

In Poland, for years, we have been disputing reasons for which Poles have fewer and fewer children. We observe that number of births is very low, that Polish women postpone motherhood and that more and more of them remain childless. A low number of children brings serious consequences to the population structure. Demographic processes that we observe, affect labour market, educational system as well as the social security system. It is still of an utmost importance to understand the reasons for which Poles are less and less likely to become parents.

Both, economists and psychologists point out that the decision regarding parenthood strongly depends on how a person perceives the benefits and costs related to parenthood. Is having a child is an attractive goal? What positive consequences will parenthood bring? And what are the costs related to raising an offspring? Young people see different positive and negative consequences of having children and these perceptions strongly affect their fertility choices.

The costs and benefits of parenthood can be of different nature. They may refer to financial, emotional or social issues. Having a child brings financial costs and new responsibilities, but it also brings a lot of joy. It can be a source of satisfaction and make parents feel secure about their future. But it can also cause parental stress, bring worries and concerns. Being a parent requires time, effort and energy, but it brings new and exciting experiences. What positive and negative consequences related to having children are recognized by men and women in Poland? Which of these consequences are most important to them? When they consider having a child, do they think of how their life would look like with a small baby? Or do they think of how their life might look like if they get older without any offspring? And do their views change as they get older? These are the main questions that we address in the research project on values and costs of children.

In the project, we combine survey data with in-depth qualitative investigations. First, we analyse in-depth interviews—open conversations on topics related to parenthood—which were conducted with men and women aged 20 to 46. In 2004-20014 as many as over 160 such interviews were conducted in various regions of Poland. This extremely rich, narrative material provides us with valuable insights into how Poles see various fears and joys of parenthood. Second, we will conduct a survey study to learn how young Poles see and assess various consequences of parenthood and how these perceptions influence their desire for children. To this end, we will collect data on about 1,200 individuals, entering adulthood: men and women aged 18-19. In two years' time, we will return to our respondents to investigate stability of their opinions. While qualitative data provide us with a comprehensive and detailed picture of Poles' opinions on values and costs of children, the survey data will allow us to verify which values and costs are most important for individual fertility choices and whether their role remains stable in time.