

Causes of giving up newborns in modern Russia

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ABSTRACT

In modern Russia, poverty is no longer the main motivation for mothers to give up their newborns and has given its way to other reasons. The authors conducted a survey of 137 mothers from the cities of the Chelyabinsk region who gave up their children in 2015, 2017, and 2019. The goal was to identify the current causes of giving up newborns in obstetric care institutions. Throughout all three years of the study, women named the difficult financial situation ($52.6 \pm 7.2\%$ of the respondents) the leading reason for giving up a newborn child. The second most frequent cause was deviant motherhood, which began before the birth of the baby ($26.6 \pm 3.5\%$). The last of the three main causes of giving up newborns was a severe pathology in the child ($14.5 \pm 5.1\%$). The next constant reason was having a child out of wedlock for single immigrant women from neighboring countries ($4.8 \pm 1.1\%$). In 2017, 4.8% of the mothers participating in the survey indicated an unresolved housing problem. Psychological testing clarified the results of the sociological study and showed that the real significance of the difficult financial situation as a cause of giving up children amounted only to 14.5%. Every second newborn given up for adoption (51.5%) was abandoned by the mother due to deviant motherhood. In every fourth case (25.7%), the cause of giving up the child was a severe pathology in the newborn.

Keywords: early social orphanhood, causes of giving up newborns, mothers who give up children

Introduction

In many works published by Russian ^[1-3] and foreign ^[4-7] researchers, the reasons for women giving up their newborns were investigated by surveying the mothers themselves. The sincerity of those mothers can raise some doubts because they had committed an act stigmatized by society. As a result, the authors of these works see the financial difficulties of the mother or her family as the main and in some studies the only reason for giving up her newborn. It is noteworthy that studies still state the same reason for giving up children throughout all years, despite the change of generations of women and the transformation of Russian socio-economic conditions as if abortion was still prohibited in Russia, contraception was not available, and socio-economic crises followed one after another ^[8]. In some cases,

newborns have health issues ^[9-11] that cause many difficulties to their mothers ^[12, 13].

An analysis of foreign publications showed that for the indigenous population of the European Union this problem has long lost relevance. Scientists study the problem of giving up newborns in third world countries or among indigenous inhabitants of economically developed countries which used to be colonies ^[14-17]. However, in third world countries, the main reason for newborns becoming orphans is the death of their mother during childbirth and the subsequent refusal of the community to take care of a weak or sick baby ^[14, 15, 18, 19].

Without a proper understanding of the foundations of a particular social phenomenon, predicting its development does not lead to the necessary results, despite serious time and material costs spent on the study ^[20]. It is particularly important to acquire detailed knowledge of the causes of negative social phenomena, which include early social orphanhood. The issue, in this case, concerns not only the financial expenses of the state but also thousands of children's lives. Therefore, in organizing the primary prevention of early social orphanhood, one needs to obtain accurate and up-to-date data on what causes this social phenomenon ^[21-23]. In this regard, the results of surveys involving mothers who had given up their children about the reasons for

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child abandonment should be checked by a more objective research method, such as psychological testing ^[19, 24].

The purpose of the study is to establish the current causes of giving up newborns in obstetric institutions.

Materials and Methods

Using a sociological study based on the developed questionnaire containing 35 questions, in 2015, 2017, and 2019, a survey was organized including 137 mothers from cities of the Chelyabinsk region who had given up their children. With the help of the survey, the causes of giving up newborns were clarified and the medical, biological, and socio-economic characteristics of mothers who had given up their children were formulated. To relieve psychological stress among the respondents who had committed a socially stigmatized act and to get more accurate answers, the questionnaires did not contain questions that could help establish the identity of the respondent. All questions of the questionnaire were conditionally grouped into several categories, such as information about the personality of the respondent, her socio-economic characteristics, medical activity during pregnancy, and attitude to contraception. Only the second half of the questionnaire contained questions about the reason for giving up the child and the circumstances that influenced it.

The results of the sociological study were double-checked using the psychological test for hidden material well-being specially developed by us for this study. 35 mothers who had given up their newborns in maternity hospitals in 2019 participated in this survey. Using this test in pregnant women, we measured three indicators: their current welfare, financial difficulties, and whether their income was enough to satisfy their needs and

demands. Measurement of these indicators in pregnant women makes it possible to assess the significance and role of material goods (money, financial situation) in deciding whether to give up a child in obstetric care institutions. On June 20, 2019, an application for the copyright certificate was filed and on 04.09 of the same year, copyright certificate No. 2019661613 was obtained. The test was entitled "Program for optimizing the psychological management of pregnant high-risk groups in cases of giving up their children in obstetric care".

The analysis of statistical patterns and correlation was carried out using SPSS Statistics Base 22.0. To determine the statistical significance of differences or similarities in the indices of the compared groups, we used the calculation of the nonparametric Wilcoxon-White test for independent populations (T). The differences were considered significant if the calculated indicator T was less than T_{05} stated in the table. To determine the randomness or significance of changes in the levels of indicators in dynamics by years of research, we used the criterion of iterations (Z). The significance of level changes was considered reliable if the calculated Z was less than the Z_{05} stated in the table ^[25].

Results and Discussion

The whole variety of phrasing used when giving up a child proposed during the pilot study was reduced to five reasons, such as difficult financial situation (including such explanations as "poverty", "lack of money", "lack of a constant source of income"), deviant motherhood (including "conflicts with family members", "the presence of socially significant and dangerous diseases", "lack of maternal instinct"), severe pathology in the child, lack of housing, and a child born out of wedlock by an immigrant mother.

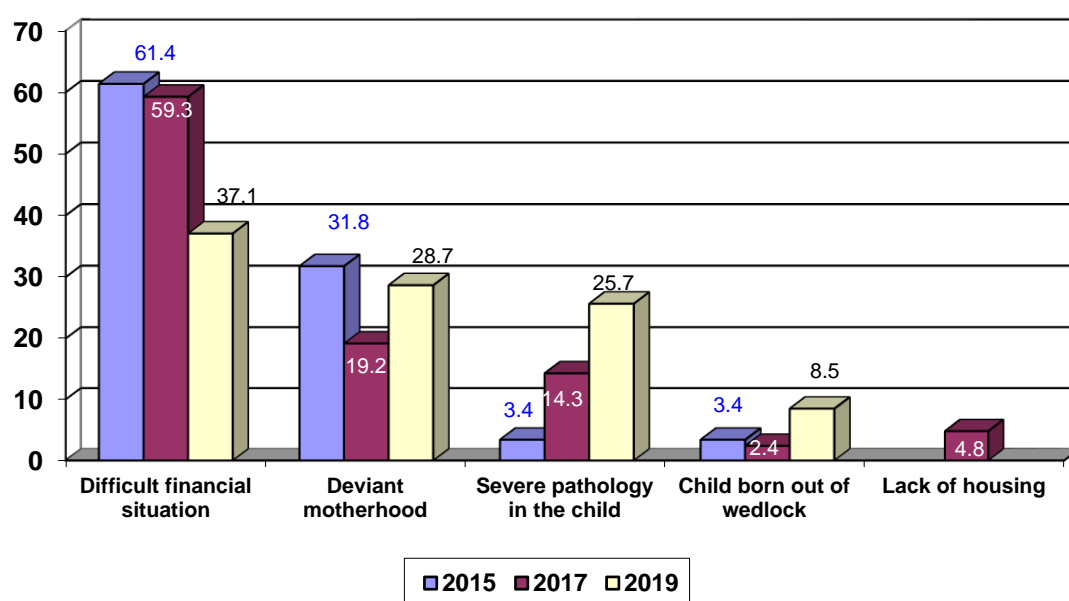


Figure 1. The structure and dynamics of the causes of giving up newborns (%).

Throughout the years of research, mothers said that difficult financial situation was the main reason for giving up a newborn

child. On average, during the period under review, $52.6 \pm 7.2\%$ of the respondents indicated this reason (Figure 1). However, the

percentage was steadily decreasing: from 61.4% in 2015 to 37.1% in 2019. The rate of decline amounted to 60.4%. The second most frequent reason for giving up newborns was deviant motherhood, which had begun before the birth of the baby. The characteristics related to this phenomenon were indicated by an average of $26.6 \pm 3.5\%$. The percentage of this cause was subject to random fluctuations over the three years of the study ($Z > Z_{05}$). The last one of the three leading causes for giving up newborns was a severe pathology in the child. On average, for the period under review, this reason was named by $14.5 \pm 5.1\%$ and the share increased ($Z < Z_{05}$) by a factor of 7.5 from 3.4% in 2015 to 25.7% in 2019.

The next constant during the study was the birth of a child out of wedlock by single immigrant women from neighboring countries. On average, $4.8 \pm 1.1\%$ indicated this reason and it increased ($Z < Z_{05}$) by a factor of 2.5 from 3.4% in 2015 to 8.5%

in 2019. Besides, in 2017 alone, 4.8% of mothers participating in the survey said that their lack of housing made them give up their newborns.

The analysis of the financial condition of the respondents indicated that the difficult financial situation was the main reason for giving up their child, and the vast majority of them in all years of the study had per capita income equaling the minimum monthly wage (MMW): from 89.2% in 2015 to 92.3% in 2019. The financial situation of this group of women worsened (Table 1). The rate of decline was 103.5%. However, the share of the respondents with per capita income from 1 to 1.5 MMW (which in monetary terms in 2019 when rounding amounted to 13 to 19.5 thousand rubles) increased: from 2.7% in 2015 to 7.7% in 2019. That said since 2017, there has not been a single respondent with an income above 1.5 MMW.

Table 1. The dynamics of the monthly per capita income in the context of the studied population (%).											
Year of the study		2015				2017			2019		
Population	Average monthly per capita income	MMW	1-1.5 MMW	1.5-2 MMW	2 MMW	1 MMW	1-1.5 MMW	1.5-2 MMW	2 MMW	1 MMW	
		<	1-1.5	1.5-2	>	<	1-1.5	1.5-2	>	1-1.5	
	Difficult financial situation	89.2	2.7	5.4	2.7	91.9	8.1	-	-	92.3	7.7
	Deviant motherhood	97.2	1.4	1.4	-	92.4	-	3.8	3.8	90.5	9.5
	Severe pathology in the child	100	-	-	-	83.3	16.7	-	-	77.8	22.2
	Foreign women	100	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	100	-
	Poor housing conditions	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-

The material condition of the majority of the respondents with signs of deviant motherhood was also unsatisfactory. Most of them had a per capita income at the level of 1 MMW during all years of the study from 97.2% in 2015 to 90.5% in 2019. At the same time, the share of the respondents with per capita income from 1 to 1.5 MMW increased from 1.4% in 2015 to 9.5% in 2019. In 2019, there were no more respondents with incomes above 1.5 MMW.

The financial situation of women who gave up the newborn because of the presence of a severe pathology during the study period was very different. If in 2015 this group was entirely represented by the respondents with a per capita income of 1 MMW, then in 2017 such women formed 83.3% of the group and some women in the group reported an income from 1 to 1.5 MMW. In 2019, the latter group became even more significant, amounting to 22.2%.

All migrant women had a per capita income of less than 1 MMW. The respondents with poor housing conditions had an income at the level of 1 MMW.

To explain the reasons for such low incomes of the respondents, we investigated the respondents' sources of income. Thus, in the group of the respondents with a difficult financial situation, the proportion of women relying on official wages was small and had an obvious tendency to decrease from 18.9% in 2015 to 7.7% in 2019 (Table 2). The most frequent source of income for this

population was casual earnings: on average, they accounted for $43.5 \pm 7.1\%$ and by 2019, their share had reached 53.8%. The next most frequent source of income was non-reported cash payments. On average, this served as the main source of income for $21.5 \pm 4.1\%$. Over the years of the study, the share increased from 13.5% in 2015 to 23.1% in 2019. The growth rate was 171.1%. Another source of income common in this group was the sale (resale) of things, as well as the money earned from the sale of found objects ($20.3 \pm 4.1\%$). Besides, the only source of income for some of the respondents was a disability pension; nevertheless, such cases did not occur regularly.

The respondents with signs of deviant motherhood did not have such sources of income as official salaries and disability pensions during all three years of the study. The most frequent source of income for this population was non-reported cash payments, serving as the main source of income for $63.6 \pm 10.1\%$. Moreover, their share, which amounted to more than 84% in 2015 and 2017, in 2019 decreased by a factor of 3.5. The second constant source was casual earnings: they were a source of income for $32.7 \pm 7.1\%$. Over the years, their share increased from 15.7% in 2015 to 66.7% in 2019. The growth rate was 424.8%. The third source of income for this population, although not constant, but noted only in 2019, was selling things (11.1%).

Table 2. The dynamics of income sources in the context of the studied population (%).

Year of the study		2015					2017					2019				
Population	Sources of income	official salary	casual earnings	unofficial salary	selling things	disability pension	official salary	casual earnings	unofficial salary	selling things	disability pension	official salary	casual earnings	unofficial salary	selling things	disability pension
	Difficult financial situation	18.9	48.6	13.5	13.6	5.4	8	28	28	32	4	7.7	53.8	23.1	15.4	-
	Deviant motherhood	-	15.7	84.3	-	-	-	15.8	84.2	-	-	-	66.7	22.2	11.1	-
	Severe pathology in the child	50	-	-	-	50	17	-	83	-	-	44.4	22.3	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Foreign women	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	100	-	-
	Poor housing conditions	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Respondents who gave up a child due to a serious pathology in the newborn had only official sources of income in 2015, including such as an official salary and disability pension in equal shares. In 2017, the situation changed dramatically: non-reported cash became the main source of income for 83.0%. In 2019, this population had all three sources of income, but no more than 55.5% of them were official.

Foreign women who came to work in Russia and gave birth here mentioned only non-reported cash as a source of income. All respondents who indicated poor housing conditions had only casual earnings.

The traditional behavior of parents in a situation of low income is the search for additional earnings. However, for most respondents, this behavior pattern was not characteristic. Thus, over the years of research, women who called the economic conditions the reason for giving up the newborn only aggravated their difficult financial situation. The share of those who constantly had additional income decreased from 21.6% in 2015

to 7.7% in 2019 (Table 3). The respondents who had a periodic additional source of income in 2015 did not have it anymore in 2019. At the same time, the share of those who had episodic additional earnings and who did not have additional income at all increased by a factor of 1.5 and 2, respectively.

In 2015, women with signs of deviant motherhood who had given up their children did not at all try to improve their financial situation with the help of additional earnings. In 2017, 12.5% of them already had a permanent additional source of income, and one-fourth could earn additional money once in a while. In 2019, only one in five had episodic additional earnings, while most did not have additional income.

For mothers who had given up the newborn due to the presence of severe pathology, the appearance of additional sources of income strongly depended on the existence of unofficial earnings ($r = +0.73$ — $+0.78$). As a result, in 2019, 11.1% had constant and periodic additional income, every fifth had episodic earnings, and only 55.6% were satisfied with the main source of income.

Table 3. The degree of constancy of additional sources of income in the context of the studied population (%).

Year of the study		2015				2017				2019			
Population	Sources of income	constant	periodic	episodic	none	constant	periodic	episodic	none	constant	periodic	episodic	none
	Difficult financial situation	21.6	29.7	16.2	32.5	8.0	4.0	4.0	84.0	7.7	-	23.1	69.2
	Deviant motherhood	-	-	-	100	12.5	-	25.0	62.5	-	-	20.0	80.0
	Severe pathology in the child	-	-	-	100	16.7	16.7	66.6	-	11.1	11.1	22.2	55.6
	Foreign women	-	-	50.0	50.0	-	-	2.4	97.6	-	-	66.7	33.3
	Poor housing conditions	-	-	-	-	-	50.0	50.0	-	-	-	-	-

Being in the most constrained and dependent financial situation, migrant women were trying to improve it. That said they had additional sources of income only occasionally. All respondents who indicated poor housing conditions also sought to improve their financial condition through additional sources of income. In half of them, these sources were periodic, and in the second half, they were episodic.

The absence of significant differences in the economic status and the way it improved in two groups of rejected mothers (women with signs of deviant motherhood and women in a difficult financial situation) made the sincerity of the answers of the latter group dubitable. All mothers who referred to economic

conditions when they gave up their children in 2019 were tested with the help of the test for hidden economic prosperity specially developed by us in 2018. As a result, the data obtained (Table 4) demonstrated that the entire population of mothers who had given up their children naming the economic reasons for the abandonment was divided into two groups. The first group (main group No. 1) received an average score of 7.4 ± 0.9 in the testing process, which indicates a low subjective assessment of their economic well-being, that is, the presence of serious anxiety associated with material problems. The share of this group amounted to 38.5% of all mothers citing the economic reasons for giving up their children.

The remaining 61.5% of women (main group No. 2) received an average score of 37.6 ± 3.0 , which was significantly ($T < T_{05}$) higher than the results of the main group No. 1. According to the concept of this psychological test, a result on a rating scale ranging from 23.97 to 55 points indicates that the subject is not worried about her poor financial situation but uses it to manipulate public opinion.

The results of the main group No. 2 were compared with the results of women who had signs of deviant motherhood (control group) and received in the testing process an average score of 33.3 ± 2.3 , which does not have significant differences ($T > T_{05}$) with the indicator of the main group No. 2. That is, the psychological state of these two groups of women associated with their economic conditions did not differ. Moreover, the existing financial situation did not bother them much.

Table 4. The results of psychological testing for the hidden economic well-being of mothers who had given up their children referring to financial reasons.

Group	Main group No. 1	Main group No. 2	Control group
Average score $\pm m$	7.4 ± 0.9	37.6 ± 3.0	33.3 ± 2.3

Table 5. The similarity of the medical and social characteristics of mothers with developed signs of deviant motherhood and women from the main group No. 2.

No.	Characteristics	Mothers giving up their children with signs of deviant motherhood (control group)	Mothers giving up their children from main group No. 2
1	Lack of family	97.6%	87.8%
2	Presence of children	100%	100%
3	The average number of abortions per woman	2.4	2.6
4	Irresponsible attitude to contraception	100%	100%
5	Did not visit a maternity center	90.4%	87.8%
6	Independence in deciding to give up the child	84.2%	87.8%

As a result, considering the results of psychological testing, the group of the respondents with signs of deviant motherhood increased due to the mothers of the main group No. 2. Thus, the current leading cause of giving up children is deviant motherhood, serving as the reason for more than half cases (51.5%). Giving up children is increasingly becoming the choice of women who have sunk to the bottom of society and suffer from all kinds of addictions (alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.). In every fourth case (25.7%), the reason for giving up a newborn was the presence of severe pathology in the child. The results of further psychological tests showed that fewer women left their children in obstetric care institutions due to difficult economic circumstances. However, this reason was often used as a pretext to cover up the true motives of their behavior. The real significance of the difficult financial situation decreased by more than four times: from 61.4% in 2015 to 14.5% in 2019, which corresponds to the third place in the structure of causes of giving up newborns in 2019. Preventive work with these population groups is not only possible but also necessary. However, no work is currently going on to prevent giving up babies by immigrant Muslim mothers coming mainly from Central Asia. The Russian

Conclusions

Summarizing the results of sociological and psychological studies, it should be noted that over the past five years in Russia, there have been significant changes in the structure of the reasons that provoke the abandonment of children by women in obstetric care institutions. Thus, if in 2015 almost two-thirds of mothers who gave up their children mentioned poverty as the reason for giving up their newborn, then in 2019, although this factor still took first place, about a third of the respondents indicate poverty in the survey. Nevertheless, this value is doubtful, since there are no fundamental differences in the medical and social characteristics of two groups of mothers giving up their children, namely women with signs of deviant motherhood and women who indicated a difficult financial situation as a reason for giving up their child but did not confirm this during testing.

As can be seen from Table 5, the compared characteristics of the two groups of mothers who gave up their children practically do not differ, which allows us to state the following. Main group No. 2 included women with signs of deviant motherhood trying to manipulate public opinion by citing the reason, which in the minds of some part of society causes pity for such a woman, rather than condemnation of her act.

Federation today is simply not ready to prevent immigrant women from giving up their children. As a result, their share in five years has grown 2.5 times. To prevent this phenomenon, the improvement of immigration legislation is required.

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