

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD IN COUPLES - A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

The transition to parenthood is a pivotal life course change, and the current research project aims at understanding its various psychological effects in young couples. Existing scientific literature lacks a comprehensive, longitudinal verification of effects of pregnancy and parenthood on social functioning of young adults. The proposed project comprises *five aspects that have never been combined in previous studies*: (1) broad assessment of wide variety psychological variables, (2) longitudinal data on (3) both partners that would include also (4) pre-pregnancy state and (5) longitudinal data on similar, childless individuals.

We would like to focus on four subgroups of personal characteristics, potentially distinguishing couples who do not have children, who expect children, and who have just experienced a birth of their first child: (a) quality of life, (b) gender-typed traits, (c) attitudes and beliefs, and (d) healthcare and disease avoidance. Within each part of the project, we will address the general hypothesis suggesting that *the experience of pregnancy and parenthood significantly impacts social and psychological functioning of young couples*. It should be noted that the results of a cross-sectional pilot study and a preliminary pre-conception – pregnancy longitudinal comparison provide support for the main hypothesis of the project. However, further longitudinal data collection in larger samples is necessary to argue for an actual, causal contribution of the transition to parenthood to psychological changes.

The study will comprise a diverse sample of Polish couples, who, in the light of demographical data, are likely to have children over the course of the project. The participants enrolled in the study cohort will take part in eight measurements – within these, at least one before, one during and two after pregnancy. Depending on the timing of conception, we might be able to include more pre-conception or post-parturition measurements. Changes in family status will be monitored by regular contact with the participants. The individuals whose family status will not change during the project will take part in the measurements every six months.

Our project will not only enable a deep analysis of developmental changes related to the transition to parenthood, but also create a fuller, consistent picture of these changes. The outcome of the project will be a thorough and comprehensive, longitudinal analysis of changes occurring at a certain developmental stage, that would encompass different aspects of daily functioning. The findings might allow for a deeper understanding of challenges and benefits associated with parenthood.

Although our project is strictly scientific, results could have a certain applicational value. Psychologically relevant interventions adapted to psychological and social changes that typically occur during pregnancy and beginnings of parenthood could assist parents to cope with the new challenges and demands of parenthood, and thus achieve a better quality of life. Further, better characterization of the psychological processes associated with a transition to parenthood would help define various potential risk factors related to well-being, so that families at risk could be targeted for psychological interventions. In addition, in the context of demographic problems Western countries face, our results might provide an interesting insight into characteristics of people who delay parenthood, or decide not to have children whatsoever.