



REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH 2009

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*What to do
to have children
if and when you want to have them*

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Introduction

Psychosocial aspects of parenthood and childlessness represent major research and political topics in many developed countries, not only in Europe [3], [10]. The reasons include aging and decreasing numbers of population, developments in reproductive medicine, which have been bringing along serious ethical questions, and democratization of the society, which strongly stresses individual human rights, including rights of children.

A qualitative research called "Psychosocial aspects of biological, non-biological and substitute parenthood and voluntary and involuntary childlessness" was conducted in 2007 - 2009 and it was supported by the grant No. 406/07/0274. The research was managed by the Faculty of Health and Social Studies of the South Bohemian University and it involved three non-governmental non-for-profit organizations with various orientations at family support:

1. The Center for Family and Social Care in Brno, whose mission is to support families in all stages of its development, to defend its interests and to assist the development of pro-family services in local communities. The center offers family, education and social programs.

2. The Center for Adoption and Foster Care is based in Prague and it is targeted at children in particularly difficult life circumstances and at children growing outside their own families. The objective of the center is to make sure that family care of the abandoned children prevails over the care in institutions and that the system of substitute family care in this country develops and changes in a comprehensive manner. The center offers consulting and training for applicants for the substitute family care and guidance, as well as assistance and support to families taking care of foster children.

3. The Maternity Hope foundation is based in Prague and it focuses mainly on organization of assistance and support to people struggling with childlessness and on public education concerning causes and treatment of fertility disorders and reproductive health. The data collection was supported by the gynecology-obstetrics department of the hospital in České Budějovice.

The common project was inspired by fact that the parenthood issues we deal with individually do not represent separate specializations but they rather constitute individual aspects of parenthood and without knowing the other aspects it is impossible for us to help our clients in a qualified manner. When dealing with the same topics for an extensive period of time one may easily end up in a stereotype, wave aside or excessively emphasize certain phenomena and incorrectly interpret other ones. The purpose of the research was to find out to what extent our intuitive perceptions and understandings are correct or false. We have asked ourselves whether we are able to understand the life experience of the parents and would-be parents we work with, whether we have succeeded in expanding the angle of view of the family and parenthood and how to improve our everyday work in the field.

We have prepared this brochure because the project included a commitment to disclose results of the research to the respondents, who had been willing to share their experience and thus had made the project possible, as they are the main recipients of the results. In this brochure you will find all our essential findings.

Methods of Research

The surveyed group consisted primarily of our clients. We obtained statements from 389 women and 118 men, aged 20–58. The group included biological parents, parents of children in substitute family care (adopted children and children in foster care), as well as parents who have used the so-called third-party reproduction, voluntarily and involuntarily childless people and people planning to become parents. We also used chat discussion on various parenthood issues, including the attitudes to the case when two babies were mixed up in a maternity hospital in Třebíč. The “hard” data are therefore inaccurate – as we have used various sources in many cases it was impossible to determine demographic parameters (sex, age, marital status, ...). And this is also one of the reasons why we do not have answers from all respondents for all the issues.

The following methods were used to obtain the data: semi-structured and non-structured interviews (targeted at the research, psychotherapeutic, random), opinion poll questionnaires (open-end), stories, chats, media communications. The selected method for the data content analysis was based on a grounded theory [26]. To check validity of the data we used the following techniques: triangulation of methods, triangulation of sources. The techniques concerning analysis and interpretation of the collected material: validation by the respondent, feedback provided by non-respondents [4], [5]. The principle of anonymity was strictly observed when working with the statements.

Before we start analyzing the results we would like to observe that any numerical data provided in the study are only approximate. The purpose of the project was to identify topics, not to conduct a statistical analysis. The approximate frequencies of occurrence are provided as they sometime add important contextual information. In parenthesis we provide examples of statements which illustrate the particular generalized category (whose title is shown in bold letters; the names of main categories have been capitalized while the names of sub-categories have not).

WHY DO (DON'T) YOU WANT CHILDREN?

Similarly as in the previous research [14], we were surprised how few people were able to respond to the question why they wanted children. We called those answers/non-answers **Non-reflected motives** and we included into this section 213 responses in total – see examples in parentheses (*... I had always wanted children and so we really did not talk about it much • I do not know why, I simply wanted it. I had never made the decision whether I do or don't. • Yes, I never thought of not wanting to have a child • Me and my wife never made the decision whether we wanted to have children. We saw it as a natural course of the things*). Sometime the respondents elaborated further on their statements and therefore we have created additional subcategories in the “Non-reflected” category. They include “**natural thing**” (frequency 68), where the respondents explained the response by saying that parenthood is natural and normal (*I always wanted children and saw it as natural • I will have a child - this has always been an absolutely natural thing for me, I will have at least one own child or another child – in foster care – even if I do not have a suitable stable partner*), **numbers** (frequency 28), contained responses which included the number of children he or she wanted (*I want to have two children because I find this number ideal • I want to have a child but only one. And my partner also wants only one. But if we happen to have twins that would be certainly fine as well*), **conditions** (frequency 42) included responses with preconditions (*...I want to have a child YES, as soon as possible, me and my husband have both finished our studies, we have an apartment and we have a place for the child, we want at least two children and we would love to have three, my husband has a good job - he is able to support the family • With my previous boyfriend I was not even able to fancy a child. Now I have been with a man for two years and I want him to be a father of my children and a partner in life. We both really want to have a baby. I mean even more than one ...*).

Another category, which included some kind of a reflection, expressed the desire to have a child in connection with satisfaction of an emotional need (frequency 78); the category is entitled **Emotion** (*...but when the baby starts running and taking – then everybody must love it • Now that the Christmas is coming I will want to decorate a Christmas tree for the children, buy presents and share the avidity and expectations at the lit-up tree • I like to take care of them and give them my love*). Within this category we have created sub-categories whenever a specific emotion was mentioned, such as **joy** (*Children are the joy of life*), **motivation** (*At thirty it had been absolutely out of question for me to give up “freedom”, to have some responsibility. But then even the wild parties were not as good as before, the same old jokes all the time*), **company** (*To have someone to take care of, to have another close person*).

Another category is called **Continuation** (frequency 43). It includes statements mentioning any kind of transcendence into the future (*Because children are the purpose and continuation of life • ...so that we experience life, so that we leave something behind, because our parents raised us and this is the way it should be = continuation of life*). Even in this category it was possible to create subcategories, as long as the statement was specific as to the kind of continuation. The sub-categories are: **continuation of the self** (*The child bears our genes to the future • ... I am personally horrified to think that there is nothing left here after me. I am not a writer, an architect or a composer, but at least something or someone will be left here after me. I do not believe in heaven but I think I can remain immortal through my offspring ...*), **continuation of the family line** (*Actually I am the last in the family, I have no siblings, no cousins to continue the line. If I do not have children then who will? The entire family will die out on the female and male sides alike*) and **continuation of spirit** (*There would be no reason to live and there would be no one to inherit our experience and further develop the humankind*).

Another major category, which we however decided not to divide, was **Relationship** (frequency 57). This category contains motives relating to continuation of the relationship with a partner (in this respect this category, to a certain extent, overlaps with the category “Continuation”), with its bond or improvement of quality (*We want to create a family, to jointly make our home, not to be just the two of us alone. I also feel that it is something big and firm which might tie us together even more • ...It is something we have in common with my husband. Something we are both involved in, the child bonds us together. It is a product of our mutual love • ... perhaps it is time to settle down and to move the relationship with my girlfriend - now my wife – somewhere further • ...it is also that I have found out that everything we do really involves the TWO of us and this has suddenly produced the natural question – why not three, well, actually four because our cat would be really mad that I forgot to count him • ... we got to a higher level in our relationship. Many relationships survived simply because they produced children*).

The motive may be also negative, such as a choice between two not really attractive variants. We have called this category **Avoiding something** (*After eight years at work I wanted to leave at any cost and I got pregnant unexpectedly. So it was simply convenient then – I did not have to practice for Spartakiada • There was also this factor that I could not stand the henhouse anymore – I mean the women I worked with*). Another similar category was **Preventing something**, e.g. preventing loss of a chance (*My reason was that I was*

afraid that after an abortion I might not be able to have children in the future • No one asked whether I really wanted a child, it was kind of recommended to me by the doctor as a cure which might work). Here the categories become very close to the sub-category “conditions”; they are actually circumstances that had made the person have a child earlier than he or she wanted.

We have created a special category **Grandfather** for one single statement (*I kind of look forward to having children of my own. In the end you will become a grandparent and this is what I personally look forward to most and I would be very sad if I cannot become a GRANDFATHER – one day!*). We felt the poetry of this statement would have been destroyed if we analyzed why he wanted to be a grandfather.

Another interesting category is **Challenge** with the frequency of 9 (*...to prove that I can handle the parent role better than my own parents • ... as soon as I have the impression or as soon as I am sure that it is the situation or fate of a child that concerns us, then I simply take it as a challenge of its kind , and similarly as in other situations, I am willing and determined simply to struggle for a victory somehow • And it is also because I like challenges in life - we had already had four children when we learned about Ondra, a mentally handicapped 14-year old and blind ...*). While in the previous categories it was impossible to say whether the statement was made by a biological or foster parent, here we can clearly recognize, even without the context, which statements refer to the substitute family care.

We are now moving to statements specific for substitute parenthood. We will not indicate the frequency as it has no meaning, not even for orientation. Referring to the statements which viewed parenthood as a challenge we may continue with the category **Helping someone**: it is a challenge, whether I am able to help to someone (*... my biological time for parenting has passed and I have my foster children mainly because I met children in difficult life situations*). Non-biological parents sometime say that this form of parenthood was a **Substitute solution** for them once the path to the biological parenthood was closed (*So far we have not been able to have a child of our own but, because we had considered adoption with my partner, we only swapped the order*). For some people it is not the alternative solution as they see no reason to take pains to become “biological” parents, they simply **Lack the instinct** (*I do not like when people find us odd just because we do not want to have children of our own. We simply have a slightly different mindset when it comes to reproductive instincts • We had adopted our first child before we even tried to have a child of our own. The experience was so addictive that I abandoned the desire to give birth to the second child and we again adopted it – I mean her*).

In the study we also addressed the motivation to have a second child – this was mentioned in 31 statements. The biggest number of statements (frequency 21) contained **Companion** as the reason, i.e. they wanted a sibling for the first-born (*...we were determined not to raise her as the only-child • ... we wanted a sibling for our son • ... because the first child started showing the only-child syndrome*). The other statements were overlapping with the motivation already described.

When analyzing statements about motivation against parenthood, i.e. for childlessness, we were surprised by one big difference. While parents or people planning to have children were often unable to answer the question why they wanted a child (see the category “Non-reflected”), the people who did not want a child (for the time being?) explained why they did not want children quite intricately. The difference can be explained by the different way of data collection. We have only minimum statements from voluntarily childless people obtained by means of interviews or questionnaires. These people are extremely difficult to reach and therefore we looked for their responses on chat forums – this means the statements were provided in a different context. Despite that we believe that the different methodology is not the only reason behind the difference. Parenthood is socially accepted and expected and therefore nobody feels the need to analyze the PRO-child motivation. Voluntary childlessness is still unusual and not always socially acceptable, as implied by the analysis of statements concerning the motivation for parenthood and childlessness in general and not on behalf of your own (this part of the research is not included in this publication). A person who does not want to have children is still under a social pressure and he/she is forced to justify his/her CONTRA to the other people and perhaps also to him/herself. The reasons in support of childlessness are contained in 69 statements. The most frequently mentioned reasons were **Absence of the instinct** with the frequency of 13 (*... I have no maternal instinct, I feel no need to have a child. Babies do not “address” me, it does not speak to me, it does nothing to me • ... I am one of those who do not feel that the life has prepared the role of a mother for them, I do not feel ashamed, to the contrary, I emphasize my responsibility because I am not going to prepare an unhappy childhood for my child simply because I have the child • ... in all my life I have never felt the slightest desire to have a child, on the contrary, I prefer getting out of their way, so I suppose the maternal instincts will not be coming any more • He is f... fascinated when he sees something little. I do not feel it yet, which is strange, women are supposed to be obsessed by it first*), and also the fact that children do not arouse positive emotions in the person, which we have called **Non-emotions**, as a complementary to the category “Emotions” (*I do not care about children, I do not find them cute or pretty. I do have friends with*

children so when I am visiting them I have to manage somehow but I have to pretend that I like them • I like people but I enjoy company of adults, it take lots of effort to communicate with children or to play with them • ... I forgot that the most beautiful thing is not to sleep at night, not to enjoy life with your wife and to take care for a little noisy baby 24 hours a day). The category, where people expressed their aversion to responsibility and loss of freedom, has been called **Lack of freedom** (... surely there are better things than tying a stone to your neck - I mean a child • ... I have come to the conclusion that if I were a man I would be probably more willing to have children than I am now as a woman. The loss of freedom is quite an important factor for me • I do not want to have child with anyone because that would limit my personal freedom and it is my priority • I cannot imagine my life without sports, singing and working for the newspaper), **Exhaustion** is the category referring to high demands of the parent role (When I feel like talking I go out. For that I do not need to have a woman at home or, god forbid, with brats, who would overwhelm me with her problems and I would have no more energy for problems of my own • ... then the "squirrel cage ". I simply cannot imagine that I will get into it and stop in some 15–20 years). Other reasons included **Finance** (I do not know why I should take care of someone else. Why should I pay for someone else with my own money. I like my peace and I like to have my money just for myself), **Dark future** (...when you think about it all, there are already too many people on the entire planet so why make more • And also I do not find the today's world pink enough to bring a child here) and **Lack of relationship**, as a complementation category to the "Relationship", referring to the lack of suitable partner or instability of partnerships (...I probably wanted children but I do not have them as I did not find anyone responsible and likeable enough to want children with him • ... why are you dragging a partner into it? He may not play a role in it at all. What is important is whether you feel like it or not because you can never rely a hundred percent on the partner).

Conclusions

It is obvious that the motivation to become/not to become a parent is a huge complex of individual, more or less cognizant and more or less important, simultaneously occurring reasons. Quite surely, no one has a child just to avoid Spartakiada or a second child just to make sure the first one is not the only child. It is more likely that people, once asked, attempt to answer and they choose one of many reasons, one of many aspects, perhaps the proverbial "last drop". Equally as other similar studies [23], [27], we have not observed any significant gender differences; all categories (perhaps with the exception of "grandfather") are saturated with female and male statements.

Very probably there are no major differences in reasons for biological, non-biological and substitute parenthood, only some items will be more emphasized (challenge) or additional (to help someone); experts dealing with substitute family care confirm that the motivation of helping someone alone is insufficient and risky for foster care.

We have not been able to answer the question whether the motivation for parenthood is more biological or psychosocial. The number of statements in the category of "Non-reflected", particularly in the sub-category "natural thing" suggests that the desire to have a child is biological. Despite that, we do not support this interpretation, along with other authors [1], [21]. In economically developed countries the significantly falling numbers of children in families, the increasing percentage of lifelong voluntary childlessness [25] and the significantly increasing (and thus from the biological viewpoint disadvantageous) age of women seeking pregnancy speak against the most significant biologizing theory at present – sociobiology [6].

As indicated by our results, we could have gone on and on, developing more sub-categories and sub-sub categories. The question is whether it makes any sense to analyze the motivation for parenthood. We are not absolutely sure whether a detailed analysis of motivation is a major factor when people decide about having a child. Our research implies that it is not. Probably the motivation is experienced as a whole, the concept is comprehensive, holistic, something one can perhaps hardly talk about. However, the categorization is definitely useful for people whose parenthood has been made difficult by their personal circumstances or by their own choice (the voluntarily and involuntarily childless, people in need of gametes donor, applicants for adoption or foster care), and for those who assist to them on the way (workers in helping professions). It is better to look for answers to tough questions in advance and to be ready for challenging situations than to be taken by surprise. For involuntarily childless people the careful structuring of motivation is particularly important; breaking down the motivation can have a major psychotherapeutic effect and, what is more, the needs in many sub-categories may be saturated in other ways than with children.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO START A FAMILY?

The absolutely most frequently mentioned precondition for the decision to have a child was **Housing and financial provision** (... I would want to have a family but only if I am self-sufficient and if I am able to support it • We are now going to economize for a year or so, so that our baby has everything it needs; certainly we are not going to false-economize on the baby, although all those things for babies, like clothes, diapers, pushchairs and so on, they are not cheap at all • I had not wanted a child for quite long, the reason was: money, my own place to live; but the situation changed so there was no reason to postpone it • Although I cannot say my income is low I still see parenthood as a major burden and I am afraid of it • When making this decision, one should check the finance as well. I am pretty sure that it is not cheap to have a family). Sometime, people have special requirements for housing, e.g. size of the apartment (... he does not want a child yet, he says that the place is small and it is not the right time and that we have no money), its location (Despite all that, a village is the best solution) or house equipment (As we are planning to have children in the future, the apartment will be small. And what is more – it does not have a lift).

One precondition to have an income is the completed study (One has to finish school, get a job and then has to start thinking about it. •... It is important to finish school and start the career) and **Stable job** (Another aspect of such a late decision was that my boyfriend was opening a restaurant, it took him nearly a year to complete the whole thing. At the moment everything is as we wanted it • ... as I have had this new job for two months I want to get into it better and, most importantly, I want to provide the financial support to the family in the future). Women also think about conditions of the maternity leave and about their comeback (I would like to work here for at least one year and only then go to a maternity leave. That would not be fair to the company to leave after six months only. In any case, I am glad that I will get some practice in the company and that I will have a place to return to. • ... now it is the best time to have a child, I have got used to my work so I suppose the job should be safe, when I get back from the maternity leave). A role is played by the type of work: people sometimes believe that some types of work are poorly compatible with family life (Naturally, I would have to quit this job. We are both waiters and we work five month round the clock. And then three month round the clock outside the place where we live, so I would stay at home on the maternity leave and Petr would find a regular job, which means a factory job • He drives a truck, so sometimes he is away for two weeks. Tomáš claims that he will quit once we decide to start a family but I am pretty sure it would be difficult for him. Probably that's why we do not want to have a family right now).

Immediately after the material provision respondents mentioned **Suitable partner** (...I would like to find a reliable guy, who would be nice and truly love me. It is terribly difficult to find such a man, and where should I find him these days anyway ... • You need to choose the right woman • ... at the moment I am looking for a place to live, I have saved the money, I have the right age so the only missing thing is a father, so that we can give it a try together • ... a partner to whom you can trust and turn to whenever you are in trouble. My previous partners did not want to even hear about a baby. Either they were not ready and wanted to enjoy life or they were too busy. Now I have been happily married for two years and both my husband and I have been perfectly sure about what we really want). Both the partners should be mature and live in a "stable relationship" (I should have been long prepared, but I am not. I live with my mum and I am used to her doing everything. If I lived alone I would be more independent. • Also the women should be physically and mentally mature, and the man as well • ... probably the most important is to start to live together first and to plan the family only later on) and "both need to want the child" (People should want it both • Because we think we have been together long and we are getting along nicely. And we have actually agreed about it). Still, not everybody believes that the relationship is significant (That means finished school, good job, money in the bank, roof over your head and good living conditions and the conviction that she can manage the family. I have not mentioned a partner because these days there are many single mothers or many divorcees, so this is quite a difficult issue).

Quite interesting were the views of **Family status**, i.e. wedding. For some people it is important that the child is born into a traditional situation (... we want to bring our baby into a full-fledged family relationship • I would like to get married before the child comes. In this society this is a certain established custom but, on the other hand, I think that in case the other parent dies or something else happens then you have some social security for the children and yourself • If we expected a child together I would want to marry him before the baby is born. I believe the child should come into a complete family, to have mom and daddy. But I do not know whether my boyfriend would agree, he does not want to talk about the wedding) and they do not want to confuse the child with different surnames of mother and father (With my boyfriend we want our children to have the same surname as ours • The wedding is not a precondition but for me it is important. As a family we should all have the same surname). Some people do not care about weddings very much (I personally would want a wedding but I do not insist on it. If my girlfriend did not want it, I would not mind) and others view it as a negative (We have agreed with my boyfriend not to get married for now but we will have a child first. It is always time enough for a wedding and I think that the paper does not help, rather to the contrary. It is also for

financial reasons, as a single mother I will have more money and the boyfriend will support the child. Moreover, we have lived together for two years so the wedding would not bring anything new • Well, as we believe it does not make sense to pay so much money for one day in your life we are not planning any wedding).

Another condition taken into account is **Age**. It is difficult to find any consensus here (*the age is quite individual, depending on when you are able to support a family, it can be twenty*). Sometimes biological clock was mentioned (*... we think it is high time for us and I can also here the “biological clock ticking”, as they say*). The quoted “magic” limit was around thirty (*Approximately around thirty, may be even thirty plus. • Well, to be honest, my girlfriend is pushing me. She is my age and she does not want to have a child at thirty.. • I would not rush it that much myself. But my girlfriend is right saying that the first child after thirty makes no good*). Some people mentioned the age difference between partners (*The partners should not be more than ten years apart, I suppose. If the man is much older then I think there is a much higher risk that something happens to him and the women will be left alone with the children*). Still, the age issue is complicated, it is hard to choose the right one (*For the child it is better to be older. When you have children at an early age you lose your young years. But then you get too lazy and do not feel like taking the responsibility, such as children, anymore*).

Some respondents also mentioned **Health** as a factor in the decision to have a child (*...I have also been to the doctor, to check whether I am actually fertile, and I am, so we are both healthy and nothing is preventing us from it*) and its precondition – **healthy lifestyle** (*First, before all this, I will have to quit smoking • I used to smoke but in pregnancy I find it terrible, despite I had been smoking for quite a long time. I would want my husband to quit as well but so far he does not seem to feel like that. I am trying to eat healthy food and also to exercise a bit • I have started cooking and I have looked for recipes which use healthier food and healthier cooking methods. I have also planned sports but unfortunately I did not have enough will to do that*). People also mentioned the effect of working conditions on health (*... I have to plan my pregnancy because I work in chemical research where I might breathe lots of harmful substances dangerous for the fetus*). One respondent even considered the right season to conceive and give birth (*In the past I thought that it was dangerous to walk with the big belly in winter, I mean you can easily slip or something. But if we succeed in June right away then the baby would be born in February or March*).

Only 4 respondents took into account **Support from the family and friends** (*I think we are both ready to have a child. We have a place to live, we have saved money and so perhaps nothing will stop us. My parents, as well as Petr’s parents, look forward to the grandchildren already • My mum cannot wait to be granny. Perhaps she has already planned where to go for a walk and what snack she is going to make for them. My daddy pretends not to care but I am sure he is looking forward to it as well, he is just not showing it. Zuzana’s parents are still quite active, they still work and have a life of their own. But they have nothing against grandchildren • For example to have a roof over your head, some financial backing and also some support from parents, grandparents, siblings, friends ...*) and one respondent mentioned **Availability of services for parents** (*I am already afraid of whether we will be able to find a nursery school or daycare. Their numbers are steadily decreasing*).

As the statements come almost completely from interviews about the planned parenthood and conditions of parenthood, some respondents spontaneously reflected on the actual **Value of planning**. Some thought that the planning and provision of suitable conditions was important (*I think that if the child comes unexpectedly then it is not a disaster, as long as the parents had been together for a while. But still, it is better for the people to talk about what they want to achieve in life first and only then to start a family • It is necessary to talk through all pros and contras with the partner. Both have to be mentally mature and ready. If they skip all this they can only wander what happens. I believe that these days it is very unreasonable to take unexpected pregnancy lightly • Parenthood should be planned in a timely manner*). Many people realize that planning and provision of appropriate conditions and reality may be two different things (*I have talked about it with my grandpa, it is a nonsense. You can take care of a child even without excellent support • Actually you cannot really plan a child and the “ideal time” for it, at least that’s what I feel. You can kind of optimize the conditions you want to bring the child in - but you never know whether it works or not. Anything may happen • I am not planning it, it is a normal natural thing and when it comes then it comes. There is no point planning it, too much planning may lead to destruction • ... I am not sure if me and my husband would have managed to date for such a long time and then got married. So I am glad that the children made us do it . We had to get married and we actually became adults together. We never really argued in our marriage. There was no major point of conflict, we are fairly similar in many aspects so all we had to do was to accept small adjustments. We got married at eighteen and we had had nothing as individuals so we built everything together, side by side, and therefore it was so easy for us to be parents, as we never stood against each other*). Sometimes the plan goes wrong – even though the required preconditions were met (*When we got married last year we thought we would have a child very soon. But now it seems to me that Zuzka is not that keen any more. I feel it that way because she is still on the pill. She always seems to have a reason – not now as we are going to the seaside next month, we are going to the mountains next month ... and so it goes on and on*).

Conclusions

When we compared statements about the conditions for parenthood made by childless people with those made by parents (see the following section), it turned out that their notions of demands of parenthood and the reality represent nearly mirror (i.e. inverted) images. The biggest parental burden is not the financial deficit, as expected by the childless, but the mental and physical exhaustion of the parents. When it comes to assistance to people, who are planning to become parents, one obvious conclusion can be drawn to the effect that young people should be taught more realistic expectations in respect to parenthood and they should least know where to seek assistance and how to use it. They should learn how to prevent their own exhaustion and how to take care of their own partner relationship. The state should make the assistance available, in terms of distance and finance, and ensure its high quality. Another potential explanation is that the childless respondents are not sure whether they actually want children at all and they simply conceal it by claiming unsuitable conditions for parenthood. Lack of finance has been actually more and more acceptable as the reason in the Czech society [11]. Nevertheless, we consider both the mentioned conclusions too simplistic or at least we think their validity is limited.

Being a parent is an exceptionally demanding role [30]: it is irreversible, it represents a fundamental turning point in a person's life, and it requires a change in one's lifestyle, huge responsibility, many obligations and limitations (*You cannot - kind of - rent the children. You simply cannot take it back once you have them. Therefore, for many people it is the most difficult decision of their life. Much more difficult than to decide about going to a university or whether this or that person is the right one for you. All the other things can be fixed or somehow reversed - you can leave a marriage but you cannot make a sperm and egg from a child*). People planning to become parents at least anticipate that (*I find the question whether to have children or not the most difficult one in my life, as it does not concern just me but also the new person. I simply have to make the decision on the child's behalf and that's why it is so hard • I do not really care for money or the so much discussed career. I simply care about my life and how I should live it the best way for me and for the others. And one big part of it is whether I should have children or not*).

We therefore believe that the strong emphasis on economic conditions is rather an indication that people look for some certainties in the uncertain process of decision-making. Money is something I can control to some extent, unlike my satisfaction, good relationship or health and contentment of my child (*Many people do plan it these days because parenthood is accompanied by uncertainty; they are afraid that they won't be able to support the child or to provide good housing. **When planning parenthood, they are creating a virtual world to cover up the fear of uncertainty***). Services and books have already turned up in many countries to help people to decide whether they should become parents [7], [31]. Any person considering parenthood should answer the following questions: Am I physically, mentally and emotionally ready to become a parent now? Am I willing to face changes in my lifestyle and in the relationship? And, am I emotionally capable of providing the environment necessary for a healthy development of the child? However, trying to guess responsibly whether I am going to be a good parent and whether I am going to enjoy it - is more like crystalomancy.

DO PARENTS NEED ASSISTANCE?

This section contains statements provided by parents about the needed assistance. The most frequently mentioned was **Babysitting** – frequency 78 (... at least once in a while they both need a time off and go out • ... mainly babysitting. I have experienced that myself that taking care of two little children continuously and without a break is exhausting! It is essential for the mother – or father – to have at least a short while for herself! Otherwise it drives you crazy! • The biggest help is occasional babysitting so that the parent can “switch off” • The help is needed, particularly once a week at least three hours of babysitting so that you are totally free and without children. •... babysitting, taking children to the school or nursery). The most frequently mentioned babysitters were **grandparents**, mainly grandmothers (I always appreciated help, particularly from the grannies and I am still using it, whenever they offer it • I never thought about it much, I always thought that I was supposed to manage it on my own somehow. But if you mean babysitting we always used it, particularly with the first children – when we needed to leave then the grannies and granddads babysat quite often). Unfortunately not everybody has the help from close relatives available; they may not be within the reach at all (Unfortunately, our grandparents are not near here so we have to help ourselves • ... perhaps occasional babysitting when we are both busy working, because we do not have grannies or other relatives at hand.), or they lack the capability, capacity or will to help (I would want at least three children but what is stopping my ambition is the fact that the grannies are not functioning sufficiently • What happened to the great grannies and granddads who used to take us to the park? Why are they all of a sudden so self-centered and do not care about the rest? Does anybody know about a granny and granddad that are missing a granddaughter? • My mom is sitting in front of TV from morning till night and watching these stupid series and she is gradually no more capable of functioning in the real world. She says I am impossible, fat, messy, terribly dressed with bad hairstyle and she is ashamed of me.). Another babysitter may be the **partner**, usually the man, as in this country the care of children until the preschool age has been still affected by gender - it is mostly women who provide the care (... my husband has flexible working hours and he can babysit several times a month for a couple of hours in the daytime, so I can do some errands, see a doctor or go swimming • The assistance is provided by my partner – very reliable), **friends** (Sometimes our friends help us so that we can go to the movies, for a walk or have a beer • ... we appreciate babysitting from the relatives and friends), a **nanny** was mentioned as well (For me the most important help is from my husband and grandmother and for the first child we had a nanny • From November I will have a nanny). Through the nanny we moved on to a potential institutional child care. Such facilities include **nursery schools** and **daycares** (But I still feel the sameness of each day. I may sound as a heartless mother , that I got myself children and now I do not know what to do with them, but I feel it is going to be better for everybody. From September the children will go to a nursery school two days a week and I will go to work • And now the supporting care institutions are important – the older one goes to the daycare and the younger one to a nursery school five days a month. If I were to spend all days taking care of a child or children I would go mad • I had no idea something like that existed, a playground acquaintance told me about it. I immediately tried it and I am very content! • She goes to a daycare five days a month and I can do the errands – like authorities, to see a friend and, most importantly, I get a great rest and I am no more nervous on the remaining days) and other **pro-family services**, either commercial (I also appreciate various benefits in public services, such as babysitting in shopping centers and other facilities.), or services provided by non-for-profit and voluntary organizations (Maternal centers in towns are, I think, the great help in towns). Also **Domestic help** is much appreciated – frequency 26 (... they get you ready meals etc. • ... also with housework and shopping– why should I do the ironing and scrubbing? • We have also decided with my husband to hire a cleaning woman. There is still a lot for me to do but now it is definitely better • My friend has used this trick with cooking – on workdays she buys lunches from the local school canteen, the portions are big so it is enough for her and the boy, and the other portion is for the husband after he gets back from work). Another frequently quoted assistance, mostly for the parents-beginners, was the **Mental support and information**. The support and help may be provided by the partner (The assistance, which in my opinion is really important and irreplaceable, is sharing – he needs to be interested, he needs to have an opinion of how to raise the kids, he needs to be available when the woman has problems with children or when her nerves are in tatters. He needs to be “mentally present” in the family. • It is mainly the mental support; in the beginning I appreciated not to be home alone with the baby, to have had someone to support me, just with words, someone who gave me advise and naturally also helped physically. • ... reliance on the partner...), **relatives** (my mom helped me very much after I gave birth, she taught me how to take care of the baby and helped me very much with breastfeeding) or **various helping institutions** (... needs rather the mental help and support. In my opinion something like that is missing here – you have all these emergency helplines for drug addicts, people in crisis and mentally ill, but I think it would be excellent to have a helpline for mothers of newborns • ... we needed information about sleeping, problems with putting the child to sleep, some minor health problems • It would be very helpful for young parents to attend courses, to learn not just how to take care of a child, but also of their marriage, how to avoid mistakes which may finally result in a breakup • Parenthood should not mean the end of all activities, hobbies, desire and friendship. All this is extremely important for the right mental balance, I would say natural. I would guide partners to do this even before they get married.). But watch out - the quantity of information should not be excessive and they should not contradict each other (In case of (a baby with)

special needs one may also appreciate some advice how to keep a sound mind and not to go berserk from all the advice given by experts.).

As a special type of mental support we may mention **Social appreciation of the parental role** (Parents probably need support from the people around them, the society should appreciate that parenting is a demanding profession • This work is done 24 hours a day and nobody appreciates it, neither financially or morally • I suppose every mother needs help, understanding and primarily she needs to be appreciated • ... they should have a higher social status ...). This may be demonstrated e.g. by services for parents, such as the already mentioned daycares, nursery schools, parent clubs and others (There is still the deep-rooted opinion in the society that parenthood is a totally private thing and that “when you got children you should help yourselves“ – we have to fight this approach currently, for example, among university teachers, where we are trying to open a babysitting place as a service for students with little children. A similar situation is with barriers in transportation means, in shops and institutions. I had been thrown out of some restaurants with a pram, very few public toilets have changing counters etc.) and offering parent-friendly jobs (It is very hard to be a parent these days. On one side you hear that parents spend little time with children but on the other hand there is the rat race, with the only goal to make money, to be at work from morning till night – how is the parent supposed to do that • ... the option to work part time. I really do mind that the society does not recognize how important it is to raise and to take care of a child. Home-staying moms who decide to take care of their children instead of working on their careers have later difficulties to return to work and to reintegrate in the society). Unexpectedly rarely mentioned (compared to the statements about the conditions for parenthood) was **Financial help**. We found only 10 statements (from the total of 241) which mentioned finance and all of them are provided in the brackets (Primarily financial! • They may also have financial problems. I would personally most appreciate domestic help so that I can spend more time with the children but we are not financially well off to afford that • Help – home – peace, tolerance + state – finance • Help? Naturally – mental, physical, as well as financial etc. • I would not mind having ten children – but I would have to win in a lottery • It depends on the situation – e.g. also financial ... • I also appreciate various benefits in public services, like babysitting in shopping centers or reduced entry fees for children or family tickets etc. • Naturally money is not everything but I suppose it is better, for example, to work hard for six months and see the children less and then to have a great holiday at the seaside, rather than to spend the whole summer in Prague just because you have no money to get out • When I go on for a week without a break, I mean without any babysitting, the bustle and hustle from morning till night, I feel like popping down a pill and I curse the bad babysitting infrastructure in this country, or the fact that babysitting is so expensive • Not only there is nobody to help me but I am unable to manage financially. I only have the parent social benefits and five thousand from the father of the two little ones.).

As indicated by the previous paragraphs, respondents said not only what kind of help they needed but they also spontaneously explained why. We intentionally included longer statements in the previous paragraph to expose the context of the requested help. We have made a brief analysis on the reasons separately and it is provided below.

Parents need babysitting and domestic help to **Switch off** – this was a very frequently used expression (... so that the parent can “switch off “ • ... simply to “switch off” for a while • ... babysitting, so that they can switch off). Why do they need to switch off ? One thing is that they need to do some demanding activities which are very difficult to do with a little child (... so I can do some errands, see a doctor or go swimming), the other thing is that taking care of a child is mentally and physically very demanding (... we are both at the end of our tethers on a daily basis • Taking care of children and the entire household is physically and mentally exacting and therefore the others should help • ... so that they can get at least a short break in taking care of the child, do their own things and hobbies, so that they do not have to be on alert all the time • ... it can easily drive you crazy to be at home all day with a child), it is a stereotype of its kind (But I still feel the sameness of each day • My nerves are breaking down from the stereotype I am living • I take the boy to the daycare, do the cooking, washing, get him back, walk the dog. It is hustle and bustle. A very boring hustle and bustle.) and primarily the responsibility lasting 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, which needs to be interrupted at least for a little while to stay mentally sound (... to have at least a short while every day just for yourself ! otherwise you go mad ! • I do need time to rest, I do not want to overstretch myself, I do not need to be the perfect mother • ... sometime I crave to be alone, just ten seconds, because somebody is here all the time • I wanted to do everything myself I ended up in a psychiatric ward • ... to keep a part of your life totally free of the children, e.g. to spend a weekend with schoolmates a couple of times a year, to send children and my husband to the weekend house, to go on a business trip • Sometimes I feel the urge to simply run away into another room and hit my head against the wall. This obsessive urge is not caused only by the children but also by my husband, who is brilliant, golden but sometimes deserving the most brutal torture).

We would like to return to the earlier mentioned interesting category “Social appreciation of the parental role“ which was perceived by the respondents as a shortage of “family friendly“ facilities and opportunities to get back to work. The social appreciation, or rather the lack of it, could be seen also at the micro-level, in contact with the close family and friends. Some parents feel **Lack of interest in me** (I really feel terrible, nobody asks me anything, like how I feel and so on. And everybody only cares about my

daughter. Nobody even notices I am there • And do not expect Christmas presents any more, only your daughter will get them • ... nobody my age has children so there is often a crowd around my son and I sit aside or answer questions about him • even my husband, when he gets home from work, jumps first to the baby and only then he greets me • Naty woke up earlier so her daddy was still at home and when he wanted to say good bye to her I was holding her in my arms and the daddy was kissing her for so long that I thought he would not leave at all - and do you think he kissed me as well ? NO, he hardly said bye • ... sometime the women – mother of a new baby, puts the husband aside). This is certainly another reason why parents need to get out from their parental role, why they need some time just for themselves (I go to work out twice a week in a gym and once a month we have a “ladies night” with my friends, it is a real balm for the nerves and it is also great to see you are still attractive and the husband does not feel so sure of you). And it is not only your own individual mental harmony that matters, also the harmony of the couple may help to prevent **Relationship problems** (... to make time for me and my husband alone because the relationship is suffering by that. It is very important • ... at least once a week to have babysitting for the child/children and make time for the two of us and have a date together • ... so that the parents can get some sleep or have time for their life as a couple • A few days ago we went to a restaurant with my husband and I immediately felt like in a different world • And naturally you need to spend some time with your man, otherwise you become estranged and then it is hard to fix. This is my personal experience).

Taking care of a child means primarily the continuous contact with him/her and sometimes the parent may miss – apart from the contact with a partner without presence of children – the contact with adults, particularly peers. The parents feel **Social isolation** (I was used to be in a company of people and it is killing me to be at home where I can communicate only with the children • I have two little children and I am experiencing an extreme social frustration. I terribly miss company and chatting • I study at a university part time but honestly, my only motivation was to get out at least four times a month, to see some people • ... I always did what I wanted to and now I feel like a boring mom. I have no one to talk to, I am living in total isolation from other people • ... a perfect cure for maternal depressions are the maternity centers and clubs. You find out you are not the only depressed mom, you charge up the batteries and you can do what you enjoy • So far we have tried a mothers club and it a real delight. But the rest of the week I have nobody to talk to, so I am insane). However, not every contact is suitable for all (Unfortunately, the maternity centers are perfect henhouses here and I do not really feel like talking to some strange women about diapers and yummys, pooh-pooh, sore fanny and all that crap • I think that mothers club may be a good thing, but basically what happens there is that the isolation of women on the maternity leave is just made collective).

Social isolation and stereotype may be a major reason (perhaps a more important one than finance) why parents with little children decide to go back to work at least part time (We will have a nursery two days a week for children from September and I will go to work. I am going to be very busy but I am really looking forward to it • ... I was really anxious , I kept bothering all the time, so I decided to go back to work. I needed contact with people • So I at least worked a couple of months from home and started studying at a university. I really suffer staying at home • originally we planned one more child but I am really wondering now whether to go back to work and resume normal life).

Conclusions

The most important help is positively babysitting and domestic help. The reason is the enormous physical and mental exhaustion of parents. Some parents point to unavailability of daycares and nurseries, but most frequently quoted was the availability of grandmothers. Still, it is perfectly possible to hire a nanny or domestic help. Why did so few people mention they had no money to pay a professional babysitter or cleaning person? Is not the problem rather cultural than that of insufficient infrastructure (no intensive demand means no offer?) or too high financial burden on families? (We are naturally aware of the fact that the prevailing majority of our respondents were from the middle and higher socioeconomic classes.) Historical demographers [13] report that it was never very usual in this country to give newborns to the care of other persons than the mother.

Obviously, the situation has not changed very much, as indicated by recent studies: “In the matters of work and care inside a family our society seems therefore relatively conservative. This concerns both the division of roles in the family and relying on public childcare facilities or paid private carers. Only a very small number of families use private childcare services and, on the contrary, giving a child to the care of a grandmother for at least a couple of hours is the everyday practice in many families.” [2]. And this has been also confirmed by some statements of our respondents (I cannot really imagine a nanny for a long period of a day or the whole day, or I could have imagined that before but now that the son is born I cannot – I want to see him growing and I am truly enjoying it • ... why should I do the ironing and scrubbing when I can hire a woman for a moderate fee, who will do it professionally, quickly, and I can be with the child, do something at home or just get out of the house. This is what I do – but please, be careful when processing my questionnaire – my partner has a different opinion of this and he does not know about it). Those using such help sometimes

have a feeling of failure (*I may sound as a heartless mother, that I got myself children and now I do not know what to do with them, but from September the children will go to a nursery school*). This is also confirmed by our everyday experience of field workers helping to families. Our clients are almost exclusively families where the child is the central value and where becoming a parent was a free and voluntary decision. Parents seek to fulfill their responsibility for the child to the maximum extent, which is extremely difficult. We are living in an era of various highly popularized studies dealing with developmental psychology and pediatrics, with the prevailing conviction that “nurture” is all-powerful, i.e. that a successful psychological, health and social development of a child is fully in the parents’ hands. No wonder that a responsible parent feels endless anxiety that he or she may neglect something, fail in some respect or otherwise harm the child and sets the highest demands on him/herself as a parent, or on the quality of pro-family services, while the quality in his/her eyes can be reached only by someone close – e.g. grandparent.

DO CHILDREN HOLD A RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER?

Strengthening of the relationship is one of the important incentives for parenthood, as indicated by the analysis of motivation; a partner relationship is also viewed as a significant precondition for the decision to become a parent. During pregnancy and immediately after the birth the expected fulfillment of the relationship is usually achieved (*... I never loved him so much as when I was pregnant and he took care of me all the time • So far the first pregnancy – only that big belly of mine – it really makes the relationship stronger, although I was little worried that my whale-like dimensions would rather put him off ... Now the baby is four days old and I believe that that it will make our relationship stronger and particularly richer • My husband is more caring and considerate now. He cares more about the household and what relates to preparations for the baby, the relationship is richer now. • My boyfriend looks forward to the child very much and at the same time he is concerned about my health and health of the baby.*). **The relationship goes through a test rather in the months and years after the delivery** (*We experienced a crises with my boyfriend once we had the baby at home. It is not that we wanted to split, but all of a sudden there was this little person who needed you more than anybody else. Before that, we had lived for each other, we had enjoyed trips together, we had gone out and now it is over • You can hardly speak of a relationship because we do not have much time for that. My wife is happy when I spend time with the kids after I get back home from work and she can have a rest for a while. When the children finally fall asleep we do not manage to do much after that • ...it is true that from partners we became parents overnight and the change was really fundamental – the two of us will no more be the most important persons – the baby will be the most important for ever – it is a perceptible shift in the relationship and luckily we feel it both that way, because I cannot imagine that I would see it that way and my husband would not.*).

Some respondents mentioned **Strengthening of the relationship** (*Neither of us has said it aloud but I am sure we both felt it the same way – family is a much stronger bond than a partnership. It is a completely different quality • Relationship ... the children were its culmination, crown, fulfillment. Only now I have started feeling as a real woman, before that I was a girl, even at twenty-five. Despite my greasy hair and draggled home clothes, I felt like a Mother, I felt a huge inflow of self-confidence, peace and strength • ... we were nervous etc. etc., but in principle I believe it has made our relationship stronger and mainly it has moved it to completely different dimensions . Suddenly we are a family • my wife and I see the first child as an asset. I cannot specifically explain why but that is the way it is • The child has definitely made our relationship stronger. I would even say that when we argued the child was a tie between us and it helped to calm down the stirred emotions • I do not see much difference, except that we have all these additional duties connected with the child. Naturally, if we had more children so you would spend more time with them and we would have less time for each other but I do not see this as a negative, we simply needed the children for the marriage.*). **Other couples struggle with bigger or smaller problems in the relationship and they mentioned Disruption of the relationship** (*The second child has brought another change, although less radical – we had known it might get difficult. It again disrupted our relationship as the second child was even more demanding than the first one. It is hard to balance the priorities – to reconcile the needs of the child with those of your partner • Our relationship probably suffered quite a lot, we probably should not have rushed with the first baby • It was definitely worth it but whether it was beneficial for the relationship, that I am not sure of • The first child estranged me from my husband very much as he did not find time for us, he did not help when it was needed and he spent little time at home. Even after the second child was born I was alone quite a lot • The relationship is dismal. We live together just because of the children. My husband spent time with them and he was happy when they were born • Luckily, I was able to talk my partner into it and it worked out – But the relationship was strongly affected by that. I thought it would disappear totally when the child is born but it did not happen. He even went to the registry to get recorded as the father. He started taking care when the baby was seven months. We had been in the US for a month and he got this impression – quite correct – that me and our baby girl may as well live without him), **which may lead to Break-up of the relationship** (*personally I was not ready for the total destruction of my current life, unfortunately, among other things it also affected the relationship with my husband, who was unable to cope. We split two years later. Something is said about the pre-adoption period, how it may “mess-up/disrupt“ relationships – lack of preparation for potential problems in relationship ... • We have been alone with my daughter for two months. After five years of marriage I decided to get a divorce. I never managed to do things at home as my husband imagined that. The clothes waited a month for ironing in the living room, the dishes were not washed immediately after lunch. There were many more problems in the marriage and they were much more serious • When I got back home from the maternity hospital I was so busy with the work around children, we did not get much sleep at night, my husband started missing the peace, he slept overnight at work and all this lead to total estrangement and finally to the break-up – although we were seeing a marriage councilor for over a year • If only one of the parents is the carer and the other is not involved, the children cannot benefit the relationship, with the time the parents either live together as strangers or they split, the purpose of the marriage and parenthood disappears. I would have wanted the children anyway, perhaps even more, but I would have thought more about choosing the right father • ...the relationship with my husband was not able to cope. He did not believe that I was tired, he and his mother kept picking on me, they said I was lazy and messy, simply impossible, he blackmailed**

me and was not willing to babysit so I did not have any time for myself, I did not get enough sleep so I broke down, started drinking quite a lot and then I was on antidepressants for a year, whenever I complained about something my husband said I was crazy, he hated when I screamed ... he now takes care of the child more, he spends more time with him but we do not get along well any more, we do not care about each other, we live like roommates in a dormitory – we do not have sex.).

And although the time with little children is also viewed as the time of **Changes in sexual life** (... what has happened with our sex life is also complicated – it may be temporary but at the moment I perceive my partner mainly as a father and myself as a dairy and service provider), not always, however, is the change to the worse (... we live like roommates in a dormitory – we do not have sex • Also sleep deprivation, exhaustion and the related less active sex life and we did not have time for each other at all); some couples speak about a positive change (Also the sexual life has been affected favorably by the child. My husband is more attentive and I am less demanding). And when the children get older the changes may be very surprising (When kids were born I did feel not like having sex for a couple of years so now it seems like a second breath. As I say... circles before my eyes and here I go. My husband must think I am weird because he really did not want it yesterday and I laid him down.).

Respondents, whose relationship was disrupted, mentioned **Disproportionate division of work**. The thing is that parenthood is associated with the traditional division of roles as it is the most effective way to handle the quantity of work. The couples who expected the demands (Before we had children me and my husband had not lived just for ourselves, we had taken care of the grandparents so it was no shock for our relationship that everything started turning around the baby) and who do not mind traditional arrangement or who were prepared for it, probably handled the situation better (It is true that we have the classical model, with the man at work and the women taking care of the household . But my wife does not mind – I do not think she is pretending it – so she deserves great thanks.). For many, however, this was unplanned and unexpected (Unfortunately, my husband has been raised to believe that all housework should be done by the woman. I said that I did not study so long to be a maid, cook and cleaning woman and he responded that I should not have gotten married) and they may perceive it as unfair, either rightfully (I cannot wait to say “I am not going to do anything because I am tired from work “ • ... when we are cleaning he keeps offending me by saying that I am messy and incapable and that he is doing the work for me. Sometime I also learn from him that I do not even cook – I actually work on a computer at home and sometimes I fix only a quick meal – my husband is used to two warm meals a day from his original family. Mostly I cook regular meals, including soup, but the thing is my husband eats the meal and immediately forgets about it and then he gets angry again, from his point of view quite legitimately. Moreover, he believes the dishes should be washed by the person who made them dirty. Additionally, he finds it natural that I take care of our boy most of the time, as it was me who wanted a child), or unjustly (Ha ha, in most of couples with children I know the women stays at home with children and they still divide the housework about 50:50, which is quite unfair to the guy. Then I meet unshaved phantoms, who get five hours of sleep and do various dangerous things – most recently one of them let an electric heater on and left the building). The fairness and unfairness actually depend on subjective evaluation, which depends on expectations and on the relationship. Some couples have been able to manage non-gender division of roles within limits acceptable for both (Benefits for our relationship: We have learned to compromise, to divide the work in a certain way, regardless of male or female roles • ...my wife stayed at home with children and a bigger part of the work was on her. But whenever I was at home I tried to help. What is so strange about it? What do you expect? The wife is at home, she cooks meals, cleans the house and when I get back in the afternoon she has her things done and I take the child and spend time with it and she can have time for herself. Then I put the baby to sleep and we have time for each other).

Conclusions

It is obvious that a child is not the culmination of a relationship but a rather its catalyst (When it comes to the relationship – I would say that in confrontation, when dealing with problems concerning children – it is kind of “real, serious “, simply there is no more space for “packaging“ • perhaps you do not have much time for your partner in the first years but both the partners must understand the limitation. I absolutely do not see it as negative, this is why you have children, to fill the time with something meaningful). Good relationships get stronger, bad ones weaker. The topic of parenthood and relationship was also important in the section dealing with the help needed by parents; respondents pointed to the importance of having enough time to work on the relationship. Authors of a very interesting study on parental traps [8] have come to the conclusion that the two most important things are realistic expectations and good relationship, which has been confirmed by our analyses as well. The realistic expectations concern primarily the scope and division of housework; the dissatisfaction is not caused by the actual share of the partners on the housework but by the difference between expectations and reality. The authors of the study say that the father’s share on the housework and care of the child is the most significant predictor of

adjustment to the parental role, both in women and men (*The children have improved our relationship. I feel that he loves me because he spends his time with my children*).

Books preparing people for parenthood [7], [8], [31] stress the importance of choosing the right partner. Couples should know that their relationship will change and that there will be changes in their sexual life, that first-time mothers will be more stressed. And, most importantly, the couples should know that a child will not resolve their bad relationship. However, it is fairly difficult to guess the partner's response in a difficult situation; only the difficult situation can test it. This does not mean that we underestimate the importance of realistic expectations (*... it made the relationship significantly stronger and better – after thirteen years of being together nothing negative could have surprised us*).

The respondents often stressed how essential it was to build and maintain the relationship in difficult conditions (*... the relationship certainly suffered by that and we had to correct it – we consciously worked on the relationship. Also in presence of the child • It is about dividing your love between two people, finding the way back to the other person • for us as partners it was demanding, particularly because we had to cooperate much more, to make arrangements, to plan things, I was much more dependent on my boyfriend – before that I had not been dependent practically at all • We had to consciously nurture our relationship and still it is much less intense now. Effective and constructive communication is much needed, otherwise you end up in a conflict easily • ... the effect is dramatic, many situations will arise to be dealt with and thus also conflicts, but many such situations are beautiful and joyful, once we are able to solve them*). We believe that this should be the central point of focus for various pro-family organizations: they should teach people to build their relationships and to support their efforts by providing quality and reliable pro-family services.

HOW AND WHEN DOES THE RELATIONSHIP WITH A CHILD ARISE?

Realistic expectations are important not only in a relationship with the partner (or his/her share on caring of the child) but also in respect to the child. In the section analyzing motives for parenthood we did not support its biological determination – parental instinct. We also looked for answers to the question how and when the relationship with the child arises. The topic is important particularly (but not exclusively) for people whose path to parenthood has been somehow aggravated (couples using treatment with donor gametes, applicants for substitute family care, involuntarily childless people, ...). The biologizing theories (e.g. sociobiology – [6]) stress biological, primarily genetic, ties. They insist that individuals tend to maximize their evolution success, i.e. how much they push their genes through into other generations. The social constructivism theory insists that the social reality is not objectively determined for the individual as a fact but it is continually constructed in the process of social interaction and communication. It builds on psychosocial ties.

Statements by our respondents on the topic "relation to the new-born baby immediately after the birth and later" included a whole range between two extremes. Some reported **Strong wave of parental love** (*I was flooded by a giant wave of maternal love and I found my son the most beautiful in the world • The wave of paternal love immediately after the birth was intense – tears • She was immediately our little Julia and we wanted to be with her all the time • It does not matter whether it the first baby or the third, but when you see him for the first time you get flooded with this "maternity wave" • ... yes, this is perfectly arranged by the nature that despite you cannot imagine yourself to be a parent once the baby is born it all comes. With us it was a wave of enormous love to this helpless little creature and immediately after that the feeling of responsibility for every moment of its life*), other have **Nice, but not as strong feelings** as they had expected (*I have naturally very nice memories of seeing my two children for the first time. But I suppose my love to them developed gradually*). Another, fairly big group of respondents felt **No relationship to the child** immediately after the delivery (*I have to admit that after the first delivery I did not feel any "Wave of maternal love" • Nothing flooded me. Although I looked forward to it so much, my first feeling was probably amazement • With the first child I had expected the flood of love as you read about it in books, but it was rather a flood of feelings of insecurity and recognizing the huge responsibility, which I felt at that time rather as a burden. • When my first daughter was born I had no maternal feelings then • I had wanted the children but the pregnancy and delivery did not wake up anything in me, it all came to me later, slowly and in the course of time*).

People were often disappointed by unfulfilled expectations and they had **Worries about their parental competence** (*I was thinking for a while whether I was actually normal. One week after my daughter was born, she cried day and night and I was terribly tired and I asked myself whether I was able to love this "screaming baby" at all • ... then I remember myself lying and thinking this had been a mistake and that we should not have had the baby, because I actually had not wanted it so strongly – and that now it turned out – that I had no maternal feelings etc. • Immediately after the delivery I did not actually feel any flood of feelings to my child. Then I thought of myself as weird*), but this is no rule (*... after the delivery I was not flooded by any major feeling but it was simply my child and I it did not simply occur to me not to love him*).

A significant number of respondents (including those who felt the wave of parental love after the birth) spoke of **Gradual relationship formation** (*... I knew it was our longed-for baby but I had to "recognize it" • Our mutual relationship definitely developed, through shared moments, new experiences, fear during illnesses etc. the maternal and paternal bonds got firmer and stronger. • In my case the relationship definitely developed and I would say it is culminating now that my daughter is two years old. • My love to the child developed gradually, hand in hand with what we experienced together. For example with each illness, with each obstacle we overcame, I loved him more • ... the relationship developed only later. It started up with the responsibility • definitely there was this wave of maternal love, enthusiasm, contentment, joy that here I have a child of my own, I was proud of my "achievement". But the true, well-founded and deserved love comes with the time you spend with the child, with the daily worries and joys • ... I experienced the birth more rationally than emotionally and the relationship developed later*). For the relationship to arise, many respondents found pregnancy more important than the birth (*I had felt maternal love since my positive pregnancy test • I was feeling the wave of maternal love while I was pregnant • My relationship to the child had developed already during my pregnancy and it only naturally continued when the baby was born*), and feeling during the birth may also depend on positive feelings during pregnancy (*When our first son was born I was at the delivery and tears from my eyes gushed out like half a meter. With the second son it was different. We had plenty of time to look forward to the first son and we were too busy caring for him to look forward to the second one, and so it was not that strong anymore*). A big role in feeling the "wave of parental love" immediately after the birth can be also played by the delivery itself (*The delivery of my daughter was awful. I was torn down there and they took her away immediately. Not that I felt like seeing her • ... with the first child I did not feel any wave – I was happy that the mother and the baby survived • ... It is hard to describe what I was feeling when the delivery was finally over, but*

probably enormous relief and fatigue • ... when they pulled out the baby I remember that I actually did not care much what it was and when they gave me the baby to my arms there was this inflow of feelings).

But mind, similar feelings are also felt by adoptive and foster parents. They may feel **Powerful wave of parental love** (*When I saw my adoptive son for the first time in a photograph – it was “love at first sight” • While I was expecting I experienced some hormonal changes, including measurable ones. With the daughter I was even able to breastfeed (I breastfeed formula with hoses and also my own milk), perhaps also thanks to herbs and not being on a pill so long. With my first one – son – I experienced a long absolute euphoria at the beginning • With one of my four adopted children I felt the sparkle leap, with the others it was more gradual. The reason was that the baby was very young and I think it was the helplessness • I also wondered whether I would love him immediately, whether I would have the maternal feeling, because it was a completely strange child. But I stopped wondering when we both came home. He was chosen for us and we were chosen for him. He is our sun, the purpose of our life. I am glad I could experience it, to think about it and realize certain things more, as I would never have had this with a biological child, I am pretty sure. I am very grateful that we had made the decision and I see the adoption as the best thing in my life*), they may also experience **Gradual relationship formation** (*With the baby girl it was more complicated, also because of the health condition of our son and because of the increasing pressure on the relationship with my husband. I was able to create a relationship with her, as satisfactory as the one with my son, only a couple of months later • My relationship developed gradually, the first meeting was pretty uneasy, especially on my son’s side. No wave actually. But I liked him very much. He is my son, I wake up at his slightest mewl, I can easily tell what his cry means – anger, pain, fear ... I can tell his voice among other children voices. I would behave, feel and act the same with my biological child – I really mean it*). And non-biological parents definitely experience **Concerns about their parental competence** (*They say the relationship to biological children may be somehow different from that to adopted children, due to the birth. However, I do not agree. I think it is inside the person, because some foster mothers ask me and they say it cannot be true, that you should actually love the foster children equally as your own and I do not agree. I think you can love all them the equally but you simply relate to them differently because each child needs a different mother*). But this topic already exceeds the scope of this brochure.

Conclusions

We incline to the theory that the relationship parent – child is more based on communication (verbal and non-verbal) and on shared intimacy than on the biological link. This is also supported by the discussion about media-exposed mix-up babies in the maternity ward in Třebíč. The crucial factor for the relationship with a child is the time spent together (*I created a warm relationship with my fourth child even before my wife. She contracted an infectious disease after she had given birth and I took care of the children*), **parenting experience** (*The feeling when I for the first time saw and held my first born son and later the other children, is hard to describe. Certainly with the other children the feeling developed and deepened. With the first one it was a paternal love and with the last one it was, well, kind of maternal love. • I considered the first children as my wife’s matter – they were born to “her”, but the last one, when I was for the first time at the delivery, was born to “us”*) **and the desire for a child** (*I find the expression “wave of paternal love” exaggerated, it was rather hard to identify. This expression may be probably fitting for parent who had waited long for the child. Otherwise the relationship to the child develops gradually • Feeling your own flesh and blood? I do not know. Perhaps the desire exists for the feeling to exist, and I believe the feeling “your own blood” may arise from that huge desire*). This topic is serious, also because ever more people, whose desire to have children fails to materialize, opt for infertility treatment with donor gametes. A more detailed research is still ahead.

CONCLUSIONS

Psychologists, social workers and other, the so-called helping professions usually expected to provide straightforward and hundred percent advice. This is not what we have provided in this brochure. We have described parenting as a very demanding role, full of uncertainties and risks. But we can perhaps reduce the uncertainties and risks in some way. In this section we have listed statements provided by the parents on how happy they are about their decision. We did not divided group them into any categories as we think the best way will be to present them without any comments.

- *Positively, the answer is yes. I wanted maximum two children before, now I can imagine having more. That was really worth it ! Benefit for the relationship – yes , even though we sometimes have different opinions about how to raise them, but I suppose it is normal. Now we are a family and that is the way it should be. We are all content. My partner's response would be at least equally positive – he would only praise the positives more (that is him, who spoils the kids)*
- *Yes, yes, yes!!! Everything was the way it should have been. All turned out great. We have survived the puberty of our daughters and now we have at home two smart and beautiful friends. One is sensitive and empathic after me, the other is rational and witty after her daddy. We gave them the best from us, their childhood was pro-active and content – and we are harvesting the produce now. I know it sounds improbably idyllic, but I would wish that to everybody.*
- *I would not probably change anything. It was a good decision to have a child, and also the other child. And if we have a third one, that is fine as well. This will certainly affect the partnership because we do not have time or energy to look for petty mistakes but we much rather watch how the kids are growing etc. It is fairly possible that if we had no children we would not have had each other now.*
- *I do not regret it but it has been the single most demanding and hardest thing I have ever done and I should say that I have achieved quite a few things professionally and personally*
- *I cannot imagine my life without the children. We had (and still have) beautiful and harmonious marriage. We would do the same thing again. We love our children and grandchildren, even though there are more worries than delights now that they are adults.*
- *On the whole I would say that a birth of a child and parenthood in general is another step upward on the way of life values and that step is pretty high ...*
- *My daughter is now a teenager so we are having some problems. I suppose I should have done sometimes more, sometimes less, I should have done some things differently. Now I am doing things differently. I am more patient. Perhaps I should have chosen a different partner. I do love my children. I decided to have my son, despite my husband did not want it, and I would do it again. My husband would answer that he did not want the second child.*
- *Children are a great gift and they have made my life much richer. It was the best invested time in my life. The children have improved our relationship. I feel that he loves me because he spends his time with my children. From the today's prospective, I may have handled one more.*
- *The time after the twins were born was very demanding (mentally, physically, socially and financially) I do not regret anything. Equally, I do not regret that I had my last son, on the contrary, I enjoyed being a mother after so many years. Although neither of my marriages lasted (the first marriage failed just because of the children – more unexpected), I and my ex-husbands do not regret, we get along quite nicely. We have come to the conclusion that children have made our lives richer, they taught us many new things and the fact the relationships fell apart later resulted in a better understanding to each other and to the children. If I could choose again, whether to have children or not – I would definitely say yes. I even regret that I am not going to have a child anymore.*
- *Benefits for our relationship: We have learned to compromise, to divide work in a certain way, regardless of male or female roles. My husband says he is grateful now that I was unyielding and insisted on IVF (without it we would have been childless) and now he is very happy that we have children.*
- *I am proud to be a father and I will happily share the experience.*
- *The choice was excellent ... We would have had much less fun and nice relationships. It also helps to build the marriage. I hope to have more children. They sometimes make my husband tired. He does not like that the house is so busy. He would prefer not to have more children.*
- *When looking at it from a distance – I mean the decision to have children – it was excellent. My character has considerably changed thanks to the children (from impatient to patient, from lazy to hardworking, from unreliable to reliable, from "hard" to forgiving, from selfish to giving...). If I was to decide again my decision would be the same – to have children, and even to have three.*

- *When the children are nice and “at ease“, then I am happy to have them and I look forward to the years we are going to have together. When they are naughty, particularly the older one, then I ask myself whether I failed as a parent, whether I should have remained single and childless, whether it would have been better for my children not to have any father at all*
- *It was a good choice to have children, I would not want to be without either of them. And it was also a good choice to accept children into foster care. Our marriage became stronger and more integral. Our life in marriage is better now than at the beginning. Still, we have not experienced any major conflicts.*
- *The fact I have had a child means a big contribution (enrichment) to my life. Unfortunately, to my ex-husband the child was only a “money guzzler“. Today I do regret that I have only one child, but because my husband did not want to have more and because the marriage later fell apart I do not have other children.*
- *The life with children in foster care is very satisfactory and fulfilling for me, despite all the problems. I would not give it up and I know that my choice was beneficial of me. I would want children again, and if possible I would want those I have now ... I have two children and I love them but I do not think that if I did not have them my life would have been worse ..., it would have been only different.*
- *My best friend has a little Nikolka, a two year-old girl, but I would not say she is all beside herself of happiness. She is angry that she has no time for herself, Nikolka is the center of everything.*
- *I know an old couple who could have children but they decided not to, they travel even now that they are old, they enjoy life and they feel no pain or deprivation in their life. Now they are about seventy and they say they do not regret it, that they have had a good life.*
- *At one time I also prattled that we cannot have a child because our income is too low and that it would restrict our career etc. Then we had our son (a little bit unplanned) and, surprise, it did not stop my or my wife’s career, we still travel on holiday and I would not say we are any poorer. On the contrary, the quality of our life is much much better.*
- *I will be turning forty soon. I do have a little bit of a career but otherwise it is the same – my husband, money, satisfaction with life and, particularly, the total absence of any maternal instinct. On the other hand I believe that if it happened, one way or the other, and if I had a child, I would be able to give it my love and care.*
- *Having children is risky. There are so many things that may go wrong. But anyway, I am very happy that we have them.*
- *When I was young I personally did not want children either, but luck would have it. I am content but I can imagine my life as a single and childless woman and I am quite sure I would not suffer. When you are dissatisfied your problems will not be resolved or mitigated by a child or a family.*
- *I have destroyed my figure for ever, yes, I will not buy new shoes because I have to buy shoes for the children, every three months actually, I will not go on holiday because we simply do not have money for it, yes, my career is gone, I take no yoga or salsa lessons because I do not have a babysitter but ... this is what I wanted.*
- *Now I do not have to remember so many female names, one is enough (actually two – we have a girl). And I definitely do not feel somehow deprived, on the contrary, I have rediscovered my forgotten hobbies, I live a lot healthier ...*
- *Well, I would just add ... I go to bed with kids at night, we chat and tickle one another, we feast on gummy bears and I can snuggle and smell their sweet bodies after the bath – this is something I would not exchange even for a Bill Gates’ bank account.*
- *If I were in my husband’s place I would want children as well. He is working on his career, he is continuing to indulge in his hobbies, his friends and when he gets back home in the evening, he only takes the best things from the baby – he would cradle him for a while and that is it. And me? It is all over. My life has turned around 180 degrees, compared to my previous pro-active life I cannot do anything, I cannot go anywhere, I have lost actually everything – my friends, interesting job, which I cannot have with the baby, hobbies... Yes, I have got the little one but if my husband leaves me (which unfortunately happens quite often), very likely I will not be able to find a decently paid job and the child may be even given to the father because he has the same rights, although he did do a thing to raise him. He works, right? Well, I also work while I am at home with the child, but I get paid very little. I would never do it again.*
- *If I am to compare from the viewpoint of emotion a holiday in the Caribbean and the welcome I get from my one-year old son when I get back home from work then the boy would win a resounding victory.*
- *I do have a child, I wanted it, I love it but I do not see maternity to be the purpose of life.*
- *But I was example much prouder of Ondra, when he trained to be a brush maker than when my first born son passed an A-level exam. Because it was fairly clear that Danik would pass it and then study at the faculty of mathematics and physics but it was far from clear whether Ondra would become the brush maker.*
- *And I keep telling myself that we can do it well, we are equipped for the children, we have had ten of them, now we only have five and we can easily manage two more boys here. And I know it is going to be worries, work and*

lottery, because they will be again handicapped children, and in the eyes of teachers I will be again the mother with problematic children. But it is still hardwired in me, that this is the biggest purpose in life – to love someone, to help him to live in a normal family, to make his or her life agreeable. This research focuses on what it is like to be a parents, even with assisted reproduction, and I am happy I was able to get pregnant and experience delivery, breastfeeding. But children home are full of kids and I suppose that choosing this way – to be a substitute parent, it is not bad at all!

- I have paid for my daughter, and it was not sure at all it was going to work, 300 thousand for the artificial insemination. I somehow cannot understand the women who voluntarily give up that feeling – joy, happiness and FULFILLMENT in general. And they can get all this for free :-) I WOULD HAVE GIVEN A MILLION, then as well and now ...

- Children keep me in “reality”, but I am glad they are big now. It was lots of work and even more responsibility. Today I am no more attracted by little children, I was taking care of them full time for twenty years. The work is done 24 hours a day and nobody appreciates that, neither financially nor morally. People much more respect the “father” who did not care of them a minute. But otherwise he is all successful, doing his career and highly regarded. He has what he wants and who he wants, as it is with money. But the children are good quality.

- I did not really have a desire for children, moreover, they doctors said I was infertile when I was as young as fourteen, but probably the children desired me and so I simply have them. I cried every time when I got pregnant – how am I going to manage? – well, and now the boys are adult...

- I can recall the situation very well, when I went with my classmates to a “booze” and I was one of the last one who did not have children. Some of my classmates who had kids, in my opinion, too early (they were 23) and after a while I asked them off-handedly: “What is so great about the children? It seems like troubles and worrying from morning till night.” One of them turned to me and said: “Can you imagine how beautiful it is when they are asleep?” I was aghast at the answer. What is that for it is beautiful only when asleep?! Hmmm, when my hormones went berserk, I finally understood. After a strange day full of crying and anxiety, I was standing over a cot and I told myself how she was – sleeping - and at that moment I remembered about my schoolmate. She was right.

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