

Factor Modelling of Russian Parents' Opinions on the Impact of the Parental Leave System on the Birth Rate

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Abstract

In the context of the negative demographic trend in Russia, new mechanisms for stimulating birth rates are of particular relevance. One such instrument is parental leave policy. The aim of our study is to model the impact of potential transformations in parental leave on the reproductive intentions of Russian parents using factor analysis. In 2022, we conducted a survey of Russian parents with children under the age of 18 months. The sample consisted of 1,000 individuals, and the survey covered nearly all regions of Russia. We identified two main components: 1. Opinions on the flexibility of the parental leave system as a factor for improving birth rates; 2. Opinions on the amount of parental leave benefits as a factor for improving birth rates. We found significant correlations between the values of these components and several socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, satisfaction with the current division of parental responsibilities within the family, the desire to legally mandate fathers to take a portion of parental leave in Russia, and the prospective evaluation of the financial status change if mandatory paternal leave were to be introduced. Our results contribute to the ongoing debate on the necessity and feasibility of improving the existing parental leave system in Russia and its potential impact on birth rates.

Keywords

Parental leave; leave system flexibility; parental benefits; Russian parents; correlation analysis; factor analysis

JEL codes: J13, J16, J18

Introduction

The demographic situation in Russia is characterized by several negative trends, including declining birth rates, an increasing average age at which women give birth, overall population decline, and other related issues. The government has implemented a series of measures aimed at increasing birth rates; however, despite these pro-natalist policies, the total number of births, crude birth rates, and total fertility rates continue to decrease. Given this negative demographic trend, there is a pressing need for innovative mechanisms to stimulate birth rates.

The declining birth rates in many developed countries can be attributed to the high level of work-family conflict. This concept is rooted in the gender dynamics of relationships based on traditional gender roles. According to this paradigm, men are seen as breadwinners, while women are expected to be homemakers. However, as economies have evolved, women have become more actively engaged in the workforce, leading to an increased burden on women as they try to balance work and family responsibilities (Hirdman & Andreassen 1991). The demands of employment can discourage women from having children, as juggling both roles can be a daunting challenge with numerous obstacles. Employed mothers may also face less favourable conditions in terms of job opportunities, wages, and career advancement compared to women without children. These disparities in treatment are often referred to as the «motherhood penalty» (Budig & England 2001).

According to the concept of parental labour, when the rewards for professional and parental labour are imbalanced, women are more inclined to prioritize their careers over child-rearing. To promote population growth, it is crucial to create favourable conditions that support individuals in fulfilling their reproductive functions (Ilyshev & Bagirova 2009). In line with the concept of gender transition, declining birth rates are a consequence of the increasing burden placed on women as they balance both parental and professional responsibilities, leading to a higher opportunity cost of women's time and a shift in societal values. Increasing birth rates can be achieved in the later stages of this transition by encouraging greater involvement of men in domestic work (Kalabikhina 2012).

Faced with the need to balance their professional and family roles simultaneously, many young women often choose to prioritize their careers and creative self-fulfillment (Baizan et al. 2016; Pevnaya & Cernicova-Buca 2020). Researchers suggest that this trend can be attributed to the limited involvement of the second parent in the child-rearing process. Women, bearing a significant burden, often postpone or even decide against having a second or subsequent child. Conversely, when fathers are actively engaged in carrying out parental responsibilities, it increases the likelihood of having a second child in the family (Faneli & Profeta 2021). The availability of non-transferrable paternal leave is seen as a critical factor in stimulating birth rates, more so than the duration or level of payments (Rebrey et al. 2023). Therefore, gender equality policies can be considered effective tools for boosting birth rates (Myrskylä et al. 2011).

Researchers argue that significant methods to encourage fertility also include creating favorable conditions for balancing work and family life and reducing the costs associated with childbirth and child-rearing (Gauthier 2007). Another potential strategy to counter negative demographic trends involves state support measures aimed at making childcare less dependent on families. This includes developing childcare services and facilities up to school age (Plantenga et al. 2008). The well-developed system of childcare services has contributed to increased birth rates in France and Northern European countries (Bonoli 2008).

On the other hand, state propaganda efforts to promote traditional family values are somewhat less effective, as they have a positive impact on the decision to have a first child but have minimal influence on the decision to have second and subsequent children (Billingsley & Ferrarini 2014).

In recent years, parental leave policies, particularly well-developed in European countries, have gained increased attention from foreign researchers. They argue that parental leave can contribute to increasing birth rates, offering several compelling arguments. Firstly, a parental leave system can be more or less flexible, allowing parents to work part-time during their leave or take shorter leave periods while receiving larger benefits. This flexibility creates favourable conditions for balancing professional and household responsibilities and helps alleviate the conflict between family and work, which is seen as a driver of declining birth rates (Ekberg et al. 2013; Nomaguchi & Fetto 2019). Secondly, the design of parental leave systems in many European countries includes paternity leave or paternity quotas. Paternity leave encourages greater involvement of fathers in childcare and eases the burden on mothers (Goldscheider et al. 2015; Farre & Gonzales 2017; Baum & Ruhm 2016). Therefore, parental leave policies are closely linked to gender equality policies, as men take on a share of household and parenting responsibilities, enabling women to more actively pursue their professional and creative potential and remain competitive in the labour market (Geyer et al. 2015; Thomas et al. 2022). Thirdly, parental benefits paid during leave contribute to the financial well-being of families and establish conditions for subsequent births (Raute 2019).

Despite the growing interest of foreign researchers in parental leave policies, Russia has given relatively little attention to this issue. Many studies have explored the involvement of fathers and the concept of paternal leave. Almazova and Ilyinykh (2015) assert that the practice of «a father on leave» is not widely popular in Russia, where traditional patriarchal values still dominate society. According to these values, mothers are expected to be the primary providers of parental and household services in the family. Researchers argue that women, after experiencing a heavy burden of domestic and parental responsibilities during their leave, often choose to prioritize their careers over having more children (Moreva & Sanochkina 2020). The gender imbalance in the distribution of household responsibilities during leave is not the only reason why families decide not to have further children. Negative effects are also linked to the declining well-being of families while on leave (Abbasov et al. 2020). Authors suggest that addressing these issues may involve developing a more flexible system of parental leave, similar to those available in many Western countries, where parents can determine the duration of their leave and adjust payment terms (e.g., opting for shorter leave with higher payments or vice versa) (Kalabikhina & Kuznetsova 2022).

In Russia, labour legislation provides for two types of leave — maternity leave and parental leave (childcare leave). However, there is no distinct paternity leave as such, and it is not stipulated by the legislation. Nonetheless, leave after childbirth can be taken by not only mothers but also fathers and other relatives of the child, such as grandparents. Leave can be used in full or partially, and it can be combined with work, provided that the work is part-time. Another distinctive feature of the Russian parental leave system is its extended duration: 140 days for maternity leave, including 70 calendar days before and 70 calendar days after childbirth, and 3 years for parental leave, with well-paid portions lasting until the child reaches 18 months (40 percent of average earnings). The Russian parental leave system has remained largely unchanged for several decades, even though its transformation could potentially offer opportunities to increase birth rates.

Our study aims to model the potential impact of parental leave transformations on the reproductive intentions of Russian parents, using factor analysis. The novelty of our research lies in assessing the reproductive effects of introducing additional flexibility elements into the parental leave structure in Russia and classifying these effects through factor analysis.

Data and methods

We conducted a sociological survey of Russian parents with children under the age of 18 months. We chose this age threshold because parents in Russia are entitled to a childcare benefit equal to 40% of the parent's average salary until the child reaches 18 months of age. Our sample consisted of 1,000 individuals, and the survey was conducted in May and June 2022, covering nearly all regions of Russia. To ensure a representative sample, we employed quota sampling based on geographical location, focusing on the federal districts of Russia. This was important due to Russia's diverse cultural landscape and significant cultural differences between regions. We utilized online panels for the survey, implementing various procedures to enhance data integrity, such as checking questionnaires for completion time, ensuring consistency in responses to logically connected questions, analysing responses to trap questions, and evaluating the linearity of table entries in questions, among others.

The sample bias did not exceed 3.1%. However, there were some limitations in the study related to the gender and education bias among parents with children under 18 months. The survey primarily consisted of female respondents with higher education degrees. We considered this gender bias appropriate, given that only 2% of fathers took paid parental leave, according to data from the Social Insurance Fund of the Russian Federation for 2019. To mitigate the impact of education bias on the study results, we rescaled the raw data using weighting coefficients to account for the distribution of people with different levels of education in the overall sample. This allowed us to control for three socio-demographic parameters: (1) having children under 18 months (the filter question during recruitment) and federal districts during respondent selection; (2) the level of education during data processing through the rescaling procedure. This approach helped reduce the influence of sample bias on the study results. The distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents is provided in the Appendix (Table A1).

To assess the impact of potential transformations in the parental leave system on the reproductive intentions of parents, we employed factor analysis. This approach was chosen because it offers the opportunity to reduce the number of variables for analysis and to identify hidden factors that explain the motives of Russian parents.

To explore the opinions of parents eligible for childcare leave regarding factors that could influence their decision to have another child, we presented seven statements about possible changes to the parental leave system. Respondents were asked to rate these statements on a 5-point scale:

- V1 – Obliging the father to take a part of childcare leave;
- V2 – Using a part of childcare leave by both parents simultaneously;
- V3 – Prolonging childcare leave if working part-time;
- V4 – Increasing the benefit when taking shorter leave;
- V5 – Increasing the childcare benefit to the level of the average income;
- V6 – Prolonging paid childcare leave until the child is 3 years of age;
- V7 – Using a part of childcare leave at any time until the child is 7 years of age.

To ensure that the variables are valid for factor analysis, we used Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. As an extraction method, we adopted Principal Component Analysis. The number of factors was determined using the Scree Plot and by evaluating the explained variance share. The Varimax method was used for orthogonal rotation. The relationship between the obtained components and socio-demographic characteristics was determined through non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests and Kruskal-Wallis tests (for nominal and ordinal variables) and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (for numeric variables). We utilized SPSS 22.0 for our analysis.

Results

Means, medians, mode, and standard deviations pertaining to the seven variables of interest are presented in Table 1.

The correlation matrix is provided in Table 2. It demonstrates the relationships between opinions of respondents regarding various opportunities for transforming the parental leave system in terms of their influence on reproductive decisions. For example, among those who believe that the obligation of fathers to use a part of childcare leave would result in new reproductive decisions about further childbearing, there is a higher share of those who claim that the use of a part of childcare leave by both parents simultaneously would also have a positive effect on birth rates. Importantly, the correlation table does not have any negative values, which means that, according to the respondents, there are not any possible transformations that can lead to falling birth rates, and thus any change in the policy would contribute to their growth.

We proved that factor analysis could be used for 7 variables observed through two statistical tests: Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, calculated according to the sample data, equals to 2246.837 ($df = 21$; $\alpha = 0.000$); Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is 0.806.

Table 3 testify to the relevance of determining two components.

Table 4 presents loadings of all variables for two factors. Each variable is clearly identifiable with only one of two factors.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
V1	3.00	3	5	1.636
V2	3.46	4	5	1.528
V3	3.84	4	5	1.306
V4	3.92	5	5	1.380
V5	4.58	5	5	0.846
V6	4.48	5	5	0.968
V7	3.75	4	5	1.368

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Respondents' Opinions about the Influence of Parental Leave System Transformation on Deciding to Have Subsequent Children

Variables	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6
V2	.689**	-				
V3	.406**	.409**	-			
V4	.370**	.366**	.494**	-		
V5	.164**	.243**	.354**	.346**	-	
V6	.191**	.269**	.381**	.303**	.460**	-
V7	.407**	.440**	.484**	.436**	.311**	.463**

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 3. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Overall %	Total	% of Variance	Overall %
1	3.317	47.380	47.380	2.529	36.125	36.125
2	1.130	16.144	63.524	1.918	27.398	63.524
3	0.713	10.188	73.711			
4	0.586	8.368	82.079			
5	0.498	7.108	89.187			
6	0.472	6.743	95.931			
7	0.285	4.069	100.00			
8	3.317	47.380	47.380			
9	1.130	16.144	63.524			
10	0.713	10.188	73.711			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Indicators	Component	
	1	2
Obliging the father to take a part of childcare leave	0.886	0.015
Using a part of childcare leave by both parents simultaneously	0.851	0.094
Prolonging childcare leave if working part-time	0.577	0.478
Increasing the benefit when taking shorter leave	0.559	0.413
Increasing the childcare benefit to the level of the average income	0.104	0.815
Prolonging paid childcare leave until the child is 3 years of age	0.132	0.808
Using a part of childcare leave at any time until the child is 7 years of age	0.589	0.439

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Source: Authors' calculations

After the factor analysis, we obtained two components:

- Component 1: opinions on the flexibility of the parental leave system as a factor to improve birth rates (36.1% of the total variance).
- Component 2: opinions on the amount of parental leave benefits as a factor to improve birth rates (27.4% of the total variance).

We discovered significant correlations between the values of these components and the age and gender of the respondents. However, we did not find any statistically significant differences between the values of these components and the level of education of family members, their income, the number of children, family status, or the population of their region (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation Between Components and Respondents’ Socio-demographic Characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Mann-Whitney U test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient
Component 1: Parental Leave System Flexibility as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates			
Respondents’ gender	$U = 25186.000$ $Z = -4.225$ Asymp. Sig = 0.641		
Respondents’ education		$\chi^2 = 8.656$ $df = 4$ Asymp. Sig = 0.070	
Education of the respondent’s spouse		$\chi^2 = 2.968$ $df = 4$ Asymp. Sig = 0.563	
Population of the respondents’ settlement		$\chi^2 = 3.569$ $df = 6$ Asymp. Sig = 0.947	
Family status		$\chi^2 = 3.356$ $df = 4$ Asymp. Sig = 0.500	
Age of respondents			$\rho = -0.040$ Asymp. Sig = 0.207
Income			$\rho = 0.007$ Asymp. Sig = 0.816
Number of children			$\rho = 0.037$ Asymp. Sig = 0.243
Age of the youngest child			$\rho = 0.042$ Asymp. Sig = 0.181
Socio-demographic characteristics	Mann-Whitney U test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient

Socio-demographic characteristics	Mann-Whitney U test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Spearman's rank correlation coefficient
Component 2: Amount of Parental Leave Benefits as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates			
Respondents' gender	$U = 34402.000$ $Z = -0.466$ Asymp. Sig = 0.000**		
Respondents' education		$\chi^2 = 0.293$ $df = 4$ Asymp. Sig = 0.990	
Education of the respondent's spouse		$\chi^2 = 0.917$ $df = 4$ Asymp. Sig = 0.922	
Population of the respondents' settlement		$\chi^2 = 1.678$ $df = 6$ Asymp. Sig = 0.735	
Family status		$\chi^2 = 7.028$ $df = 4$ Asymp. Sig = 0.134	
Age of respondents			$\rho = 0.070$ Asymp. Sig = 0.028*
Income			$\rho = -0.037$ Asymp. Sig = 0.242
Number of children			$\rho = 0.024$ Asymp. Sig = 0.448
Age of the youngest child			$\rho = -0.035$ Asymp. Sig = 0.272

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' calculations

The following are the most significant results of the study.

Women more often believe that increasing benefits may improve birth rates (Figure 1).

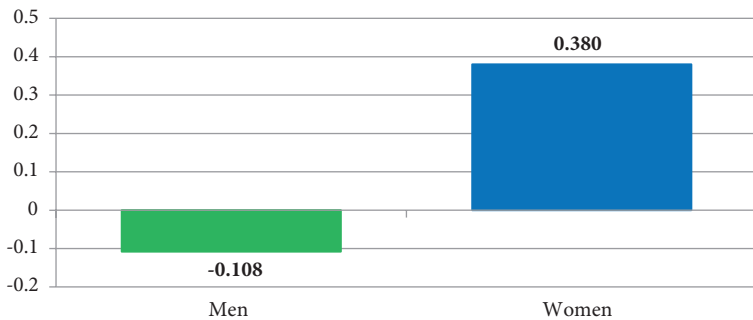


Figure 1. Component 2 (Amount of Parental Leave Benefits as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates) for Respondents of Different Genders. Source: Authors' calculations

We identified a weak but significant correlation between the age of respondents and Component 2 (see Figure 2). This correlation might be attributed to the fact that older parents were educated during the era of Soviet paternalism, where the government played a pivotal role in ensuring the financial well-being of its citizens.

Figure 3 illustrates that respondents' perceptions of the flexibility of parental leave are closely linked to the introduction of paternal quotas. If respondents express agreement with the introduction of paternal quotas as part of parental leave, they also tend to endorse the idea that a more flexible leave system in Russia can have a positive impact on birth rates.

The stipulation of obligatory paternal quotas can potentially influence the financial status of the family. Respondents assess this influence differently depending on which factor for birth rate growth is more significant for them—the flexibility of parental leave or the amount of benefits (see Table 6).

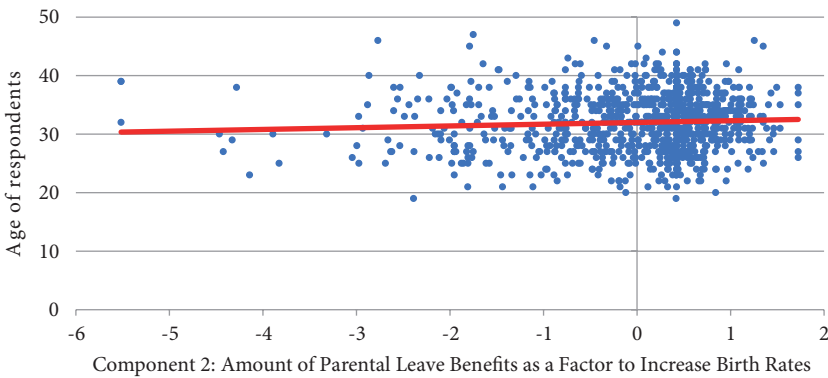


Figure 2. Correlation Between Component 2 and Age of Respondents. *Source:* Authors' calculations



Figure 3. Correlation Between Opinions on the Introduction of Paternal Quotas and Evaluations of Parental Leave System Flexibility Impact on Increasing Birth Rates. *Source:* Authors' calculations

Table 6. Correlation Between Components and Perspective Evaluation of Family's Financial Status Change in case of Introducing Paternal Leave (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient)

Variables	Component 1: Parental Leave System Flexibility as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates	Component 2: Amount of Parental Leave Benefits as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates
Family's financial status change in case of introducing paternal leave	$\rho = 0.456$ Asymp.Sig = 0.000**	$\rho = -0.124$ Asymp.Sig = 0.000**

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors' calculations

Thus:

- The stronger parents believe that the flexibility of the parental leave system may increase birth rates, the more frequently they support the idea that introducing paternal leave will improve the financial well-being of their family (see Figure 4).
- Conversely, the stronger parents believe that the amount of parental benefits may increase birth rates, the less often they argue that introducing paternal leave will change the financial well-being of their family (see Figure 5).

We also discovered that a stronger belief in the potential of a flexible parental leave system to contribute to increased birth rates is more prevalent among those who are either fully satisfied or completely dissatisfied with the way parental responsibilities are shared within their families (see Table 7).

To comprehend the reasons for the correlation between the allocation of parental responsibilities and the assessment of the parental leave system, we asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to the sharing of parental responsibilities during leave (refer to Table 8).

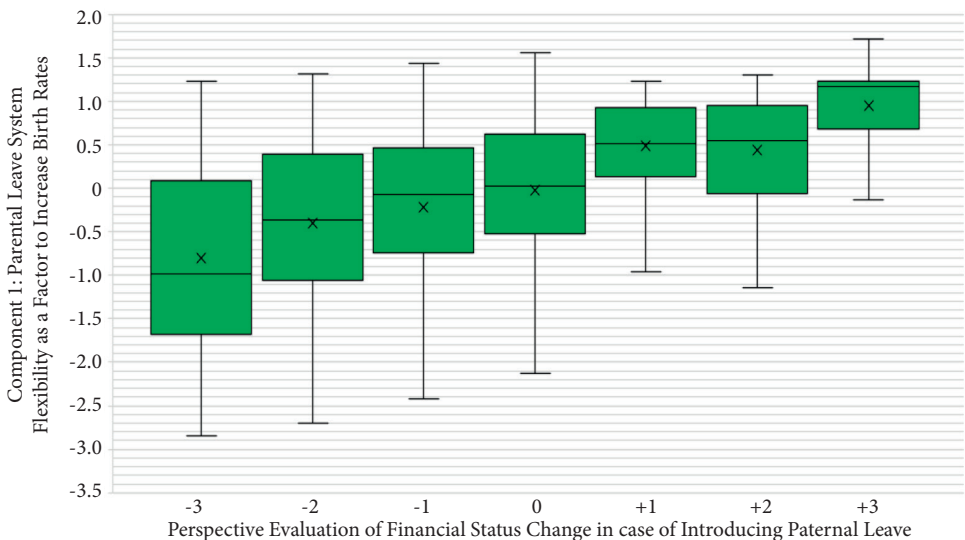


Figure 4. Correlation Between Components and Perspective Evaluation of Financial Status Change in case of Introducing Paternal Leave. Source: Authors' calculations

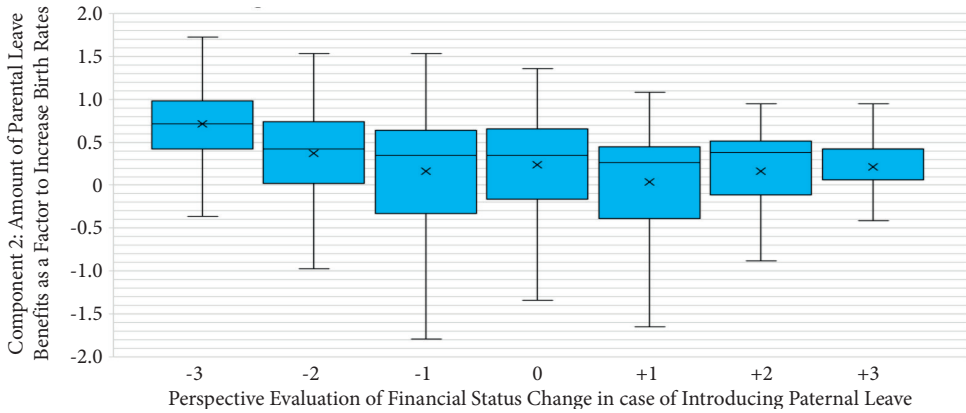


Figure 5. Correlation Between Components and Perspective Evaluation of Financial Status Change in case of Introducing Paternal Leave. *Source:* Authors’ calculations

Table 7. Correlation Between Satisfaction with the Distribution of Responsibilities in the Family During Leave and Evaluation of Parental Leave System’s Role in Increasing Birth Rates

Degree of Satisfaction	Median Value of Component 1: Parental Leave System Flexibility as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates
Fully satisfied	0.370
Rather satisfied	0.014
Both satisfied and not	0.172
Rather dissatisfied	0.406
Very dissatisfied	0.336

Source: Authors’ calculations

Table 8. Statistically Significant Correlations Between Components and Respondents’ Agreement with Statements on Intrafamily Distribution of Duties (Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient)

Statements Evaluated	Component 1: Parental Leave System Flexibility as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates	Component 2: Amount of Parental Leave Benefits as a Factor to Increase Birth Rates
“Spouses have to take an equal part in the childrearing process”	$\rho = 0.132$ Asymp.Sig = 0.000**	$\rho = 0.077$ Asymp.Sig = 0.016*
“Parental leave should be taken by the mother because it is her duty”	$\rho = -0.062$ Asymp.Sig = 0.049*	$\rho = 0.099$ Asymp.Sig = 0.002**
“If possible, it would be better to use babysitting services while parents pursue their career”	$\rho = 0.148$ Asymp.Sig = 0.000**	
“Parents should not turn to grandparents for their help because taking care of children is the responsibility of parents”	$\rho = 0.096$ Asymp.Sig = 0.002**	$\rho = -0.104$ Asymp.Sig = 0.001**

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Authors’ calculations

Respondents who assert that parental leave is primarily a mother's responsibility tend to place stronger emphasis on the amount of parental benefits as the most effective factor for stimulating birth rates. In contrast, those with opposing views attribute the primary role to elements of flexibility within the parental leave structure.

Similar perspectives are held by parents who are open to using babysitting services to alleviate the parental burden and create opportunities for professional development; they regard flexibility elements as a key factor in boosting birth rates. Conversely, those who prefer to take care of their children themselves, without relying on grandparents' assistance, attach greater importance to the role of flexibility within parental leave when making decisions about childbirth, and, conversely, consider the amount of parental benefits to be less significant.

Discussions

Our results give rise to a debate on several interrelated aspects.

1. Based on parents' opinions, we can determine two factors that could contribute to improving birth rates—adding more flexibility elements to the parental leave structure and increasing parental benefits. Therefore, further research may concentrate on which specific flexibility elements may be more important for different categories of parents and their hierarchy. Concerning the amount of benefits, on January 1, 2023, Russia launched a new one—the so-called universal benefit, which substituted several previous ones. To qualify for the universal benefit, an applicant must have an average per capita household income below the subsistence minimum, and assets do not exceed the stipulated limit. Now, the task is to monitor the effectiveness of this measure and its influence on making new reproductive decisions.

2. Components identified in the factor analysis, to some extent, illustrate major problems typical for the existing leave system in Russia.

The amount of parental benefit in Russia accounts for only 40% of the average salary, while it also has a maximum ceiling. The benefit obviously cannot compensate for expenses after childbirth. As a result, the financial well-being of a family with a new-born deteriorates significantly. Moreover, although the duration of parental leave in Russia is 3 years, the benefit is paid only in the first 18 months. In these conditions, returning to work appears to be a more promising economic strategy than having subsequent children.

According to the experience of many world countries, additional flexibility elements may be viewed as an effective instrument for increasing birth rates. As Russia does not provide an obligatory part of leave for fathers and an opportunity to take leave by both parents simultaneously, a major part of childcare burden is shouldered by mothers. The long absence from work may trigger labour discrimination against women and considerably overcomplicate their professional adaptation. To avoid the progressing family–work conflict, Russian women may deny having subsequent births and prioritize their career.

3. Most often, flexibility elements as a factor for improving birth rates are mentioned by those fully satisfied or completely dissatisfied with the division of household responsibilities in the family. We suppose that these are two diametrically opposite groups of Russian parents. In the first case, spouses follow an egalitarian model of sharing household chores; thus, they realize how important flexibility is, as it implies that both spouses are involved in child-rearing. In the second case, on the contrary, there may be an imbalance in the division

of responsibilities between spouses. This category needs more flexibility elements (e.g., paternity quotas) to encourage a more proactive involvement of the second spouse in childcare during leave. The importance of the parental leave system flexibility factor for the birth rate growth in Russia is more evident for the respondents with egalitarian attitudes—they more willingly rely on paid childcare service providers rather than grandparents' help. We hypothesise that higher parental leave flexibility will allow for a bigger number of children in this population group; for example, through the introduction of father's quotas or shared use of parental leave by both parents. Shared use of parental leave by both parents can be achieved by reducing the total duration of leave, which will keep the level of public spending almost unchanged. In our opinion, parents can choose the duration of shared paid parental leave that is appropriate for them. In this case, the maximum duration of shared paid parental leave could be 240 days (assuming that paid parental leave lasts from the 3rd month to the 18th month of the child's life).

Importantly, the lack of a relationship between flexibility elements as a factor for improving birth rates and the level of parents' education can be attributed to the ambiguous role of education in determining birth rates. For example, Balbo and co-authors conducted a comprehensive review of research on birth rate factors and concluded that “the results linking education to fertility are... mixed, with recent empirical results... showing a non-relevant association between education and fertility” (Balbo et al. 2013). The absence of a relationship between flexibility and socio-demographic characteristics may also suggest that various socio-demographic groups of parents find it relevant to increase the flexibility of the parental leave system in today's Russia.

Regarding increasing parental benefits as a factor for increasing birth rates, it is more frequently mentioned by women than men. This difference may be due to women being the primary beneficiaries of leave in Russia. According to statistics, women's income levels are lower than those of men. The Russian Federal State Statistics Service reports that the salaries of highly qualified male employees are 43% higher than those of women with similar competence levels (Rosstat 2021). Consequently, families seem to make an economically rational choice—the leave is taken by the spouse with the lower income level.

Conclusions

Our research has generated the following key findings:

1. Factor analysis played a crucial role in modelling Russian parents' opinions regarding the influence of the parental leave system on birth rates. It enabled us to identify two groups of components that, according to parents, could positively impact birth rates. Further correlation analysis revealed which socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were associated with these factors.

2. The primary factors that may contribute to higher birth rates are the introduction of additional flexibility elements in the parental leave structure and increased parental benefits. Interestingly, flexibility elements as a factor for improving birth rates are most frequently mentioned by those who are either fully satisfied or completely dissatisfied with the division of household responsibilities within their families. On the other hand, a greater emphasis on higher parental benefits as a factor for increasing birth rates is observed among women compared to men. We also found that the significance of the parental leave flexibility factor for stimulating birth rates in Russia is particularly emphasized by a specific group

of respondents—those with egalitarian intrafamily attitudes, who are more inclined to rely on paid childcare service providers rather than grandparents' help. Hypothetically, it is this group of «current» and potential parents whose reproductive behaviour will be primarily influenced by a more flexible parental leave system.

Our results provide valuable information for discussions on the necessity and potential improvements to the existing parental leave system in Russia and their potential impact on birth rates.

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Appendix

Table A1. Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Parents with children under the age of 1.5 years (n=1000)
Gender	
Male	7.7 %
Female	92.3 %
Age	
18-29	32.6 %
30-39	60.5 %
40-49	6.9 %
A family member who uses the right to parental leave	
Mother	96.7 %
Father	2.6 %
Grandparent	0.7 %
Number of minor children	
1 child	38.6 %
2 children	44.9 %
3 children	13.9 %
4 children and more	2.6 %
Level of education*	
Secondary general (school only)	7.3 % (24.2 %)
Professional (college / technical school)	25.7 % (38.7 %)
Higher Professional (university)	66.6 % (35.5 %)
Postgraduate professional (academic degree)	0.4 % (1.6 %)
Federal districts	
Central	26.9%
Northwestern	9.6 %
Southern	11.3 %
North Caucasian	0.7 %
Volga	19.8 %
Ural	8.4 %
Siberian	11.5 %
Far Eastern	5.6 %

* – During the analysis, a reweighing procedure based on this parameter was employed. The shares after the application of weighting coefficients are indicated in parentheses.

Source: Authors's calculations

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