing level of education of mothers, the age and later planning of first motherhood increased (see Figure 2). This research issue is the focus of Wu and MacNeill (2002), who conclude that women's level of education influences their return to work, career and thus postponement of motherhood and parenthood. Thus, more educated women are more likely to remain childless or have fewer children than women with lower levels of education. This is a society-wide phenomenon, especially in the developed world. As well as d'Albis, Greulich and Ponhiere (2017) point out, that educated and economically active women certainly postpone first childbirth in comparison to women who are less educated and who are not working, or according to Myrskylä, Barclay and Goisis (2017) currently older mothers tend to have higher education and smaller families than their younger peers. Moore and Waite (1977) point out that having children under the age of 20 is significantly related to lower levels of education. Similarly, Maslowsky, Stritzel, and Gershoff (2021)

point out that women who give birth as teenagers have lower levels of education than women who give birth at age 20 or older. Requena (2022) emphasizes that this negative educational gradient in fertility is pervasive, despite specific differences across countries or regions, countries' institutional contexts, and time periods.

A sub-objective of the research was the work activity of mothers on parental leave and concerns about the loss of professional competences and the reduction of qualification skills in relation to educational level. The results show that, of the total number, a higher percentage of mothers with a higher level of education (46%) are working while on parental leave compared to mothers with a lower level of education (31%). This is related to the result of examining the concerns about the loss of professional competences and reduction of qualification skills. Of the total, 32% of mothers with higher education have concerns. The motivation to work does not lie in the financial need to provide for the family but in maintaining and further developing professional skills and the associated social status. Another logical explanation is that this is due to the sheer demanding nature of this group of women's employment and the requirements of their work performance. The results of our investigation are consistent with the results of the Ulker and Guven (2011) in Australia and Klerman and Leibowitz (1994) study in the USA. Here too, it has been shown that women mothers with higher education, higher wages and more professional experience return to the market previously, most working women who had a one-year-old child returned to work within three months of giving birth. In the Czech Republic, we can already see cases where mothers with higher wages and higher professional status than their husbands/partners return to work after maternity leave and fathers take up parental leave.

The importance of the discussion can be seen in the comparison with the theoretical views of experts on the topic and with the results of our research.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the level of education of women in many ways influences the motivational factors for motherhood and parenthood not only in the Czech Republic. Women in the post-modern social era want to apply for higher positions, build their careers and be financially independent. This is also linked to the level of higher education and professionalisation, which increases the age of current mothers and significantly influences the number of planned children. The gender politics of developed countries and the competitiveness of women with men in the labour market is increasingly visible and paradoxically has a negative impact on overall population development.

The findings of our research show that the motivation for motherhood and parenthood is closely related to the social status of contemporary women and the factor of their educational level influences their decision-making when starting a family. Although social systems allow women to remain on parental leave and support motherhood and parenthood, women with higher education return to the labour market earlier than women with lower levels of education. This is also due to family ties, norms and values in different segments of society, as well as to the traditional behaviour of individuals within the stratification of society. These findings can be used on a practical level in the formation of family policy,

employment policy and other specific areas of economic policy, as well as in the adjustment of legal norms and general working conditions, which on the one side emphasize the role of the family in society (and generally try to support the birth rate), and on the other side, they offer a “comfortable” compromise between women and their employers to combine work and family life. A typical example is the possibility of part-time work, support for pre-school education, support for children’s groups and other forms of care for children, whose mothers have to or wish to work.

Its limitations and limits can also be identified in the presented output. This is especially the absence of consideration of generational differences. It is understandable that even the university-educated woman, who experienced motherhood and parenthood 40 years ago, had different attitudes to some aspects of the research than the university-educated woman today. A certain distortion in the generalization of findings can also be found in the geographical location of the questionnaire survey, which was conducted in the Moravian-Silesian Region. The mentioned region is partly specific, not only from the point of view of the structure of economic sectors, but also the social composition of the population and the unemployment rate. Further research could be extended to include intergenerational comparisons of mothers’ attitudes towards the experience of motherhood and parenthood, or it could be suggested to conduct similar research in another, economically different, region and conduct an interregional comparison of the results. It would also be interesting to analyse the complete data within the framework of other statistical and mathematical methods, e.g. within the framework of factor analysis or classification and association trees.

The contribution of the paper is also the analysis and subsequent comparison of research of selected experts and authors who deal with the issue of women-mothers and their motivation for motherhood and parenthood in relation to the level of education. The results of the research confirm these theories and have thus contributed significantly to the expansion of knowledge from the Czech environment.

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