

The role of a parent is one of the most important in an adult's life. According to research conducted in the United States and in the European Union, between 93% and 98% of adults have or would like to have at least one child in their lifetime. Thus it can be concluded that despite the general decline in fertility rates observed in developed countries in recent decades, the desire to have children is still a widespread human need.

Research on parenting shows that taking on the role of a parent can lead to increased maturity, but it has been found that parenting is often a heavy burden for young people. Taking on the role of a parent often causes severe stress, leads to a decline in self-esteem, and can trigger negative personality changes.

In 2018, researchers from the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium), Moira Mikolajczak and Isabelle Roskam, launched an in-depth and systematic study on one of the most serious effects of long-term parenting stress, which is referred to as *parental burnout*. Our research project aims to advance the knowledge of parental burnout by thoroughly analyzing the origins of burnout, which probably date back to the first months and years of parenthood. To date, there has been no in-depth and systematic longitudinal study of parental burnout in individuals who are just beginning to realize the role of a parent in the world. Our research project aims to fill this gap. As recent research has shown, parental burnout is also associated with regretting parenting decisions, which may cause parents experiencing parental burnout to abandon further procreative plans and forgo having more children. However, the effects of parental burnout on changes in procreative plans have not been studied before, and our study will be the first project of its kind.

### **The studies**

Our project involves conducting a series of three longitudinal studies with independent samples. The planned study will transcend many of the limitations that have been present in previous research on parental burnout:

1) we will conduct the first longitudinal study on the process of parental burnout starting even before the individual becomes a parent (before the first child comes into the world), so we can observe the process of parental burnout from the very beginning and for the first time identify its early predictors;

(2) the study will be based on a research design that has not been used before: we will use intensive measurement (every 2 months), which will allow us to make the most detailed and precise observations in previous studies and isolate precise developmental trajectories of parental burnout dating back to pregnancy; we will also conduct the longest longitudinal study of parental burnout, which will begin during pregnancy (third trimester) and continue for 3 years after the child is born;

(3) we will also examine whether parental burnout, experienced mainly by parents from highly developed countries, affects procreation plans. Indeed, we hypothesize that it is possible that parents' declining desire to have children may be due precisely to progressive parental burnout.

### **Reasons for undertaking the research problem and effects of the study**

Recent research has revealed that the percentage of severely burned out parents in Poland is one of the highest in the world. It is estimated that about 9% of women and 2% of men in Poland are characterized by severe burnout, which, compared to other populations studied so far, places Poland among high-risk countries. Recent studies also show that among young Polish parents, around 13% regret having decided to have a child in the first place, which is a significantly higher percentage than in other countries studied so far (in the US it is around 7% and in Germany around 8%). These observations, which suggest that Polish parents experience greater difficulties in adapting to the parental role than residents of many other developed countries, were one of the reasons for the decision to prepare the planned project. The results of our study will allow for a better understanding of the causes of parental burnout and, in the future, for planning professional, evidence-based methods of support for parents.