Explaining persistence of early entrance into parenthood in Ukraine: the role of family relationships

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Early transition to parenthood in Eastern European countries is associated with the pronatalist family policies and regional reproductive norms. However, limited research has examined the continuity of this behaviour, particularly how it connects to family relationships a major source of welfare in this part of Europe.

OBJECTIVE: To examine how family relationships influenced the entrance into parenthood in Ukraine around 1950-1975, when the pronatalist family policies and modern reproductive norms emerged.

METHODS: The analysis of 66 life history interviews collected in Ukrainian cities of Lviv (west) and Kharkiv (east).

RESULTS: Family relationships promoted first parenthood to take place shortly after marriage. Although this transition coincided with the moment in life when economic uncertainty was high, the informants experienced security and confidence when entering parenthood early, which was linked to high reliability on grandparental support with childcare. These intergenerational relationships derived from paternalistic family values, which had also prevailed in historical family systems in Ukraine. During the socio-economic changes after the 1950s, these values reinforced parental social pressure, which in turn formed expectations of grandparental support by the children. The degree of reliability on grandparents differed between the two

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cities. In Lviv, couples often resided separately after marriage that allowed them taking the greatest responsibility for childcare, while leaving grandparental support as additional, which could be linked to the historical pattern of the nuclear-stem family system. In Kharkiv, spouses tended to reside with either of the parents after marriage and to relay more on them, also with childcare, which could derive from the historical pattern of the communitarian family system in the region.
CONTRIBUTION: Paternalistic intergenerational relationships in tandem with the Soviet pronatalist policy and economic uncertainty contributed to the persistence of early and universal transition into parenthood in Ukraine.

1 Introduction

One of the biggest puzzles of contemporary fertility behaviour in Eastern Europe is that although there is a wide availability of modern contraception and diffusion of new family values, first parenthood still takes place relatively early in the life course and in close proximity to marriage. In Ukraine, for example, the mean age at first birth among women was 24.5 in 2011, while the mean age at first marriage was 24.1, which today is among the lowest marriage ages in Europe (Eurostat, 2015b,a). Scholars often argue that pronatalist policies, uncertain economic conditions and social anomie have encouraged early entry into parenthood in this part of Europe (Billingsley, 2010; Frejka, 2008; Perelli-Harris, 2005, 2008; Sobotka, 2004; Thornton and Philipov, 2009). Others additionally suggest that the reproductive norms particular for these regions also favour early first childbearing. These norms include early motherhood as a biological necessity (Gabriel, 2005; Mynarska, 2010), grandparental support with childcare (Gabriel, 2005; Rotkirch, 2000; Rotkirch and Kesseli, 2010), and first birth as the greatest achievement of adulthood and womanhood (Blum et al., 2009; Rotkirch and Kesseli, 2010).

Although these explanations shed some light on recent developments in the early transition to parenthood, they do not attempt to grasp the historical continuity of this trend, such as explaining why and how early first birth has been a particular feature of fertility behaviour in Eastern Europe for at least the last 150 years, as historical demographic studies show (Coale et al., 1979). One vital issue that needs to be addressed in this continuity behaviour is how the transition to first parenthood occurred under the changing structural conditions imposed by the USSR, particularly when the pronatalist policies of the Soviet Union, economic uncertainty, and modern reproductive norms were just appearing in the 1950s and 1960s. This paper therefore examines individuals' decision-making on

the transition to first parenthood in Ukraine at that time, and it pays particular attention to family relationships in these processes.

The family constitutes the primary social environment for reproductive decision-making. Moreover, in Eastern Europe, family relationships have been characterised by strong ties over several decades. In the historical context, strong family ties were reinforced though frequent intergenerational co-residence and patterns of partible inheritance (Czap, 1982; Viazzo, 2010). Although during the Soviet time changes in some traditional practices occurred, such as the abolishment of private property and thus the discouragement of traditional inheritance and residence patterns, traditional family values were still promoted by the state. This especially holds true for the later period of Stalin's regime (1935-1953) and the de-Stalinization processes after 1953 both of which signalled a return to the traditional family values (Goldman, 1993; Lapidus, 1978). In practice, the state's promotion of these values meant that, like the historical context, the family continued to provide the major welfare for its members, especially in crisis situations, such as child and elderly care. Moreover, post-war Soviet family policy reproduced paternalistic and pronatalist values that were also typical for historical family systems in many Eastern European regions (Mezei, 1997). So far, however, little attention has been paid to understand how the continuity in family values anchored in historical family systems has shaped the continuity in early transition to parenthood in the Soviet context and more specifically what role family relationships played in in this transition. This study therefore asks: how did family relationships influence decisions about the transition to first parenthood in Ukraine from around 1950 to 1975 when the pronatalist family policies and modern reproductive norms emerged?

To detect family influences, I use the framework introduced in Bernardi (2003) and later studies (Bernardi and Klärner, 2014). I analyse 66 life history interviews with men and women who were in their parenthood years during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in the cities of Lviv and Kharkiv. The cities are the major centres in western and eastern Ukraine, respectively, and were chosen for a comparative analysis because they provided differences in many socio-cultural aspects, such as language, religion and historical family systems.

In the following section, I provide an overview of the ethnographic and historical literature on family relationships in Ukraine over time, and I compare them for western and eastern Ukraine. I also discuss how I apply these influences to detect cultural patterns of family relationships and values in relation to entry into parenthood. In the third section, I describe the field sites, data collection, and data analysis. In the fourth section, I address

family influences on timing and decisions of first parenthood, including grandparental support provision with childcare. In the concluding section, I discuss the links between the continuity in early transition to first parenthood and family relationships in Ukraine.

2 Family relationships in Ukraine over time

In the territories of current western Ukraine,[1] strong intergenerational dependencies up until marriage and cooperative relationships between siblings after marriage characterised families in this region. These family relationships largely derived from the historical co-residence and inheritance patterns typical for the region. As such, inheritance was historically partible and land was equally distributed among all sons at marriage (Behey, 2003; Kaser, 2002). After marriage, a couple typically set up a nuclear household, separate from the parents, and worked their land alone. Siblings could decide to merge their land if their own parcels were too small.[2] Only an oldest son and his family stayed with the parents, worked the same land, and provided elderly care in later life. According to Kaser (2002, 2006), a similar pattern of family relationships can also be observed in parts of Romania, and it represents a mix of stem and nuclear family systems.

In the territories of current eastern Ukraine, such as the Sloboda Ukraine region,[3] historical household and inheritance patterns were different from those in western Ukraine, which also promoted different types of relationships between family members. As sons transitioned to marriage, they did not move to their own households but lived with their parents until their father's death. The inheritance was collectively owned, meaning that the land was not divided between the sons at marriage; however, they had the right to use it only if they got married (Kaser, 2002; Kravec, 1966). Only after the father's death would the sons be allowed to divide the inheritance. However, the rules on whether they divided it equally differed from household to household, which was also the major cause of conflicts between adult siblings. In this multigenerational household setting, one's social status strongly depended on age. Ethnographic studies have shown that newly-wed women had the lowest status in the household and were often subordinate to other kin members, such as mothers-in-law (Hilevych and Rotering, 2013; Ivanov, 1898; Kis,

[1] Current territory of western Ukraine covers the areas of historical eastern Galicia, to which belong today's Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil provinces (*oblasts*).

[2] Austro-Hungarian laws encouraged collective ownership of the land because the land fragmentation in eastern Galicia became a crucial issue in the late 19th century. The peasants, however, opposed these laws, and they have never been fully adopted (Franko, 1888; Kaser, 2002).

[3] Current territories of Sloboda Ukraine occupy the entire Kharkiv province, and parts of Symmy and Lyhanks provinces (*oblasts*).

2012). However, when they became mothers-in-law themselves, they would acquire one of the highest positions in the household. As a result, intergenerational dependency at least during the early years of marital life was among the main characteristics of families in Eastern Ukraine. Scholars suggest that this tradition of family relationships was also common in historical Southern and Central Russia and is typically defined as a joint or communitarian family system (Czap, 1982; Hoch, 1982; Polla, 2006; Todd, 1988).

When the Soviet regime was established in the early 20th century, these traditional household and inheritance patterns were discouraged. However, the Soviet ideology still supported a communal lifestyle, like the communitarian model, yet not necessarily between kin members. Some argue that traditional communal lifestyle made adapting to the Soviet values easier in the regions where the communitarian family systems prevailed, such as in parts of European Russia and in Eastern Ukraine, and harder in the areas where stem family systems had prevailed, such as in western Ukraine and the Baltic states (Todd, 1988, 1990).

After the 1950s, the Soviet state started a return to traditional family values, and now the family, not the community, was seen 'as a fundamental agency of socialisation, as a supplier of essential productive, reproductive and emotional services, and as a basic unit of decision-making that mediates the relation between public and private domains' (Lapidus, 1978, p. 234). Moreover, the forced industrialisation and rapid urbanisation that characterised the Soviet state in the 1950s and 1960s also facilitated the re-adoption of rural family values in Soviet cities – a phenomenon typically defined as *'ruralization'* (Blum, 2003). Studies on urban families in Soviet Russia and Ukraine show that collective values and reciprocal support between colleagues and neighbours, as well as strong intergenerational relationships, constituted an essential part of people's everyday lives (Semenova and Thompson, 2005; Vinokurova, 2007). Studies on western Ukraine also illustrate that in the 1950s and 1960s, the patterns of family relationships that existed in the city of Lviv were also based on the local peasant family values brought by migrants from the neighbouring rural areas (Bodnar, 2010). Some additionally suggest that after the 1950s, the Soviet family policy started to implement paternalistic and pronatalist values also particular for historical family systems (Mezei, 1997), which reinforced the conservation of these values in society. So far, however, little attention has been paid to how this continuity in family values and relationships could have shaped the continuity in early transition to first parenthood in the Soviet context. This paper therefore asks: how did family relationships influence decisions on transition to first parenthood in Ukraine from around 1950 to 1975 when the Soviet family policies and modern reproductive norms

emerged?

As discussed earlier, depending on which family values are important, different types of interdependencies in terms of power structures and support provision can drive family relationships. In this respect, family members can wield direct or indirect influences on each other's (reproductive) actions, decisions and attitudes to reinforce certain interdependencies. Scholars define four such mechanisms, among which social learning and social contagion are indirect influences, while social pressure and social support are more direct influences (Bernardi, 2003; Bernardi and Klärner, 2014). Moreover, social support and social pressure may not only be expressed by family members but can also be expected from a target person. For example, before getting pregnant, a woman may have a certain idea of how her future childcare could be arranged and who may be involved in it, such as the husband, grandparents or friends. If she expects to receive support from any of these people, but the person cannot fulfil her expectation, this situation may alter her decision to enter parenthood. In this respect, expectations and actual provision of social support are crucial in fertility decision-making.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Data collection

The life history interviews were conducted with men and women born between 1925 and 1948, residing in the Ukrainian city of Lviv or Kharkiv during the 1950s through the 1970s, and who were also in their reproductive age during this period, which was characterised by a rapid decline of fertility rates in Ukraine. In total, 66 interviews were conducted: 33 from Lviv and 33 from Kharkiv. Table 1 illustrates some general characteristics of the informants.

Fieldwork was conducted between July 2012 and April 2015. I spent 10 months conducting fieldwork in both cities: July-August 2012, March-May 2013, August-November 2013, and February 2014. During October 2014-April 2015, 20 interviews were conducted with the help of a research assistant in Kharkiv. The socio-demographic profile of the research assistant is similar to mine – a female, PhD student in her mid-twenties – except that she originates from eastern Ukraine, and I come from western Ukraine. Recruiting a research assistant was not in the original plan, but it was necessary due to the unstable political situation in eastern Ukraine after November 2013. However, coming from the relevant cultural background allowed her to build trust with the informants more

Table 1: Characteristics of the informants interviewed for this study

	Lviv	Kharkiv
Number of informants	33	33
Men	9	8
Women	24	25
Number of couples	6	4
Rural origin	13	10
Urban origin	20	23
Working class	12	13
Civil servants	17	13
Scientific elite	3	7
Number of children:		
0	2	2
1	9	13
2	19	16
3	3	2
Age at marriage:		
min	18	18
max	35	34
mean	24.5	23.67
standard deviation	3.55	3.51
Age at first child:		
min	19	19
max	36	41
mean	26.12	26.06
standard deviation	3.52	4.47
Age at second child:		
min	22	23
max	40	42
mean	31.79	31.64
standard deviation	4.17	4.79

Source: the author's dataset 'Family and Fertility in Soviet Ukraine'

easily during the fieldwork. Similar to my experience of conducting follow-up interviews with informants when needed, the research assistant also practiced this strategy; however, together we reviewed the topics to be addressed during the follow-ups.

Snowball and purposeful samples were employed to recruit the informants. Both samples are purposeful in their nature (Patton, 1990). However, while snowball sampling, also called chain sampling, is applied to search for a possible interview subject through the previous informants, the later sampling technique is applied to search for potential informants through other sources (Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2006). This allowed me to collect interviews from different networks of people. These two sampling techniques were used to ensure that the informants came from economic and educational backgrounds as diverse as possible.

That said, I did not aim for a representative sample of the entire population of the two cities but rather to interview a diverse enough group of individuals to enable a study of differences along a number of axes. The aim for acquiring the diversity within the sample was also the reason why 66 and not six interviews were collected. That said, more than 66 interviews could also have been collected, but at some stage I realised that many patterns I had investigated started to re-appear. However, if I had decided to get more information on individual experience of divorce, miscarriage and child mortality, which in this dissertation are analysed in the context of the aforementioned events, I should have collected more interviews applying critical case sampling techniques to find people who had experienced these rare events (Patton, 1990).

The informants were recruited with the assistance of non-profit organisations working with the elderly, through Internet advertisements, and with the help of local people encountered during the fieldwork. This meant that in some cases the informants directly contacted my research assistant or me, while in other situations we had to contact the informants whose contact information we had received. We worked with such non-governmental organisations as Red Cross, Salvation Army, Veteran Unions and other local organisations. Through these organisations we were able to recruit people from the working class and civil servants. To access the higher class (scientific elite), we used our own networks of people working in scientific institutes and universities.

In addition to the interviews, we collected life history calendars (LHCs) in which data on household composition, births, marriages, and employment history of the informant and spouse were recorded (see for general information on LCH see Axinn and Pearce (2006)). LHCs were filled in with every informant after the interview. Information provided in Table 1 derives from the informants' LHCs. Finally, I collected population statis-

tics and ethnographic literature on both regions. I used data on births and population numbers to calculate crude birth rates for the regions (see Figure 1).

3.2 Data analysis

Given the specific nature of retrospective data, I did not try to detect the exact reality or the truth behind every life story to answer my main research question. Instead, I aimed to inform the general narrative by discussing various reproductive experiences and the logic individuals attached to their decision-making and to surrounding family relationships.

To perform the analysis, I used *Atlast.ti* qualitative software. I applied two coding strategies to analyse the interviews. First, I carried out structural coding (Saldaña, 2012) to identify life course transitions and their sequences in every interview. Second, I performed domain and values coding (Saldaña, 2012) of the transitions related to first parenthood: pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, miscarriage and childcare. After the coding, certain sub-categories emerged, such as 'right timing of parenthood', 'decision-making on parenthood', and 'expectations of parental support'. I then used the query tool to select the quotations according to the groups of documents that were created beforehand (i.e. 'families' of documents): city (Lviv or Kharkiv) and gender (male or female). Finally, throughout the analysis, I used the LHCs as a triangulation tool with which I could reconstruct a biographical profile of every informant and link it to their narratives when needed.

4 Setting

The cities of Lviv in western Ukraine and Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine are the field sites in this study. Historically, western and eastern regions of Ukraine differ in many aspects, such as religion, language, economic development, demographic behaviour, and traditions of family relationships.

In general, the city of Lviv was slower to industrialise and to adopt Soviet social reforms than Kharkiv, which was comparatively a more industrial and secular city. The modernisation process in Lviv started in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it was part of Austro-Hungary and later Poland. However, this process was slower than in Central and Eastern Ukraine, which at that time fell under the rule of the Russian Empire. During the interwar period, Lviv was a multicultural city where ethnic Polish and Jewish groups constituted the majority of the population. Industrialisation was

further reinforced when western Ukraine became part of the Ukrainian SSR in 1939 and especially after the Second World War. By 1959, Lviv's city population had reached almost half a million people (411,000), which made it the biggest city in western Ukraine (Bodnar, 2010). The city's population also became more homogeneous in the aftermath of the Soviet and German occupations during the Second World War. During the 1950s and 1960s, the rapid influx of migrants primarily from the neighbouring rural areas and small towns meant that Ukrainians came to constitute the city's majority (60% in 1959) (Hrytsak, 2007). During this period, Russian immigrants were the second largest minority in the city (27% in 1959) (Hrytsak, 2007); however, their percentage declined over the years. Female labour force participation in Lviv also increased from 12.3% in 1950 to 42.3% in 1960 (Hyk, 1987, p. 193).

In contrast to Lviv, socio-economic development in Kharkiv followed a different trajectory. Rapid economic development in the region started in 1919 when the city of Kharkiv also became the capital of the Ukrainian SSR. From that moment, the machine industry and various light industries started to develop. The industrial developments during the interwar years, which later continued during the 1950s and 1960s, led to a rapid influx of migrants to the city from the neighbouring rural areas and from Russia. The city's ethnic composition, however, remained the same as before the Second World War. According to the 1959 census, Kharkiv was composed of 48.4% Ukrainians, 40.4% Russians, and 8.7% Jewish residents (Pikalova, 2004). In the mid-twentieth century, the city became one of the largest in Ukraine with a population of 950,000 people in 1959 (Rachkov, 2011, p. 213). Female labour force participation during these years was high. According to the state statistics, in 1950, the proportion of women among blue-collar and white-collar workers was 46.9%.[4]

During the interwar period, the fertility transition was underway in Ukraine, and by the 1960s, fertility fell below replacement level in some regions in eastern Ukraine, including Kharkiv. In the Lviv region, the fertility transition started earlier, at the end of the 19th century, but it was more prolonged and below-replacement fertility was reached only in the 1990s. The main consequences of Ukraine's post-war fertility decline were an even earlier entrance into parenthood than in the interwar period, typically by the age of 25; considerable spacing between births; and the tendency of stopping reproductive activities after first birth (Steshenko, 2010). A decline in later-order births rather than postponement of first birth also characterised the lowest-low fertility trend in the mid-

[4]Department of demographic statistics of Kharkiv Statistical Office, email request on April 2, 2014.

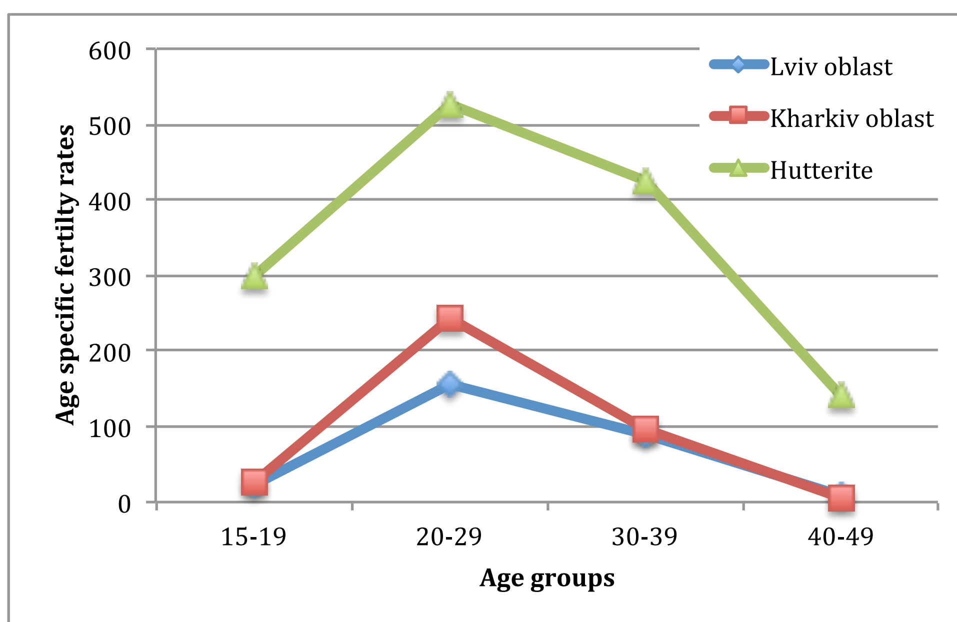

Figure 1: Age specific fertility rates per 1000 women for Kharkiv and Lviv provinces (*oblasts*) in 1960 compared to Hutterite ASMFR, 1921-1930. Sources: Lviv oblasts – Department of statistics of Lviv Statistical Office, acquired on September 9, 2015; Kharkiv oblasts – Department of statistics of Kharkiv Statistical Office, acquired on April 5, 2013.

1990s in Ukraine (Perelli-Harris, 2005, 2008; Sobotka, 2004). Figure 3.1 illustrates that on the regional level in 1960s, early entrance into parenthood, as well as the majority of other births, took place before the age of 30. Moreover, compared to Hutterite age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) in 1930 that represent the universal pattern of uncontrolled fertility, the ASFRs in Lviv and Kharkiv were two to three times lower for all age groups. This suggests that fertility was significantly controlled in these areas.

In response to the general tendency of declining fertility during the post-war years, the Soviet family policy took pronatalist and paternalistic measures to boost fertility rates primarily by encouraging early first parenthood. In the 1950s and 1960s, some significant parental benefits were introduced, such as granting working mothers 112 days of paid maternity leave: 56 days before delivery and 56 days after delivery, and in cases of complications during delivery, additional days could be added (Lapidus, 1978). Non-working mothers did not have any limits on maternity leave and it was not paid. Officially, however, the state granted any mother with children priority on the labour market (Lapidus, 1978). This measure was meant to encourage women not to delay parenthood but to enter it at an early age. Another legal mechanism that encouraged early age at first parenthood was that married couples with children had priority in receiving state housing. Moreover,

the size of the apartment depended on the size of the family. In some cases, it was also possible to receive a temporary apartment first before getting a permanent one.

Another prominent event of the time was the re-legalisation of abortion in 1955. It is generally suggested that abortion legalisation negatively influenced fertility in the Soviet Union (Blum, 2003). That said, it did not significantly impact the timing of the entrance into parenthood because before first birth, abortion was rarely practiced and even strongly discouraged by medical practitioners (Hilevych, 2015). Discouraging abortion before first birth combined with a limited knowledge and availability of alternative birth control methods also facilitated a faster transition to first parenthood after marriage.

5 Results

Throughout the analysis, I observed two phases where family influences were crucial: timing of and decision on first parenthood. The distinction between these two phases is crucial in the context of Ukraine because the legalisation of abortion allowed couples to make an actual decision about first parenthood after conception took place. In this section, I address both phases in the context of family influences, and the interdependencies in family relationships they implied. In doing so, I discuss: 1) which social norms existed around the 'timing' and 'decision' on first parenthood; 2) family and peer influences on the formation of these norms, namely 'right' timing of first parenthood, and how they motivated the informants to follow these norms; 3) how the social influences, particularly from the parents and spouses, formed certain expectations regarding support provision with childcare; and 4) how these expectations were fulfilled.

5.1 First parenthood: the most important, yet rarely planned event in life

Among all the informants, first parenthood was seen as one of the main events in life. The importance of this event was linked to certain legal possibilities that entrance into parenthood could reinforce: ability to apply for an apartment, and even an increase in the chances of getting a job. These possibilities were mainly available to married couples with children, which would be 'considered a family', as one informant put it (Maria, born in 1936, qualified worker, Lviv). Although this phrasing could derive from legal terminology, it also conveys a social meaning related to the change of social status upon entry into parenthood. Rotkirch and Kesseli (2010) in their study on the post-Soviet

period underline that for Russian women, entrance into motherhood signifies achievement of womanhood. Others additionally indicate that in Russia during the Soviet period, marriage and parenthood preceded the stages of leaving the parental home, establishing financial independence and finishing educational training (Blum et al., 2009). Similarly, for my informants in Ukraine, entrance into parenthood signified the transition from youth to adulthood, and this was equally important to both men and women.

Remarkably, although first parenthood constituted one of the most important events in life, it was rarely planned and the informants commonly claimed that 'planning' was not an appropriate term to describe their first parenthood decisions. In fact, the absence of any planning habits was related to limited or no use of birth control before first pregnancy, as well as few discussions between spouses about it, as the following quotes illustrate:

> It happened like it should. We did not plan it. No one planned these things. It was legal, so to say. We were married (Andrij, born in 1937, civil servant, Lviv).

> It happened like it is, during our very first night together, at the very first moment... It just happened. There were no birth control methods at that time, nothing (Larisa, born in 1939, scientific elite, Kharkiv).

These accounts show that first pregnancy not only took place but also had to happen spontaneously. Some informants even expressed critical views on using any means of birth control to delay first pregnancy and perceived this behaviour as unacceptable and even selfish if practiced among married couples. The common view was that that when an individual married, it meant that s/he was ready to have a child and thus to have a family:

> It was supposed to be like that: once you're married, you have a child. If there is nothing, then you may start worrying. Generally, it was like that in all families (Natalka, born in 1945, civil servant, Lviv).

In this respect, not planning first parenthood complied with the understanding of 'right' timing of first pregnancy – typically within a few years after marriage. Surprisingly, among my informants, 'right' timing of first parenthood was not linked to biological age, as previous studies find for contemporary Russia and Poland (Gabriel, 2005; Mynarska, 2010), but was associated with a deadline for marriage. Age limits for marriage were well defined, particularly for women: at the age of 25 and above a woman was considered an 'old maid' if she was not yet married. In the following section, I show how these social norms around the 'right' timing of first parenthood were embedded in individual relationships with family and peers.

5.2 The ‘right’ timing of first pregnancy in the context of social relationships

To underline the importance of the ‘right’ timing of first pregnancy in one’s life course, I start discussing it with the cases that deviated from the norm, namely when first pregnancy did not take place within one year after marriage. The following quotes from female informants illustrate these experiences:

> Sveta (first child) was born in 1957. But I did not get pregnant during the first year (after marriage). It worried me, and so I decided to consult my gynaecologist, who said that everything was fine and I just had to try more (Evgenija, born in 1930, civil servant, Kharkiv).
>
> I wanted to have a child soon after the marriage, but I didn’t get pregnant for some time. His parents also worried. They worried that I may not have children. But later I gave birth to Andriy (Oksana, born in 1932, unskilled worker, Lviv).

As the quotes illustrate, the common concern behind a delayed first pregnancy was that one of the spouses, typically the wife, could be sterile and thus unable to have children. Such a diagnosis was seen as ‘a tragedy and often a social taboo’ (Rotkirch, 2000, p. 7) in Soviet society. Surprisingly, this issue would worry not only the spouses but also the parents and the in-laws, as Oksana mentioned. While first pregnancy was typically not discussed and some women mentioned that they were too shy to tell anyone that they were pregnant until they showed, the delayed pregnancy provoked discussion on this topic and could even cause spousal and inter-generational tensions. These tensions were particularly apparent when it was not immediately clear whether delayed first parenthood was a biological inability or a purposeful delay. So, at this stage parents and in-laws would closely supervise their children, as the quotes below illustrate:

> It seems that they (parents-in-law) talked about it to him (her husband), because once he told me: ‘We’ve been living together? for such a long time, but nothing has happened yet’ (Sofia, born in 1935, civil servant, Lviv).
>
> She (wife) didn’t want to have a child right after marriage. And my mother suspected her... But my wife knew all these tricks. First, she wanted to finish her educational training, and then she started with her work (Maxim, born in 1935, civil servant, Kharkiv).

Similar to Maxim’s wife, some females would purposefully decide to postpone first pregnancy to pursue their educational or career goals first. But this was often considered selfish, and eventually it could imply less support from a husband. This would automatically mean fewer opportunities for cooperation in birth control. Certainly, traditional female methods of birth control, such as sponges, the calendar method or even abortions,

could be used, but this behaviour would create even more conflict in spousal and intergenerational relationships. Therefore, a married woman trying to delay a first pregnancy was very likely to be exposed to social pressure to submit to the 'right' timing.

Intriguingly, when the postponement of parenthood was a couple's mutual decision, less normative pressure would be attached to this behaviour, and a couple would be allowed to exercise more agency in their decisions but, of course, within certain time limits. This was especially true if a couple could justify their decision with concrete reasons such as not having their own place to live (e.g., when residing with parents was not possible), living in separate residences after marriage (e.g., husband was in military service), or explaining that they needed some time to settle down as a couple, as the quotes below illustrate:

> The first one was born two years after we got married. It was not strict that it should happen right away, and moreover we did not have a place to live. We did not have an apartment yet. But when Lena was born, we received a room in a shared apartment (Raisa, born in 1934, skilled worker, Kharkiv).

> We did not want to have children right after marriage, as life only starts at this stage, so we wanted to wait a bit. At that time, it was not as if one had to immediately have a child. But when we were ready for it, it was our mutual decision. Our daughter was born in 1954 (one year after the marriage) (Markian, born in 1929, unskilled worker, Lviv).

Besides spousal and intergenerational relationships, peers and siblings also exerted social influences favouring first parenthood to happen soon after marriage. At the moment of marriage and entrance into parenthood, many male and female informants were often close to completing their studies, or had just started to work and, thus, they were often in close relationships with their peers. In addition, some couples resided with their parents or other kin, such as aunts or older siblings, during the first years after marriage, which also made them more inclined to have closer relationships. Surrounded by peer and sibling environments, the informants could observe how marriage and first parenthood took place in other couples, and compare these experiences to their own.

> Within three years after we graduated from the institute, we all got married. My friends also gave birth and we had many common interests, like children. For example, my friends [showing pictures with them] this friend Lida gave birth to Sergey a bit earlier. And all my friends were giving birth and we lived through that together (Svetlana, born in 1941, civil servant, Kharkiv).

> During the first few months we still lived at his parents and with his siblings and their families. As sisters-in-law we used to help each other and sometimes took care of each other's children. The oldest son of one of my sisters-in-law was half a year older than my son, and children of other sisters-in-law were also born very close to each other, so it was easy for us to help each other out. However, soon thereafter we received our own place (Kateryna, born in 1942, skilled worker, Lviv).

Through communication, support and spending leisure time together with peers and siblings, the informants learned about the advantages of 'right' timing of first parenthood. As Svetlana indicated, friends having children around the same time was beneficial, as it allowed maintaining close friendships also after marriage through sharing parenthood experiences. Friends might also form an exchange network to swap children's clothes and other things that were not easily available as well as to consult each other with practical household issues (Rotkirch, 2000).

At a first glance, relationships with siblings(-in-law) implied similar influences as those from peers. But, because siblings(in-law) are also related through kin ties, they automatically put them into a certain social position with respect to the parents and other kin. As Kateryna's testimony illustrates, when siblings(in-law) share a household, they might feel more obliged to help out each other with some issues, such as childcare (see also Hilevych and Rotering 2013). Such support may unconsciously impose feelings of sameness, as well as feelings of completion between siblings(in-law) with respect to the timing of parenthood, which would be especially crucial in a society where first birth is associated with achieving adulthood.

In the following sections, I show that close parental supervision around the timing of first parenthood eventually resulted in expectations of receiving grandparent support with childcare.

5.3 Looking for a safety net: deciding on first parenthood and spousal expectations of receiving support with childcare

In their testimonies of first parenthood, informants generally expressed confidence and security in proceeding with first parenthood even though many still did not have their own apartment or a permanent job, and some even had to finish their studies. Surprisingly, such attitudes contrast to those surrounding the transition to second birth when material uncertainty was seen as the major obstacle for proceeding with a second pregnancy Hilevych (2016). The informants actually experienced economic uncertainty at both transitions, but they seemed to rely on certain premises when entering parenthood.

These premises seemed to compensate for the uncertain material conditions. I observed a vivid illustration of such premises in the cases where aborting the first pregnancy was considered but not carried out, as the quotes below illustrate:

> I told my husband that I got pregnant, and right away I asked, What shall we do? You live there, and I live here. But once the child is born, what then? At that time I didn't live in Lviv yet. And I worried a lot about how we were going to arrange everything. I even thought of not giving birth at that time. But he said, You will definitely give birth. He also discussed it with his parents What shall we do? We do not have a place to live in Lviv. I also didn't have any work in Lviv. Maybe we can stay here, in Malynivka (a town in Lviv province)? I thought. But he had to stay in Lviv because of his work. So, his parents said, Immediately move me to Lviv. They were so wise. And then he found a job for me, and so I moved (Halyna, born in 1943, civil servant, Lviv).

> *Zoya:* We talked about my first pregnancy with my mother-in-law.
> *Interviewer:* Did you discuss it?
> *Zoya:* Of course, we needed to!
> *Interviewer:* Can you describe what it was like?
> *Zoya:* On the 14th of April (1954) we got married. We did not live together yet. On the 1st of May (1954) we went to my village, and there I got pregnant. Then, there was the question: whether to abort it or not? We gathered with the three of us: my husband, my mother-in-law and I. We thought, "So, what to do?" She said, "Of course, give birth". And I said, "But how? I still have to write my thesis. It's not only about going to university. Lectures and writing the thesis, how will I cope with all of this?" And she said, "Don't worry, I'll help you. You should not do it (abortion)". And I didn't do it (Zoya, born in 1931, civil servant, Kharkiv).

As these testimonies show, considering pregnancy termination constituted an actual moment of making a decision about first parenthood, and it implied a different set of social influences. The moment of deciding on whether to terminate first pregnancy or not was also often the moment when practical matters around this event would be discussed. Although the practical aspects were the primary concern of the spouses, these concerns would also be discussed with the parents, as Halyna and Zoya described. This means that at the decision stage, couples would start to seek cooperation with parents. By consulting parents, a young couple would seek not only advice but also support with childcare. The promise of support with childcare seemed to be an important factor for not terminating the first pregnancy but proceeding with it. When these expectations were not met, the pregnancy would likely be aborted. However, among my informants the termination of first pregnancy happened only in a few cases.

More importantly, I also observed expectations of receiving grandparental support with childcare among the couples that did not consider termination. These informants

indicated that they typically did not plan anything, neither pregnancy nor childcare arrangements in advance, which may sound risky when one still had to finish educational training or did not have a place to live. The reason for the absence of such planning was often that there was an implicit understanding that parents would always help.

> You know, at that time we didn't plan far into the future, not really. I knew that the child would be born, but how life would be afterward, whether I would defend my *kandydatska* (an equivalent to the PhD thesis) and would build my career, I didn't think about it. I knew that I would have a child that I needed to take care of. Besides, I thought that I might have some help. My mother would help for sure, and maybe my parents-in-law would also help (Daryna, born in 1939, scientific elite, Lviv).

> During the first year after the marriage, we were renting the flat. We wanted to enjoy life [laughing]. Later, our son was born and we moved back to my parents. We lived with them for some time until we received our own apartment (Andrei, born in 1934, scientific elite, Kharkiv).

In the following section, I discuss how these expectations of receiving support with childcare were fulfilled.

5.4 Provision of support with childcare

Surely, frequent post-marital residence with or close to parents or in-laws made access to grandparental support easier. Even when residing separately, grandparents were still able to provide some support, yet not on a daily basis. In this way, post-marital residence defined the degree of grandparental involvement in childcare, which differed between Lviv and Kharkiv.

In the context of Lviv in western Ukraine, couples commonly resided separately from their parents before or shortly after marriage. Separate post-marital residence made a couple primarily responsible for childcare, and complementary gender roles were often practiced between spouses. A husband would be the main source of income in the family, while the wife would stay with the child during the first year(s). A woman would arrange a part-time work schedule or would even resign from work for this period. When a wife had to return to work after maternity leave, a couple would hire a nanny or would hand over their child to a nursery. In this respect, both spouses would still equally contribute to childcare by sharing the time and material costs spent on it. In another paper I show that because both spouses commonly contributed to childcare in Lviv, they chose to have a second child soon after the first, saving childcare costs for both husband and wife (Hilevych, 2016).

Even though spouses were primarily responsible for childcare, the role of grandparents or other kin was also important in this process. During the first months after delivery, a woman would typically either reside with her family (separate from her husband), or the maternal grandmother would visit the family during the first few weeks. Bodnar (2010) indicates that the habit of staying at the maternal grandparents was especially common among couples of rural origin. In either way, the role of a grandmother or other female kin was to assist a wife with childcare.

> After delivery, my cousin took me to her place, and I stayed with her for a few days. After that, I went to my sister in the village and stayed with her for three weeks. My husband was in Lviv at that time, and he visited me often. When I returned to Lviv, I took care of my daughter until she turned eight months, and then we handed her over to the nursery (Maria, born in 1936, qualified worker, Lviv).

> My mother came to help me at the beginning. She was with us for around one month, and she showed me some essential things, like how to bath and swaddle, and what I should or should not to do during this process (Olena, born in 1925, civil servant, Lviv).

Despite that hospital midwives frequently consulted women on childcare, the role of maternal kin was essential in providing assistance with bathing, swaddling and breastfeeding, and the female informants very much valued these experiences. The assistance, however, rarely implied that a grandmother or other kin would entirely take care of the child if a wife stayed at home.

Not frequently, some of my Lviv informants also resided with parents after marriage, and mother or mother-in-law would assist them with childcare. In these conditions, a wife would still do most of the childcare duties herself, while her mother or mother-in-law would take over this duty at later stages, i.e., after maternity leave.

> My in-laws stayed with the child afterwards. My mother-in-law would stay with her during the day, and I would come to feed her during the lunch break (her child) (Lybov, born in 1932, civil servant, Lviv).

> I intended to take maternity leave for eight months, and I was going to take some holiday hours for this. But my mother-in-law said, Why should both of us take care of one child? So, eventually she took care of my first and also of my second one (Nadia, born in 1938, civil servant, Lviv).

A similar way of arranging childcare was even more common among the informants from Kharkiv, as post-marital residence with parents after first birth was widespread there. When a wife returned to work after maternity leave, she would also be expected to carry most of the household and childcare responsibilities. The support of the grandmother was essential under these conditions, as with the birth of a(nother) child, the dou-

ble burden on a young wife would increase (Hilevych, 2016). Usually, the grandmother would entirely take over childcare duties after maternity leave ended.

> My children (twins) were born in May, so I had my maternity leave throughout June, July and August, as I did not have to teach during these months. When I returned to work, I had to teach both day and evening classes, but I still could come in between to feed them. My mother-in-law was my greatest supporter at that time. We lived with her, and she stayed with them all the time (Larisa, born in 1939, scientific elite, Kharkiv).

> I had maternity leave, and I also saved some holiday hours. So, in total I had three months of maternity leave after the delivery. After these three months, I had to go back to work and my mother-in-law took care of my children, both of them actually. Some women took their children to nurseries, of course, but it is//that's because they did not have anyone to help them (Naida, born in 1936, unskilled worker, Kharkiv).

The couples from Kharkiv tried not to hand over their children to nurseries at an early age, if that was possible. Grandparental support rather than their own coordination of the process or husband's involvement was preferred. Women often tried to arrange a grandmother to be with a child even when they lived in different cities. Handing a child over to the nursery after maternity leave was considered rare and inappropriate if grandparents were available. When no grandparental support was possible, a couple would ask their neighbours to help. Finally, involving a husband in childcare was not only uncommon, but it was also not even expected. Instead, women often felt that men could not properly handle children and might even need care themselves. These attitudes towards and practices of childcare in Kharkiv coincide with the observations Rotkirch (2000) drew about the Soviet families in Saint-Petersburg, Russia. She observed that for Russian women, maternal care implied not only taking care of her biological children, but also taking care of 'grandchildren, children of relatives and friends, husband, elderly parents and parents-in-law' Rotkirch (2000, p. 118). Rotkirch calls this phenomenon extended mothering. My observation is that this phenomenon as practiced in Soviet Kharkiv and Saint Petersburg was part of the communitarian family system, where a mother-in-law held great authority in the household.

6 Conclusions

In this study I showed that parents and spouses exerted mainly social pressure and cooperation, while siblings and peers exerted social contagion and social learning to influence couples' understandings that entrance into parenthood should take place soon after mar-

riage, which I defined as the 'right' timing for parenthood. I also observed that the notion of 'right' timing of first parenthood often coincided with the moment in life when a couple's economic uncertainty was high. Surprisingly, this uncertainty rarely discouraged the informants from postponing or terminating the first pregnancy. On the contrary even, informants experienced security and confidence when making a decision to enter parenthood early. I showed that this feeling of security surrounding the entrance into first parenthood is closely linked to the reliability on grandparental support with childcare. If these expectations were not fulfilled, informants were likely to terminate the pregnancy; however grandparents would often conform to these expectations.

The existence of such expectations and that they were often confirmed suggests that paternalistic and protective values characterised intergenerational relationships in both Ukrainian cities during Soviet time. These paternalistic values around intergenerational relationships also prevailed in historical family systems in both regions, where in the nuclear-stem family system in Lviv parents had to equally provide for their children until marriage. In the communitarian family system in Kharkiv, this was also the case, even after marriage. After the Second World War, these family values were reinforced by the Soviet state through family policy. Furthermore, because the Soviet political-economic system was characterised by shortages in everyday goods, food and housing, that state portrayed the family, rather than the community, as primarily responsible for the socialisation and raising of children. This made grandparental support essential. Additionally, grandparental support with childcare was also perceived as more desirable than other types of childcare possibilities, such as those provided by the state. When grandparents are still young and employed, they are also likely to have more resources and possibilities to provide sufficient material and non-material support to their children and grandchildren. Therefore, in contemporary scholarship early childbearing is often seen as a livelihood strategy to overcome economic uncertainty by receiving parental support (Gabriel, 2005; Perelli-Harris, 2005; Rotkirch and Kesseli, 2012).

Although family relationships in both Lviv and Kharkiv were based on paternalistic intergenerational relationships, the degree of reliability on their help depended on post-marital residence. When a couple resided separately from parents or in-laws after the marriage, they would also take the greatest responsibility for childcare and, thus, grandparental support would become an additional and temporary option. This behaviour I observed in Lviv in western Ukraine. It also complies with the pattern of post-marital residence typical for the nuclear-stem family system where only an oldest son and his family stayed with parents while family's other sons formed independent households based on

the resources the parents provided them. However, when a couple resided with either of the parents after marriage, the couple also tended to rely more on parental support with childcare, as observed in Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, where communitarian family systems had historically prevailed. Under the conditions of prolonged post-marital residence, childcare would become a shared responsibility of a woman and her mother(in-law), rather than that of the couple.

Rotkirch (2000, p. 118) links these aspirations to a phenomenon she calls extended mothering – when maternal care implied not only taking care of biological children but also taking care of 'grandchildren, children of relatives and friends, husband, elderly parents and parents-in-law'. She finds this care pattern to be particular for Russia, and I also find it relevant for eastern Ukraine. However, this shared responsibility did not always imply cooperation between female generations, and it may also have resulted in conflicts, particularly between mothers- and daughters-in-law, as was showed in an earlier study (Hilevych and Rotering, 2013). The culture of submissive, subordinate and in some societies even abusive relationships between mothers- and daughters-in-law is widely discussed in anthropology. As such, evolutionary anthropologists suggest that intrafamilial conflict of interest between mothers- and daughters-in-law could especially arise in the context where reproductive competition is likely to happen (e.g., when re-marriage and widowhood are part of the demographic regime) (Voland and Beise, 2005). Cultural anthropologists additionally suggest that this phenomenon has geographic boundaries stretching from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, where co-residence with in-laws is widespread and which forms the so-called 'the great mother-in-law belt' (Brown, 1997).

With regard to sibling and peer relationships in the case of Lviv, siblings also encouraged the 'right' timing of first parenthood, while in Kharkiv similar influences were coming more from peers. Although this assumption should still be more closely examined in the future, I suggest that these differences could be linked to more cooperative relationships between siblings in Lviv, which are in line with the tradition of partible inheritance discussed earlier. In Kharkiv, closer relationships with peers than with siblings could be an outcome of collective inheritance where siblings historically had to compete for its division before and after the father's death. In my earlier study, I show that the competitive nature of sibling relationships was also crucial for the transition to second birth when the expectations of receiving grandparental support were high in Kharkiv, but parents had to choose whom to help (Hilevych, 2016).

Based on the discussed earlier dichotomy between parental authority versus conjugal authority in the decision-making, my findings additionally suggest that the character of

intergenerational relationships shapes not only the character of couple relationships but also that of sibling and peer relationships. This aspect should be taken into account in future studies focusing on how family ties shape(d) fertility behaviour in Eastern Europe.

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