

# Mother and child”: a comparative analysis of socio-cultural discourses

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**Abstract.** This article discusses the phenomenon of motherhood through the prism of dyadic relations "mother-child" in an interdisciplinary context: biological, medical, psychological and social aspects are given. The analysis of factors affecting the occurrence of various kinds of problems in dyadic relations is carried out. The data of various studies in different countries, on various social and age groups of respondents are considered. The aspects affecting the dyad and perception of oneself as a mother that arise after childbirth, as well as factors that arise long before motherhood, are evaluated. The article describes the results of a study among unmarried girls regarding their readiness for motherhood, positioning themselves as expectant mothers. The empirical study involved 319 female full-time students at Southern Federal University, aged 18 to 22 years. According to the results of the study, it was determined that most of the girls are not ready to become mothers, not for reasons related to health, but because of a lack of necessary knowledge and skills. They lack information to complete a holistic view of the upbringing and education of the child.

## 1 Introduction

Today we often turn to an interdisciplinary approach in order to study a particular scientific problem from different angles, to do a better analysis. But there are such phenomena that in principle cannot be studied by the methods of one science, they are interdisciplinary in nature.

A striking example of this is the phenomenon of motherhood. What is more biological or social in it? On the one hand, this is an instinct due to the action of the hormone oxytocin, on the other hand, biological mechanisms have remained unchanged for centuries, and new models of maternal behavior appear in society: an example is the phenomenon of “social orphanhood” or a completely new type of positioning, called "I'm mother' (Iammother)".

What is even more remarkable in the phenomenon of motherhood is that the object in this phenomenon is dual. The study of motherhood is impossible in isolation from the child: his characteristics, behavioral reactions, needs in many ways (although, of course, not completely!) Determine what his mother will be. And on the other hand: a mother with an conniving type of behavior will “force” the child into more expressive reactions to attract her attention; An anxious mother will form anxious behavior in her child, etc. At a certain stage of development, two separate human organisms are so closely connected (biological, psychological, social) and

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so interdependent that for understanding the processes occurring between them, for helping them, it is more advisable to talk about a single whole formed by them two. It is this idea of the psychological and physiological unity of maternal and child organisms that formed the basis of the concept of “dyad”.

Modern researchers note that the nature of the relationships that form in the mother-child dyad is influenced by a large number of independent factors of biological, psychological and social nature. Biological factors may include the nature and timing of delivery, as well as the somatic health of the mother and newborn. So, according to the results of a study conducted by a group of scientists from Bicocca University of Milan, preterm delivery affects the development of the “maternal constellation” (the term Daniel Stern, denoting changes that occur with a woman in relation to her system of values and attitudes) and, therefore, on their transition to motherhood. These difficulties, according to the authors of the study, can affect the development of maternal identity, self-representation of the mother of her child and the relationship with him [5]. Another team of authors also implemented a study aimed at studying the effect of preterm birth on the peculiarities of building relationships in the mother-child dyad. In accordance with the results of this study, mothers of preterm infants showed a higher level of obsession ( $M_{\text{preterm birth}} = 4.07 \pm 0.74$ ,  $M_{\text{full-term birth}} = 4.39 \pm 0.51$ ,  $t = 2.22$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ) and remoteness ( $M_{\text{premature babies}} = 4.45 \pm 0.83$ ,  $M_{\text{full-term babies}} = 4.79 \pm 0.34$ ,  $t = 2.51$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) than mothers of full-term children. From the data obtained, the researchers conclude that preterm delivery can be a risk factor for the interactive relationship between a mother and a premature baby [2].

Another biological factor affecting the maternal identity development is the nature of feeding the baby. According to a study by Ellie J. Lee in the UK, feeding babies with milk can compromise the identity of women as “good mothers.” The author notes that the maternal experience of women who do not practice breastfeeding includes such components as “moral collapse”, a sense of disobedience, and the decision to act alone in response to “information overload”. Thus, the biological factor - breastfeeding - causes the corresponding social attitude, which ultimately affects the psychological state of women [3].

A significant number of studies are devoted to the analysis of the influence of the childbirth nature on the subsequent psychological state of the mother. In part of these works, the influence of a certain type of delivery on the development of relationships between mother and child is also monitored. Psychologists from the David Ben-Gurion University of the Negev conducted a study of the severity of postpartum psychopathology and the presence of disturbances in communication with the baby among mothers who underwent emergency and planned caesarean section, as well as vaginal delivery. As a result of the study, it was found that the most traumatic effect is the emergency cesarean section, which has a negative effect on the psychological state of the mother and her relationship with the child. According to Israeli scientists, it is possible to reduce the adverse effect of operative delivery by enhancing the perceived mother's social support and developing a sense of coherence [4].

Studies that are at the intersection of medical and psychological data can also include a number of studies studying the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after childbirth on mother-baby interaction. One such study is the work of Italian scientists C. Ionio and P. Di Blasio (Chiara Ionio & Paola Di Blasio). The aim of their study was to find out whether symptoms of postpartum stress can affect the relationship between mother and child. According to the results of the study, it was found that persistence of symptoms of PTSD has a greater effect on early interaction between mother and child, compared with women who did not have postpartum symptoms of stress [1].

The influence of postnatal symptoms of post-traumatic stress and depression on the relationship of the couple and the relationship between the parent and the child is also devoted to the study of scientists from the University of Sussex (University of Sussex). In this study, the symptoms of PTSD and depression reliably correlated with the relationship of the couples and

the bonds of the parent and child. It was proven that the symptoms of PTSD had a direct effect on the relationship between the parent and the child, but the effect of PTSD on the relationship of the couples was mediated by depression [6].

Despite the fact that the usual consideration of the mother-child dyad is built after the birth of a child, do not underestimate the period when a woman only plans to become a mother. Motherhood, as a social, historical and biological phenomenon, is formed even before the appearance of the child. (Andreeva T.V., Kagan V.E., Ovcharova R.V., Sysenko V.A., Kharchev A.G.). Almost from birth, the girl is immersed in unconscious traditional knowledge of how to be a mother, which is transmitted from generation to generation. This method of knowledge transfer has long been dominant in the development of ideas about motherhood in girls [7].

The modern attitude to motherhood has undergone a number of significant changes both on the part of society as a whole, and in particular on the part of expectant mothers. Some researchers have noted a decrease in the importance of motherhood in favor of other social orientations (career, gender independence) (Rosen R., Twamley K.) [10]. It is also worth noting that, due to the development of science and medicine, almost all women can experience the happiness of motherhood, regardless of age [8], which in turn affects the knowledge about motherhood and the baby. So with an increase in age, responsibility for one's health and the health of the child also grows [9].

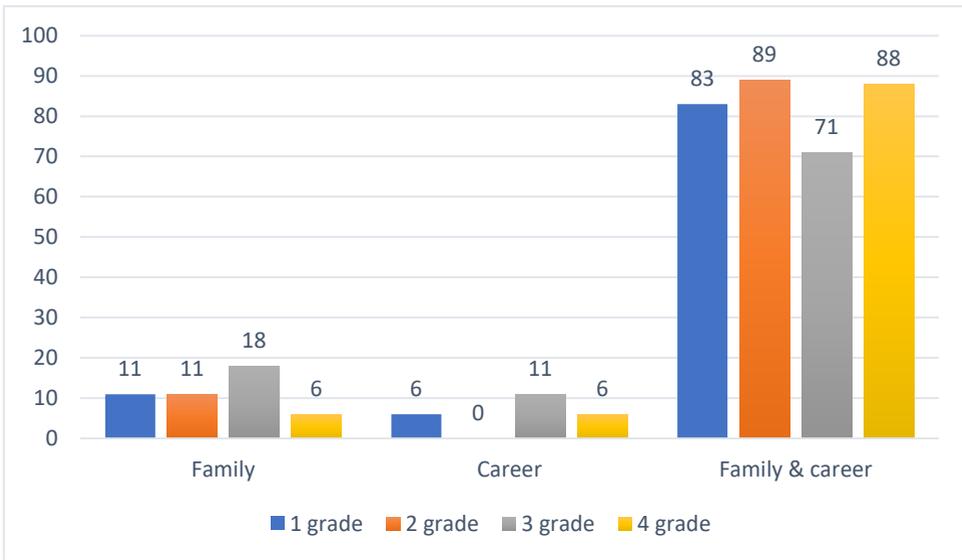
## **2 Research methods**

The study was conducted on the basis of the Southern Federal University. The empirical study involved 319 female students enrolled in full-time higher education (in the 1st year group - 79 people, in the 2nd year group - 80 people, in the 3rd year group - 83 people, in the 4 year group - 77 people). Age - 18-22 years.

The purpose of the study was to determine the readiness for motherhood of unmarried girls. To achieve this goal, a stating research strategy was used. The following methods were carried out: anamnestic survey and questionnaire.

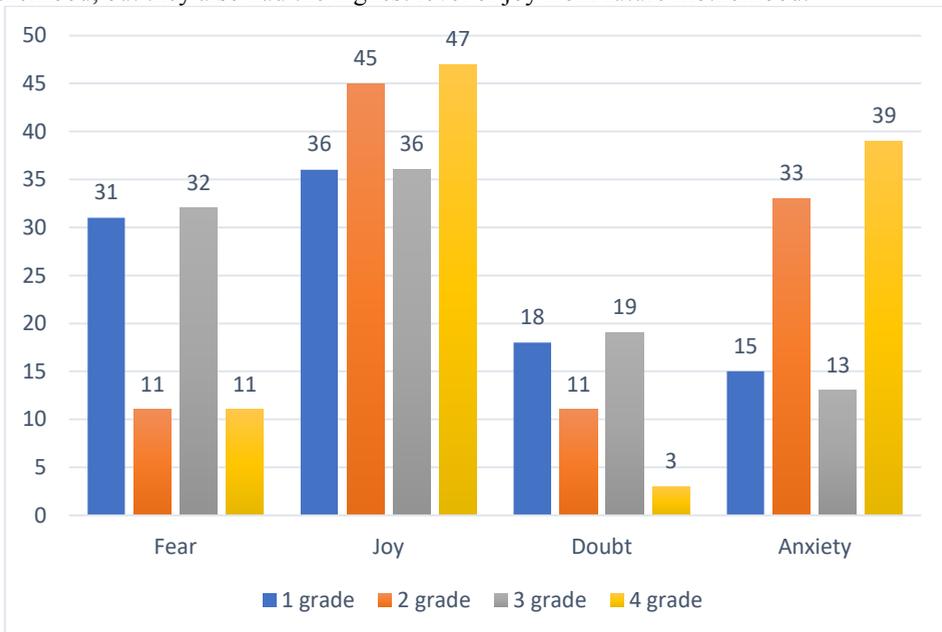
## **3 Research results**

The desire of female students to realize themselves exclusively as a spouse and mother in the same percentage ratio at the 1st and 2nd courses (11%), and at 3 - 18%, which exceeds the results of girls in the 4th year by 3 times. In turn, in the third year only 11% of girls prefer their careers, which is higher than in the 1st and 4th courses (6%). The possibility of combining family and career was supported by 89% of second-year students who did not separate their careers separately (0%). It is also worth noting that despite the high percentage of girls who are ready to combine both family and career in the 3rd year, this indicator is lower than the others and makes 71%, but the significance of only the family for 3rd year students is higher - 18% (Figure 1)



**Fig. 1.** Preferences of female students in choosing a career or creating a family

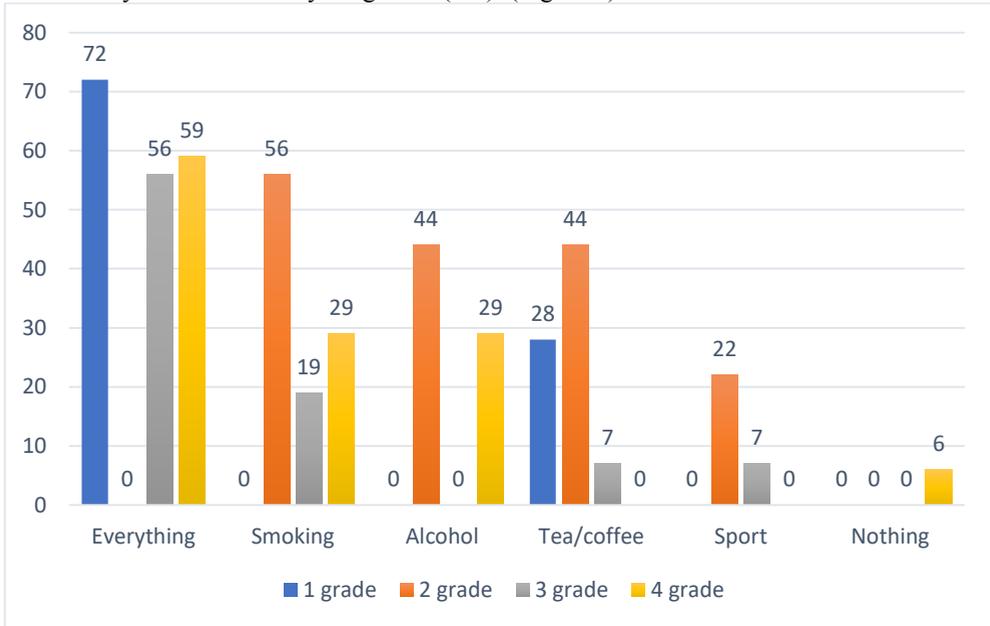
The desire to be a mother for girls is associated with certain experiences that do not always have a positive color (Figure 2). So, future parenting causes fear among 31% of 1st year students and 32% of 3rd year students. While 2nd and 4th year students associate it with a sense of anxiety (33% and 39%). 4-year student girls (3%) had a low level of doubt about motherhood, but they also had the highest level of joy from future motherhood.



**Fig. 2.** Attitude of female students to future parenthood

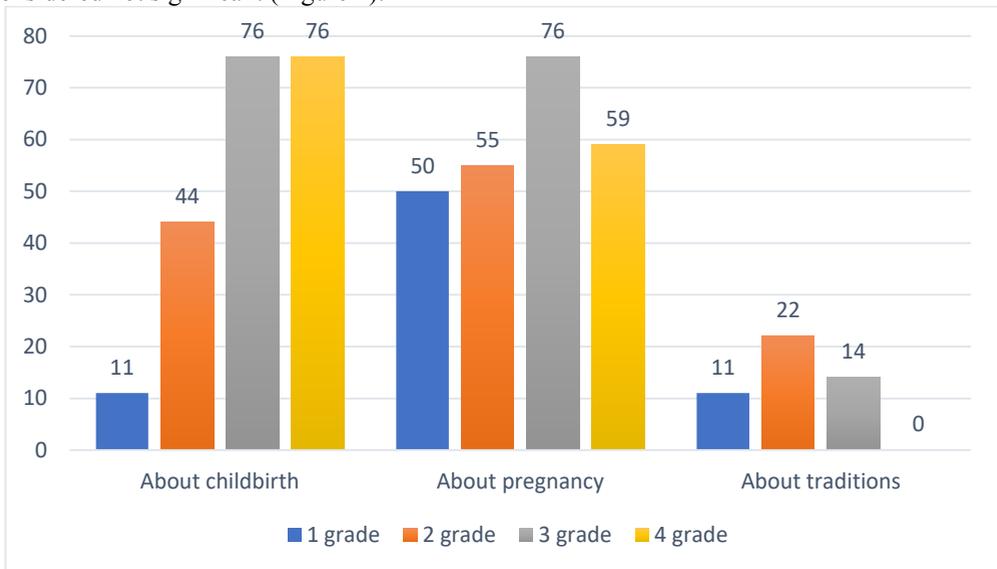
For students to receive joyful emotions and positive experiences from motherhood is the major dominant. And what would it really be like 72% of first-year female students are ready to protect themselves from negative pleasures as much as possible. 2nd year students are able to not smoke (56%), not to drink alcohol (44%), to reduce or remove caffeine from the diet (44%),

to stop playing sports (22%). The restrictions are reduced in the third year, while girls in the 4th year are ready not to forbid anything at all (6%) (Figure 3).



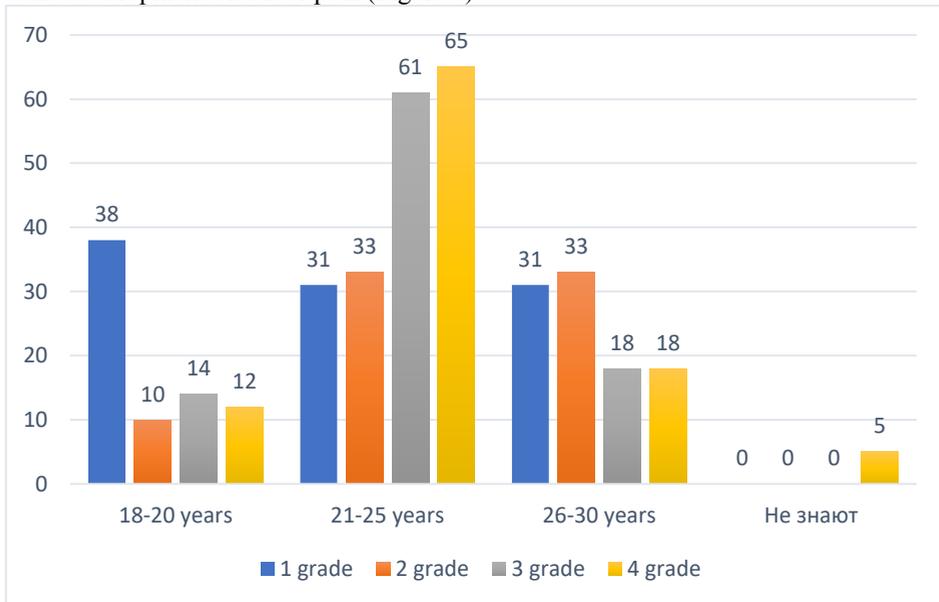
**Fig. 3.** Preparedness of female students to restrict pleasures during pregnancy

The desire to study the issue of motherhood and prenatal development, to better understand all the mechanisms of interaction "mother-child" can be traced at all courses. The peak of interest in pregnancy information falls on the 3rd course (79%). Knowledge about the child is relevant for students of 3 and 4 courses (76%). It is worth noting that the information on the traditions associated with pregnancy, childbirth and the upbringing of a girl student is considered not significant (Figure 4).



**Fig. 4.** The need for knowledge about the prenatal and early development of the child

According to female students of the 1st year, the birth of a child should be between the ages of 18-20 (38%). This time period reflects their education at the university, which may indicate a desire to have a child and give birth to them. At the same time, students of 3 and 4 courses consider the age of 21-25 years old (61% and 65%), the age when the training is already completed, to be optimal. Female students of the 2nd year equally distinguish the age of childbearing at 21-25 years (33%) and 26-30 years (33%), believing that the child should not affect the development of career path (Figure 5).



**Fig. 5.** Optimum age for childbirth

Thus, one can trace the influence of age and the desire to focus on the family or career, thereby shifting these factors in diametrically opposite directions. Maternity for girls is being replaced by education and career. Perhaps the value of education and career is a feature of this sample, due to the fact that these are university students.

It is worth noting that all the female students who took part in the survey are not married and do not have children, from socially prosperous full families, and also entered the university after school.

## 4 Conclusion

Modern digital space provides a tremendous stream of information that can transform any person. With the discovery of such opportunities, mankind has stepped over the turn of the century in an instant. Many social, cultural, scientific degrees of freedom have appeared. But such an abundance of information without proper structuring is not able to bring the desired result.

An important period for a woman to bear and give birth to a child has ceased to be the central leitmotif of a woman development. Social freedom gives rise to the idea of replacing the birth of a child - the "birth" of a career or a complete rejection of motherhood.

We recorded a low level of knowledge about perinatal culture. The dyad "mother and child" is considered only after birth, but it is assumed that you can interact with the baby in the womb. This provokes erroneous ideas about the upbringing and development of the child.

Most of the girls are not ready to become mothers not physically, but because of the lack of the necessary knowledge and skills. There is not enough information to complete a holistic view of the upbringing and education of the child. Now it is a kaleidoscope of the advice of their parents, articles in magazines, chapters from books, not always competent specialists from the Internet. And as a result, the incorrect psychosocial development of children, which can manifest itself both in the near future and in many years.

To change this situation, it is necessary to purposefully build a training vector on understanding all aspects of motherhood and childhood.

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