Who needs (or doesn't) three years of parental leave?

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Abstract: In this work we study the actual length of parental leave in Russia and the factors influencing it. In our estimates we use a survival analysis model applied to 20-year panel data from the nationally representative survey of the HSE RLMS.

According to the results, shorter actual parental leave is more often observed among women who have better connections with the labor market (a higher level of education, work experience) and wider external and intra-family resources for childcare. In contrast, older age, having another child and living in areas with lower mean wages discourage young mothers from returning to work. We also show that the probability of an earlier return to work after the birth of a first child in the 2010s decreased significantly compared to the 2000s, which we explain by the introduction of the maternity capital program and increased state support of families with children, which together with the stagnation of labor incomes could reduce the interest of families in an earlier return of young mothers to work.

International comparisons show that Russia belongs to the group of countries with the longest paid maternity and parental leave; at the same time, it is only in the 4th quintile in terms of the labor force participation rate among women aged 15-64. Taking these results into account, we suggest some improvements to the parental leave policy. Among other possibilities, we suggest considering flexible leave (reducing its duration while keeping the same total payment) and discontinuous leave (giving parents the right to go back on unpaid leave if necessary), as well as the introduction of non-transferable paternity leave.

Keywords: mothers, parental leave, maternity leave, employment of mothers, family policy, survival analysis, RLMS.

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1. Introduction

Despite relatively high overall female employment, Russia lags behind most developed countries in terms of the share of working women with children under the age of three: 24% versus 59% on average for OECD countries (Kolesnik, Pestova, Donina 2021). Among the reasons for this lag are the lack of childcare services, the lack of places in the preschool education system, the lack of partner support in caring for a child and the longer duration of parental leave compared with other countries.

Figure 1 summarizes information on the economic activity of women depending on the length of paid parental leave (including leave for pregnancy and birth) in 189 countries in 2019. A long leave is observed only in the countries of the former USSR (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Uzbekistan) and in the former countries of the socialist bloc (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic). At the same time, the level of economic activity of women in Russia is not high compared to other countries. Russia belongs to the 75st percentile of the countries of the world in terms of the level of economic activity of women aged 15-64 years.





Source: Authors' calculations based on World Bank data https://genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/#gender

Over the past decades, many countries have reformed their parental leave systems, thus providing researchers with data from a kind of natural experiment on the effect of the length and generosity of paid parental leave on fertility and subsequent female employment. For example, a reform carried out in 2007 in Germany included the replacement of a targeted allowance for up to two years with an earnings-related allowance paid over a period of one year. It has been shown (Bergemann, Riphahn 2022; Kluve, Tamm 2013) that, despite the lack of impact on

employment in the long term, the short-term effect of the reform was noticeable: mothers began to return to paid work earlier, immediately after the expiration of benefits. The reform had the greatest impact on high-income mothers, among whom employment of those with children older than a year increased significantly (Chirkova 2019).

In France, on the contrary, an experiment was undertaken to lengthen paid leave for a particular group of recipients. Starting in 2004, mothers of first children were offered the opportunity to extend paid parental leave for up to six months in the event of part-time employment. (Joseph et al. 2013) showed that for those who took longer leaves, employment increased at the end of the vacation, but relative wages decreased, with the effect most pronounced for the most educated women.

Numerous empirical studies suggest that the impact of job security for young mothers on the likelihood and quality of their future employment is mixed. Pettit and Hook (2005) have shown that the effect of parental leave duration on subsequent employment is not linear. The dependence of the probability of a mother's employment on the length of leave has an inverted U-shape: for not too large values, this effect is positive; the presence of a leave helps to maintain the connection of mothers with the labor market, but its extension significantly reduces the likelihood of employment.

A comparative study based on data for OECD countries (Thévenon, Solaz 2013) also confirms an inverted U-shape of the relationship between employment and vacation length: paid vacation, if less than two years, has a small positive effect on women's employment and contributes to a small narrowing of the gender gap in employment, while longer leaves reduce the likelihood of employment. In the case of wages, the dependence is unequivocal: longer paid leave contributes to the growth of the gender gap in wages. After a long maternity leave, a significant part of professional skills and human capital is lost, which subsequently becomes an important factor in the motherhood penalty, and also leads to an increase in the gender wage gap and a deterioration in the situation of the most vulnerable groups of workers, including mothers raising a child without a father (Morosow, Jalovaara 2019).

There is evidence that longer leave has a negative impact on the quality of a mother's subsequent employment. Finnish data have shown that a childcare allowance up to age three contributes to a longer absence from the workforce, which subsequently negatively affects women's working career (Morosow, Jalovaara 2019). In a study using data for Germany and the United States, it was shown that mothers who previously had a high employment status return to their jobs faster and are less likely to leave their careers (Grunow, Aisenbrey 2016). In another study, the authors showed that long periods of absence of paid work for women increase the risk of downward mobility and reduce the chances of career growth not only in Germany and the United States, but also in Sweden, where the level of support for maternal employment is traditionally high (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, Grunow 2009).

In our study, we wanted to look at how Russian women manage their leave. We were interested in which demographic and social groups of women tend to "sit out" their maternity leave or, conversely, go to work earlier than others.

The literature distinguishes 4 groups of factors influencing the decision concerning the use and duration of parental leave (Lapuerta, Baizán, González 2011). First, there are the individual characteristics of the parent on leave and the household in which he/she lives. Among the factors influencing the length of the leave, researchers note the level of education,

income, type of ownership of the enterprise the parent works for, the birth order of the child in the family (Evertsson, Duvander 2011). A higher level of education tends to correspond to a mother's greater connection to the workforce and therefore contributes to her earlier return to work. Women from low-income households stay on leave longer. The duration of a mother's leave in connection with the birth of a first child is slightly longer compared to subsequent ones (Hobson, Duvander, Halldén 2006). Studies also show non-random selectivity for the birth of a third and subsequent children (Andersson 2008).

The group of individual factors also includes the characteristics of the parent's employment, including the type of enterprise ownership, the number of working hours (the possibility of part-time work), working conditions, distance from home (Crompton 2006), and the level of wages. For example, work in a private enterprise has been shown to reduce leave time (Bygren and Duvander 2006), and workers with higher wages tend to return to work faster (Sundström and Duvander 2002).

The second group of factors are the characteristics of the partner, primarily the indicators of his education and employment (Lundberg, Pollack 1993). There is evidence both for the significance of these factors (Lappegard 2008) and for their significantly smaller effect on the length of leave compared to the individual characteristics of the parent on leave (Kuhlenkasper, Kauermann 2010). The third type of factors are related to gender values and societal norms, including the social acceptability of different family care arrangements and the division of care time and effort between partners (Paye and Sinyavskaya 2010; Zhou and Kan 2019). The fourth group of factors includes various institutional characteristics of the national and/or regional system of assistance to families in the care of children.

Russian studies of the employment of women with children mainly deal with the topic of the motherhood penalty (see, for example, (Nivorozhkina, Nivorozhkin, Arzhenovsky 2008; Oshchepkov 2020)). Based on Russian data, the size of the motherhood penalty was obtained, which is estimated as the percentage of losses in wages of women after the birth of a child compared with women without children with similar individual characteristics. For example, in the early 2000s, the penalty was estimated at 8% (Arzhenovsky, Artamonova 2007), and in a later work (Biryukova, Makarentseva 2017) it was about 4% for 2014. It was also shown that for more educated mothers, the relative size of the penalty is greater (Yermolina et al. 2016). In addition, there is empirical evidence that despite the presence of a motherhood penalty, the difference in wages between women with children and those without is generally smoothed out by the time a child reaches the age of 3-4 years (Yermolina et al. 2016).

At the same time, as far as we know, there are no Russian studies that examine the factors of the length of maternity leave. In our study, we will try to fill this gap and compare the results with estimates for other countries.

The article has the following structure. Section 2 presents the data and methodology of a quantitative study and summarizes the hypotheses formed based on the results of a literature review and a preliminary analysis of data for subsequent testing using regression analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the estimates obtained during the quantitative study (Results ection). The work concludes with a brief discussion about improving parental leave policy and the main conclusions of the study.

2. Data, methodology and research hypotheses

The object of our study is the duration of maternity leave, defined as the period of absence from the workforce from the moment a child is born. Using such a broad definition of leave allows us to include previously unemployed women in the analysis.

Sources of data on the length of maternity leave in Russia

We managed to find two sources of data on the duration of maternity leave in Russia: Russian Monitoring of the Economic Situation and Health of the Population of the National Research University Higher School of Economics (hereinafter RLMS) and Comprehensive Monitoring of Living Conditions of the Population of Rosstat (hereinafter CMLC). Each of these surveys has its own advantages and disadvantages.

The RLMS data have a panel structure that makes it possible to track events in the lives of respondents over several years. At the same time, we were able to estimate the duration of maternity leave in the RLMS only in years, not in months, as is done in most international studies. This is due to the lack of information in the RLMS about how many months the respondent worked in a given year (in a normal situation, it is not important). Thus, it is not possible to specify exactly when the woman returned from maternity leave.

The Rosstat CMLC data are not panel data, i.e., each time they represent a situation at a specific point in time without the possibility of comparing individual observations for different years. However, the survey for those on parental leave asks respondents to "Specify the month and year you went on leave, and in which month of this year you started work", which makes it possible to calculate the duration of the leave in months.

However, an attempt to include these data in the analysis was unsuccessful. The start date of the leave given by the respondents does not correlate well with the date of birth of the child, and the results of the regression analysis of the duration of the leave turned out to be counterintuitive (higher education contributes to a longer leave) and contradicted both the calculations based on the RLMS data and the results of studies for other countries. Most likely, the problem lies in the fact that respondents often find it difficult to name the exact date of a very distant event.

Empirical basis and construction of variables

The empirical basis of the study are the RLMS data for 2000-2020. The analysis used the longitudinal structure of the survey data, which makes it possible to follow the changes that occur with a woman and the household in which she lives from the moment of birth of a child to the start of work (completed observation episode) or until the last time she was present in the survey database (censored episode). We interpreted the duration of the leave as broadly as possible, defining it as the time spent by a woman not in the workforce from the moment the child was born.

We excluded the self-employed from the number of employed, since this type of employment is often unstable (Bobkov et al. 2017). However, the calculations confirmed the robustness of the results to a broader definition of employment (including the self-employed).

We only looked at first births during women's participation in the survey. This method of selection made it possible to avoid repeated inclusions: each respondent was taken into account in the model only once. The birth of subsequent children was accounted for by a special variable.

The proportion of first births in our sample was 61%, second births 30%, third and subsequent births 9%.

Thus, the object of our study is young mothers - women who had children during their presence in the RLMS sample, and it is important to note that 'young' in this case refers not to the age of the mother, but to the age of the child.

We used a number of independent variables to identify factors influencing duration of leave (see Table 1 for a complete list). The individual characteristics of the mother were considered, including age, marital status (registered or unregistered marriage), level of education, and the presence of paid work just before the child's birth. In addition, the decision to go to work can be influenced by the number and ages of other children in the family, in connection with which we included in the model information about the child's birth order, as well as about the birth of one or more other children during the period of observation.

To take into account a family's having external assistance in the care and upbringing of children, the independent variables "relative assistance" and "non-relative assistance" were included in the model (constructed, respectively, based on the questions "During the past 7 days, have relatives who live separately helped take care of the child?" and "During the past 7 days, have other people who are not your relatives helped take care of the child?"). Information on external care assistance in the survey is provided for each minor child. When forming the variables, we used data for the child for whose care the woman was on leave at the time of observation.

In addition to external assistance, assistance to the young family can be provided by cohabiting relatives, in connection with which we added the variables "living together with the parent(s)" and "living together with the parent(s) of the husband". When constructing variables, we used data on family ties between family members from the RLMS household file.

The model also included information about the woman's subjective perception of the family's financial situation and the likelihood of losing her job. A low level of satisfaction with the financial situation was determined using the question "How worried are you that you will not be able to provide for yourself in the next 12 months?" (response "Very worried"). Fear of losing her job was assessed using the question "How worried are you that you might lose your job?" (response "Very worried").

To take into account regional specificities, we included the variable "quintile group of regions by the level of average wages" in the model. The values of the average salary were considered in comparable prices, i.e., taking into account the size of the cost of a fixed set of consumer goods and services.

As a dependent variable, we look at the number of years spent away from work since the birth of a child. The average length of leave thus determined was on average 2.95 years for employed and unemployed women, 2.86 years for first births and 3.06 years for second and subsequent births (Table 1). For women with work experience, the average length of leave was lower - 2.56 years, for those with higher education - 2.66 years. The mean values of the independent variables included in the analysis are also presented in Table 1.

	Model 1 (all cases)	Model 2 (cases of first birth)	Model 3 (cases of second and subsequent births)
Duration of an "out of workforce"	2 9/6	2 875	3 06
episode due to the birth of a child	2.540	2.075	5.00
Married, including unregistered Locality type	0.882	0.848	0.937
Moscow and St. Petersburg	0.089	0.090	0.088
Regional centers	0.327	0.366	0.264
Other cities	0.277	0.274	0.282
Urban-type settlement and village Education	0.307	0.270	0.366
Not above general secondary	0.177	0.156	0.212
Primary vocational	0.212	0.187	0.250
Secondary professional	0.232	0.247	0.206
Higher professional	0.380	0.410	0.332
Birth order of child			
First	0.615	1.000	
Second	0.298		0.775
Third and subsequent	0.087		0.225
Another child was born	0.216	0.275	0.123
Mother's age			
Under 25	0.179	0.267	0.039
25-29 years	0.330	0.422	0.184
30-34 years	0.261	0.205	0.350
35 years and older	0.230	0.106	0.427
Has work experience	0.646	0.614	0.698
Period of child's birth			
2000-2005	0.213	0.228	0.189
2006-2010	0.280	0.298	0.250
2011-2015	0.330	0.326	0.337
2016-2020	0.177	0.147	0.224
Availability of care assistance			
Non-relatives	0.058	0.066	0.047
Relatives	0.335	0.351	0.309
Low assessment of financial situation	0.390	0.374	0.417
Fear of losing job	0.446	0.420	0.487
Lives with child's grandparents	0.308	0.358	0.229
Number of observations	1952	1201	751

Table 1. Mean values of the variables included in the regression analysis

Source: Authors' calculations based on RLMS data.

Quantitative research methodology

To study the factors of the duration of women's absence from work after childbirth, we use a regression analysis of survival using a nonparametric Cox model in discrete time (Cox 1972; Klein, Moeschberger 2003).

As the dependent variable, we consider the number of years spent out of the workforce since the birth of the child. For a discrete random variable T, which reflects the length of a young mother's absence from the workforce, the risk function λ is defined as follows:

$$\lambda(t) = P(T=t \mid T \ge t). \tag{1}$$

For a state that lasted *t* years, this function reflects the probability of its termination within the next year. The discrete Cox model defines the functional form of the relationship between risk and explanatory variables as follows (Klein, Moeschberger 2003: 259):

$$\frac{\lambda(t,X,\beta)}{1-\lambda(t,X,\beta)} = \frac{\lambda_0(t)}{1-\lambda_0(t)} \exp(\beta' X),$$
(2)

where X is the vector of explanatory variables, β the estimated coefficients, and $\lambda_0(t)$ the basic risk function equal to its value in the absence of the impact of explanatory variables, i.e., when $\beta^{\prime} X=0$. Vector X contains information about the individual characteristics of the young mother, her partner and her family (see Table 1).

RLMS data on the status of a young mother in the labor market is incomplete, due to interval censoring and censoring on the right. Censoring on the right is observed for incomplete episodes of going back to work, when the episode of the woman's absence from the workforce during the observation period has not ended. The use of duration analysis methods makes it possible to solve the problem of estimation bias due to right-hand censoring.

Interval censoring occurs because in some cases there are gaps in the observations, and we cannot understand whether the woman went to work at that time or not. The removal of observations with omissions reduced the sample by about 10 per cent.

Hypotheses

Kaplan-Meier diagrams make it possible to study pairwise dependences of the length of mothers' leave from work on the individual and household factors of interest to us. We have included information on the probability distribution of staying out of the workforce for groups of women depending on the level of education, the child's birth order and the time period of his birth (Figures 2-4).

A comparison of the distribution of the probability of remaining on parental leave as a function of education level indicates an earlier return to work for women with higher and secondary vocational education (Figure 2). The graph also clearly shows that in the long term, 10-15 years after the birth of a child, the economic activity of women with a low level of education is noticeably lower than for everyone else.

Also of interest is the effect of a child's birth order on a mother's return to work (Figure 3). There is evidence in the literature that in the case of a first child, the actual length of leave is slightly longer than in other cases (Hobson, Duvander, Halldén 2006). The data in Figure 3 do not allow us to reach a definite conclusion; we can only note that the probability of an early return to work for second births is consistently higher than for first ones. With births of a higher order, there is no complete clarity, but it is clear that in the long term, the economic activity of mothers with many children is expected to be significantly lower than for the rest.

Figure 2. Kaplan-Meier diagram for the probability of not working as a function of a mother's education level



Source: Authors' calculations based on RLMS data.

Figure 3. Kaplan-Meier diagram for the probability of not working as a function of a child's birth order



Source: Authors' calculations based on RLMS data.

Figure 4. Kaplan-Meier diagram for the probability of not working as a function of a child's period of birth



Source: Authors' calculations based on RLMS data.

Another factor whose impact on the likelihood of an early return to work is of interest is the period of a child's birth. The 20 years under study were eventful in terms of the country's demographic and economic development. During this time, a number of demographic policy measures were implemented and periods of economic growth and relative stability were replaced by noticeable economic shocks. How did these affect the labor activity of mothers? The answer is clear (Figure 4): in the 2010s, young mothers returned to work later than in the 2000s. The details of this process, whether it depends on the child's birth order, will be looked at more closely using regression analysis.

A review of earlier studies on the factors of young mothers returning to work, as well as a preliminary analysis of the characteristics of mothers and their households using Kaplan-Meier diagrams, allow us to formulate the following empirical research hypotheses.

- Contributing factors to a mother's early return to work include work experience (Makay 2017) and a high level of education (Grunow, Aisenbrey 2016), a higher birth order of the child (Hobson, Duvander, Halldén 2006), the availability of help with childcare from relatives and non-relatives both in and outside the household, and living in a region with a developed labor market.
- 2. The chances of an earlier return to work are reduced by a higher age of the mother and a later period of birth (the effect of expanding state support for families and children, as well as the stagnation of real wages, which reduces the gain from returning to a paid job). The effect of a woman's marital status on the probability of ending maternal leave can be multidirectional: on the one hand, the presence of a partner can make the financial situation of the family more stable and contribute to a longer leave. On the other hand,

the partner can take on some of the childcare responsibilities, thereby making it easier for the mother to go to work.

3. The nature of the dependence of the probability of returning to work on the characteristics of the mother and the household in which she lives may depend on the child's birth order. To take into account this possibility, 3 econometric models were considered: in addition to the full sample, subsamples for mothers of a first, as well as a second and subsequent children, were considered.

Regression analysis, in contrast to pairwise comparisons, makes it possible to assess the influence of the listed factors, other things being equal, i.e., taking into account the influence of other characteristics of the mother and her family, which makes it possible to significantly refine the results of the preliminary analysis.

3. Results

We assessed the chances of new mothers returning to work using a non-parametric Cox model of event duration analysis. We consider the duration of a woman's leave from work from the moment (year) of the birth of a child, with the indicator of the exit from this state being the woman's return to work. Three sampling options were considered: all observations, observations for the first child, observations for the second and subsequent children. It was not possible to separately consider the sample for mothers with many children (having three or more children) due to the small number of such observations. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2.

Some of the factors that have a significant impact on the chances of young mothers returning to work are in line with our expectations. So, for example, the birth of another child significantly reduces the likelihood of a woman returning to work, while work experience, as well as the fear of losing her job, on the contrary, significantly increase it.

The mother's high level of education also has an expected effect on the duration of the leave: the presence of secondary and, in particular, higher vocational education contributes to an earlier return to work. For mothers of second and subsequent children, the effect of education is especially pronounced. Thus, the hypothesis of shorter leaves for the more educated and highly skilled, repeatedly confirmed in international studies (Grunow, Aisenbrey 2016; Hobson, Duvander, Halldén 2006), also turned out to be correct for Russian data.

The presence of a partner (both in a registered and unregistered marriage) does not affect the duration of the leave. In the calculations, we also considered other versions of the model, including various characteristics of the woman's husband/partner, such as the partner's employment, higher education, a registered marriage, etc. According to the results obtained on Russian data, the significance of the impact of the woman's family status and the partner's characteristics on the duration of the leave is not confirmed. In the scientific literature, as a rule, it is noted that the presence of a partner allows a woman to be on maternity leave longer, although it should also be noted that in foreign works the leave is shorter (Morosow, Jalovaara 2019; Kuhlenkasper, Kauermann 2010).

External assistance from non-relatives is not common. Thus, on average, about 6% of women in the sample used it (see Table 1). As a rule, this assistance is paid (more than 65% of cases of assistance for the care of children under 5 years of age), which suggests that this is mainly babysitting services. According to the results, the presence of non-relative assistance significantly

contributes to an earlier return to work in the case of the first child and is an insignificant factor for the subsample of mothers of second and subsequent children.

Regardless of the child's birth order, the factor of help from relatives who are not part of the household turned out to be important. Cohabitation with the child's grandparents (only in the case of the first child) also encourages women to go to work.

Let us note the influence of the period of a child's birth, especially of a first child. The probability of returning to work over the past 10 years has been steadily declining compared to the period from 2000 to 2005. This is partly due to the strengthening of the state's demographic policy. In 2007, the state introduced a maternity capital program, which may have had an impact on the family's need to earn money for housing and children's education, as well as other family support measures. The expansion of the child allowance system, which has taken place regularly since 2007, may have reduced the need for families to earn additional income. Another explanation for women's longer absence from the workforce in the 2010s compared to the 2000s could be that labor income grew much more slowly during this period, which in turn reduced the economic attractiveness of women returning to work earlier.

In order to take into account the peculiarities of local labor markets, dummy variables for quintile groups by average wages were added to the model. Note that the RLMS sample includes only a part of the regions of Russia. According to the results, living in regions with relatively low wages reduces the likelihood of an earlier return to work. This is understandable - compensation for returning to work in the form of a difference in labor income and childcare benefits is lower in such regions, which makes returning to employment less attractive.

The characteristics of the locality turned out to be insignificant - there were no significant differences in the probability of returning to work for women living in regional centers and other cities compared with residents of rural areas.

The age of the mother reduces the chance of returning to work: compared to women under 25 years of age, those in the age groups of 25-29 years and especially those of 30 and older are less likely to return to work from maternity leave. Of course, the effect of age is partly offset by other characteristics that, on the contrary, contribute to an earlier return from maternity leave and are more common among older women - the presence of a paid job before the birth of a child and the experience of returning to work after the birth of a previous child. Nevertheless, the problem of age exists: other things being equal, it is much more difficult for women after thirty to go to work after the birth of a child.

In a work based on American data (Macran, Joshi, Dex 1996), it is noted that the duration of maternity leave decreases with the age of the mother. We have the opposite results, but most likely the differences are due to the specifics of the American case (very short paid leave), as well as the fact that we look at all women (both working and not working before the birth of a child).

Another important result of the analysis is the significance of a child's birth order. Taking into account other characteristics of the mother, the probability of terminating a leave taken to care for a third and subsequent children is higher than for a leave connected with the birth of a second and especially first child. This effect is typical for an earlier (up to three years) return from maternity leave, although in general, mothers with many children are expected to be out of the labor market more often in the long term. We assume that when a mother returns to work again, the family uses already developed schemes for replacing part of her household work, for example, getting help from relatives both inside and outside the family and using babysitting services and preschool institutions, thus making possible a quicker return to work. It is also possible that the more children there are in the family, the more urgent is the need for additional income, and as a result, the more difficult it is for the mother not to work or to be on unpaid leave.

		(
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3			
	(all cases)	(cases of first birth)	(cases of second and			
			subsequent births)			
Marriad including uprogistared	-0.082	-0.059	-0.106			
Married, including unregistered	[0.087]	[0.100]	[0.184]			
Type of locality; omitted category - village, urban-type settlement						
Pagianal contars	-0.07	0.01	-0.201*			
Regional centers	[0.073]	[0.093]	[0.118]			
Other cities	-0.02	0.028	-0.083			
Other cities	[0.076]	[0.100]	[0.119]			
Education; omitted category - not above general secondary						
Primary vocational	0.009	-0.102	0.118			
	[0.094]	[0.126]	[0.142]			
Secondary vocational	0.239***	0.164	0.309**			
	[0.092]	[0.118]	[0.150]			
Lligher professional	0.327***	0.233**	0.432***			
nigher professional	[0.091]	[0.119]	[0.147]			
Birth order of child; omitted catego	ry - first child, for mo	del 3 – second child				
Second	0.334***					
Second	[0.071]					
Third and subsequent	0.501***		0.207*			
	[0.122]		[0.122]			
Another shild was here	-0.308***	-0.297***	-0.409***			
Another child was born	[0.068]	[0.079]	[0.144]			
Mother's age; omitted category - u	nder 25 years					
25-29 years	-0.456***	-0.440***	-0.636**			
25-25 years	[0.084]	[0.093]	[0.266]			
20-24 years	-0.850***	-0.912***	-0.958***			
30-34 years	[0.098]	[0.120]	[0.265]			
25 years and older	-1.275***	-1.241***	-1.435***			
SS years and older	[0.112]	[0.149]	[0.269]			
Has work experience	0.673***	0.651***	0.781***			
has work experience	[0.066]	[0.081]	[0.120]			
The period of the child's birth; omit	ted category - 2000-2	2005				
2006-2010	-0.121	-0.152	-0.054			
2000-2010	[0.075]	[0.094]	[0.129]			
2011-2015	-0.232***	-0.264***	-0.159			
2011-2013	[0.076]	[0.097]	[0.126]			
2016 2020	-0.327***	-0.512***	-0.118			
2010-2020	[0.106]	[0.154]	[0.154]			
Availability of care assistance						
Non-relatives	0.181	0.294**	-0.041			
Non relatives	[0.111]	[0.133]	[0.205]			
Belatives	0.352***	0.316***	0.430***			
	[0.061]	[0.078]	[0.100]			
Low assessment of financial situation	-0.09	-0.153**	0.026			
	[0.058]	[0.075]	[0.092]			
Fear of losing job	0.452***	0.445***	0.427***			

Table 2.Results of regression analysis of parental leave duration factors, logarithm
of the odds ratio of going to work (Cox model)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		
	(all cases)	(cases of first birth)	(cases of second and		
			subsequent births)		
	[0.058]	[0.073]	[0.096]		
Lives with child's grandparents	0.140**	0.179**	0.093		
	[0.066]	[0.084]	[0.115]		
Quintile group of regions in terms of average wages (in comparable prices): omitted category – Group 3					
Group 1 (with the lowest wages)	-0.251**	-0.289**	-0.209		
	[0.100]	[0.129]	[0.160]		
Group 2	-0.213**	-0.276**	-0.11		
	[0.093]	[0.117]	[0.158]		
Group 4	-0.025	0.029	-0.1		
	[0.092]	[0.117]	[0.153]		
Group 5	0.023	-0.039	0.124		
	[0.088]	[0.112]	[0.146]		
Number of observations	1952	1201	751		
Number of completed episodes	1356	836	520		
Log-likelihood	-9137.065	-5207.907	-3015.683		

Source: Authors' calculations based on RLMS data.

Note: *significance at the level of 10%; **significance at the level of 5%; ***significance at the level of 1%. Standard errors are in parentheses.

The results of our study are resistant to small changes in the underlying model, such as expanding the definition of employment (including self-employment), changing the definition of marital status and spouse/partner characteristics, using other regional characteristics, etc.

Our estimates have an important limitation. The RLMS data do not allow the estimation of the length of maternity leave in months. Our calculations were carried out in years, which certainly significantly reduces the quality of the estimate, especially considering that paid leave in Russia is one and a half years. It should also be noted that, in our efforts to avoid repeated inclusions, we consider strictly one birth for each woman. The values of most independent variables correspond to the end of the observation episode (a return to work or the last period of being in the sample). Because of this, we cannot distinguish, for example, a single mother from a woman whose marriage broke up after the birth of a child.

4. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we have tried to answer the question of what factors contribute to or hinder young mothers from returning to the workforce earlier. To a 20-year panel of a nationally representative study we applied duration analysis to assess a woman's chances of being out of the workforce due to childbirth.

The overall conclusion of our study generally confirms the results obtained earlier for other countries: women who have more diverse resources, both individual and family, return to professional work after the birth of a child faster. Higher levels of education, work experience, family and, to a lesser extent, non-relative assistance, living in a region with higher wages and experience of going to work after the birth of an older child will, all other things being equal, increase the likelihood of women returning to work.

Currently, Russia takes a non-standard approach to parental leave by international standards. In the aggregate, it lasts up to the age of three, which is noticeably longer than in most countries, but half of the leave is unpaid, though the mother's job is secure. The paid part of the

leave, consisting of maternity leave and parental leave (140 + 475 days), is also noticeably larger than in most other countries. Due to objective reasons, maternity leave is less variable, and the main cross-country differences are concentrated in the duration of parental leave.

A separate problem is the unpaid part of parental leave. How important is it for Russian women to keep a job, if Russia has one of the lowest unemployment rates even at the peak of economic crises? As has been repeatedly shown, the Russian labor market adapts to crises by reducing real wages in exchange for keeping workers in their jobs (Kapelyushnikov 2022). In practice, the realization of women's right to keep their jobs often leads to discrimination by employers who are trying to get rid of employees who go on maternity leave or put pressure on them to shorten their leave (Center for Social and Labor Rights 2014; Kalabikhina 2017).

This measure is both an obvious burden for employers and at the same time not in demand by many women. As can be seen from our study, young mothers with work experience and a good education often do not use all of their leave, even the paid part, foregoing state support in order to continue working and maintain their professional skills and careers. Their rejection of the guarantees offered can be seen as a request for a more diversified leave policy that caters to the interests of different groups of women.

What can be proposed to improve the policy of granting parental leave? One possibility is a system of flexible leave, in which the woman and the household in which she lives independently determine the duration of the maternity leave, without losing their entitlements for a year and a half, which would be redistributed to the months they have selected. Establishing a minimum length of leave under this scheme would make it possible to bring Russia's experience closer to that of developed countries, where the leave is significantly shorter and the average salary is significantly higher. Secondly, a divided (intermittent) leave could be considered: repeated periods of leave over the allowable three years, if necessary, at the parents' choice. Under such a scheme, only the first part of the leave is paid, but the mother or father can go on leave again with the preservation of the workplace if necessary. Thirdly, thought could be given to shortening the leave to a year with a simultaneous increase in the amount of payment. Another modernization option is the introduction of non-transferable paternity leave, which would allow a combination of maternity (parental) and paternity leave, further contributing to a more equitable distribution of care for children within the household.

We understand that the proposed changes to the parental leave system may be ill received by the public. Ideally, the reduction of paid and unpaid maternity leave should be accompanied by an improvement in the whole system of family-work balance for different sociodemographic groups of parents. This includes the institution of certified nannies, guaranteed places in nursery groups, a variety of formats for these groups, three-party agreements on a friendly climate for parents with the participation of employers, and policies regarding care for the elderly and needy family members, since the time spent taking care of them often competes with childcare time.

In the recent past, the social dilemma associated with motherhood, as a rule, sounded like this: what is more important - fertility or female employment? Over time, these choices have ceased to be mutually exclusive. Flexible employment options and the expansion of childcare services allow women to reduce their absence from the workforce due to the birth of a child.

In the future, we plan to continue to study the impact of parental leave on women's labor activity. Of particular interest is the influence of the distribution of gender roles in the household

on the length of maternity leave. Based on British data (Zhou, Kan 2019), it is shown that couples with a large number of children are less likely to adhere to the male breadwinner model, and families with a male breadwinner, in turn, are less likely to have more children. Thus, greater gender equality within the family has ceased to be an obstacle to fertility. This hypothesis could be tested on Russian data.

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