Being an Older Mother: Metamorphoses of Late Motherhood from the Foundation of Czechoslovakia up to the Present

Abstract

The doctoral thesis gives a macro-structural view of the metamorphoses of late motherhood, here defined as motherhood of women aged over 35, as they have occurred in the Czech lands between 1920 and 2015. The study examines to which extent the reflection of late motherhood in selected professional and feminine / lifestyle periodicals converges with the findings derived from demographic data analysis. For this purpose, a mixed methods research has been conducted to link the conclusions from quantitative analysis of demographic data (demographic analysis and binary logistic regression) to those from qualitative and quantitative media analyses (discourse and content analyses).

As the study shows, the development of late motherhood in the Czech lands varies across a range of possible perceptions in the media, levels and fertility rates. The thesis shows a strong coherence between the perception of late motherhood in the media and conclusions drawn from the demographic data analysis, which are consistent for most of the observed years.

According to the results of the analysis, with some simplification, five different types of late motherhood are determined. The first type, the "Experienced Mother" (1920-37), represents a late mother as a married woman with several children and highly experienced in household management and child rearing. The second type, the "Merited Mother" (1960-62), highlights not only experience, but furthermore the ability to combine work achievements with the care for a multi-member family. The third type, the "Anxious Mother" (1979-81), points out the negatives associated with late motherhood: health problems and the psychological unpreparedness of late mothers (anxiety, worries). The fourth type, the "Hedonist Mother", and the fifth type, the "Working Mother", (both 2011-13) are represented in discourse concurrently. The "Hedonist Mother" enjoys motherhood and stays at home with her child for a longer period because she has already reached her career goals. The "Working Mother", which is less represented, is the exact opposite of the "Hedonist Mother", as this mother wants to balance work and family and therefore, she returns to work soon after giving birth.

Contemporary late motherhood is associated with a postponement of motherhood, which, in discourse, is explained to be a consequence of unfortunate factors / life stages (e.g., finding a suitable partner). However, the author of the thesis defines it a risk, that in discourse, the biological limits of women’s fecundity are often overlooked, while the socially accepted postponement of maternity can ultimately mean remaining childless.

Keywords: late motherhood, mixed method research, fertility, demographic analysis, logistic regression, discourse analysis, content analysis