

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN BIRTH RATE PHENOMENON IN THE COUNTY OF SIBIU

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Keywords: birth rate decrease, socio-economic factors

Abstract: In Romania, the demographic transition and the economic crisis brought about the lowest birth rate and fertility indicators ever registered in the modern history of the world, with a major socio-economic impact on middle and long term. The purpose of this paper is to identify the ensemble of socio-economic factors and to observe the way in which they influenced the birth rate decrease in the county of Sibiu, taking into account the residence environments (rural-urban) and the age groups. The results obtained are characteristic for a society where the economic condition of the family degraded and in order to meet her needs, the woman involves herself in income-generating activities as much as a man does. Birth rate decrease did not occur as a result of the disappearance of the maternal feeling, the economic factor with its multiple aspects (proper housing, larger budget, proper social protection) has remained a decisive factor in founding and enlarging the family.

Cuvinte cheie: scăderea natalității, factori socio-economici

Rezumat: În România, tranziția demografică și criza economică, au dus la înregistrarea celor mai scăzuți indicatori de natalitate și fertilitate din istoria modernă a țării, impactul socio-economic pe termen lung și mediu fiind major. Scopul acestei lucrări este de a identifica ansamblul de factori socio-economici și de a urmări modul în care au influențat scăderea natalității în județul Sibiu pe medii de rezidență (rural – urban) și pe grupe de vârstă. Rezultatele obținute sunt caracteristice unei societăți în care starea economică a familiei s-a degradat, iar pentru îndeplinirea nevoilor sale, femeia se implică în egală măsură cu bărbatul într-o activitate socială aducătoare de venit. Scăderea natalității nu este dată de dispariția sentimentului matern, factorul economic sub multiplele sale aspecte (locuința corespunzătoare, buget mai mare, protecție socială adecvată) rămâne hotărâtor pentru întemeierea și lărgirea familiei.

INTRODUCTION

Birth rate, as a main component part of the natural growth movement, decisively influences the entire process of population's reproduction through its dynamics.

In the last two decades, radical changes occurred in the demographic situation of Europe. The registered tendencies were the following:

- strong decline of fertility, the decrease of the number of children and delay in giving birth to the first child.
- decrease of the number of marriages and the increase of the divorce rate, the consensual unions replacing more and more the marriages. As a result, the number of children born outside marriages increased.
- the part played by women in the developed societies increased, as well as the level of education. This phenomenon has favourable consequences on children's health condition. The number of the undesired children increased and, as a result, the time spent on growing up children, increased as well. The change of the women's part in society has also an impact on the divorce rate, in the sense that it increases the divorce incidence.
- the efficacy of the contraceptive methods facilitated the consensual unions and the reduction of the number of the undesired children.
- the equilibrium occurring between the number of born alive and the number of deaths brings about a low natural growth.

The decreasing tendency of birth rate and fertility leads, among other factors, to the growing old of the Romanian population.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper is to identify the ensemble of socio-economic factors and to observe the way in which they influenced the birth rate decrease in the county of Sibiu, taking into account the residence environments (rural-urban) and the age groups

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This paper was imagined as a qualitative study, using the homonymous questionnaire with pre-formulated answers, as the working method. The study batch is made up of 80 female persons, aleatorily selected and belonging to the urban and rural environments of the county of Sibiu.

For data collection, I collaborated with a family physician working in the city of Sibiu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

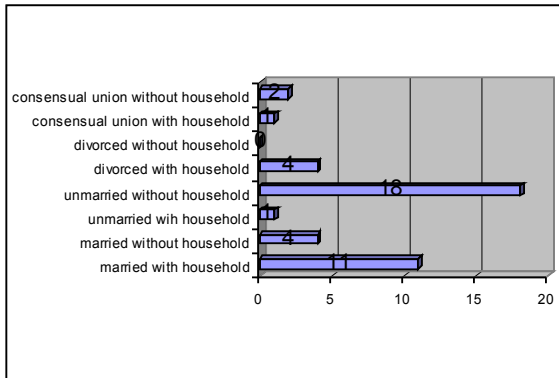
The studied persons are female persons, aged between 18-40 years old, coming from, both the urban and rural environment, in similar percentages.

Out of the total of the studied persons, 60% said that they do not own a household. I made a comparison between the civil status of the questioned persons and whether they own a

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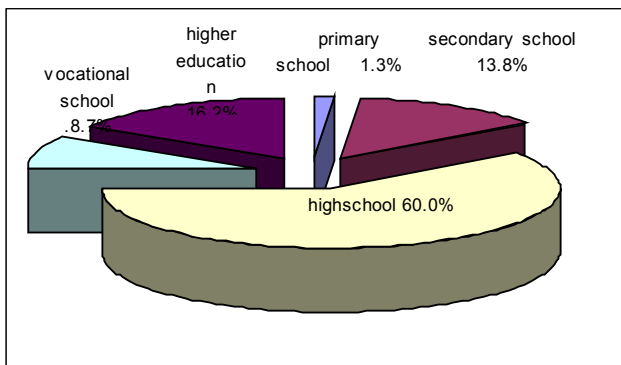
household or not, taking into account their origin environments. In the urban environment, it can be observed that the majority of those married and divorced own a household, while the unmarried persons do not have in general a personal household (picture no. 1). A part of the couples is living together with the parents of one of them, forming up the so-called multigenerational households.

Picture no. 1. Correlation between the civil status and household possession, in the urban environment.



The persons included in the study batch have in general a lower education, only 16,2% have higher education (picture no. 2).

Picture no. 2. Subjects' repartition per study levels



The study of fertility taking into account the level of education of the woman emphasises a decrease of fertility along with the increase of the training level. I evaluated the average number of the children of the studied persons and I noticed a decrease of the number of children in the urban environment, as against the rural environment, along with the increase of the mothers' education level.

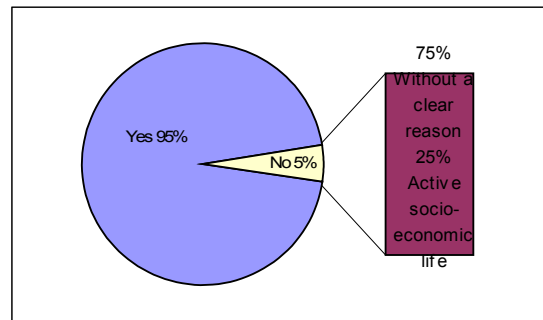
Regarding the income of the studied persons, it can be observed a larger frequency in the persons with a medium income (50%), followed by those with under-average income (32.5%) and above the average – only 17.5% (picture no. 3). The economic function provides the satisfaction of the familial needs. If, in the past these were accomplished only by men, today, the woman as well develops a social activity which generates income. Thus, in very many families, there are two income sources. In the present transition period of time, as a result of the socio-economic decline, of the increased rate of unemployment and financial difficulties, the economic conditions of many families worsened, they reaching an under-average income level.

The main obstacles encountered by the studied persons when founding a family are: insufficient funds, a too stressing professional life, partners living in different cities.

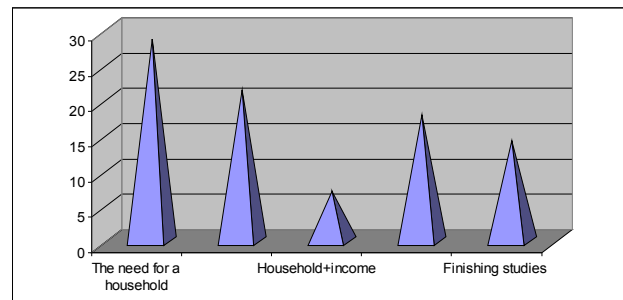
When questioning the study persons about the wish of having children, 95% of them said that they wished to have children (picture no. 3).

Regarding the question about the right moment for having children, most of the persons mentioned first of all the need for having a household – 28.6% and a sufficient income – 21.45. Others stressed the importance of having a stable workplace – 17.9% or, taking into account others' opinion, the right moment would be after finishing studies – 14.3% (picture no. 4). The economic factor, under its multiple aspects (proper household, sufficient income, proper social protection) remains the decisive factor for founding and enlarging a family.

Picture no. 3. The wish of having children expressed by the study persons



Picture no. 4. The optimum moment for having a child, taking into account the origin environment, in the county of Sibiu



The planning family services, recently introduced in the Romanian medical practice, answered to the requirements of a large category of population and played an important part in increasing health quality and in improving the woman's social status, through the exercise of the fundamental right of deciding on her own organism and destiny. Out of the study batch, 72.5% of women use contraceptive methods (58.8% upon the physician's prescription and 13.7% without prescription), while 27.5% do not use contraceptive methods. The reasons for which women choose using the contraceptive methods are the following:

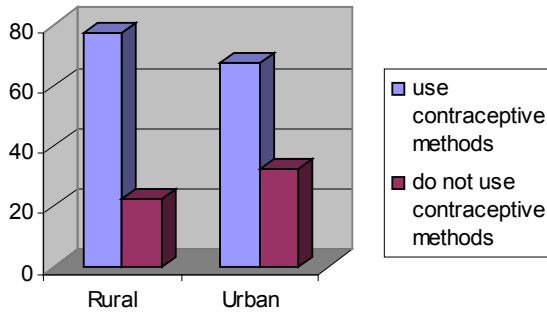
- they wish to delay the moment of having children;
- a certain period of time between births is preferred;
- a certain number of children is preferred.

It is good to see that the contraceptive methods are used in the rural environment, too. This is due to the fact that the family planning programme has been introduced at the level of the family physicians within the rural environment, the cities benefiting only from counselling at the level of the medical offices specialized in family planning services. It is thus observed a better accessibility of the women in the rural environment to the contraceptive methods, the counselling being accomplished directly by the family physician (picture no. 5). The picture no. 6 presents the different contraceptive methods

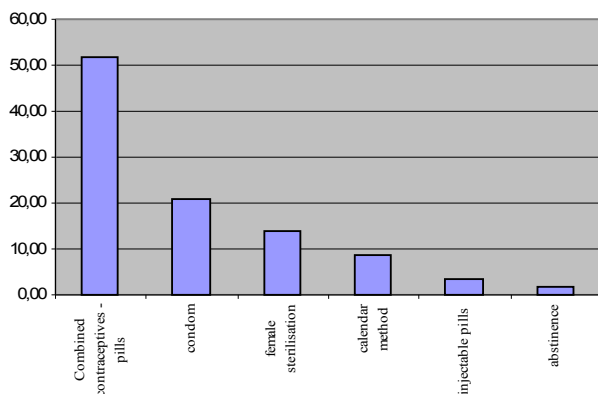
used by the studied women.

Taking into consideration the number of children per family, it can be observed that almost half of the couples have only one child (50.9%), followed by the families with two children - 37.7% and the families with three children - 3.8%. The families with 4-8 are represented in small percentages - 1.9% (picture no. 7).

Picture no. 5. The use of contraceptive methods by the questioned persons, taking into account the origin environment



Picture no. 6. Contraceptive methods used by the studied women

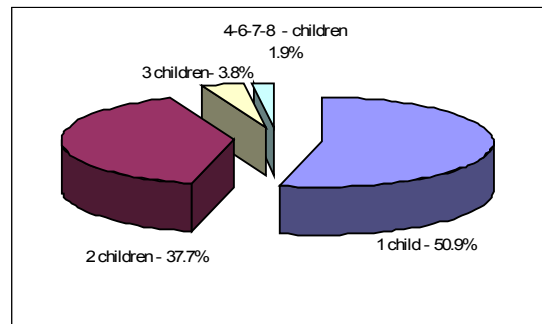


Regarding the age at which the first birth occurred, it could be observed an average age of 22 years old, with a minimum value of 17 years old and a maximum one of 30 years old (picture no. 8). In the rural environment, the average age of the first birth is 21.4 years old, with a minimum value of 17 years old and a maximum one of 30 years old. In the urban environment, the average age at the first birth is 23.5 years old, with a minimum value of 17 years old and a maximum of 29 years old.

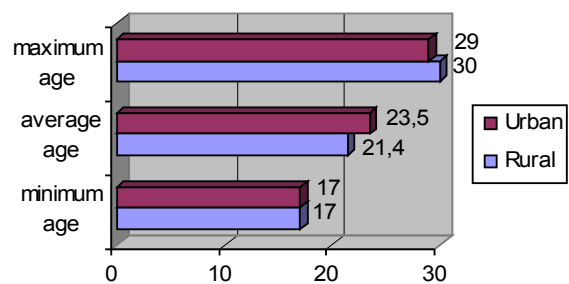
It is to be noticed that in the rural environment, the average age at the first birth is smaller than in the urban environment. The minimum and maximum values are similar.

Regarding the question „Did maternity allowance encouraged you to a new birth?“ only 22.6% of the women who have or are going to have children answered affirmatively. The majority said “NO” (77.4%) (picture no. 9). The demographic policy after 1990 did not bring positive results in raising the birth rate. The only measure that encouraged mothers to give birth was the maternity allowance awarded for a period of two years, allowance that reached today the sum of 783 RON. The compulsory insurance history was of at least 10 months.

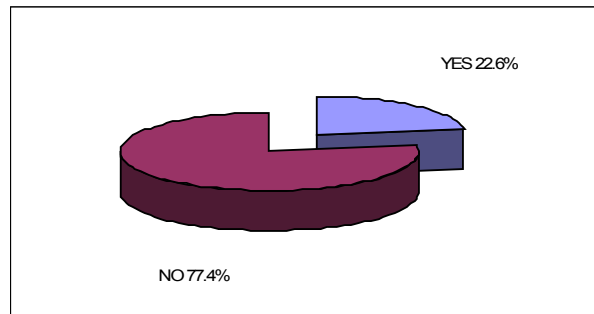
Picture no. 7. The number of children per family, in the study batch



Picture no. 8. The age at first birth, taking into account the origin environment.



Picture no. 9. „Did the maternity allowance encouraged to a new birth?“



According to the Law no. 19 of 17 March 2000 on the public pension system and other rights of social insurances, published in the Official Gazette no. 140 of 01 April 2000, at article 118, it is provided that the future insured mothers are entitled to 126 calendar days for pregnancy and confinement leave, period of time in which they benefit from maternity allowance. The pregnancy leave is awarded on a period of 63 days before birth and the confinement leave, for a period of time of 63 days after birth.

The maternity allowance, before and after birth, is calculated taking into account the average of the monthly incomes for the last 6 months, multiplied with a percentage of 85%.

The allowance for child care is established as being 85% of the gross salary used at the establishment of the state social insurances budget.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In all developed countries, there is a tendency for decreasing the birth rate. In Romania, the lowest birth rate and fertility indicators can be found, the socio-economic

- impact on long and medium term being major.
2. The birth rate in the county of Sibiu follows the same descending trend taking into account the average birth rate. In the year 2005, it reached 9.9%.
 3. The urban environment favours the feminine labour force, occurring thus the internal migration from the rural environment towards the urban one in search for employment or under the form of study visits in other cities, creating thus the premises for a separation from the origin family.
 4. For the young in the transition period (of socio-economic decline), where the economic difficulties and the lack of a household are predominant, the single status lasts longer in the urban environment, while in the rural one, it favours the multigenerational households, where the young couple is living with the parents of one of the partners.
 5. The urban life favours less the marriage; also, marriages stability is less.
 6. The present Romanian society disposes of a trained female population, due to the development of the females' part in the society. In the urban environment, there is an increased number of women with higher education, while in the rural environment, the women with low education (high school only) are predominant.
 7. Along with the increase of the women's training level, the fertility decrease phenomenon decreases, as well, a phenomenon which is more stressed in the urban environment.
 8. The increased weight of the unemployed in the rural environment indicates even a decrease of the incomes at this level.
 9. The reduced level of incomes favours the existence of families with many members, which is equal to a high birth rate. Along with the increase of incomes, the tendency of downsizing the family becomes obvious.
 10. Without being able to state whether it is an external temporary or definitive migration, the wish for going aboard in search for a job is larger among the female population within the urban environment, the age group weight, 17-24 years old, belonging to the majority, which is important from the demographic point of view.
 11. Regarding the foundation of a family, the environments analysis reveals the fact that in the rural environment, the main obstacle is represented by the insufficient incomes - 83.3 %, while in the urban environment, apart from the insufficient incomes (36 %), there is also the very active socio-professional life (28 %).
 12. Birth rate decrease is not brought about by the disappearance of the maternal feeling; women wish to have children in a percentage of 95%, but the socio-economic conditions are determining in taking a decision.
 13. Marriage is wanted to a large extent by the female population of both environments – urban and rural – the relation between marriage and children birth is still strong in Romania; the number of children born outside a marriage is relatively small in our country.
 14. The economic factor, under its multiple aspects (proper household, larger budget, proper social protection) remains decisive for family existence.
 15. The use of contraception leads to the decrease of the total rate of fertility, of maternal and infant mortality, the benefit being reflecting on the health of the child, mother, couple and family.
 16. By extending the counselling in family planning activity at the level of the family physician medical office, the accessibility of the female population has increased. Most of the women included in the study use contraceptive methods, the most used being the oral pills, followed by the male condoms and the female sterilisation.
 17. The decrease of the number of abortions, as a result of the introduction of the contraceptive methods and of a better health education, represents an important gain in women's health.
 18. The decrease of birth rate is synonymous with the increase of the first new born weight, that is with the population orientation (50.9%) towards the reduced family type, from the point of view of the number of members.
 19. While the urban family has the tendency of forming an isolate unity, made up of the parents and one child, two at the most, in the rural environment, the number of the members of a family is larger, including as well the parents or the brothers or sisters of one of the spouse.
 20. The age at first birth is smaller in the rural environment (21.4 years old) than in the urban environment (23.5 years old).
 21. In the urban environment, one can notice the tendency of delaying the first pregnancy (30.1 years old), in comparison with the rural environment (27.2 years old).
 22. The maternity allowance favoured especially the appearance of the first and of the second child in a family.
 23. Only a demographic policy, realistically conceived and oriented towards the young couples may positively influence the birth rate in continuous decrease in Romania.

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