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Uncertainty, indifference and ambivalence in reproductive decision-making

Given the very low fertility rates and the increasing childlessness, childbearing choices remain at the heart of demographic studies. Researchers are continuously trying to understand the factors and mechanisms that influence how many children (if any) people have and when. In the studies on this topic, it is quite common that childbearing is perceived as an outcome of a (fairly) rational decision making process: from attitudes, ideals and preferences, through fertility desires and intentions, to actual behaviors. However, this process is filled with indecision, doubts and uncertainty, which are rarely in the main focus of researchers. Our project aims to fill this gap.

In the project, we aim **to better understand the phenomenon of uncertainty in childbearing intentions**. In the study, we distinguish between two types (sources) of this uncertainty: it may result from **ambivalent or indifferent attitudes** towards having children or from uncertain **circumstances and conditions** in which a decision to have a child is made.

In the project, we will make use of several available social databases, which contain information on attitudes towards parenthood as well as on childbearing intentions. We are also planning to obtain new questionnaire data by completing on a national sample of men and women of reproductive ages. Already existing and newly collected data will enable us to construct measures of ambivalent and indifferent attitudes towards parenthood, and then to carry out multidimensional analyzes in order to find answers to the following questions:

- What are determinants and correlates of the ambivalent and indifferent attitudes towards parenthood? How are they related to different personal characteristics, other attitudes, life goals or personality?
- How are ambivalent and indifferent attitudes towards parenthood associated with uncertainty in childbearing intentions? How does this uncertainty depend on attitudes and on various circumstances and conditions?
- What behaviors result from uncertain fertility intentions? Are they related to postponement of parenthood? Or maybe they lead to behaviors that increase the risk of an unplanned pregnancy? Do the consequences of uncertainty depend on what the source of uncertainty is?

We will conduct our analyzes on the Polish data, but the main results will be verified on the data from other countries (among others, from the USA, Austria, France or Bulgaria). Our findings will contribute to a better understanding of reasons why people want to have children and of the circumstances in which they become parents.