

Dr. LINA ŠUMSKAITĖ
Vilnius University and
Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Lithuania

Assoc. prof. dr. MARGARITA GEDVILAITĖ-KORDUŠIENĖ
Vilnius University and
Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Lithuania

VAIDA TRETJAKOVA
Vilnius University and
Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Lithuania

Dr. GRAŽINA RAPOLIENĖ
Vilnius University and
Lithuanian Social Research Centre, Lithuania

Childless women's parenting practices in Lithuania

The aim of the presentation is to disclose in what ways and how often women, who don't have children communicate with children of other people (relatives, friends, colleagues at work etc.) and disclose the meaning of these relationships for childless women.

Childlessness in family research is mostly analyzed from the life course perspective – under what circumstances women remain childless (Bernardi et al. 2007, McQuillan et al. 2012), but very few studies focus on childless women communication with children of other people. Some studies found that childless women still do parenting work, especially single women with lower education (Martin, Kendig 2012). Yet the meaning of this communication for women and the role of children in woman's life has not received much attention from researchers. Some studies in European societies that incorporate caregiving for children in broader community tend to compare the support flows within the familial dyads. For example, M. Allbertini and M. Kohli

(2009) found that older childless individuals in Italy give more support to their nieces and nephews than parents do, as they extend their social network for compensating the lack of biological children (Albertini, Kohli 2009). In return, older childless people get support from more diverse personal support networks, partly from volunteering and charity work (Albertini, Kohli, 2009; Albertini, Mencarini 2014). Other studies report that childless women have more time and resources, which they can invest in their nieces and nephews, than mothers do (Pollet et al. 2006; Tanskanen 2015).

European Values Survey data (2008) illustrate contradictory attitudes towards childlessness (Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė, Tretjakova, Ubarevičienė 2019), which are seen as both supporting individualistic values, stating that an individual has the right to decide whether to have a child or not, and familialistic, – that children give meaning to life, especially for women. Along with other Eastern European countries (Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Ukraine), Lithuanians declare more traditional family norms and less approval of voluntary childlessness (Merz & Liefbroer 2012).

The presentation is based on qualitative research (45 semi-structured interviews) with women aged 28-71 y.o., who don't have children because of various reasons. Interviews conducted in 2017-2018. The research was funded by Lithuanian Research Council, the scientific project *Childlessness in Lithuania: socio-cultural changes and individual experiences in modern society* (contract No. S-MOD-17-3)

The majority of women kept close relationship with children of siblings, took care, and spent some leisure time together. Some older childless women participated in parenting tasks intensely, and tended to consider children of siblings and friends as their own, these women experienced social motherhood. Another group of women, comprised of both younger and older, constructed the relationships on the basis of friendship. The role of other people's children was less significant

for the third group, in which women defined their relationships with children as distant. This group was also comprised of both generations. These findings revealed the way kin and non-kin members are included into parenting tasks and this encourages reconsidering the notion of the nuclear family as an isolated unit.

Keywords: childless women's, meaning of childrens, qualitative methodology, Lithuania.