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Parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26 – a pilot study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Starting a family and becoming a parent are elements of human life closely related to motivations and personal experiences, which can be both positive and negative. The main objective of this study was to identify and analyze the parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26.

Materials and methods: The study involved 312 individuals aged 20–26 (mean age: 22.6 ±1.87). The diagnostic survey method was employed, using a questionnaire as the research tool. This questionnaire comprised a standardized test, the parental motives questionnaire – short version (CBQ-SF), and an original questionnaire (AKA).

Results: The score for positive motivations is significantly lower in women ($p = 0.0002$; median in female group = 37, median in male group = 43.5), as is the overall intensity of parental motivations ($p = 0.0052$; median in female group = 5, median in male group = 13). Additionally, older study participants exhibited higher scores for negative motivations to have children ($p < 0.0001$; rho = –0.123) and higher parental motivation scores regarding parental intentions ($p < 0.0001$; rho = 0.220). Respondents with a higher education level, particularly those with a master's degree, showed higher parental motivation scores in terms of parental intentions compared to those with lower education levels ($p = 0.004$; median in the group with a master's degree = 7, median in the group with a batchelor's degree = 6.6, median in the group with primary or secondary education = 3).

Conclusions: Socio-demographic factors, such as age, sex, place of upbringing, and level of education, significantly impact the motivation of young Poles to have children. Additionally, an important aspect of parental motivation is the pro-family policy in the respondent's country of residence.

Keywords: parenthood; having children; motivation.

INTRODUCTION

One of the stages of human development is having children. This is also associated with starting a family, and the tasks of a parent are examples of basic social roles related to gender and functioning in a marital relationship [1, 2]. Motivation, in colloquial terms, is perceived as a conscious driving force that gives an impulse to specific actions, shaping a person's attitude throughout life. Motivation can take an active form, such as when an individual defines what they want to achieve, leading directly to their behavior. In the context of parenthood, motivation encompasses all inclinations leading to positive or negative reactions to various aspects of being a parent [3]. According to Eichelberger, motivations concern many human spheres and can be considered from individual and social perspectives, classified into 7 types: existential, biological, pragmatic, instinctive, ideological, romantic, and external [4].

Having a child is a new and often challenging situation, particularly for prospective parents. Fatherhood is often equated with being the "head of the family" and ensuring its well-being. Each term carries related experiences, feelings, duties, and privileges [5]. The role of a parent is also influenced by individual attitudes toward having a child and parental beliefs. The foundation of the family and its primary task is to shape the child's sense of subjectivity. Zubrzycka-Maciąg studied the role of parents in creating a child's sense of subjectivity, emphasizing that parents should build a relationship with the child based on mutual respect and equal treatment. They are responsible for shaping a young participant in social life who will be aware of their value and have a directed hierarchy of values [6].

When examining motivations for having children, it is essential to consider various influencing factors. Literature suggests that motivations may stem from personality traits, an individual's hierarchy of values, and their worldview, shaping attitudes toward parenthood, starting a family, and raising children. Parental motivations and personality traits are genetically conditioned and linked to the gradual development of the human species, suggesting a possible association between these aspects. Having children involves taking responsibility for their upbringing, and starting a family entails fulfilling a social role. The literature identifies several personality traits affecting attitudes toward having children, known as the Big Five model, which includes: conscientiousness, openness to new experiences, kindness, honesty, and prudence [1].

Age directly influences parental motivations. In highly developed countries, pervasive consumerism and a strong desire for professional development often delay decisions about having children. Women tend to focus on professional achievements before starting a family. This trend is also evident in Poland, where changes in attitudes and life priorities since the political transformation have resulted in later family formation. Currently, the highest fertility rates are among women aged 27–31, indicating an increase in the age of first childbirth by 6–8 years compared to the early transformation years and by about 4 years compared to the early XXI century. According to the Central Statistical Office, the median age of women giving birth in 2021 was almost 31 years, compared to 26 years in 1990 and 2000 [7, 8, 9].

Having children and starting a family directly impact a country's demographic condition. In Poland, this topic was explored in research conducted by the ASM Center for Market Research and Analysis. The survey, involving a representative group of Polish women and men, identified life priorities such as: stability, future certainty, starting a family, self-development, and pursuing passions and interests. Respondents considered family, personal development, and hobbies as important values. They expressed a desire to have children, citing traditional attitudes toward family, marriage, and parenthood. The prevailing family model is a married couple with 2 children [4].

An important parameter reflecting the country's demographic condition is the natural increase, defined by the Central Statistical Office as the difference between the number of live births and deaths in a given period. In recent years, Poland has experienced negative natural increase values. In 2022, the natural increase per 1,000 population was –3.5‰ [9]. The political and demographic situation in Poland provides a starting point for discussions about procreation, parenthood, sexual awareness, and education. Young people, who are beginning to build their future and make significant decisions about starting a family, are an interesting group for examining parental motivations.

The main objective of the study was to find out the parental motivation of Poles aged 20–26.

In light of the main objective of the study, the following specific objectives were distinguished:

- examination of the impact of sociodemographic factors on the parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26 in terms of the general parental motivation index and its components;
- examination of the impact of the subjective assessment of the pro-family policy conducted in Poland on the parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26 in terms of the general parental motivation index and its components;
- examination of the impact of the tightening of abortion laws in Poland on the parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26, in terms of the general parental motivation index and its components;
- examination of the impact of subjective attitudes toward having children on the parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26, in terms of the general parental motivation index and its components.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study, conducted from January to April 2023, included 312 participants, with 80.77% women (n = 252) and 19.23% men (n = 60). The diagnostic survey method was employed, using a questionnaire consisting of the standardized parental motives questionnaire – short version (CBQ-SF) and the author's questionnaire (AKA). The survey was conducted electronically via computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI), adhering to principles of anonymity and voluntariness. The questionnaire was distributed to students of Polish universities, in youth clubs, and via social media, targeting young adults active on these platforms. Potential respondents were informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and research hypotheses, and provided informed consent to participate.

Inclusion criteria were defined as individuals aged 20–26 years, residing in Poland, and willing to voluntarily and consciously participate in the study. Exclusion criteria included individuals younger than 20 or older than 26 years, residing outside Poland, and not willing to voluntarily participate.

The AKA consists of 2 parts – the first part contains questions about sociodemographic data and subjective perceptions of motherhood, while the second part is based on the CBQ-SF. The CBQ-SF was adapted into Polish by Mynarska and Rytel [3]. The research tool has 2 versions, 1 for women and 1 for men, both consisting of 2 parts.

The first part, called the scale of positive parental motives/motivations, contains 15 potential positive consequences of having children, each assessed on a 4-point scale: not at all – 1, slightly – 2, average – 3, very – 4. The result of the positive motivation scale is the sum or arithmetic mean of all items on this scale. A high score on the positive motives (PCM) scale indicates a high tendency to react positively to various aspects of parenthood.

The second part, the scale of negative motives/motivations, consists of 12 potentially negative consequences of having children, each assessed on the same 4-point scale. The result of the negative motivation scale is calculated similarly to the positive scale. A high negative motives (NCM) scale factor indicates a high tendency to react negatively to various aspects of parenthood.

The last page of the questionnaire includes additional questions about parental desires and intentions. The first 3 questions are about the desires and intentions to have a child, each scored on a scale of 0–10, with the total score calculated as the sum or average of all 3 questions. The next 2 questions concern parental goals over the next 3 years, assessed similarly. The scales of parental desires and goals are theoretically separate scales [3].

Using the CBQ-SF tool, the parental motivation index – the overall CBQ-SF score – is determined by subtracting the sum of the PCM from the sum of the NCM.

Parental motives questionnaire – short version overall score equals positive motives sum minus negative motives sum

The higher the general CBQ-SF score, the more positive the overall motivations toward having children and parenthood [3].

A Shapiro–Wilk test was performed to test the normality of the distribution of results. The following descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results of the CBQ-SF survey and verify the hypotheses: Mann–Whitney U-test, Kruskal–Wallis test, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, and Dunn–Bonferroni post hoc test. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS PASW Statistics 18 and Statistica 13.3. A value of $p < 0.05$ was assumed as the level of statistical significance.

RESULTS

The results of the study present factors determining parental motivations, including those arising from individual characteristics and those influenced by pro-family policies in Poland. Statistical analysis provided answers to the research questions regarding the parental motivations of Poles aged 20–26.

The age of the respondents ranged 20–26 years, with an average age of 22.6 ±1.87. Half of the study group (n = 156) were in a civil partnership. Urban residents accounted for 88.8% of the group (n = 277), while 11.2% (n = 35) lived in rural areas. The place of upbringing during childhood also varied: 70.8% (n = 221) grew up in cities, and 29.2% (n = 91) in the countryside.

Regarding education, the majority of respondents had primary education – 65.7% (n = 205), 23% (n = 72) had a batchelor's degree, and 11.3% (n = 35) had a master's degree. Among the study participants who were active students, the survey questionnaire included their level of study (batchelor's or master's degree). The study group was predominantly childless, with 92.3% (n = 288) having no children, and only 7.7% (n = 24) reporting having a child. Respondents were asked about their subjective feelings regarding having children and to assess the political and social aspects of parenthood.

For quantitative variables (age, sum of positive motivations, sum of negative motivations, total score, sum of parental desires and intentions, and sum of parental intentions), the normality of the distributions was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test. These tests indicated that none of the distributions of the variables were close to a normal distribution. The distribution of the quantitative variables and the results of the normality test are shown in Table 1.

To analyze the impact of respondents' gender on the intensity of parental motivation, the Mann–Whitney U-test was performed for the overall CBQ-SF score and its components. The test results are shown in Table 2.

The Mann–Whitney U-test showed statistically significant differences between the surveyed women and men in terms of positive parental motivations and the general parental motivation index. The value of positive motivations was significantly higher in men's responses ($p = 0.0001$). Similarly, the general indicator of parental motivation was significantly higher for men compared to women ($p = 0.005$). In the study group, men

TABLE 1. Distribution of results, quantitative variables, and normality test (Shapiro–Wilk test)

Variable	Mean ±SD	Median	Mode	Min.–max.	Q1	Q3	n	z-value	p-value
Age	22.61 ±1.87	22	22	20–26	21	24	312	0.917	0.0001
Total PCM	36.73 ±10.93	39	multiple	14–57	29	45	312	0.964	0.0001
Total NCM	32.55 ±8.14	33	30	12–48	27	39	312	0.987	0.006
Overall result	4.18 ±16.48	6	6	–34–40	–7	17	312	0.969	0.0001
Sum – desires and intentions	19.75 ±8.67	22	30	3–30	15	27	312	0.903	0.0001
Sum – goals	6.88 ±6.00	3	2	2–20	2	11.75	312	0.786	0.0001

SD – standard deviation; PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

TABLE 2. Results of the Mann–Whitney U-test for the "sex" variable

CBQ-SF	Sex	Mean ±SD	Median	Min.–max.	Q1	Q3	n	z-value	p-value
Total PCM	female	35.68 ±10.16	37	14–56	28	45	252	–3.762	**0.0001**
	male	41.15 ±11.21	43.5	15–57	34.25	49.75	60		
Total NCM	female	32.78 ±8.17	33	16–48	27	39	252	–0.707	0.480
	male	31.62 ±8.02	32	12–48	28	36.75	60		
Overall result	female	2.9 ±16.48	5	–34–37	–9	17	252	–2.796	**0.005**
	male	9.53 ±15.47	13	–33–40	0.5	20	60		
Sum – desires and intentions	female	19.43 ±8.97	21	3–30	13	27	252	–0.869	0.385
	male	21.1 ±7.17	23	3–30	18.25	25.75	60		
Sum – goals	female	6.87 ±6.04	3	2–20	2	12	252	–0.223	0.824
	male	6.9 ±5.89	4	2–20	2	10.75	60		

CBQ-SF – parental motives questionnaire – short version; SD – standard deviation; PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

more frequently expressed the desire to have a child and had higher indicators of positive parental motivation.

The correlation between the general indicator of parental motivation and its components with the age of the respondents was examined using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Details are presented in Table 3.

The study of the correlation between age and the general index of parental motivation and its components in the study group (n = 312) revealed a statistically significant weak negative correlation between age and total NCM (rho = –0.123; p = 0.03), and a statistically significant positive correlation between age and sum of goals (rho = 0.220; p = 0.0001). This indicates that as respondents' age increased, the sum of parental NCM decreased, while the value for parental goals increased. In other words, older participants exhibited fewer negative parental motivations and stronger behavioral parental motivations in terms of parental intentions.

To assess the impact of the place of upbringing on the intensity of parental motivation in terms of the overall CBQ-SF score and its components, the Mann–Whitney U-test was conducted. The test results are presented in Table 4.

The Mann–Whitney U-test showed statistically significant differences between respondents who grew up in the countryside and those who grew up in the city in terms of the "sum of goals" indicator (p = 0.024). The value for the "parental intentions" indicator was significantly higher for people who grew up in the countryside. This means that, among the respondents, those raised in the countryside exhibited a greater desire to have a child in terms of parental intentions than those raised in the city.

To assess the impact of the level of education on the intensity of parental motivation, the Kruskal–Wallis test was performed for the overall CBQ-SF score and its components. The test results are shown in Table 5.

The Kruskal–Wallis test showed statistically significant differences between respondents with varying degrees of education in terms of the "parental intentions" indicator (p = 0.004). The value for the "parental intentions" indicator was significantly higher for people with a master's degree compared to those with lower levels of education. This indicates that respondents with a master's degree exhibited a greater desire to have a child in terms of parental intentions.

To accurately determine statistically significant differences between the subgroups representing different educational backgrounds, a Dunn–Bonferroni post hoc test was performed. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 6.

The Dunn–Bonferroni post hoc test showed statistically significant differences between respondents with a master's degree and those with primary or secondary education (p = 0.01), as well as between those with batchelor's degree and those with primary or secondary education (p = 0.005).

The correlation between the general parental motivation index and its components with the subjective assessment of the impact of pro-family policy in Poland on the parental motivation of young adults was examined. Respondents' subjective assessments of the impact of pro-family policy were declared in the author's part of the questionnaire using a Likert scale of 1–5, where "1" indicated a strong negative attitude and "5" indicated a strong positive attitude.

The normality of the distribution of the variable "evaluation of pro-family policy" was checked using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which found that the distribution deviated from normal (p < 0.001; z = 0.765). Therefore, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used for the analysis. Details are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 3. Results of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the "age" variable

Variable		Total PCM	Total NCM	Overall result	Sum – desires and intentions	Sum – goals
Age	rho	–0.017	–0.123	0.047	0.012	0.220
	p	0.771	0.030	0.406	0.830	**0.0001**

PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

TABLE 4. Results of the Mann–Whitney U-test for the "place of upbringing" variable

CBQ-SF	Place of upbringing	Mean ±SD	Median	Min.–max.	Q1	Q3	n	z-value	p-value
Total PCM	rural	38.19 ±9.75	40	14–57	31	45	91	–1.326	0.185
	urban	36.13 ±11.35	38	14–56	28	45	221		
Total NCM	rural	32.53 ±8.24	34	12–48	27	39	91	–0.077	0.938
	urban	32.57 ±8.13	33	12–48	27	38.5	221		
Overall result	rural	5.66 ±15.27	6	–34–40	–3	17	91	–0.721	0.471
	urban	3.57 ±16.95	6	–34–39	–8	17.5	221		
Sum – desires and intentions	rural	20.41 ±8.43	22	3–30	16	27	91	–0.811	0.417
	urban	19.48 ±8.79	21	3–30	13	27	221		
Sum – goals	rural	8.08 ±6.52	5	2–20	2	14	91	–2.252	**0.024**
	urban	6.38 ±5.72	3	2–20	2	10	221		

CBQ-SF – parental motives questionnaire – short version; SD – standard deviation; PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

TABLE 5. Kruskal–Wallis test results for the "education" variable

CBQ-SF	Education	Mean ±SD	Median	Min.–max.	Q1	Q3	n	H-value	p-value
Total PCM	primary or secondary	37.14 ±11.23	39	14–56	29	46	205	1.328	0.515
	batchelor's degree	36.4 ±9.61	37	14–52	30	45	72		
	master's degree	35 ±11.72	35	14–57	25	44	35		
Total NCM	primary or secondary	33.09 ±7.96	33	12–48	27	40	205	2.573	0.276
	batchelor's degree	31.21 ±8.53	31.5	14–48	23.25	37.75	72		
	master's degree	32.2 ±8.28	32	17–48	27	38	35		
Overall result	primary or secondary	4.05 ±16.81	6	–34–40	–8	16.5	205	0.240	0.887
	batchelor's degree	5.19 ±15.24	5	–34–32	–4	17.75	72		
	master's degree	2.8 ±17.23	6	–34–27	–12	17	35		
Sum – desires and intentions	primary or secondary	19.82 ±8.72	22	3–30	15	27	205	0.668	0.716
	batchelor's degree	20.25 ±8.16	21.5	3–30	15.25	26.75	72		
	master's degree	18.31 ±9.51	19	3–30	8	27	35		
Sum – goals	primary or secondary	5.94 ±5.36	3	2–20	2	9	205	10.931	**0.004**
	batchelor's degree	8.47 ±6.59	6.5	2–20	2	13.75	72		
	master's degree	9.11 ±7.13	7	2–20	2	16	35		

CBQ-SF – parental motives questionnaire – short version; SD – standard deviation; PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

TABLE 6. Results of Dunn–Bonferroni post-hoc test for the "education" variable

CBQ-SF		Kruskal–Wallis test		Dunn–Bonferroni post-hoc test
		H	p	
Education	master's degree – primary or secondary education	10.931	**0.004**	0.01
	master's degree – batchelor's degree			1.000
	batchelor's degree – primary or secondary education			0.005

CBQ-SF – parental motives questionnaire – short version

TABLE 7. Results of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the "evaluation of the pro-family policy" variable

Variable		Total PCM	Total NCM	Overall result	Sum – desires and intentions	Sum – goals
Evaluation of the pro-family policy	rho	0.251	-0.149	0.239	0.186	0.101
	p	**0.0001**	**0.008**	**0.0001**	**0.001**	0.075

PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

The study of correlations in the entire study group (n = 312) for the score value of the Polish pro-family policy and the general indicator of parental motivation and its components showed several statistically significant findings:

- a positive weak correlation between the "total PCM" indicator and the pro-family policy score (rho = 0.251; p = 0.0001);
- a negative weak correlation between the "NCM sum" index and the pro-family policy score (rho = –0.149; p = 0.008);
- a positive weak correlation between the overall result of parental motivation and the pro-family policy score (rho = 0.239; p = 0.0001);
- a positive weak correlation between the "sum of desires and intentions" index and the pro-family policy score (rho = 0.186; p = 0.001).

No statistically significant correlation was found between the "sum of goals" indicator and the pro-family policy assessment score. This means that respondents who positively assessed the pro-family policy in Poland exhibited greater positive parental motivations, a greater overall intensity of parental motivations, and higher parental desires and intentions. Additionally, respondents with a positive evaluation of the pro-family policy in Poland exhibited lower negative motivations toward having children.

The correlation between the general indicator of parental motivation and its components with the subjective assessment of the impact of tightening the abortion law in Poland on the parental motivations of young adults was also examined. Respondents declared their subjective assessment of the impact of the tightened abortion law in the author's part of the questionnaire on a Likert scale of 1–5, where "1" meant a definite lack of influence and "5" indicated a definite influence in the respondent's opinion. The normality of the distribution of the variable "assessment of the tightening of the abortion law" was checked using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which found that the distribution deviated from normal ($p < 0.01$; $z = 0.794$). For this purpose, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used, and the details are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8. Results of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the "assessment of the tightening of the abortion law" variable

Variable		Total PCM	Total NCM	Overall result	Sum – desires and intentions	Sum – goals
Assessment of the tightening of the abortion law	rho	–0.287	0.357	–0.370	–0.333	–0.338
	p	**0.0001**	**0.0001**	**0.0001**	**0.0001**	**0.0001**

PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

TABLE 9. Results of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for the "subjective attitude to having children" variable

Variable		Total PCM	Total NCM	Overall result	Sum – desires and intentions	Sum – goals
Subjective attitude to having children	rho	0.655	–0.590	0.723	0.768	0.557
	p	**0.0001**	**0.0001**	**0.0001**	**0.0001**	**0.0001**

PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

The correlation study in the entire study group (n = 312) for the impact of tightening the abortion law in Poland and the general indicator of parental motivation and its components showed the following statistically significant findings:

- a negative weak correlation between the "total PCM" indicator and the score of tightening the abortion law (rho = –0.287; p = 0.0001);
- a positive weak correlation between the "NCM sum" index and the score of tightening the abortion law (rho = 0.357; p = 0.0001);
- a negative weak correlation between the "general result of parental motivation" and the score of tightening the abortion law (rho = –0.357; p = 0.0001);
- a negative weak correlation between the "sum of desires and intentions" index and the score of tightening the abortion law (rho = –0.333; p = 0.0001);
- a negative weak correlation between the "sum of goals" index and the score of tightening the abortion law (rho = –0.338; p = 0.0001).

These results indicate that respondents who declared that the tightening of the abortion law in Poland definitely influenced their parental motivations exhibited lower intensities of positive parental motivations, general motivations to have children, parental desires and intentions, and parental intentions. Conversely, these respondents were characterized by a greater intensity of negative parental motivations.

The correlation between the general parental motivation index and its components with the subjective attitude toward having children among respondents was also examined. Respondents declared their subjective attitude toward having children in the author's part of the questionnaire on a 1–5 Likert scale, where "1" meant a definitely negative attitude and "5" meant a definitely positive attitude toward having children. The normality of the distribution of the "subjective attitude to having children" variable was checked using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which revealed a non-normal distribution (p < 0.01; z = 0.809). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used for the analysis, and the details are presented in Table 9.

The correlation study in the study group (n = 312) for the score value of the subjective attitude toward having children and the general indicator of parental motivation and its components showed the following statistically significant findings:

- a strong positive correlation between the "total PCM" indicator and the score value of the subjective attitude toward having children (rho = 0.655; p = 0.0001);
- a moderate negative correlation between the "NCM sum" index and the score value of the subjective attitude toward having children (rho = –0.59; p = 0.0001);
- a strong positive correlation between the index of the total value of parental motivation and the score value of the subjective attitude toward having children (rho = 0.723; p = 0.0001);
- a strong positive correlation between the "sum of desires and intentions" index and the value of the subjective attitude toward having children (rho = 0.768; p = 0.0001);
- a moderate positive correlation between the "sum of goals" index and the subjective attitude toward having children (rho = 0.557; p = 0.0001).

These results indicate that respondents declaring a positive or definitely positive attitude toward having children were characterized by greater intensities of positive parental motivations, general parental motivations, stronger desires and intentions, as well as parental intentions. Conversely, respondents with a positive or definitely positive attitude toward having children exhibited lower intensities of negative parental motivations.

A Mann–Whitney U-test was conducted to assess the effect of the number of children on the intensity of parental motivation in terms of the CBQ-SF total score and its components. The results of the test are presented in Table 10.

The Mann–Whitney U-test revealed statistically significant differences between respondents declaring different numbers of children they had in terms of several variables: total PCM (p = 0.041), total NCM (p = 0.0009), overall result (p = 0.0022), sum – desires and intentions (p = 0.023), and sum – goals (p = 0.02).

Specifically:

- the total PCM index was significantly higher for those with children compared to those without children. This indicates that individuals who are already parents exhibit more positive parental motivations than those without children;
- the total NCM indicator was significantly higher for people without children compared to those with children. This suggests that childless individuals display more negative parental motivations than those who are already parents;

TABLE 10. Results of the Mann–Whitney U-test in relation to the "number of children" variable

CBQ-SF	Number of children	Mean ±SD	Median	Min.–max.	Q1	Q3	n	z-value	p-value
Total PCM	0	36.357 ±11.1	38	14–57	28	45	288	–2.039	**0.041**
	1–2	41.208 ±7.39	43	24–54	36	47	24		
Total NCM	0	33.01 ±8.075	33	12–48	27	39.5	288	3.297	**0.0009**
	1–2	27.08 ±7.06	28	15–38	21.5	33	24		
Overall result	0	3.34 ±16.56	5	–34–40	–8	17	288	–3.061	**0.0022**
	1–2	14.12 ±11.67	13.5	–14–39	7	22	24		
Sum – desires and intentions	0	19.44 ±8.73	21	3–30	13.5	26	288	–2.271	**0.023**
	1–2	23.5 ±7.101	24.5	8–30	20	30	24		
Sum – goals	0	6.57 ±5.75	3	2–20	2	11	288	–2.325	**0.02**
	1–2	10.54 ±7.74	10.5	2–20	2	19.5	24		

CBQ-SF – parental motives questionnaire – short version; SD – standard deviation; PCM – positive motives; NCM – negative motives

- the overall result indicator showed significantly higher values for individuals who are already parents compared to those who are childless. This implies that parents demonstrate greater overall parental motivation compared to those without children;
- the indices sum – desires and intentions, as well as sum – goals, were significantly higher for people with children compared to those without children. This indicates that having children positively influences parental motivations in terms of desires, intentions, and goals.

DISCUSSION

Parental motivations are the tendencies of a person to manifest the desire to have a child or not to have one. Motivations are dynamic and can be modified over the course of a person's life under the influence of their experiences and life circumstances. This pilot study found a number of statistically significant changes in various variables. However, most of these were of weak value, indicating the need for further research in this direction and for increasing the study group to verify the results.

The literature on the subject provides examples of variables that affect a person's motivation to have children. By reinterpreting the results of the survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center in Poland, Izdebski and Wąż showed that parental motivations are modified by gender. Respondents asked about their desire to have a child in the future differed in declared answers depending on gender. A definite desire to have a child is declared to a greater extent by men than women, and a definite lack of desire to have a child is more prevalent among women than men [10]. The obtained results align with the results of research in which men are characterized to a greater extent by positive parental motivations than women.

Based on a qualitative demographic study conducted in the form of interviews with the respondents, Mynarska provided several factors that the respondents indicated as necessary to start a family [11]. The largest percentage of respondents indicated mental maturity, understood as inner harmony, emotional stability, and the end of the period of youthful rebellion, as a condition for starting a family, having a child, and educating the future young generation. Respondents also mentioned completing education, having a job, and housing as factors necessary to make a decision about having a child. Work was the common denominator and the central aspect of the analyzed statements, indicating the degree of awareness of young people about the responsibility associated with starting a family and having a child.

The gender variable is an individual trait that can be directly reflected in parental motivations and attitudes toward having a child. In most of the available literature, the studies included only women of different ages. The general parental motivations of an individual are influenced by several external factors, particularly related to self-development and age. The study by Ahmed et al. showed that the positive desire for fertility was higher among younger women (under 35), partners with university education, delayed marriage age, shorter duration of marriage, and paid work. In addition, the prevalence of positive maternal motivations was significantly higher among working women than among housewives. The prevalence of positive motivations for fertility was significantly higher among men with secondary and university education than among men with a lower level of education [12]. The results of the cited study are identical to our own, in which respondents with batchelor's or master's degree were characterized by a higher rate of parental motivation in terms of parental intentions.

Mynarska and Rytel, using the CBQ, found that childless women exhibited higher levels of negative motivations toward childbirth and parenting compared to men. These findings align with our research, which also showed women having greater negative parental motivations than men. The authors highlighted women's awareness of the physical pain and effort involved in pregnancy and childbirth. Since men do not experience labor pains, their positive motivations for having children

are greater, resulting in a higher overall positive attitude toward parenting [13].

An important factor that affects parental motivations in both women and men, is age, which is related to the decline in procreative possibilities over time. A conscious society considers the passage of time when planning to start a family. Hashemzadeh et al. found in a systematic review that age impacts parental intentions for both sexes [14]. Similarly, in a study by Muluneh and Moyehodie, women aged 15–24 were more likely to desire more children compared to women aged 30–49. The desire for more children decreases as the age of first marriage increases for most women [15]. These results confirm the significant influence of age on parental motivations.

Gray et al. showed that age is an important factor influencing the desire to have children among young people, as it is a predictor of parenthood both biologically and socially [16]. Young parents who experience the joy of parenthood are more likely to want additional children compared to older parents. From a demographic perspective, the understanding of parenthood's social dimension is beneficial and desirable. Mynarska also highlighted a woman's age as a significant factor in the decision to become a mother [11]. Respondents expressed concern that delaying motherhood for too long could result in losing the biological ability to conceive and bear a healthy child. Young people are aware of women's reproductive possibilities and, as future young parents, will have sufficient knowledge to make informed decisions about family expansion and child-rearing. Research indicates that negative parental motivations decrease with age. This study focused on individuals aged 20–26 years. Respondents over 26 are considered to be in full reproductive readiness. Therefore, the research findings align with those of the cited authors.

Awareness of the biological functioning of a woman's body is essential for young people to make responsible decisions about motherhood and expanding the family. Research indicates that as respondents age, negative parental motivations decrease while parental intentions increase. Among young women beginning to contemplate motherhood, birth anxiety is common. They wish to become mothers but fear the processes and potential complications. This highlights the need for increased awareness of young women regarding family planning, procreation, physiology, and possible childbirth pathologies [17].

An important factor influencing the general parental motivations of young Poles is their subjective assessment of Poland's pro-family policy. A study conducted by Dom Badawczy Maison in 2015 revealed that Poles have a negative opinion of the pro-family policy in Poland [18]. While they prefer larger families and desire to have more children, they often choose not to due to concerns about financial support for a large family. This points to the need for state support for large families, addressing not only the needs of families with many children but also the demographic challenges of the aging Polish society.

Świątkiewicz, in his analysis of widespread cultural changes, highlighted key attitudes that undermine family support. These attitudes stem from moral transformations affecting the modern family. The author noted the absence of a responsible pro-natal policy by state or local government structures, which significantly contributes to the development of negative attitudes among young people toward starting a family. He emphasized that a stable and responsible pro-family policy is crucial in influencing young people's decisions regarding having and raising children [19]. In recent years, several assistance programs for large families have been introduced, such as the "500 plus" program aimed at providing financial support to children from large families. However, the direct impact of pro-family policy in Poland on the parental motivations of young Poles has not yet been investigated. This research provides a contemporary perspective on this persistent issue, reflected in Poland's current demographic situation.

Young Poles who view Poland's pro-family policy positively tend to exhibit higher levels of positive parental motivations. Sobolewska-Popko presented a socially significant conflict between the roles of parent and employee, identifying this as a prevalent issue in contemporary society [20]. This conflict is detrimental both to individuals and society as a whole, necessitating the integration of these roles. In sociological terms, role integration occurs when individuals experience facilitation, i.e., positive interactions between work and family, leading to mutual enrichment, strengthening, and improvement of these roles. The conflict between family and professional roles can be a barrier for young people who wish to expand their families while also pursuing professional development [19]. Without intervention in pro-family policies, particularly those regulating the work conditions for pregnant women and young mothers, there is a risk of further declines in the birth rate in Poland.

Having a child alters young adults' perspectives on the socio-political situation in their country. Adach et al. discussed young parents' views on sex education in schools, revealing that individuals without children were more supportive of sex education than parents. The analyses indicated a more positive attitude toward sex education among women, probably because they are more directly affected by the risks associated with inadequate education, such as unwanted pregnancies or abortions [21]. This highlights an important aspect of pro-family policy, which should aim to cultivate a conscious society and a responsible generation of young people prepared to make informed decisions about motherhood and family expansion.

The topic of pro-family policy in Poland is directly related to the tightening of the abortion law. A study asked respondents to assess how the stricter abortion law affected their parental motivations. Those who felt the law in Poland had a significant impact on their motivations showed a higher rate of negative parental motivations. Redd et al. also explored this issue, revealing that individuals across all education levels experienced adverse reproductive effects due to the restrictive abortion policy [22].

An indispensable element affecting the motivation to have children is one's corporeality and their acceptance of their own body. This can be particularly challenging for individuals, especially women, with disabilities. Ganle et al. conducted

research on parental motivation among women with diagnosed disabilities, identifying 5 main motivational factors: the joy of motherhood, childbearing as a means to combat stigmatization and negative stereotypes, social security, economic security, and self-fulfillment. The factor of self-fulfillment is particularly interesting, as it can be interpreted in 2 ways – biologically, as women fulfilling their role as carriers of human life, and socially, as mothers raising successful citizens [23].

Several factors shaping the general subjective attitude toward parenthood form the basis of an individual's specific attitude toward having children. The study showed that respondents with a positive attitude toward having children exhibited significantly higher levels of positive parental motivations. According to the literature, various factors influence the general subjective attitude toward having children. Oshrieh et al. found that the motives for having children depend on the strength of women's decisions and financial problems. Their quantitative study highlighted that cultural and economic factors were more important than other factors in determining the procreative motives of young people [24].

Factors influencing medical students' decisions to become parents were studied by Alfaraj et al., who found that most medical students were concerned about starting a family and made their decision to have children based on important life circumstances [25]. Hashemzadeh et al. noted that the lower levels of education and professional achievements in both sexes, younger age in women, length of marriage, and the desire to have more children were significantly associated with a positive attitude toward having children [26]. However, the results of our research differ in terms of the respondents' education levels. Respondents who declared having a batchelor's or master's degree showed a higher intensity of positive parental motivations. This is likely due to their higher social awareness of demographic decline risks and the aging society phenomenon.

The general attitude toward having a child is significantly shaped by the state's pro-family policy and support programs for young parents. Grządzielewska and Przeperski found through surveys and focus studies that for young people, the decision to have a child and start a family is not a priority [27]. Young adults are more focused on personal development and achieving professional and life success, considering family and children as secondary. They value independence and autonomy in making decisions about motherhood, believing such decisions should stem from personal choice rather than societal or state expectations.

Zhu et al. identified several factors influencing young parent's decisions to have a second and/or subsequent child, including the age of the mother, the age of the first child, the family's economic conditions, expenditures on children's education, and national pro-family policies. They emphasized the need to reduce the financial burden of child-rearing and to increase time off for parents to alleviate parental pressure. Governments and societies must enhance their support to encourage having a second or third child, thereby improving the national fertility rate [28].

Koert and Daniluk analyzed parental motivations from the context of delayed parenting. They found that many surveyed women attributed their childlessness to factors related to previous relationships. Reasons included loneliness, being with a partner reluctant to parenthood, or being in a relationship with someone who self-identified as irresponsible. The research suggests that young women should enter new relationships consciously, discussing their potential desire to have children with their partners to avoid future disappointments. The researchers advocate for workshops aimed at young people, presenting the realities of parenthood from both the mother's and father's perspectives. This approach emphasizes that the decision to have a child should be mutual, well-considered, and certain [29].

Being a parent can significantly influence a person's worldview and value hierarchy. The presence of a child can also be an important determinant of a man's future parenting motivations. A study conducted by Alexander et al. used individual research interviews to survey both childless men and fathers in the United States [30]. They found that many men experienced increased parenting motivations after becoming fathers, describing this change as an increase in their optimism and zest for life. These findings align with our research, which also observed an increase in parental motivations across all aspects after having a child.

However, Alexander et al. also identified men who reported increased reluctance to have more children after the birth of a child [30]. Perhaps this is due to individual personal characteristics, which can differ depending on age. The decision to become a parent is crucial due to the responsibilities it entails. Young adults represent a highly heterogeneous study group regarding personality traits and value hierarchy, making them a fascinating subject for socio-psychological research.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Socio-demographic factors, such as: age, gender, rural upbringing, level of education, and existing children, significantly positively influence the motivation of young Poles to have children. Positive parental motivations are more prevalent among males, older individuals, those raised in rural areas, individuals with a master's degree, and those who already have children. The general subjective perception of parenthood is shaped by the respondent's value hierarchy and worldview.
2. An important aspect of parental motivation is the pro-family policy in the respondent's country of residence. Young adults pay attention to family-friendly policies of the state, which directly impact their parenting motivations, as evidenced by the study reflecting awareness of the importance of pro-family policies and the needs of young parents.
3. A valuable recommendation is to enhance procreative education in Poland, particularly aimed at promoting parenthood, raising awareness about the country's demographic situation, and fostering responsible procreation.

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