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**MODERN DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEMS IN WESTERN EUROPE:
NEW THREATS AND CHALLENGES (SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECT)**

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European society faces a new challenge – “childfree”. The term “childfree” characterizes people who voluntarily refuse a role of parents because of a number of reasons among which is basically either the aspiration to build a successful career, fear of physiological process of childbearing or unwillingness to bear responsibility for a child. The term was introduced by the adherents of such ideology as an opposite term for the word “childless” and means a person who does not have children. Such childfree persons create communities on the Internet, communicate on forums and chats and distribute in electronic mass media articles promoting ideology of voluntary childlessness describing the advantages of being “childfree”. It is obvious that the distribution of such ideology causes the indignation and the protest of the society which keeps traditional family values. The most furious “childfree” opponents create web-sites on the Internet devoted to the critic and struggle against the ideology to be “childfree”. The representatives of the counteracting parties often dispute on on-line forums and chats. The content of such forums and chats proves that the society considers the active propagation of “childfree” ideology to be a real danger. A relatively new phenomenon of “regretting

motherhood” is also contributing to the development of “childfree” ideology and supports it. Many people believe that the distribution of voluntary childlessness ideas can affect substantially the youth values formation and cause the demographic crises in Europe and in other countries.

Keywords: family, values, challenge, demographic threat, native people, motherhood, regretting motherhood, European society

СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ В ЗАПАДНОЙ ЕВРОПЕ: НОВЫЕ УГРОЗЫ И ВЫЗОВЫ (СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНЫЙ АСПЕКТ)³⁸

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Очередным вызовом европейскому обществу стала идеология «чайлдфри». Термин «чайлдфри» характеризует людей, добровольно отказывающихся от родительства в силу ряда причин, среди которых наиболее значимыми является карьера, страх перед родами или простое нежелание брать на себя ответственность за ребенка. Представители «чайлдфри» создают сообщества в интернете, общаются на форумах и распространяют информацию о своем мировоззрении и образе жизни, подчеркивая преимущества жизни без детей. Очевидно, что распространение таких идей и взглядов не может не вызвать возмущения в обществе, поддерживающем традиционные семейные ценности. Активные противники идеологии чайлдфри также создают интернет сообщества и вступают в дискуссии с представителями вышеназванной идеологии. Анализ материалов форумов и публикаций интернет сообщества показал, что идеология чайлдфри может представлять реальную угрозу современному обществу. Относительно новое явление «сожалееющее материнство» также вносит вклад в распространение идеологии «чайлдфри» и поддерживает ее. По мнению большинства, распространение идеи добровольной бездетности может оказать воздействие на формирование ценностей молодежи и повлиять на усиление демографического кризиса в Европе.

Ключевые слова: семья, ценности, вызов, демографическая угроза, коренное население, материнство, сожаление о материнстве, европейское общество

National consciousness has a certain cultural ideal of the image of a man and a woman, a family, and roles that are performed within the family. However, one can not help noticing that along with traditional family values, new tendencies arise that form a completely different image of the family in which young men and women, for certain reasons, physiological, psychological, social, ideological, religious or ideological and political, can not or do not want have children [5]. Young people refuse or postpone the creation of a family and the birth of children, which often results in the adherence to the ideology of childfree, people who voluntarily refuse to give birth. In this regard, the priority tasks for most such families are getting a decent education, getting a well-paid job, building a career.

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The problem of voluntary childlessness has long been popular in Western society and even in Russia we can observe the echoes of this fashionable trend. The issue of a voluntary renunciation of the birth of children is often associated with the problem of the natural decline in the population of a particular country, as well as with various social and psychological aspects concerning the value orientations of modern youth, matrimonial behavior, relationships with the family, society and the state [4, p. 344]. Against the backdrop of discussing the problems associated with the spread of the so-called “non-parents” in the world, another social phenomenon is emerging – the so-called “regretting mothers” – women with children, but regretting that they have given birth.

There is a common belief the society that motherhood automatically brings happiness with itself, fills life with meaning. Any behavior that challenges this social attitude is perceived as a deviation. Therefore, any regret about changing the social status from unencumbered to maternity is considered as a deviation from the norm, just as for many people a deliberate refusal to procreate or surrogate motherhood is also considered as a deviation from the norm. The more is the conservativeness of the society, the more rigid is the condemnation of any non-standardity, including the behavior of a woman performing the role of a mother, if it does not comply with socially prescribed norms [2].

Childfree individuals are people who have wittingly refused a role of parents; they are those who do not wish to have children for whatever reasons.

The data on the term origin and the phenomenon are rather poor and isolated, however, on a number of sources on the Internet, it is known, that the concept “childfree” was introduced by the American feminists Shirley Radl and Ellen Peck. They considered the term “childless” to be a little insulting as childlessness is perceived by people as inferiority, impossibility to execute the main mission physically, and free from children individuals simply do not wish to become parents. In order to protect the rights of childless individuals, Sh.Radl and E.Peck started up the first childfree community and named it the “National Organization for Non-Parents”. The women, consciously remaining to be childless, joined the movement at once. The public paid attention to the activity of these two Americans: the community representatives became real stars of newspapers and magazines, and they stated their major principles on pages of their own books. The first childfree organization existed only one decade, but it made the basis of the movement in the world.[1]

In the English language the word “childfree” became a part of ordinary speech, it is often said as “CF”. The movement gained in popularity in 1990 when one the first modern groups – the Childfree Network (USA) appeared. The teacher of high school Leslie Lafayette from California created the public network ChildFree Network (CFN): over 5 000 participants, 33 branches all over the country, political and social claims to the society encouraging exclusively families with children. One of the requirements of CFN was: cancellation of privileges for those who have children. Though the establishing of such organization was welcomed by the American society ambiguously, the organization had a success; new communities appeared and spread across Europe and Australia. The census of 2003 in the USA showed the record quantity of childless individuals – 44 % of women at the age of 15-44. The National Centre of Statistics of Public Health Services asserts, that the percent of the American women of copulative age defining themselves as “willingly childless”, quickly grew: there were 2,4 % in 1982, 4,3 % in 1990 and 6,6 % in 1995 [1].

Most women become mothers, but the proportion of women who remain without children has increased in recent decades to about 20 %. Despite the increasing proportion of women without children, the cultural expectation to bear and rear children has remained strong in American society. The power of the «motherhood mandate» seems to have weakened, but the social identity of women has remained strongly linked to their status as mothers. In the United States, the attainment of parenthood has remained central to adult identity and has usually been the most salient identity for parents. Life course theorists argue that life paths are constructed within the constraints and opportunities of both historical and biographical time. Social norms establish expected transitions through out the life course

that are tied to age and social status. In the United States, motherhood has been a central life transition that is tied to other transitions. Life course theorists see cultural schemas and social norms as contributing to the definition of appropriate behaviour that influences life paths at the same time that they acknowledge the influence of constraints and social context. In recent decades, the rising cost of raising a child has led some to wonder why people want children. Lifecourse theory thus suggests that one reason American women have children is because of social norm expectations. [3]

In Russia childfree individuals started up the online community in the end of 2004 which comprised about 500 persons. The followers of willing childlessness made their own web-site where they show the discontent with the people which do not accept and do not understand the opinion of their community. There are also web-sites devoted to studying of this phenomenon in terms of Russia. Russian psychologists and sociologists have revealed a number of national features of childfree movement, e.g., the opposition to the state demographic policy. Russian childfree individuals motivate their unwillingness to have children, first of all, with absence of economic stability in the country, considering that the birth of a child is connected with financial difficulties, the loss of work, absence of career growth, the extra-expenses dealing with education and medical treatment of a child.

Quantitative findings, while generally focused broadly on both the childfree and involuntarily childless, suggest that childfree adults do not universally reach the decision to remain so at the same stage of life or in the same way. Though qualitative studies are well suited to examining processes such as how individuals come to identify as childfree, fewer qualitative investigations focus specifically on pathways to the childfree identity. Such studies have the potential to illuminate the quantitative patterns described in the aforementioned studies.

On the Internet there are a lot of web-sites about and for childfree individuals. The first ones are devoted to studying of the above mentioned community, its motivations, opinion and the behavioural stereotypes, the second ones are created only for those who supports the belief “free from children” or those who are interested in such ideology and are ready to adjoin this movement. Both of them can represent essential scientific interest for philosophers, culturologists, sociologists, psychologists and other scientists: the phenomenon of “childfree” movement draws attention of many researchers who, making depth interviews and opinion polls among the representatives of this movement, aim to find out the internal reasons of unwillingness to have children and to estimate the influence of radical sights ability “free from children” on youth, demographic situation and social stability of the society. [1].

Speaking about the phenomenon “childfree”, the majority of researchers who do not recon themselves to the mentioned community, agree that the conscious unwillingness to have children is a deviation from the norm, contradicting the traditional model of a family and the essence of a human nature. It is basically explained by the unwillingness of the majority of women to experience the stages of family life such as: education – marriage – the birth of a child. Nowadays young women are purposeful and focused on professional, personal, and career growth, therefore they often prefer the good and highly paid work which requires the most part of their time more than creation of their own family and the birth of children. That is why we see the growth of the number of psychologically and physiologically healthy women, willingly refusing to become a mother or postponing the period of a birth of the first child for later period.

Sociologists also notice that the representatives of childfree movement are more intelligent, have better jobs, are professional experts and managers, have higher income, prefer to live in large cities, are less inclined to religion and follow traditional customs less than other people. They are focused on the comfortable life, hobby, friends, own self-development, emotional and physical intimacy with the partner and strive to have more free time. For such people career development and self-development are very important, therefore they are not intent to waste time, strengths and money on the child who “will grow and

may not appreciate it". Women can worry about their figure, be afraid of childbirth, recollect their injuring or poor childhood, offending, oppressing, or parents being constantly absent. Some childfree individuals are called by the researchers as ideological or convinced childfree individuals. They are the people actively propagandizing the childfree movement on social networking sites and online forums, calling other people to join their community, composing such statements as "it is immoral to bring new people in this world because each born should die one day" and actively supporting such radical way of contraception as sterilization.

It is evident, that the distinctive feature of the childfree movement followers and their oppositionists is an active participation in the discussions on the forums for/about "childfree", regular stressing their point of view and at times even active expression of hostility to their opponents. The sharp mutual aversion of two opposite categories of people is also related to the last feature: supporters of classical family values and willingly refused a child-bearing. The information on any phenomenon marked as deviation, received from mass media, is as a rule perceived a priori negatively, therefore active struggle against them on social networking sites, forums, and in social advertising becomes natural reaction to occurrence of childfree movement representatives in the society. The representatives of childfree movement are considered in the society as the "other ones", any deviation from habitual norms, discrepancy to any established standards is perceived by the person as "other one", "another one", or "alien".

Many people consider the phenomenon of "childfree" as socially dangerous, representing threat for a demographic situation in Europe and actively urge to struggle with the representatives of this movement. Such attitude to "childfree" movement in Europe is caused, first of all, by the fact that each new generation enters the society with already rooted norms, traditions, stereotypes, and those who try to break these stereotypes and aspire to break tradition, as a rule, face a bitter resistance from those who keep these traditions and norms. On the other hand, the so-called "infringers", facing resistance of the society, protect themselves, showing aggression, and it finds the response among the same "other ones", converting this phenomenon into a mass one. That is why there are special forums on the Internet for "childfree" followers where they offer their opinions offensively about the people having children, pregnant women, babies and growing up children, with undisguised disgust and rage splashing out their negative emotions, accumulated after communication with those who does not accept them, rejects their opinions and considers them as "strangers".

Thus, in search of a compromise between two contradictory parties it is very important to investigate the mentioned problem comprehensively, in particular, to study the opinion of the people not belonging to a category of "childfree". Among such people it is especially important to specify young married couples, young mums as well as the representatives of young people not having families. It is essentially important to reveal their reaction to some statements of childfree movement representatives. Such data can be used subsequently for the substantiation of social consequences of free from children ideology propagation in circles of young people, that subsequently can be represented in the recommendations for the social services which activities are directed on the family planning, child-bearing as well as to the organizations, dealing with the solving of demography and demographic policy issues.

Not long ago a new phenomenon emerged in modern western society – "regretting mothers".

The Israeli sociologist Orna Donat first raised the problem of regretting motherhood. Touching on this forbidden topic, cardinally overturning the idea of the traditional image of the mother, which says that children are the highest happiness, she told the society that there are still women who are not happy because of their motherhood, although they love their children. [4]. The sociologist Christina Mundlos continued studying this phenomenon, after publishing the results of research in her book. She analyzes the attitudes prevailing in

the society, gives advice to victims and discusses political solutions. From the results of her interview with regretting mothers and her psychological and sociological analysis, the true picture of the myth of motherhood and the real situation is formed. The research makes clear that regretting about motherhood concerns many women. Her book brings the issue to a broad discussion and makes it clear to women that they are not alone. One of the main reasons for the emergence of this phenomenon in modern society, according to Cristina Mundlos, is the discrepancy between the own needs and the expectations of the society.

Modern mothers suffer from the traditional image of the mother, ingrained in our minds. As many as 96 % of mothers want to work. The gap between the needs of women and the demands made by the society is the main cause of maternal discontent. The higher the requirements for the mother, the more diverse are her tasks, and the more difficult it is to meet them. Therefore, women are under the stress of a loser feeling that does not meet the requirements of the society.

Multitasking and combined tasks lead to stress. Women should lead most of the household, in some families, only a woman is involved in this process. The mother is also involved in the upbringing of children. The organization, implementation, coordination and distribution of all tasks and arrangements of all family members (for example: an appointment with the dentist, the child's attending of additional classes, the processing of the necessary documents) is designated by sociologists as "management of combining". Mothers are almost mostly responsible for this complex of tasks. They also take care of their own professional growth.

The phenomenon of regretting motherhood may contribute to the development of childfree ideology in western society. Everyone knows that the birth rate in Europe is falling, besides the number of migrants is increasing. Thus, the non-indigenous population of Europe is growing, which threatens the traditional European culture. Active discussion of the problem of regrettable mothers can lead to the fact that the number of voluntarily childless families in the society may increase which may cause a demographic catastrophe.

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