GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PARITY-SPECIFIC FERTILITY TRANSITION MODELS

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SUMMARY

Most demographic studies focus on the reproductive behavior of women, leaving a gap in the understanding of male demographic fertility. New fertility patterns in recent decades and the increasing involvement of men in family planning and the number of children within a couple have provided solid grounds for analyzing male reproductive behavior in investigating fertility determinants. The study aims to explore the differences in parity patterns between men and women in Moldova, comparing the age at which men become parents for the first time, the number of biological children over their lifetime, and the transition to the first, second, and third child. Using data from the Generations and Gender Survey conducted in 2020, the research focuses on cohorts of men and women born between 1950 and 1989. To test the hypotheses that men have a longer reproductive lifespan, start their reproductive activity later than women, and registers a higher number of biological children, the following methodologies are employed: Analysis of the mean number of biological children for selected birth cohorts 1950-1985; Determination of the proportion of men who remain childless by the end of life and the proportion of women who remain childless by the end of the reproductive period; Evaluation of the transition to the birth of children of different parities for men and women using probability models. The results indicate significant gender differences: men become parents, on average, three years later than women and have a lower average number of children over their lifetime. Additionally, the proportion of men who remain childless throughout their lives is significantly higher compared to women who have completed their reproductive period. These findings suggest substantial differences in the reproductive behavior of men and women, contributing to a broader and more complete picture of population dynamics and fertility trends.

Keywords: male fertility, parity patterns, biological children, GGS, Moldova

INTRODUCTION

The majority of demographic studies focus on women's reproductive behavior, leaving a gap in the understanding of male demographic fertility. New fertility models in recent decades, along with men's increased involvement in family planning and decisions about the number of children within couples, have provided strong reasons for analyzing male reproductive behavior.

In Moldova, the fertility model has undergone a dynamic transformation over the past three decades. The period after 1990, witnessed significant changes in the timing and occurrence of life transitions among young adults. A sharp decline in the total fertility rate was recorded during the 1990s, as it dropped from 2.1 to 1.44 children per woman between 1990 and 2003, and in 2023, it reached 1.6 children per woman of reproductive age. Demographic forecasts predict that the number of births will continue to decrease in the coming decades due to the population's structure and the entry into reproductive age of the few generations born in the late 1990s and early 2000s. (Gagauz, et al., 2021). If in 2023, a total of 24,033 thousand children were born in Moldova according to official statistical data (NBS, 2023), according to the I-low scenario of projection elaborated by Center for Demographic Research (Gagauz, et al., 2021), this number may decrease until 2040, reaching only 15.8 thousand. The decline in fertility in Moldova is driven by the decreasing proportion of women giving birth to higher-order children (three or more) and the increasing share of women who have not given birth to any children by age 30. The postponement of births to older ages is one of the leading causes of the reduction in the number of children born. Meanwhile, women's educational level and place of residence stand out as key factors in the fertility transition from the traditional model to the modern one, associated with birth control and childbearing outside of marriage (Grigoraș & Gagauz, 2022).

The traditional focus of fertility analysis is on women, to whom this behavior is automatically attributed. Existing studies have as main purpose the dynamics of fertility, the characteristics of fertility transition (Grigoraș, 2019), and the typology of reproductive behavior (Grigoraș & Gagauz, 2022), with the main fertility measures being, in fact, indicators of female fertility. Consequently, the subject of male reproduction in Moldova has been marginalized until now. The reasons for excluding men from the analysis of fertility indicators are primarily due to the limitations of available official data sources. For instance, in cases where children are born to unmarried women, the biological father may not be declared on the "birth certificate", leading to a lack of accurate data. Therefore, researchers often have to rely on representative sociological surveys in which men are asked about the number of biological children. In this context, using data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) provides an opportunity to develop a comparative analysis of the number of biological children reported by men and women. This allows for a deep analysis of parity models and the transition to the first, second, and third child among men and women.

Although Moldova is in line with the process of fertility transition toward the modern model of reproductive

behavior (which is characterized by changes in reproductive behavior appearing in postponing marriage and the first birth to older ages (tempo effect), causing a decrease in the number of children of higher birth orders and an increase in the proportion of families with a small number of children (quantum effect), (Grigoraș & Gagauz, 2022), there are some particularities. Family and children hold an essential place in the priorities of young people. Both men and women exhibit high reproductive aspirations. The results of the GGS (2020) study, highlited that the ideal number of children in a family for men is 2.6, while for women, it is 2.7 (UNFPA, 2020). Marriage is often seen as a necessary step before having children. Thus, men and women tend to plan the moment they become parents based on when they get married, and delaying marriage leads to postponing the first birth, which influences the total number of children a couple may have. The results of the sociological study on the prevalence of cohabitation without marriage registration among young people in Moldova and the factors influencing these arrangements showed that childbirth is primarily associated with marriage rather than partnership. This association is driven by the deep-seated desire for long-term and stable relationships, which plays a significant role in family planning in Moldova (Gagauz, 2021). The delay in men and women marrying is causing a shift in the timing of becoming a parent for the first time. As a result, women and men who marry earlier may start having children sooner, which can impact the total number of children they have (Lesthaeghe, 2020).

The persistence of the traditional breadwinner model among Moldovan men, where they are the main providers of family income, can influence decisions regarding starting a family, registering a marriage, and, not least, fulfilling reproductive intentions. Studies show that limited opportunities to combine professional and family roles lead men to continue being the primary supporters of the family (Gagauz, 2021).

Studying demographic fertility from the perspective of men provides a more complete understanding of reproductive behaviors and gender dynamics in the process of realizing reproductive intentions and the transition to parenthood. The study highlights differences in fertility patterns, comparing the age at which men become parents for the first time, the biological number of children over their lifetime, and the transition to the first, second, and third child. Thus, including men in fertility studies will allow for the development of more equitable and effective demographic policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research on fertility chiefly focuses on the patterns among women. However, recent studies have emphasized the importance of integrating male perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding of fertility transition dynamics (Oláh, Kotowska, & Richter, 2018),(Keilman, Tymicki, & Skirbekk, 2014).

Recent research on male and female fertility trends since the 1970s in 14 European countries, shows that male fertility has been lower than female fertility in recent periods but was higher in several countries in the 1970s (Dudel, Cheng, & Klüsener, 2020). In most European countries, the percentage of men who remain childless is higher than that of women. Childlessness is higher in countries where the mean age at marriage is high, and entry into motherhood is, on average, more delayed. However, in Central and Eastern Europe countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Russia, the percentage of childless women aged 40-44 remains low (≤ 10%). On the other hand, the lifetime childlessness rate among men is increasing, with over 23% of men aged 45-49 remaining childless in some European countries such as Finland, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Czech Republic (Miettinen, et.al., 2015).

Studies on fertility differences between men and women suggest that since the 1960s, fertility rates among men have been lower than those of women in most European countries. A marked increase in childlessness and a decline in progression to second births have contributed to decreased completed fertility for both sexes, especially in cohorts born after 1960 in Serbia (Nikitović, et.al., 2024).

Age disparities between mothers and fathers can impact fertility differences between men and women, (Fox, et.al., 2019). With regard to age-specific fertility, researchers demonstrate very different male and female fertility patterns resulted from the effect of age. Male fertility is found to have a later and lower peak, and remaining higher than that of female's with increasing age. Men are also observed to start having their first births later as compared to women. Moreover, the first birth distribution of men is found to be more dispersed than that of women in many populations (Dudel & Klüsener, 2019), (Schoumaker, 2019), (Szoltysek, et.al., 2017).

The results of a study based on the GGS dataset from Russia (2004), investigated gender-specific fertility differences in terms of age, timing, and parity patterns. The study found out that although men generally become fathers later, their fertility patterns are similar to those of women. Additionally, the results indicate that Russian men end their reproductive period at the same age as women, and a longer reproductive span does not lead men to have more children than women (Alich, 2007).

A study on the impact of sociodemographic factors on male fertility transition in the Czech Republic revealed that men are more likely to become fathers if they are in

co-residential partnerships, primarily through marriage, have higher education, and live independently. On the other hand, being a student, not being in a relationship, and having a significantly older partner reduce the likelihood of becoming a father. The study used a longitudinal approach and found that the factors influencing men's path to fatherhood have changed, (Kyzlinková & Šťastná, 2018) keeping our audience engaged and interested in the evolving research.

BACKGROUND

Moldova experienced significant socioeconomic crises after the collapse of communism in 1989 and subsequently gained independence in 1991. This is especially true for cohorts of men and women born in the 1970s who reached adulthood during this period. Political changes, along with the transition to a market economy, led to the emergence of economic uncertainty, unemployment, and a lower standard of living, which influenced marital and reproductive behavior (Gagauz, 2012).

The profound social and economic changes that followed led the generations of reproductive age to delay or reduce the number of births in response to the uncertainty and instability of the period (Gagauz & Grigoraş, 2018). Although the studies did not focus on men, the experiences are reflected on the entire population (men and women cohorts).

The age difference between men and women at marriage is a significant factor in the fertility transition. This age gap can influence the age at which couples have their first child, determining their reproductive behavior. According to the GGS report (UNFPA, 2020), in Moldova, by the age of 24, only 14.9% of men are married, compared to 46.1% of women. This significant difference shows that women tend to marry earlier, which increases the probability of them starting their reproductive lives before men. In the 25-29 age group, almost half of men (46.7%) are married, but this proportion is still lower than that of women. In the 25-44 age group, nearly two-thirds (66.67%) of women are married. This difference in the timing of marriage creates a gap between the onset of reproduction for men and women, which has a significant impact on fertility by sex. At the same time, a widespread phenomenon characterizes reproductive behavior in Moldova—the birth of children outside of marriage. In this context, every fourth woman aged 15-49 declared the birth of a child out of wedlock (26.0%), (UNFPA, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study explores differences in fertility patterns between men and women in Moldova, using data from the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) conducted for the first time in 2020. It contains detailed information on the demographic and social events of the population in the Republic of Moldova. The data was weighted to ensure the representativeness and accuracy of the results. Thus, the analysis focuses on cohorts of men and women born between 1950 and 1989, with a total sample of 7,501 respondents. The age distribution ranges between 30 and 70 years. The valid number of cases for men is 3,345 (47.4% of the sample), and women represent 3,706 valid cases (52.6%). To analyze men's reproductive behavior compared to women's, we compare the number of biological children reported by male respondents by birth cohort and compare them with women from the same birth cohort. Biological children are defined as those offspring born directly from an individual through a biological procreation relationship. This category includes all children who are direct descendants of biological parents, without considering aspects related to adoption or other forms of non-biological parenthood. All cases of reporting biological children for men under 15 years and for women under 14 years were excluded.

To compare the number of biological children, a specific syntax was developed: the sum of the number of biological children reported by respondents for their current partner (dem42, dem44, dem46), each previous partner (lhi08_, lhi10_, lhi12_*) and previous partners with whom they did not cohabit (lhi19), (Jin, Grunwald & Rijken, 2024). The analysis addresses the event of the birth of a first, second and third biological child (in a data set expressed in the month and year of birth). The average number of biological children was analyzed for each selected birth cohort, allowing for a comparison between men and women. The statistical package SPSS was used for analyzing and managing demographic variables, as well as for developing the specific syntax related to the biological number of children.

The probability method was applied to analyze transition patterns to parenthood. This method allows the estimation of the probability distribution function and the analysis of the time until the occurrence of a specific event, in this case, the birth of a child of a specific order. The probabilities of a particular event occurring were determined separately for men and women to compare fertility trajectories between genders.

THE RESULTS OF RESEARCH

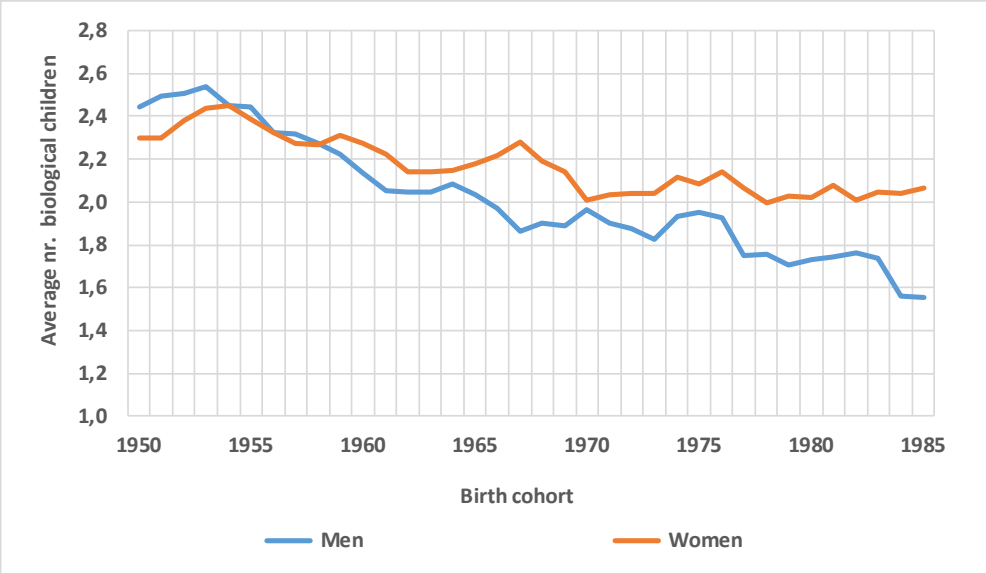
The results show that for the cohorts born in 1950 and the mid-1960s, the age at first birth exhibited relative stability for both sexes; however, the differences between genders remain evident (Fig.1). Men born in 1950 had an average of 2.77 children, while women had an average of 2.44. Towards the end of that decade, there is a general trend of decreasing the average number of children among both men and women.

The reproductive behavior of the cohorts of women and men born in the mid-1960s, when they reached reproductive age, was influenced by the family policies of the 1980s, which affected fertility, leading to a higher average number of biological children (in 1966: for men – 2.33, and for women – 2.34). During this period, a significant difference was recorded in the number of biological children, with an increase for women and a decrease for men, which could be caused by differences in the cohort sizes of men and women.

The cohort born in 1985, which had not yet completed their reproductive period at the time of the interview, indicates a more pronounced gender difference, especially among men. The differences observed in the younger cohorts may be attributed to the tendency of men to fulfill their reproductive intentions at a later age than women. This trend, combined with the socio-economic uncertainty and instability of the period, contributed to the continued decline in the mean number of biological children.

Figure 1

The mean number of biological children over cohorts 1950-1985



Source: Moldova, GGS (2020)

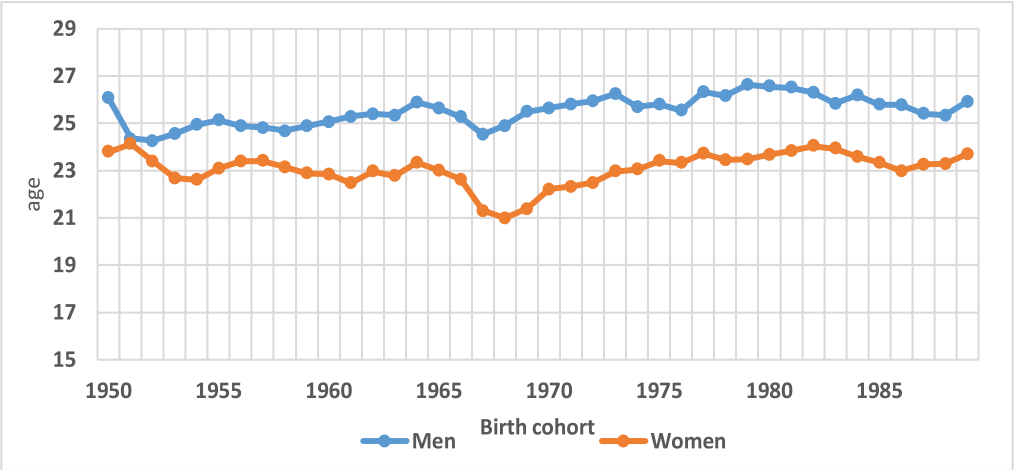
Thus, men tend to become parents for the first time around 25. At the same time, women reach this threshold around the age of 23, reflecting distinct socio-cultural norms regarding gender roles and the transition to parenthood.

There has been an increase in the age at first birth for cohorts born in the 1970s, attributed to changes in demographic behavior and the onset of the second demographic transition. Age patterns have shown a downward trend for cohorts born between 1980 and 1985, representing a solid indication of the establishment of the fertility transition, and the age difference between men and women has increased. Results from local studies analyzing birth patterns in female cohorts revealed that an early fertility pattern was characteristic for female cohorts born in the 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, in these cohorts, the birth model was rejuvenated and influenced by family policies in the 1980s, which decreased higher-order births at older ages. This behavior led to the emergence of a delayed fertility pattern, in which first births occurred later, and the total number of children decreased (Gagauz & Grigoraș, 2018).

In general, the sex-specific age difference in the analyzed cohorts is stable, maintaining a difference of about three years.

Figure 2

Mean age at first marriage (birth cohorts 1950-1989)



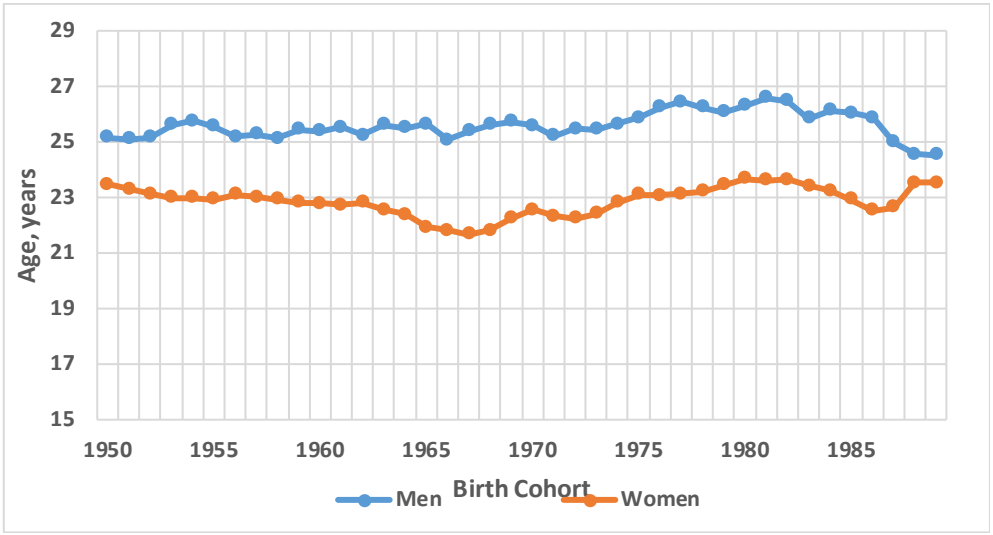
Source: Moldova, GGS (2020)

Generally, men tend to marry later than women, resulting in a delay in the time when men start having children compared to women. The age at first marriage for different cohorts highlights specific gender differences. For those born in the 1950s-1960s, the age at first marriage was significantly lower (Fig.2). However, for those born in the 1980s, the average age at first marriage has increased considerably. Up to the mid-1960s, an early marriage pattern is observed, with men marrying around the age of 25 and women around the age of 23. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the age at first marriage increased to 26 years for men and 24 years for women, with an average age difference of two years between men's and women's first marriages.

The age gap can be explained by that aspect that males become sexually mature approximately two years later compared to their female counterparts. According to marriage market theories, relatively stable ages at first birth and "historical perpetuation" generate a stable age distance within the range of two to three years. This age gap is only widened or closed if high barriers (economic or social) to enter a (marital) partnership are imposed on men or women, e.g. payment of high bride money or dowry; the achievement of a certain social position etc. (Shephard, 2019). Even if the presented models did not account for such factors, the results suggest that these barriers are significant in Moldova.

Figure 3

Mean age at first birth (birth cohorts 1950 to 1989)

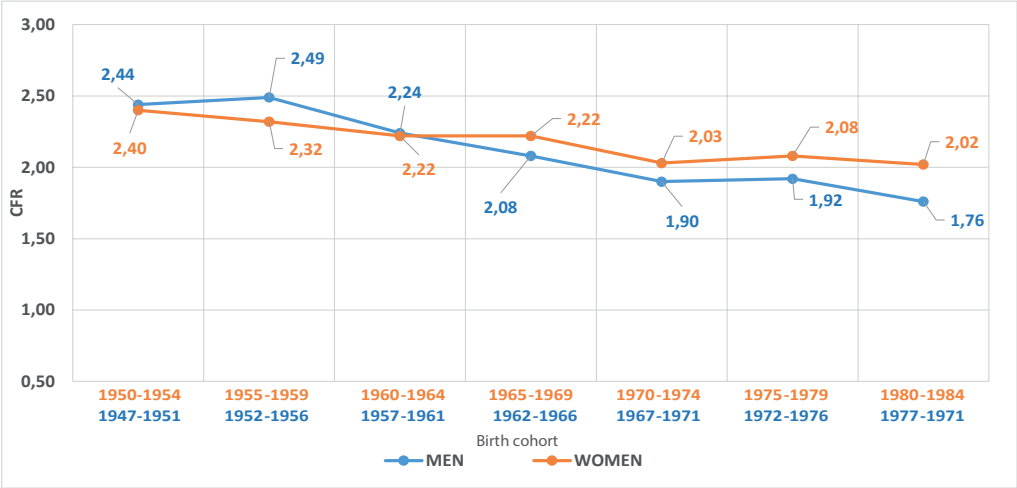


Source: Moldova, GGS (2020)

Men tend to become parents for the first time three years later than women. To compare male and female cohorts, the group of women born between 1950-1954 was compared with the group of men born between 1947-1951 (Fig.4). After making this adjustment, the differences between the two groups became significantly smaller. However, both male and female cohorts show a trend of decreasing numbers of biological children. For the cohorts born between 1977 and 1981, the average number of children for men was 1.76, while for women born between 1980 and 1984, it was 2.02.

Figure 4

Sex differences in Cohort Fertility Rate

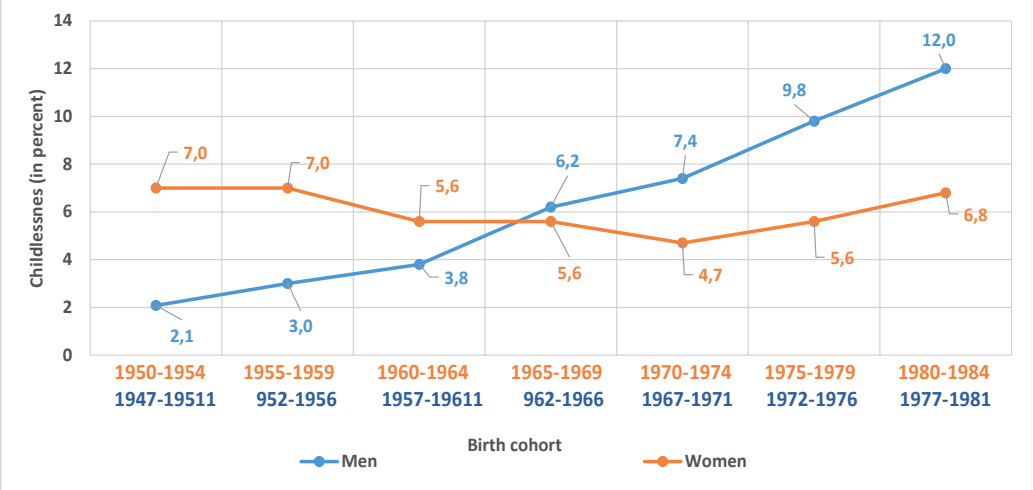


Source: Moldova, GGS (2020)

In Moldova, it is uncommon for women to stay childless, as most women aim to have at least one child during their reproductive years. The percentage of women who have not had children by the end of their reproductive period is compared to the percentage of men who are three years younger and have not had biological children in their lifetime. There is a variation in the percentage of childless women across different generations born between 1950 and 1984, ranging from 7% to 5.6% (Fig.5). In contrast, the percentage of men born between 1947 and 1966 is significantly lower but shows an increasing trend, from 2.1% to 6.2%. These differences can be attributed to the sizes of the cohorts as well as other relevant factors that have influenced the demographic structure of the male population. The reversal of the percentages of childless women and men in the cohorts born in 1970 indicates changes in the reproductive behavior of both men and women. Research from various countries has shown that voluntary childlessness is more common among men than women. The decision to have children generally has a greater impact on women's lives, as they tend to be more eager to have children (Szalma, et.al., 2015).

Figure 5

Reported childlessness (women birth cohorts 1950 to 1984, men birth cohorts 1947-1981)



Source: Moldova, GGS (2020)

The distribution of men and women by the number of biological children reveals similar changes between the sexes. Families with two children are predominant among both men and women. A characteristic specific to men is the realization of reproductive intentions later in life, which leads to a higher proportion of persons who do not have any children in the younger cohorts born between 1980 and 1984 (22%), who were aged 36-40 at the time of the interview (Fig.6,7).

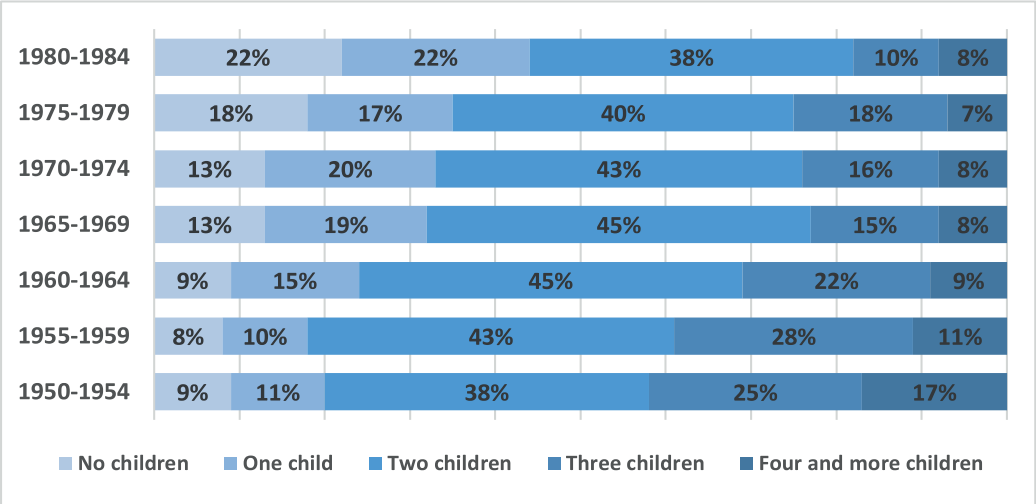
Compared to women, the proportion of men without children is increasing and is significantly higher among both mature and younger cohorts. The proportion of men who have had no children by the age of 46-50 (the cohorts born between 1970 and 1974) is 13% (although this proportion may decrease due to the aging reserve and the unlimited reproductive capacity of men). There is a notable increase in the proportion of men with one child, rising from 11% in the cohorts born between 1950 and 1954 to 20% in the cohorts born between 1970 and 1974.

At the same time, it is observed that men experience a faster reduction in the number of biological children of the third birth order and more. If the cohorts born between 1950 and 1954 reported a proportion of 41%, in the cohorts born between 1970 and 1974, this proportion has decreased to 24%. In a comparative aspect, women exhibit a more rapid reduction in the number of children of the fourth rank and more, while the decrease in the number of children of third birth order is more gradual.

The fact that men are having children later in life suggests a shift in priorities, especially among younger generations. More younger men are not having children, which could have important effects on family life and government policies that support families. Also, there is a significant decrease in the number of men with three or more children, compared to women. This shows a change in family preferences and a reconsideration of traditional roles within the family.

Figure 6

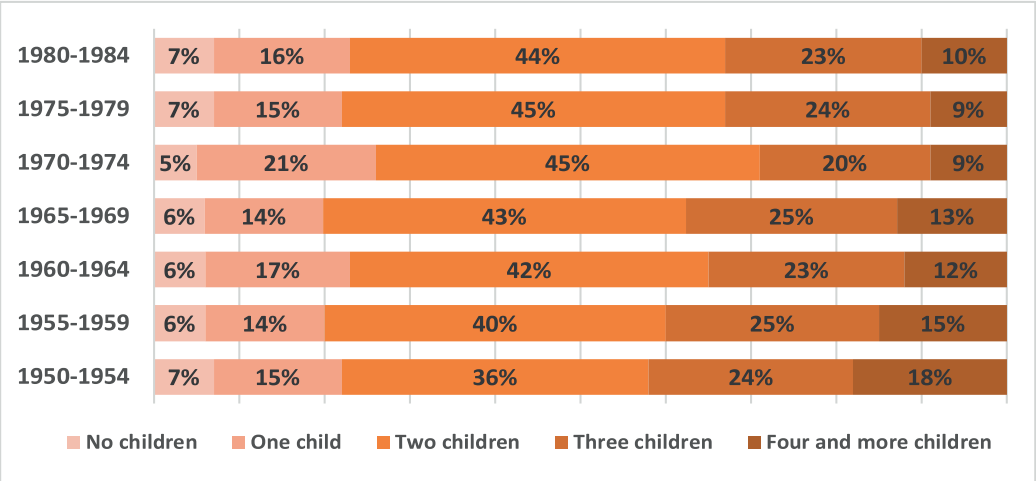
Men - Parity-specific distributions (birth cohorts 1950 to 1984)



Source: Moldova GGS (2020)

Figure 7

Women- Parity-specific distributions (birth cohorts 1950 to 1984)



Source: Moldova GGS (2020)

SEX DIFFERENCES IN PARITY-SPECIFIC TRANSITION MODELS.

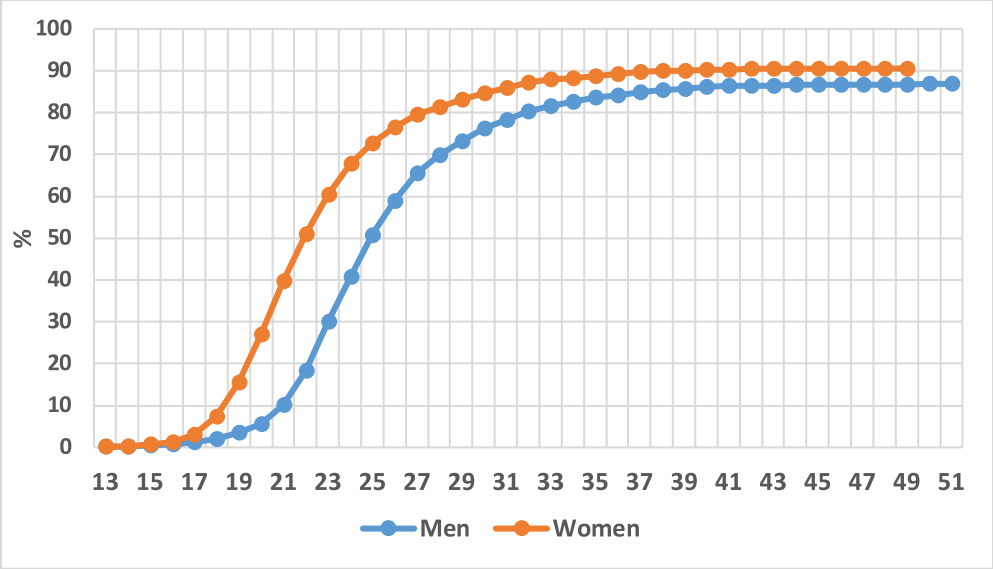
The transition to parenthood highlights specific characteristics of reproductive behavior depending on the sex variable, serving as a relevant indicator of reproduction. The data demonstrate significant disparities in the likelihood of having a child at a certain age throughout life for men and women in Moldova.

The results showed that women become mothers earlier than men become fathers, and we explored the impact of gender on the likelihood of having biological children of different birth orders by a certain age. We chose men and women aged 35-60 to calculate the probabilities of having biological children of different birth orders. These respondents either completed or were close to the end of their reproductive process, allowing us to track the probabilities of having biological children of different birth orders over their reproductive lifetimes and highlighting fertility differences based on gender. The population selected for analysis, recorded during the demographic GGS study, refers to cohorts born between 1960 and 1985.

Thus, the probability of having a first child at the age of 22 for women is 50%, while for men it is below 20% (Fig.8). Starting at age 23, the probability of having a first child for women begins to increase, reaching 80% at the age of 27, whereas men reach this point at the age of 31. The gap reaches its minimal values by the age of 33, and by the age of 35, it stabilizes at 90% for women and 82% for men. By the end of the reproductive period for women aged 40-49, the probability of having a first child is 90%, while for men, by the age of 50, the probability is 87%, indicating that men have a more extended reproductive period than women.

Figure 8

Probability of having the first child,

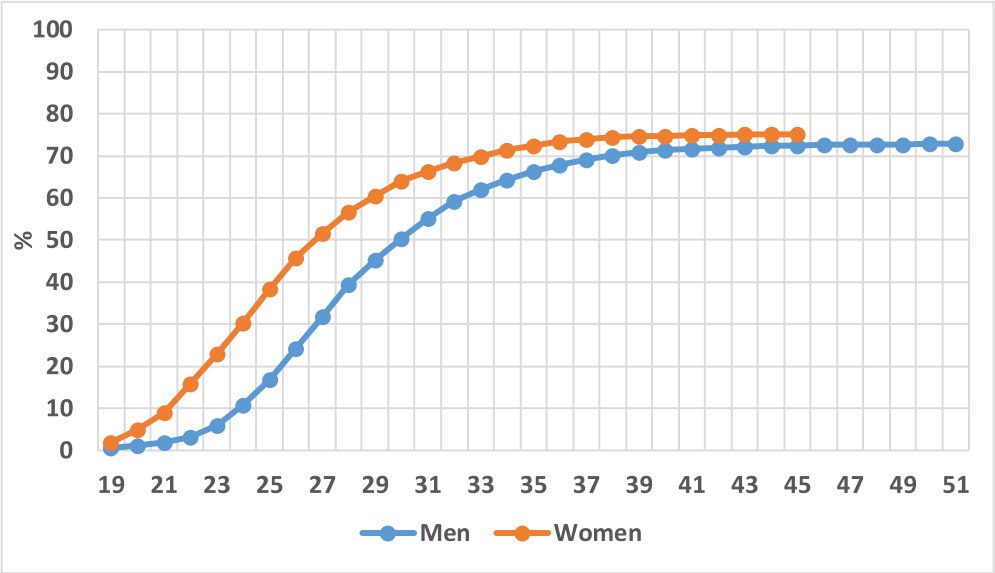


Source: Moldova GGS (2020)

The probability of having a second child at a certain age shows significant differences based on age, with distinct probabilities for men and women. The most notable differences occur at younger ages, up to and including 28 years (Fig.9). Women tend to have a second child at a younger age compared to men. For women, the probability of having a second child at age 27 is 50%, while men reach this probability around 30.

At 33, the probability of having a second child for women is 70%, while men achieve this proportion by age 38. From age 35, the probability of having a second child for both men and women starts to become similar, and the differences decrease. After age 35, the gap between the two probabilities gradually narrows, indicating that most men and women have had a second child by this age. By age 40, 75% of women and 71% of men have had a second child. The probability curve for men transitioning to a second child declines more slowly. It extends over a longer period, reflecting the tendency of men to become parents for the second time at older ages, with a 71% probability by age 51.

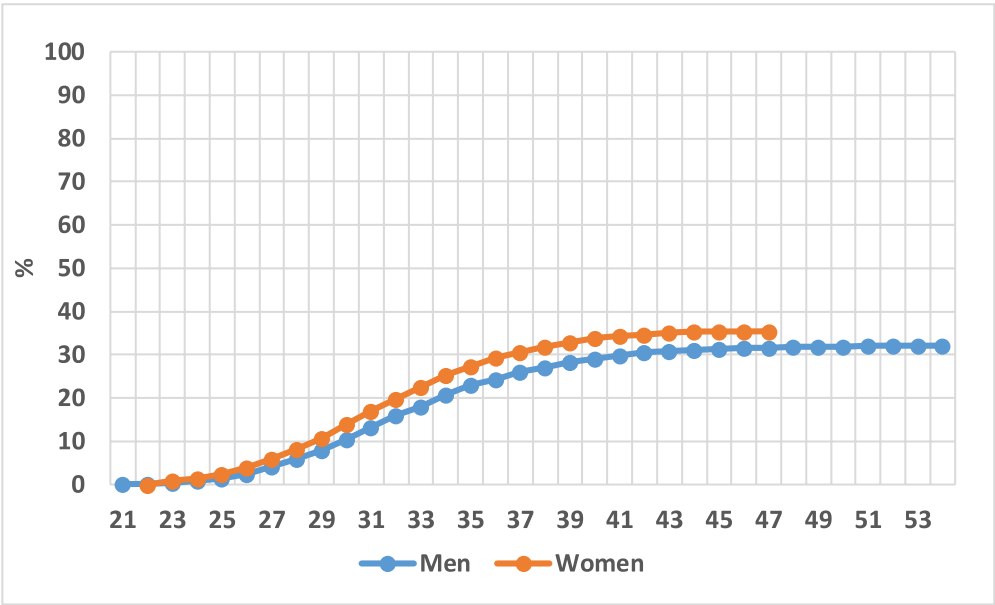
Figure 9
Probability of having a second child



Source: Moldova GGS (2020)

The transition to having a third child in Moldova shows a shift towards older ages, with variations of up to 9% in the 29-34 age range (Fig.10). By the age of 36, approximately 30% of women have a probability of having a third child, whereas the probability curve for men reaches 20%. A characteristic feature for both men and women is that the probability curves extend into older ages. On one hand, the fertility curve for women is limited to age 47, reaching a probability of 35%. On the other hand, the probability of having a third child for men extends until the age of 54, reaching 30%.

Figure 10
Probability of having a third child.



Source: Moldova GGS (2020)

We find that a significant portion of the reproductive intentions of both women and men are fulfilled by age 37, considering that the probability of having a first child is 90% for women and 85% for men. By 39, 75% of women and 71% of men have a second child. By the age of 40, 35% of women and 29% of men have a third child.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the differences in parity-specific transition models between men and women in Moldova, focusing on cohorts born between 1950 and 1989, although older generations (1941-1949) could have been included. The longitudinal approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of fertility dynamics by tracking reproductive behavior across life stages and transitions to different birth orders. However, ensuring the quality and reliability of data on male fertility is more challenging than for women, as men need a clearly defined reproductive period like women (15-49 years). Furthermore, since the study relies on self-reporting, there is a risk of underreporting the number of biological children by men. Data may be influenced by memory recall and respondent honesty, as it is easier to link mothers with their children than fathers, especially in cases of children from different relationships or unplanned children.

Significant differences and changes in the demographic fertility levels of men highlight a notable decrease in the number of biological children of the male and female cohorts born in 1950-1980. The average number of biological children among men born in 1950 was high, at 2.44, but this number rapidly declined in younger cohorts, reaching 1.76 children for men born in 1980. Compared to men, women experienced a slower reduction in childbearing, with fertility dropping from 2.40 children for women born in 1950 to 2.02 children in cohorts born in 1980.

The results elucidate that men become parents, on average, three years later than women and have fewer children over their lifetime. Moreover, the proportion of men who remain childless throughout their lives is moderate (13%), compared to women. For females who have completed their reproductive period, childlessness remains low (5%), consistent with similar findings in Eastern European countries (Miettinen, et. al., 2015). Despite this, the two-child family remains the predominant model for men and women across all cohorts. The declining proportion of individuals with higher-order births in younger cohorts suggests a broader trend toward smaller families and lower fertility.

The probability of having a first child is significantly higher for women at younger ages. However, by age 35, gender differences start to diminish, and by age 39, most men and women have at least one biological child. In Moldova, men typically end their reproductive period by age 54, while women conclude theirs around age 47, particularly for second and third children. Contrary to findings from Russia results (Alich, 2007), where men end their reproductive period around the same time as women (age 49), fertility patterns in Moldova show more significant differentiation between male and female reproductive behaviors.

Neither the evaluation of the aggregate indicators, nor the transition to the first, the second and the third birth allude to the assumption that men from Moldova, have more children during their lifespan, even if men have the biological ability to become fathers at older ages. Being in agreement with other longitudinal studies on transition to fatherhood of male cohorts, the main manifestation of changes in reproductive behavior for young cohorts was the postponement of childbearing to older ages which started with the cohorts born in the late of 1960 (Dudel, et. al., 2020); (Kyzlinková & Šťastná, 2018), (Zeman, Beaujouan, Brzozowska, & Sobotka, 2018).

The fertility pattern of Moldovan men is influenced by two main aspects. First men typically become fathers three years later than women, as they complete their reproductive period at older ages. Second, the prevalent preference for families to have two children in Moldova further contributes o explain particularities of reproductive behaviour of men.

The results of this study underscore the importance of examining parity-specific fertility transitions for both men and women during periods of declining fertility, particularly in research on demographic patterns. Moreover, these findings emphasize the need to study the socio-demographic and economic factors contributing to the differences in fertility behavior between men and women in Moldova.

CONCLUSION

The study has contributed to a deeper understanding of fertility trends by gender and transition to parenthood, offering a comparative perspective on these processes. The research highlights the need for a longitudinal approach and a detailed analysis of gender-differentiated reproductive behavior to clarify fertility dynamics and their influence on demographic sustainability.

To sum up, Moldovian men reported fewer biological children than their female counterparts. The special pproach of comparing the number of biological children of female birth cohorts with male birth cohorts three years older elucidates more minor sex differences. Additionally, the proportion of men who remain childless throughout their lives is significantly higher compared to women who have completed their reproductive period. Moldovan men's fertility pattern can be characterized by

the onset of reproductive activity at older ages, having fewer children on average than women, and ending their reproductive period later in life. These findings suggest substantial differences in the reproductive behavior of men and women, contributing to a broader and more complete picture of population dynamics and fertility trends.

The consistent trend of families having two children and a decrease in the number of higher-order births among younger generations indicates a broader shift towards smaller families and declining the total number of biological children. The convergence in declining fertility among men and women suggest solid foundation for more effective and targeted policies aligned with contemporary demographic realities.

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