Chapter 1

TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD IN THE LIFE COURSE

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ABSTRACT

The transition to parenthood represents a crucial biographical event with far-reaching consequences for the individual's life. A declining number of children and a prevalent postponement of first parenthood until later ages invoke two major questions: Which are essential determinants of the decision whether or not to start a family and to what extent is this decision really a conscious one?

In 1987 a survey was started aiming to accompany 500 individuals during their life course up to now and further on. Since then, data of 20 waves have become available. At the beginning the participants were 14 years old. Now they are 33 years old; hence they are just about to potentially start a family.

This article describes the context within which people decide to become parents, it identifies corresponding determinants as well as factors for postponement and, furthermore, it scrutinises the individual's values and goals in the course of time. Aspects such as the desired number of children as well as the number of actual deliveries, the present wish to have a child and the way of planning a pregnancy are considered as family aspects. These aspects are put in context of personality aspects such as attitudes towards children and towards becoming a parent. Aspects of the partnership are included.

Interrelations among these aspects are tested by multivariate statistical methods. Several analyses show a clear-cut difference in the decision for a first child in contrast to further children. Positive emotional aspects associated with having children influence particularly the ideal number of children and the current wish for a child, especially in case of couples without any children so far. Finally, the issue concerning highly educated women and motherhood will also be discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of starting a family such as marriage and the birth of children are individual behavioural patterns. Yet they are linked to a society's general living conditions and to cultural norms. Effects of the sociocultural and economic context shape these behavioural patterns, which always emerge out of concur and of cooperation with other members of society. For being based on social behaviour the process of starting a family can thus be specified as a social one. Hence the process of starting a family implies both the occurrence in a social environment and the reflection of the circumstances (Wendt, 1993).

Social change in terms of sociology of the family turned out to be an area of conflict particularly between freedom and risk in the last decades. Since the decision to start a family represents only one option among others the choice not to start a family at all gains attraction. In this context many people's family biography appears to be patchwork and various ways of family life seem to be appropriately described as 'elective affinities' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1997; Leip, 2004). Formerly parenthood used to be taken for granted, whereas today problems and difficulties are more and more associated with parenthood. At the same time hesitation, weighing up, and postponement should not be interpreted as a private conflict, but rather as an expression of epochal social change. This change led to closing old commitments and establishing new ways of life, which also involve new expectations and demands as well as new freedom and dependency. Demanding a piece of life of one's own often comes along with this social change and serves as a mirror for the changing ways of life in contemporary societies. These ways of life are assumed to reflect people's promises and yearnings, their disappointments and anxieties, their conflicts and inconsistencies. All these aspects influence women's lives as such but also the relation between mother and child (Beck-Gernsheim, 2006).

This contribution deals with these conflicts and inconsistencies, as mentioned above, therefore with demographic changes in Germany on an individual level. Based on longitudinal survey data containing nearly 20 years of observation and analysis the process of starting a family and, as the case may be, the transition to parenthood will be traced. Furthermore we would like to point out a special feature of this analysis: The age cohort of survey participants born in 1973 had to cope during late adolescence with profound changes due to the German reunification in 1989. For this reason they had to tackle not only general developmental tasks regarding the transition from adolescence to adulthood but also tasks deriving from the changing social system. The transition to adulthood contains several tasks such as forming one's identity and reaching a decision in mainly three domains: Career choice, starting a family and view of one's livelyhood (Meulemann, 2002).

None of these three aspects might have been easily manageable and gone according to plan. In 1989 many of the 16 year old participants had already a reliable prospect of an apprenticeship training position; however they were not able to take this position or to complete their apprenticeship because of the profound social and economic changes of the German reunification (Förster, 2002).

Characteristic of the GDR was an early commitment to a partner including starting a family. With the reunification this shifted the social structure and many people tried to handle the resulting changes and find their position in society instead of starting a family at this point.

The survey's participants were socialised in the GDR throughout their childhood; hence some specific aspects with respect to family structures and processes in the GDR are outlined in the following.

Typically people in the GDR had a strong orientation towards partnership and parenthood. Families usually consisted of parents with one or two children and these families represented the core and standard family. In the eighties 62% of all households belonging to 18 to 40 year old women were composed of couples with their child or children. On the other hand childless couples and three-generation-families rarely existed (Wendt, 1993).

Even though many couples were married at a young age the number of unmarried mothers increased in the seventies and eighties caused by national welfare policies. In 1989 the proportion added up to 50%. Yet many of the women married subsequently after giving birth to their first child. Parenthood became integrated in people's biography at a comparatively young age. The average age of first pregnancy was 22 to 23 years whereas first pregnancy beyond the age of 30 was clearly an exception (Schlegel, 2002; Adler, 2002).

Besides to early parenthood the GDR featured another distinctive aspect: Usually women participated full time in the labour market and therefore working women and mothers were regarded as being standard. Yet this standard came along with the fact that women also shouldered a double burden of waged work on the one hand and the bulk of household responsibilities on the other.

After the end of the GDR and the accession to the FRG the fertility rate declined dramatically within the former parts of the GDR. In 1989 the GDR's total fertility rate still substantially overtopped the FRG's total rate. Later the fertility rate temporarily bottomed out at 0.77 children per woman in the parts of the former GDR. This was the lowest proportion ever recorded in a country with respect to fertility. From 1991 to 1995 the parent generation was not maintained by newborn children to 50% (Wendt, 1993).

In fact the reunification altered all social institutions ranging from the kind of economy to the kind of cohabitation. The GDR featured a high level of central planning and a rather low level of individual choices. In the wake of the German reunification people's biography became more and more individualised and everyone faced an unfamiliar multitude of options as well as the imperative to reach a decision among all these options (Adler, 2002; 2004; Scheller, 2004; Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007). Former ideals and normative behavioural patterns had not yet complied with these new requirements and people experienced a so-called 'behavioural lag' so the social environment in the former GDR adapted slower to the changed economic conditions (Dorbritz & Ruckdeschel, 2007).

From about 1995 the total fertility rate increased again in the new parts of Germany. While in 1991 the average number of children in the new parts of Germany added up to 30% less compared to the old parts, in 2004 the average number of children per woman was 1.31 and hence only 5% lower than the average number of children per woman in western Germany. This increase of the fertility rate can be mainly ascribed to women aged 25 to 35 whose fertility rate doubled over the period from 1991 to 2004. For instance in 1991 women of this age group gave birth to approximately 400 children per 1000 women whereas in 2004 it were 900 (Eisenmenger et al., 2006).

2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN GERMANY

As in many other industrialised countries parenthood in Germany is increasingly being postponed to an older age. Furthermore parenthood is no longer necessarily connected to marriage. Especially in the eastern parts of Germany the single mother and unmarried relationships can prevalently be encountered. Couples often get married after giving birth to their first child however many parents continue to cohabit without intending to marry (Dorbritz, Höhn & Naderi, 2005). In most of the European countries the proportion of children born to an unmarried mother amounted to less than 10% in 1980 whereas two decades later it amounted to almost 30%. However in 2002 the proportion of 26.1% children born to unmarried mothers in Germany was under the European average (29.2%). In western European countries a high rate of children born to unmarried mothers tends to result in higher fertility rates. Accordingly new forms of partnership are not inconsistent with the intention of starting a family (Heß-Meining & Tölke, 2005).

Another feature of German demography is that many grown-up children aged from 18 to 24 years still live at their parent's home and have intentions of moving out at a later age, this is especially the case for young men. Hence men are establishing a life on one's own responsibility notedly later than women. This also leads to a postponement of potentially intending to have a family and actually starting one.

Recently childlessness in highly educated women is a matter of controversial debate. Repeatedly a proportion of 40% childless university graduate women were reported (Grünheid, 2004; Scharein & Unger, 2005). However this proportion considerably varies depending on which national data set is applied ('Mikrozensus' versus 'Sozio-Ökonomisches Panel' / SOEP) and on how closely 'academic' is defined (Scharein & Unger, 2005). Yet there is a correlation between length of education, childlessness and age of first pregnancy: The longer women spend time for their education, the higher is their age at first pregnancy and the more likely they remain childless (Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991; Huinink & Kreyenfeld, 2004).

The level of education alone does not sufficiently explain childlessness in women rather there is evidence for the direction of study to be influential as well as Hoem, Neyer and Anderson (2006) showed in the case of Sweden.

There is also a correlation between career position and childlessness at least concerning higher career positions (Wirth & Dümmler, 2005).

Today in the parts of the former GDR and at the time of the GDR childlessness in highly educated women has never been an issue. The transition to parenthood indeed takes place relatively late in people's biography, but only a few highly educated women abstain from giving birth at all (Biedenkopf, 2005; Grünheid, 2004).

Basically the number of childless women increased in the last couple of years. Approximately 30% of the women of the cohort born in 1970 remain childless (Dickmann, 2003). At the same time these estimates can only be problematically deduced from official statistics. The precise amount of childless women per cohort cannot be calculated until menopause hence for women aged 45 and older. For instance reliable calculations regarding women born in 1955 refer an amount of 22% childless women in Germany, 8% in France, and 17% in the Netherlands and in the UK (Höhn, Ette & Ruckdeschel, 2006).

For the time being the total fertility rate adds up to 1.6 in the western parts of Germany and to 1.8 in the eastern parts (Schwentker, 2006). However it remains unsolved, if these estimated low rates of fertility may be essentially caused by a timing effect to which first pregnancies are being postponed to older ages but not completely renounced (Sobotka, 2005).

Generally there is not only an increase of childless couples but also a substantial decrease of one-child families. This process relates to the sociological term bimodal distribution of the number of children: Either there is no transition to parenthood at all or, if there is one, parents usually decide to have two children. However this bimodal distribution needs to be differentiated with respect to educational level, birth cohort and region (eastern parts of Germany versus western parts) (Grünheid, 2004; Huinink, 2002).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Sample

The sample is part of a longitudinal panel survey - the 'Sächsische Längsschnittstudie' - which has been ongoing since 1987 with annual data collection.

The survey was first carried out in 1987 containing a random and representative sample of pupils born in 1973 from 72 eighth-grade classes in 41 different schools located in Leipzig and Karl-Marx-Stadt (today Chemnitz). Accordingly the survey covers the first teenage years of the survey's participants still living in the GDR, and then experiencing the reunification, and finally the survey covers the participant's adulthood in the following years of adjustment to the new economic and social system. In this way not only important developmental passages can be pictured in this panel survey but also the effects of the reunification in terms of a unique life event (Förster et al., 2007).

The first three waves consisted of 1281 individuals, after the end of the third wave in 1989 nearly half of them continued to participate in the survey. The number of participants varied in the years from 1990 to 1994 between 170 and 276, and from 1995 to 2006 between 350 and 400 with tendency to increase.

The mode of data collection at every wave has been a written questionnaire and since 1990 it was send to the participating individuals by post.

3.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis was done by SPSS for Windows (version 12) with descriptive as well as inferential statistics. After controlling data for mistakes bivariate and multivariate procedures were applied.

This study uses data from wave 10 to 20 (1994 to 2006) of the 'Sächsische Längsschnittstudie' with emphasis on wave 18 and 20 (2004 and 2006) for these two waves consisted of questions concerning family issues.

3.3. Data Analysis Framework

Referring to longitudinal data determinants of starting a family and features of the context in which these family processes take place are being explored in this study. Aspects such as motives for having a child receive emphasis in this contribution. Additionally socio-demographic features, for instance sexual gender, educational level, parenthood, and place of residence, are incorporated into the analysis as well. Referring to specific items concerning parenthood and starting a family, intentional aspects of generative behaviour were also examined at least rudimentary.

The analysis framework aims to value the model's constituents and their potential causal connections. It integrates basic essentials of the theory 'Value of Children' (VOC) by Hofman and Hofman (1973) and the 'Theory of planned behaviour' (TOPB) by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980, 2005).

3.3.1. The Intention to Start a Family

The actual generative behaviour is interpreted to be at least partly a result of one's intention. Hence the recorded actual number of children and a potential pregnancy in the past two years was considered to reflect to what extend the respondent's intention to start a family was put into practice.

The intention itself to start a family or have another child was operationalised by three items:

(1) The intensity of a current wish for a child was rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = 'not at all', 2 = 'hardly', 3 = 'somewhat', 4 = 'strongly', 5 = 'very strongly'.
(2) The ideal number of children.
(3) The estimated likeliness of giving birth to a (another) child in the following two years.

This was rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

3.3.2. Leipzig Questionnaire on Motives for Having a Child (LKM)

In order to examine determinants of the individual's wish for children, the Leipzig questionnaire on motives for having a child (LKM – Brähler, Stöbel-Richter & Schumacher, 2001) was applied.

Instructions for the questionnaires are: 'Everybody has thought about a personal wish for a child at some time. Some decide in favour of a child, others decide against having a child. How much do the following motives affect your personal decision?'

Participants rate their answers to the 20 given items on a 5-point scale from 'does not affect me at all' (=1) to 'affects me greatly' (=5). The items reflect positive aspects of having a child as well as possible constraints. The 'Value of children'-Theory by Hofmann and Hofman provided a basis for this conceptualisation (cp. Brähler et al., 2001 and Stöbel-Richter, 2000).

The four scales of the LKM are characterised as follows:

LKM 1: Desire for emotional stabilisation and finding meaning. (Examples: 'A child gives me the feeling to have a real home.' & 'To feel love for one's child can not be replaced by anything else.').

LKM 2: Fear of personal constraints. (Examples: 'With a child of our own my partner and I have not enough time for each other.' & 'With a child I would no longer be able to cultivate my friendships the way I did before.').

LKM 3: Desire for social recognition. (Examples: 'A child is necessary for me to be acknowledged as an adult.' & 'With a child I experience a higher social standing in our society.').

LKM 4: Fear of financial constraints. (Examples: 'There is a lack of sufficient public aid for families with children.' & 'To have a child in our society means a handicap.').

3.3.3. Socio-demographic Features

Since the age was determined by each wave its effect could not be tested separately. Hence other aspects were centered such as sexual gender, marital status, parenthood, residence (East / West Germany), educational attainment, and experienced unemployment.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Characteristics of the Sample

The following chart 4.1 displays the number of participants and their corresponding age regarding waves 10 to 20, on which this analysis is based.

Chart 4.2 covers residence and parenthood regarding waves 18 to 20. Approximately two thirds of the participant population have children in the meantime, a quarter moved to West Germany and abroad.

Chart 4.1. Number and age of participants per wave

	Year	Total	Men	Women	Age in years
W 1	1987	1407	744	663	14
W 3	1989	1281	645	631	16
W 10	1994	250	114	136	21.5
W 11	1995	316	148	168	22.5
W 12	1996	355	163	192	23.5
W 13	1998	368	167	201	25.1
W 14	2000	398	185	213	27.2
W 16	2002	423	200	222	29.0
W 17	2003	419	193	226	30.1
W 18	2004	418	193	223	31.1
W 19	2005	385	179	205	32
W 20	2006	391	178	213	33

Chart 4.2. Residence and parenthood

	W 18 – 2004	W 19 – 2005	W 20 – 2006
Total	418	385	391
Parents	235 (57.0 %)	235 (61.4 %)	244 (64.6 %)
Childless participants	177 (43.0 %)	148 (38.6 %)	134 (35.4 %)
East Germany	316 (76.3 %)	293 (76.3 %)	286 (73.9 %)
West Germany	91 (22.0 %)	87 (22.7 %)	94 (24.3 %)
Abroad	7 (1.7 %)	4 (1.0 %)	7 (1.8 %)

Participants' labour force participation from the year 2004 to 2006 is shown in chart 4.3. In large part participants are employed but there are also about 10% in each case unemployed or on parental leave. A percentage of 26.6 (N = 101) of the participants graduated in 2006.

4.2. Partnership – Married and Happy?

4.2.1. Contentment in the Relationship and Living Arrangements

In 2006 and thus at the age of 33 many participants are just about to establish a family life and 64.6% of the participants have already children. The marital status displays as follows: 45.8% of the participants are married and 48.9% are unmarried. Among the unmarried individuals a percentage of 21.9 are involved in a committed relationship and another 16.4% additionally share a household (cohabitation). Anyway most of the participants are involved in a somewhat conventional relationship in terms of a committed long-term and sexually faithful partnership. Approximately 10% of the participants are single and not involved in any intimate relationship at that time.

Men and women do not differ in living arrangements (Chi² = 4.879; df = 4; p = .300) though they do concerning marital status: Women of this study marry significantly earlier than men (Chi² = 17.438; df = 4; p = .002; compare figure 1).

Men and women also differ in the duration of their respective partnership: In 2006 women state an average partnership duration of 10.6 years whereas men state 8.18 years (t-test / t = -3.96; df = 297; p < .001).

Chart 4.3. Participants' labour force participation (column percentage)

Status	2004 – N (%)	2005 – N (%)	2006 – N (%)
employee	178 (43.0)	150 (39.1)	164 (42.5)
Worker	77 (18.6)	79 (20.6)	70 (18.1)
parental leave/ at home	44 (10.6)	42 (10.9)	37 (9.6)
self-employed	36 (8.7)	36 (9.4)	40 (10.4)
unemployed	40 (9.7)	42 (10.9)	42 (10.9)
student	7 (1.7)	5 (1.3)	2 (0.5)
civil servant	22 (5.3)	18 (4.7)	18 (4.7)
apprentice	1 (0.2)	2 (0.5)	2 (0.5)
misc.	9 (2.2)	10 (2.6)	11 (2.8)

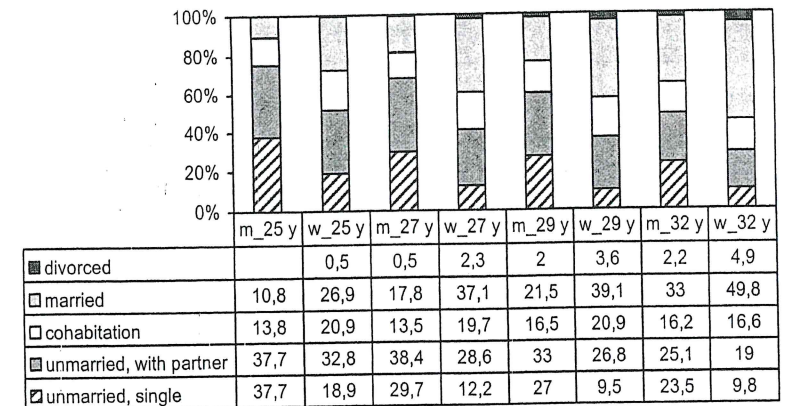|	m_25 y	w_25 y	m_27 y	w_27 y	m_29 y	w_29 y	m_32 y	w_32 y
divorced		0,5	0,5	2,3	2	3,6	2,2	4,9
married	10,8	26,9	17,8	37,1	21,5	39,1	33	49,8
cohabitation	13,8	20,9	13,5	19,7	16,5	20,9	16,2	16,6
unmarried, with partner	37,7	32,8	38,4	28,6	33	26,8	25,1	19
unmarried, single	37,7	18,9	29,7	12,2	27	9,5	23,5	9,8

Figure 1. Percentages of marital status in the years 1998 to 2005 for women and men at age 25, 27, 29, and 32.

Gender differentiates the marital status even more articulately considering its development over the years. Women marry earlier than men, however they divorce earlier and more often, too.

Couples with children live longer together than couples without children at the point of the interview in 2006 (10.63 years and 6.22 years; t = -6.558; p < .001).

4.3. Children – Yes or No?

4.3.1. Actual Number of Children

Since the age of 19 participants were asked about children of one's own at that time and about their ideal number of children. At 33 years 64.6% of the participants have children. Of the participants 34.7% have one child, 26.2% have two children, and 3.7% of the participants have three or four children. Another 35.4% are childless so far.

Regarding parenthood there are differences between men and women: Of the women 16.1% have children by the age of 25 whereas 5.4% of men have children at this same age. At age 33 a considerable number of men still are childless (45.3%) but 27.4% of the women. Roughly one third of the participants have one child (34.6% of the women and 34.7% of the men). There are only 17.1% two-parity men but 33.7% two-parity women. A family with three or four children rarely occurs for men and women likewise (3% of the men and 4.3% of the women). All of these gender differences are significant (Pearson Chi² = 20.246; df = 4; p < .001).

In this study the general tendency of first child postponement can be replicated: Only a few women get pregnant in their early twenties. Most of the women give birth to their first child in their late twenties, where men postpone even longer. Thus the number of two- or more parity men is rather low. At the age of 33 years three-quarter of the participating women

have children (72.6%) and more than half of the participating men (54.7%). However the number of individuals with children can be assumed to increase in the following couple of years with respect to this women's residual time of fertile years.

Among participants who are childless at the age of 31 (wave 18 in the year 2004) 7.6% declare never to want any children, 20.9% feel ambivalent and cannot decide whether to have children one day or not, and 69.2% wish to have children one day. Only a few participants are not able to give birth to a child themselves or their partner, respectively.

4.3.3. Ideal Number of Children

Generally the ideal number of children is greater than the actual number. As to only 30% of the survey's participants the actual number of children matches the ideal number. The mainstream trend favours two-parity families 51.5% and 27% of the participants favour one-parity families and every eighth respondent appreciates 3 or more children to be optimum. A percentage of 9.1% of the survey's participants perceive voluntary childlessness as an ideal condition.

Regarding the congruence between ideal and actual number of children one can see that 44.4% of one-parity individuals also declare one child to be their ideal number of children yet another 48.4% favour two children and 6.4% three or more. Only one individual with a child admitted to ideally remain childless. Concerning parents with two children ideal and reality match in 80% of the cases and 20% wish to have three or more children. More results are shown in chart 4.4.

Chart 4.4. Ideal and actual number of children in 2006

Ideal		Actual number of children				Total
		0	1	2	3 +	
0	N	32	1			33
	% of actual number	24.8	0.8			
	% of total	8.8	0.3			9.1
1	N	42	56			98
	% of actual number	32.6	44.4			
	% of total	11.6	15.4			27.0
2	N	50	61	76		187
	% of actual number	38.8	48.4	80.0		
	% of total	13.8	16.8	20.9		51.5
3 +	N	5	8	19	13	45
	% of actual number	3.8	6.4	20.0	100	
	% of total	1.4	2.2	5.3	3.5	12.4
total	N	129	126	95	13	363
	% of actual number	100	100	100	100	100
	% of total	35.5	34.7	26.2	3.5	100

Chart 4.5. Development of ideal and actual number of children over the time comparing graduates and non-graduates

Wave	Age	Ideal number of children			Actual number of children			Still at college*
		Graduates	Non-graduates	p	Graduates	non-graduates	p	
8	19.5	1.91	1.61	.031	0.00	0.03	.166	27 %
9	20.5	1.95	1.58	.003	0.03	0.05	.583	24 %
11	21.5	1.56	1.57	.892	0.03	0.12	.025	27 %
12	23.5	1.79	1.66	.276	0.06	0.15	.031	20 %
13	25.1	1.80	1.61	.048	0.07	0.30	<.001	16 %
14	27.2	1.80	1.58	.025	0.23	0.50	<.001	5 %
16	29.0	1.73	1.55	.035	0.36	0.62	.002	4 %
17	30.1	1.76	1.58	.056	0.51	0.74	.011	3 %
18	21.1	1.85	1.60	.009	0.73	0.83	.336	2 %
19	32.1	1.83	1.57	.011	0.84	0.94	.301	1 %
20	33.2	1.90	1.62	.005	0.99	1.04	.980	1 %

* percentage compared to total sample.

Comparing participants who graduated (26.8%) at university and participants without a university degree (65.9%) – individuals who have not finished their degree yet remain discounted – differences in terms of the ideal number of children are found (t-test: $t = -2.822$; $df = 362$; $p = .005$). Graduates state on average a higher ideal number of children ($M = 1.90$ versus $M = 1.62$). Yet the actual number of children does not differ (t-test: $t = .025$; $df = 374$; $p = .980$).

Over the entire survey's period the ideal number of children is higher for individuals who graduated or are going to graduate than for the other participants. This effect becomes particularly explicit from wave 18 and participants aged 31. Graduates' ideal number of children substantially increases from 1.75 in wave seventeen to 1.89 in wave twenty.

Up to wave 19 graduates' actual number of children tends to be lower compared to individuals without a degree. Thenceforward the difference decreases thus graduates seem to get involved in starting a family later in life than other people do. The postponement of the transition to first parenthood concerns both men and women likewise. Chart 4.5 displays the development of ideal and actual number of children over the time comparing graduates and non-graduates.

4.3.4. Ideal Number of Children over Time

At least in terms of one or two children the ideal number of children proves to be steady in a longitudinal perspective. Approximately one third of the survey's participants wish to have one child (in 1995: 30.4% and in 2006: 26.8%) and half of the participants prefer to have two children (in 1995: 51% and in 2006: 51.6%).

The percentage of individuals who favour a life without any children declined from 9.9 in 1995 (participants' age 22.5 years) to 9.3 in 2006 (33 years). By contrast the number of individuals who favour a family with three or more children increased: In 1995 a percentage of 8.9% reports an ideal number of children of three or more and in 2006 12.3% follow this ideal.

Among so far childless individuals 24.8% claim to ideally remain childless, whereas 32.6% favour one child, 38.8% favour two children and another 3.9% report three or four children to be their ideal number of children. Since an extensive majority states to ideally have a family with one to four children, at least some of them are likely to actually have children in the future.

Among individuals with children 23.9% name one child as their ideal number of children, 58.5% name two children, and 16.0% three or more.

Parents and childless individuals differ regarding their ideal number of children. As expected parents report a higher number than childless participants (1.95 versus 1.22; Pearson Chi² = 75.14; df = 4; p < .001).

Concerning the ideal number of children 75% of the couples believe to be in mutual consent, 10% think that their ideal number of children is higher compared to their partner's, 5% suppose to favour a lower number, and another 9% cannot tell and do not think about this issue.

4.4. CURRENT WISH FOR A CHILD

Despite macro-level social changes and facing common birth decline the aim in life to raise children remains permanently meaningful and becomes in the life course even more and more important. Nevertheless only some of the survey's participants state to have a current wish for a child. A percentage of 21.8 replies to have a strong or very strong current wish for a child, 17.1% are undetermined ("somewhat"), and 61.1% hardly wish for a child or do not want to have a child at all at this point.

Childless individuals specify a stronger wish for a child than parents (M = 2.71 versus M = 2.08; t-test: t = 4.407; df = 361; p < .001).

Chart 4.6. Current wish for a child in 2004 compared to 2006

Wish for a child	(Very) strongly		Somewhat		Hardly/not at all		Mean*	F	p
	2004 (%)	2006 (%)	2004 (%)	2006 (%)	2004 (%)	2006 (%)			
total	17.9	21.8	26.7	17.1	55.4	61.1	2.35 2.31	25.09	<.001
men	17.9	24.4	28.9	11.9	53.1	63.7	2.41 2,35	11.40	<.001
women	17.9	19.8	24.8	21.3	57.3	59.0	2.29 2.27	16.16	<.001
parents	15.6	17.0	19.4	16.1	65.1	66.9	2.11 2.08	10.04	<.001
Childless participants	21.2	29.9	36.8	19.7	42.0	50.4	2.67 2.71	16.82	<.001

mean* - upper value: in 2004; bottom value: in 2006.

The wish for a child has changed over the past two years. Using 1-way ANOVA differences between these two points in time are tested to be significant. The amount of individuals who have a strong or very strong current wish for a child increases as much as the amount of individuals who hardly or not at all wish for a child. Conditioned by age the differences between these two groups seem to become more articulate.

4.5. Can Children Be Planned for?

4.5.1. Intention and Realisation of Pregnancies

In 2004 participants appraise the importance of pregnancy prevention at this point in their life. A percentage of 37.9 declare a prevention to be very important, 25.4% important, 12.8% somewhat important, and 23.8% hardly or not important at all.

On the other hand 35% of the survey's participating women – respectively the female partner of the male participants – were pregnant in the preceding two years. Most of these pregnancies were intended (77%) and in 79% of the cases the partner participated in the decision. However 23% of the previous two years pregnancies occurred unintended.

In 2006 a percentage of 26.1 became pregnant in the preceding two years; in 69.5% of the cases the pregnancy was intended. Compared to 2004 the proportion of unintended pregnancies increased in 2006 (Chi². = 9.907; p = .002).

In terms of planning 29% of the participants intend to get pregnant within the following two years in all probability or at least rather probably. This proportion decreased to 18.8 % in 2006. Taken this intention into account the probability to actually give birth to a child increased, too (Chi² = 57.91; p = .001). However only half of the intended pregnancies have been realised and nearly 10% of the actual pregnancies have hardly been intended.

4.6. Attitudes towards Having Children

The different aspects of attitudes towards having children are surveyed using the 'Leipzig questionnaire on motives for having a child' (LKM). The results reflect ambivalence in terms of positive emotional aspects related to having children (LKM 1) but also perceived economic constraints and insufficient social support (LKM 4).

Chart 4.7. Intended pregnancy in 2004 and actual pregnancy until 2006

Intended pregnancy in the following two years (2004)	Actual pregnancy until 2006	
	Yes	No
(very) probable	45 (14.9 %)	44 (14.5 %)
hardly / not at all probable	29 (9.6 %)	146 (48.3 %)
I do not know	11 (3.6 %)	27 (8.9 %)
total (N = 302)	85 (28.1 %)	217 (71.9 %)

Chart 4.8. Multiple regression analysis with beta coefficients (total sample N = 362 in the year 2006) for LKM scales and selective aspects concerning starting a family

Scales of LKM	Ideal number of children	Actual number of children	Intended pregnancy	Current wish for a child
LKM 1	.078	.062		.043
LKM 2		-.060		
LKM 3			-.034	
LKM 4	-.048			-.035
adj R²	.262	.157	.006	.033
F	63.85	35.05	2.90	7.35
df	2	2	1	2
p(F)	< .001	< .001	.089	< .001

Gender differences are tested using one-way ANOVA; Men associate with children more personal constraints than women (LKM 2) and expect more strongly to become recognised as an adult by means of fatherhood (LKM 3).

The influence of motives for having children on the ideal and actual number of children and on the intention to get pregnant within the following two years was tested by multiple regression analysis regarding the total sample as well as parts of the sample.

4.6.1. Correlations Regarding the Total Sample

Regarding the ideal number of children the explained variance is very good (26%). The more individuals associate positive emotional aspects with parenthood and the less they worry about economic constraints due to having children the higher is their ideal number of children.

The explained variance for the actual number of children is good (15%). Individuals who associate positive emotional aspects with having children and who do not worry as much about personal constraints due to parenthood also have more children within the survey's period.

Motives for having children do not influence the intention to become pregnant within the following two years. The amount of explained variance is negligible in this case.

The LKM scales do hardly affect the current wish for children as well. Only 3% of variance can be explained by motives for having children in terms of LKM 1 and 4.

Chart 4.9. Multiple regression analysis with beta coefficients (subsample: parents N = 228 in the year 2006)

LKM scales	Ideal number of children	Actual number of children	Intended pregnancy
LKM 1	.033	.016	-.026
LKM 2			
LKM 3			
LKM 4	-.048	-.028	
adj R²	.089	.026	.010
F	11.98	4.15	3.13
df	2	2	1
p(F)	< .001	.016	.078

Chart 4.10. Multiple regression analysis with beta coefficients (subsample: childless individuals N = 124 in the year 2006)

LKM scales	ideal number of children	intended pregnancy	current wish for a child
LKM 1	.097	-.064	.143
LKM 2	-.044	.058	-.075
LKM 3		-.067	
LKM 4			
adj R²	.355	.187	.350
F	35.49	7.61	35.02
df	2	3	2
p(F)	< .001	< .001	< .001

4.6.2. Correlations Regarding Parents

Motives for having children hardly influence the decision to have another child. Concerning the intention to get pregnant and the current wish for a child there are negligible or no correlations at all with the LKM scales.

LKM Scales 1 and 4 explain very little variance of the actual number of children either.

The explained variance for the ideal number of children is merely satisfying (9%).

4.6.3. Correlations Regarding Childless Participants

Motives for having children influence the decision for first pregnancy very much. The explained variance amounts to 35% regarding the ideal number of children and the current wish for a child while both results can be interpreted to be very good. The explained variance for the intention to have children is good (19%).

In all three cases emotional aspects are of substantial importance but so are worries about personal constraints due to having children. This reflects how ambivalent this survey's participants perceive the matter of starting a family.

5. DISCUSSION

Data analysis points out that having a family still has high priority among this survey's participants. Most individuals live in a committed relationship where the average duration of partnerships is 9.39 years in this survey. However women become involved earlier than men. One possible reason might be that young men move out of their parents' home relatively late. In 2005 and aged 32 a percentage of 41.9% is married, of participants who currently live in Saxony 39.2% are married. These results are little above average compared to the Saxon average of 36.5% regarding individuals aged 31 to 32 years in 2003 (Statistical Yearbook of the Free State of Saxony 2004, 37).

Yet the often described mainstream trend of postponing marriage while living in a committed relationship is replicated by this data. Especially individuals living in the former parts of the GDR are usually unmarried although probably involved in a relationship (Bien & Marbach, 2003; Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2004; Brüderl, 2004). However there is no linear correlation between the current wish for a child and the relationship's duration or the contentment with the relationship.

Two thirds of the participants have children, yet most of them are single children. Men frequently decide to have children later in their life than women. The fact that childlessness is higher in men than in women results to some extend from men often being three years older than their female partners thus parenthood does not yet have equal priority for them compared to women of the same age.

Of this survey's participants 7% are voluntary childless, this is less than the German average of 10% (Stöbel-Richter & Brähler, 2006). The mainstream trend of postponement of first parenthood and a higher percentage of voluntary childless couples is replicated in this survey and contrasts behavioural patterns which were typical for the GDR.

The ideal number of children remains moderately stable in the life course. At age 20 this number is highest, up to age 29 it decreases again and increases for individuals aged 30 and older. This development seems to be presumably linked to the transition to labour force participation. In their early twenties most participants successfully concluded job training and they are about to start a gainful employment respectively they are on the job already and in the middle of starting a career. Matters of family become less important in this time period. After having established the better part of one's career on age 30 matters of family regain importance. Thus corresponding to previous studies changes in one's personal circumstances may alter one's planning to start a family (Turchi, 1991). This applies accordingly for first parenthood in terms of a significant change of personal circumstances due to a child.

Participants' actual number of children averages out at 1.79 and is considerably higher than the eastern German average of 1.6 regarding women aged 24 to 34 years (Eurobarometer, 2001; Goldstein, Lutz & Testa, 2003).

The study replicates a strong discrepancy between ideal and actual number of children. Furthermore not only the actual but also the ideal number of children decreases and currently amounts under the general value of 2.1 necessary for society's full reproduction (Lutz & Milewski, 2004; Heß-Meining & Tölke, 2005). A total of 39.8% agree between ideal and actual number of children, their generative behaviour can be interpreted as being completed. Involuntary childless individuals (8.8%) not taken into account there are 51.4% who may give birth to a child in the following years with respect to the ideal number of children.

In consideration of planning to start a family half of the participants' intended pregnancies have not been realised up to 2006 and one third of the actual pregnancies were not intended. The results illustrate that the transition to parenthood is only partly under intentional control and notably influenced by uncertainty and ambivalence.

Of the participants 21.8% express a current wish for a child where so far childless individuals wish more for a child than parents. Data also show an increasing differentiation in older ages concerning the current wish for a child.

Positive emotional motives particularly influence the current wish for a child in eastern German population. At the same time worries about economic restraints due to children diminish this wish. Both influential aspects depict the ambiguous process of the transition to parenthood. By contrast the wish to gain social acceptance by being a mother or more intense worries concerning one's personal freedom on the part of the men is only the case in the western German population. In agreement with previous studies regarding the eastern German population data indicate ambivalence deriving from the wish for warmth and intimacy on one side and actual or supposed restraints caused by structural and financial circumstances on the other (Stöbel-Richter, 2000; 2004; Stöbel-Richter et al., 2006).

Whereas there are little differences with respect to sexual gender parents and so far childless individuals differ in their motives regarding children. Parents emphasise emotional aspects and childless participants point out personal restraints. Childless individuals perceive more ambivalence in terms of expected positive and negative aspects of parenthood which effects the ideal and the actual number of children, the intention to become pregnant in the following two years, and the current wish for a child.

Consistent with further studies, university graduated individuals of this survey become parents later in their life than individuals without a degree (Scharein & Unger, 2005, Biedenkopf et al., 2005; Wirth & Dümmler, 2005). Women's educational level supposedly influences the transition to first parenthood in a negative way. High opportunity costs aggravate the ambivalence regarding the decision for a first pregnancy. However two or more parity seems to be positively linked with men's educational attainment and income level (Klein, 1993). The correlation between female educational attainment and postponement of first parenthood is not sufficiently explained by opportunity costs. 'Participation in the educational system takes time and affects women's opportunity to marry and to have a first child' (Blossfeld & Huinink, 1991, 146). The authors underline the influence of duration of school enrolment beside the mere educational attainment. In the GDR both educational groups presented a similar transition to parenthood. Of women 20% gave birth to a child during their education and 70% were mothers five years after having started a gainful employment, whereas after reunification in 1990 a percentage of 33% were mothers (Sackmann et al., 1996).

Thus features of the individual as well as situational circumstances influence the transition to parenthood. Referring to longitudinal data changes in personal motives and circumstances can be explored and the impact of these changes on the transition to parenthood. Intention can only partly control this process particularly because the aspects, which influence one's intention, modify in the life course such as the ideal number of children alters in connection to one's career. Yet there are some stable influences on the transition to parenthood such as educational attainment though the explanation of this effect remains to be discussed. Because of constantly changing situational and personal features the determinants of the transition to parenthood need to be observed in the long run in order to identify substantial determinants and to distinguish these from temporary influences, which are appropriate only for a certain period in time. The study aims to provide data for this framework. However comparisons to further cohorts are needed to detect causal correlations and to truly understand individuals' generative behaviour.

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Chapter 2

RESILIENCE IN RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

Using a cross-sectional survey research design, the present study explores those resilience factors that enable reconstituted families to withstand and rebound from the disruptive challenges they face. Remarried families who had been married for one to 23 years, with at least one family member presently at school, took part in this study. A parent and a child (older than 12 years) from 57 Belgian families independently completed questionnaires and answered an open-ended question. The following factors associated with family resilience were identified: (1) redefining stressful events and acquiring and accepting social support, (2) a sense of control over the outcomes of life events and hardships, as well as an active, rather than a passive, orientation in adjusting to and managing stressful situations, and (3) family communication that is affirming, conveying care and support.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, the nuclear family was the norm. During the last decade, however, the nuclear family has given way to more complex family structures. The idyllic image of two parents having children, the nuclear family of the 1950s, is replaced with a more complex but realistic vision of parenthood and families in the 1990s (Hetherington, 1999). At present, the reconstituted family is the fastest growing family structure in the United States. Approximately half of all marriages every year are second marriages for one or both partners. Researchers estimate that half of Americans live in a reconstituted family situation or will do so during their lives. It is forecast that this will be the dominant structure by the year 2010