

Housework, Childcare, and Fertility Intentions: The Role of Fathers' Involvement in Belarus

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Abstract

The impact of fathers' involvement in household tasks on fertility intentions is being both increasingly acknowledged and contested. This article adds to the evidence base by analysing the relationship between fathers' involvement in childcare and housework and the short-term fertility intentions of mothers and fathers in Belarus. Due to its fertility dynamics, marked by early first childbearing, low-to-no second childbearing, and high divorce rates, the case of Belarus presents an opportunity to revisit theoretical assumptions surrounding fathers' involvement and their role in second-parity transitions. Employing the results of the Generations and Gender Survey (2017) for Belarus, I performed separate logistic regressions for mothers and fathers who are fertile, aged 18 to 45, in a partnership, and have at least one child under 14 years of age in the household. The results revealed that fathers' involvement in childcare is positively associated with the fertility intentions of the fathers, but not those of the mothers. In contrast, fathers' involvement in housework is positively associated with the fertility intentions of the mothers, but not those of the fathers. Furthermore, education, the self-assessed household economic situation, and employment status are associated with fertility intentions, while gender-related values are not. The results provide partial support for the multiple equilibrium framework, but also challenge its underlying assumption that gender role symmetry drives higher fertility. Rather, the study reveals that the effects of fathers' participation in the household are contingent on gender and the type of task, and that factors related both to gender and to economic well-being and certainty should be considered when analysing fertility intentions.

Keywords

Belarus; childcare tasks; fathers' involvement; fertility intentions; gender equality; housework tasks

1. Introduction

Fathers' involvement in housework and childcare is seen as an important, yet contested, determinant of second-childbearing. Although a large body of research has confirmed the relevance of the relationship between fathers' involvement in the household and fertility, the evidence on the strength of this relationship, as well as the extent to which these effects are contingent on gender and the type of tasks, is, to date, inconclusive (Raybould & Sear, 2021). Furthermore, most analyses have focused on countries with fertility regimes that are more akin to the dynamics observed in Western Europe and Scandinavia (e.g., Aassve et al., 2015; Fanelli & Profeta, 2021). No comparable analyses have yet been conducted on Belarus, which differs from most other Central and Eastern European countries due to its early first childbearing, low-to-no second childbearing, and high divorce rates, as opposed to other countries that experience higher postponement and lower marriage rates.

This article examines the relationship between fathers' involvement in childcare and housework tasks and the short-term fertility intentions of parents in Belarus via the conducting of separate logistic regressions for mothers and fathers who are fertile and aged 18 to 45, in a partnership, and who have at least one child under the age of 14 years in the household. The analysis employed data provided by wave 1 (2017) of the international Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) for Belarus (Sakalova & Rotman, 2020). The analysis considers fathers' involvement in both childcare and housework, household income, gender-egalitarian values, and other demographic characteristics.

This article adds to the evidence base on fertility intentions in post-socialist countries in several ways. Firstly, it explores how fathers' involvement in household tasks is related to short-term fertility intentions. While second-parity fertility (i.e., the transition from having one child to having two children) has received significant attention from policymakers, its determinants differ from those that influence first-parity fertility (Riederer et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2014). As such, the determination of the role of fathers' involvement in household tasks is key to understanding second-parity fertility. Secondly, the article examines the case of Belarus, which comprises both an understudied and specific case in the post-socialist country context. The specific fertility characteristics of Belarus, i.e., relatively stable marriage rates, early first-childbearing, high first-parity fertility, and low second-parity fertility, are particularly suited to the study of the drivers of the fertility intentions of parents. Moreover, in contrast to other post-socialist countries with low marriage rates, Belarus has a high divorce rate (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.-a). Thus, the research sample includes co-resident children, both biological and non-biological. Thirdly, the study included the conducting of separate analyses for mothers and fathers aimed at identifying gender-specific relationships. Fourthly, it examines childcare and housework separately, and controls for sociodemographic factors, economic well-being, and gender values. This approach serves to reveal the specific effects of fathers' involvement in housework and childcare, while considering alternative explanations for fertility intentions, in order to present a comprehensive overview.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 examines fertility trends in Belarus in the historical context, reviews the state of evidence on gender norms in Belarus, and analyses family policy frameworks in order to assess the extent to which they incorporate aspects of fathers' involvement. Section 3 synthesises the existing theory and evidence on gender role symmetry and fathers' involvement as explanatory factors

of fertility. Section 4 introduces the dataset and the variables applied. Section 5 then analyses the results. Section 6 provides conclusions based on the research findings.

2. Fertility in Belarus: Context, Norms, and Policies

2.1. Historical Context and Fertility Development in Belarus

A short summary of the historical context is required to fully understand fertility trends in Belarus. Following the end of World War II, the Soviet Union rapidly integrated women into the workforce as industrialisation increased the demand for labour. Belarus was one of the leading Soviet states in terms of providing affordable childcare and parental leave, thus enabling women to balance work and family life (Lebid, 2021; Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008). Furthermore, the socialist regime made significant strides in terms of enhancing the access of women to education and reproductive rights. As a result, the participation of women in the workforce surged, and two-child families remained the prevailing norm. However, gender inequality continued to linger beneath the surface. Women were disproportionately represented in low-skilled jobs and lacked opportunities for career advancement; moreover, they were expected to shoulder the dual burden of paid professional work and unpaid domestic labour (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Pascall & Manning, 2000; Szikra & Szelewa, 2010).

During the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus underwent significant economic transformation; it shifted from a centrally planned economy with the security of a welfare state to an unstable, market-oriented economy. As a result, Belarus faced a deep structural economic crisis during the transition period of the 1990s (Sobotka, 2003). The transition from state-controlled to privately-owned companies, along with changes in the labour market and labour demand, led to economic uncertainty, job insecurity, and unemployment. This subsequently resulted in a sharp decline in GDP, which negatively impacted family incomes and increased the costs of housing, credit, and childbearing and rearing (Allison & Ringold, 1996; Frejka, 2008; Matysiak, 2009).

The Belarusian total fertility rate (TFR) dropped significantly during the economic crisis, falling from above-replacement levels in the Soviet era to just 1.33 in 1996, according to the Human Fertility Database (HFD, 2021). Between 1997 and 2005, the TFR reached the “lowest-low fertility” rate, defined by Kohler et al. (2002) as a TFR of below 1.3. Although the TFR began to recover after 2006, so as to reach 1.71 in 2015 (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.-b), Belarus experienced a further sharp decline in the TFR from 1.72 to 1.08 between 2016 and 2024. Recent evidence suggests that this decline can, at least partly, be explained by increasing social insecurity, rising living costs, political instability, and a negative macroeconomic outlook, all of which counteracted the effectiveness of family policy measures (Sharilova & Bandarenka, 2022; UDF.BY, 2021). Furthermore, demographic cohort shrinkage appears to have played a major role; the TFR applies to all women of reproductive age, whereas fertility intentions are strongly and negatively associated with increasing age. As a result of the sharp fertility decline during the 1990s, the decreasing number of young women who entered reproductive age created a structural inertia that was difficult to reverse (Frejka & Sobotka, 2008; Kłysiński, 2023).

In contrast to most Western European and Central European countries, which experienced the extended postponement of childbearing, or tempo effects, and low first-parity fertility, the fertility dynamics in Belarus were characterised by only moderate postponement, high first-parity fertility, and low second-parity

fertility, which translated into a real reduction in the number of children, or quantum effects (Ishchanova, 2022). As opposed to other post-socialist countries, which experienced relatively low marriage rates, Belarus experienced relatively stable marriage rates and cohabitation, but also high divorce rates, which ranged between 3.0 and 4.1 divorces per 1,000 mid-year population between 2004 and 2017, i.e., in the 13 years prior to wave 1 of the GGS (see also National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.-a).

At the same time, a representative survey conducted by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies in 2014 confirmed a significant discrepancy between the desired number of children—2.4 on average—and the actual number—1.3 (Artemenko, 2016). These results suggest that the TFR could, at least in theory, have been above the replacement level if it had not been depressed by other factors that prevented the progression from first to second-parity fertility. Together with high mortality, especially among working-age groups, and net emigration, Belarus's fertility dynamics contributed to the trend towards depopulation (Shakhotko, 2008).

2.2. Fertility and Gender Norms in Belarus

In comparison to other Central and Eastern European countries, Belarus experienced only moderate postponement or tempo effects, but strong quantum effects, which were driven by low second-birthrates (Ishchanova, 2022). Gender norms in Belarus generally encouraged early childbearing (Ananyeu et al., 2013). The latest available comparative data from 2021 indicate that Belarus had the third-lowest mean age at first birth (MAB1) in Central and Eastern Europe, i.e., 26.9, behind Moldova (25.1) and Bulgaria (26.5), and followed by Romania (27.1) and Slovakia (27.3; UNECE, n.d.). It is worth noting that the MAB1 in Belarus has increased in recent years from 26.5 in 2017 to 27.24 in 2024, according to national statistics (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.-c). While this trend mirrors that of other European countries, according to the available data, the Belarusian MAB1 is not yet catching up to that of other countries.

Traditional gender norms continue to shape expectations of women as the primary caregivers and domestic housekeepers, while fathers often maintain a secondary role in the performance of household tasks (Saxonberg, 2014; Steinbach & Maslauskaitė, 2022). Moreover, the overall decline in GDP and income, rising unemployment, and the corresponding increase in the elasticity of the participation of the female workforce have created a macroeconomic environment in which women prioritise workforce participation over having additional children (Pastore & Verashchagina, n.d.). The female labour force participation rate remains high at 83.3% and almost matches the male labour force participation rate of 84.8% according to data from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (2024). Almost the same percentage of women worked 21–40 hours per week in 2024 (women 81.1% vs. men 88.7%), while only 5.4% of women worked up to 20 hours (compared to 2.1% of men). Additional data from 2015 reveal that women spend more than twice as much time on household work as men, which suggests that women face a substantial double burden (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.-d). Given this context, women in Belarus and comparable Eastern European countries tend to have only one child so as “to satisfy the social norm of becoming a mother, while at the same time limiting the inevitable double burden of working full-time and taking care of household tasks” (Zeman et al., 2018).

2.3. Family Policy in Belarus

The Government of the Republic of Belarus has expressed concern about the negative impacts of population decline on the economy, social systems, infrastructure, and even national security. Consequently, it has adopted demographic policies that aim to address the country's low fertility rate. Following the adoption of the Law on Demographic Security in 2002, the Belarusian government established a legal framework for regulating demographic processes (Bobrova et al., 2019). It subsequently introduced several national programmes that apply policy tools in the family policy sector so as to encourage population growth. More recently, the Belarusian government launched the Nation's Health and Demographic Security in Belarus, 2021–2025 programme.

The Belarusian Government has introduced pronatalist family policy instruments. Belarusian family policy primarily follows the neoclassical model, which prioritises financial incentives for childbearing over policies that address gender inequality and the triple burden of housework, caregiving, and professional employment (Ishchanova, 2022). Financial incentives include progressive benefits for first and subsequent births. Moreover, the government provides institutional care for children under three, as well as housing, tax, and credit benefits for families with children, and enhanced financial support for families with children with disabilities (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, 2016; Ministry of Labour and Social Protection et al., 2011; Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus, 2025).

While universal childcare is available, the majority of parents only claim this benefit for children aged 3–5. The National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (2019) estimates that around 96% of children in the 3–5 age group attended preschool care centres in 2017, with no substantial changes reported compared to previous years. In contrast, the percentage of children aged 1–2 was substantially lower in 2017 at 39.7%, up from 35.1% in 2013. Concerning school-aged children, parents have the right to petition for institutional childcare for up to six hours following the standard school day, which is granted provided a critical mass of requests is received and the school is equipped to provide meals and materials (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 2011). The share of pupils in grades 1–9 who were enrolled in after-school daycare groups in educational institutions in 2017 was comparatively low at 20% of the total number of children enrolled in school, with no notable changes compared to previous years (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2019).

The Belarusian population policy agenda incorporates a number of gender-egalitarian policy instruments, including measures aimed at incentivising the involvement of fathers. However, the effectiveness of these instruments is severely limited by the insufficient financial resources committed to them (Ishchanova, 2022). Parental leave is available for up to three years, though the income replacement level is low and not tied to previous earnings (Social Security Administration, 2018). While both mothers and fathers are entitled to take parental leave, the uptake rate of fathers is very low. According to the most recent available data, between 2016 and 2019, the percentage of female and male employees (aged 15–74) on parental leave up to age three differed significantly: approximately 10% of women compared to only 0–0.2% of men (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2020). A new gender-egalitarian policy was introduced in 2020 that granted fathers 14 days of leave within six months of the birth of a child. However, paternal leave is unpaid unless the employer voluntarily continues to pay the father's salary (Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus, 2025).

Belarus continues to face substantial data and evidence gaps. While the TFR in Belarus rose from 1.49 in 2010 to 1.71 in 2015, it remained significantly below the replacement level of 2.1 (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.-b). Although this increase may have been linked to the National Programme of Demographic Security of Belarus, no causal analysis has been performed aimed at confirming which measures, if any, were effective. In addition, the TFR declined again after 2016, even dropping below the minimum target TFR of 1.32 set by the government in the Nation's Health and Demographic Security in Belarus, 2021–2025 programme (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, 2021).

3. A Theoretical Framework for Fathers' Involvement and Fertility

Fertility scholars generally concur that fathers' involvement in household work comprises an important, yet contested, explanatory factor for fertility intentions and behaviour. As societies underwent post-industrial transformation in the second half of the 20th century and fertility rates plummeted, the debate on fertility was dominated primarily by the neoclassical theory after Becker (1991) and the second demographic transition narrative after van de Kaa (2001). The debate surrounding fathers' involvement in household tasks initially gained traction in the early 2000s, when it was observed that Nordic countries with higher gender symmetry—i.e., higher female participation in the labour market and higher male participation in household work—experienced a fertility rebound to above-replacement level (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; McDonald, 2000; Myrskylä et al., 2011). In contrast, countries with high levels of gender equality in the labour market but low levels of gender equality with respect to the distribution of household work observed no such change. Crucially, the fertility rebound in Nordic countries was driven largely by more highly-educated women, which contradicts the neoclassical argument that higher education levels are associated with a higher opportunity cost of having children (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015). Conversely, the second demographic transition arguably underemphasised structural factors, as illustrated by the facts that family preferences remained remarkably stable amidst declining fertility and that the fertility decline was reversed with increasing human development (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; Myrskylä et al., 2011).

The multiple equilibrium framework has emerged as a corrective theoretical context that posits that fertility trajectories in industrial and post-industrial societies follow a U-shaped transition from a traditional male-breadwinner/female-homemaker equilibrium (high fertility), through a dual-earner/female-homemaker state (low fertility), to a dual-earner/dual-career equilibrium (rebound; see Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; McDonald, 2000). The multiple equilibrium framework bridges structuralist and culturalist arguments by suggesting that two classes of mechanisms act to reduce gender role asymmetry and facilitate higher fertility: firstly, institutional adjustments such as generous parental leave, flexible work, and institutional childcare, which potentially reduce the cost of combining employment and childbearing, and secondly, fathers' involvement in household tasks, which acts to reduce the double burden borne by mothers (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; McDonald, 2000). A range of demographic studies have linked the higher participation of fathers in housework and childcare to higher second and third-parity fertility (Aassve et al., 2015; Fodor et al., 2002; Mencarini & Tanturri, 2004; Oláh, 2003; Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008; Pinnelli & Fiori, 2008; Spéder & Kapitány, 2014; Sullivan et al., 2014).

However, recent studies and systematic reviews indicate that a higher degree of nuance is required. Four points of criticism stand out. Firstly, evidence shows that fertility is not positively influenced by perfect

gender role symmetry across all household tasks, but rather by the balanced and complementary distribution of household tasks (Raybould & Sear, 2021). On a related note, other research revealed that households in which men participate substantially more in housework than women are also more likely to experience lower fertility (Dommermuth et al., 2017).

Secondly, the effect of fathers' involvement in household work on fertility intentions depends on which household tasks are shared and whose fertility intentions are being examined (Neyer et al., 2013; Riederer et al., 2019). Time-use and attitudes research shows that housework is generally perceived as less enjoyable and more burdensome than childcare (Koster et al., 2022; Poortman & Van Der Lippe, 2009; Sullivan, 2013). An emerging body of studies has further confirmed that the fertility intentions and behaviour of parents are related to the participation of fathers in housework, but have determined no, weak and contingent, or even negative, associations between fertility intentions and behaviour and the participation of fathers in childcare (Fanelli & Profeta, 2021; Leocádio et al., 2024; Raybould & Sear, 2021; Riederer et al., 2019). In addition, new evidence suggests that the participation of fathers in childcare is positively associated with the fertility intentions of fathers but not those of mothers (Leocádio et al., 2024).

Thirdly, recent evidence suggests that the relationship between fathers' involvement in household tasks and fertility is moderated by attitudes, expectations, and perceptions of fairness; when fathers' actual involvement falls short of the mothers' expectations, the fertility intentions of the mothers and the progression towards second-parity fertility decline (Aassve et al., 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2013; Riederer et al., 2019).

Finally, current empirical trends challenge the empirical foundation of gender role symmetry. Nordic countries—formerly the model case for how institutional adjustments and gender role change act to stabilise fertility rates—have seen a renewed decline in fertility rates since around 2010 in terms of both tempo and quantum (Hellstrand et al., 2021). This renewed fertility slump, which has been driven largely by falling first-parity birthrates (but also by lower second-parity birthrates), illustrates that institutional adjustments and male involvement in household work are insufficient in terms of facilitating a sustained recovery. Complementary explanations are offered by neoclassical theory, which highlights the importance of the stability of income, employment, and housing, etc. (Becker, 1991). In addition, uncertainty frameworks, such as the Narrative Framework (Vignoli et al., 2020), demonstrate that fertility can be depressed by objective precarity (such as expensive housing and the cost of living), as well as subjective perceptions of socioeconomic risk (Matysiak et al., 2021; Vignoli et al., 2020).

Although the relationship between fathers' involvement in household work and fertility has been debated intensively, the evidence base regarding post-socialist countries remains limited; moreover, the heterogeneity of post-socialist countries has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged. Belarus provides a critical case for revisiting theoretical expectations surrounding fathers' involvement in household tasks. In contrast to other post-socialist countries, Belarus has stable marriage rates and high first-parity fertility; however, it struggles with second-parity transition and high divorce rates, which are of particular relevance with regard to men's involvement in household tasks. Moreover, since Belarus provides universal institutional childcare, the effects of fathers' involvement in childcare can be more easily isolated from those of institutional childcare, which is beneficial in terms of comparing the role of fathers' involvement in housework and childcare.

Existing theories and evidence suggest that the analysis of fathers' involvement in household tasks and fertility intentions should differentiate between their involvement in childcare and housework, and that the fertility intentions of mothers and fathers should be considered separately. In addition to fathers' involvement and sociodemographic factors, the analysis must also account for alternative explanatory factors associated with economic well-being and uncertainty, and gender attitudes. These factors led to the definition of the following research question:

What relationship, if any, exists between fathers' involvement in childcare and housework tasks and the short-term fertility intentions of mothers and fathers in Belarus when controlling for sociodemographic factors, economic well-being and uncertainty, and gender attitudes?

4. Research Design

4.1. Data and Methodology

The author relied on data obtained from the international GGS when addressing the research question posed in the study. The GGS comprises comparative surveys of nationally representative samples of the resident population aged 18 to 79 in each of the participating countries. Respondents are interviewed face-to-face and provide information on themselves, their partners, children, parents, other household members, and social networks. A detailed description of the design, scope, and aims of the survey can be found in Gauthier et al. (2023) and Vikat et al. (2007).

The first GGS wave in Belarus was conducted in 2017 (Sakalova & Rotman, 2020). The final sample comprised 9,996 men and women aged 18 to 79. A number of data quality risks were evident, e.g., the estimated average non-response rate was 24% since the fieldwork phase overlapped with the summer vacation season, and the household addresses sampled were derived from the national census of 2009 since no more recent census data were available. Nevertheless, to date, this dataset remains the only cross-national survey to be conducted in Belarus on the socio-demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of individuals, as well as their fertility intentions and gender indicators, including gender attitudes and behaviour related to housework and childcare at the time of the interview. While no comparable analyses are available for Belarus, research in Scandinavian and Baltic countries has confirmed that the fertility data in the GGS are consistent with those from the HFD and estimates by the United Nations (Leocádio et al., 2023).

The sample was restricted to GGS respondents aged 18 to 45 who were in a partnership, had at least one co-resident child under the age of 14, and reported being fertile but not pregnant at the time of the survey. The age restriction was selected since parents aged over 45 have typically already realised their fertility intentions in the context of the early first childbearing, low-to-no second childbearing regime in Belarus. Respondents with co-resident children were considered to be mothers or fathers so as to account for those respondents who are in a partnership with a divorced parent with one co-resident child. This choice was informed by the high divorce rate in Belarus. Both partners in step-families often expressed enhanced intentions to have a shared biological child (Thomson, 2004; Vikat et al., 1999): 4.9% of the female respondents and 8.2% of the male respondents in the sub-sample had just one step-child and 1.7% of the female respondents and 2.2% of the male respondents had two or three step-children.

Descriptive statistics were applied aimed at assessing the differences in short-term fertility intentions between sociodemographic subgroups, and binomial logistic regression was employed to examine the extent to which various sociodemographic characteristics were associated with fertility intentions. Separate analyses were conducted for mothers and fathers to account for gender-differentiated associations. The final sample comprised $n = 804$ mothers and $n = 662$ fathers.

4.2. Measurement of the Variables

The analysis considered short-term fertility intentions, the distribution of childcare and housework tasks, the respondent's age, the number of co-resident children, educational status, household income, own employment status and that of the partner, and gender value orientation and attitudes.

4.2.1. Dependent Variable

Short-term fertility intentions: Given that the results from only one wave of the GGS in Belarus are available to date, fertility intentions were considered to serve as the best available proxy indicator for actual fertility behaviour. The vast majority of fertility research recognises fertility intentions as a strong predictor of actual fertility behaviour (Quesnel-Vallée & Morgan, 2003; Testa & Toulemon, 2006; Westoff & Ryder, 1977). Nevertheless, it is important to understand the limitations of this proxy. Fertility intentions are subject to revision, and their realisation is often contingent on family networks, demographic factors such as age and parity, and socioeconomic factors such as education, income, and employment status (Balbo & Mills, 2011; Quesnel-Vallée & Morgan, 2003; Régnier-Loilier et al., 2011). Childbearing intentions were elicited in the GGS via the following question: Do you intend to have another child during the next three years? The five possible responses were: (1) *definitely not*, (2) *probably not*, (3) *I am not sure*, (4) *probably yes*, and (5) *definitely yes*. The two negative responses were recoded into (0) *no*, and the two positive responses into (1) *yes*, to enable the more meaningful interpretation of the odds of having positive short-term fertility intentions in the logit model results. In the end, 27.4% of mothers and 35.0% of fathers in the restricted sample stated their intention to have another child within the next three years.

Respondents who replied *I am not sure* were excluded since they did not report clear fertility intentions and, therefore, comprised an analytically ambiguous category. Furthermore, the exclusion of “uncertain” responses enhanced the degree of comparability with previous fertility research, while exerting only a limited impact on the final sample size—this category consisted of only a small proportion of the initial dataset (16%).

4.2.2. Independent Variables

Childcare and housework tasks: Fathers' involvement in childcare and housework was measured via the question: Please tell me who does the following tasks in your household. The analysis of childcare tasks included all three items that were available in the dataset, regardless of the child's age: “dressing the children or seeing that the children are properly dressed,” “staying at home with the children when they are ill,” and “playing with the children and/or taking part in leisure activities with them.” The analysis of the housework tasks considered four items that were available in the dataset: “preparing daily meals,” “vacuum-cleaning the house,” “doing the laundry,” and “organising joint social activities.” These activities are traditionally performed by women in Belarus, akin to other post-socialist countries (Aassve et al., 2015; Fanelli & Profeta,

2021; Riederer et al., 2019), and are reported by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus (n.d.-e) as requiring the most time within the household. The possible answers for all the items were (1) *always me*, (2) *usually me*, (3) *me and my partner about equally*, (4) *usually my partner*, (5) *always my partner*, and (6) *always or usually someone else*. The items were recoded by assigning a value of (1) *woman* in cases where the female respondent or the male respondent's female partner always or usually performed the task, a value of (2) *both sexes equally* if the respondent and her/his partner shared the task equally, and a value of (3) *man* if the male respondent or the female respondent's male partner always or usually performed the task. Separate mean indices were subsequently created for childcare and housework tasks. With regard to the sub-sample of female respondents, 55.9% of women reported performing childcare tasks themselves, 43.1% reported sharing them with their partner, and 1.0% reported that their partner always or usually performed childcare tasks. A similar distribution was observed in the sub-sample of male respondents: 48.8% of men reported that their partner performed childcare tasks, 50.3% reported sharing them, and 0.9% reported doing childcare tasks themselves. Regarding housework tasks, around half of all the respondents reported that the woman performed them primarily on her own (52.7% for the female sub-sample and 61.5% for the male sub-sample). In the end, 47.0% of women and 37.0% of men reported sharing such tasks with their partner. The respondents in both sub-samples indicated that men performed only a very small share of housework tasks themselves (0.3% for the female sub-sample and 1.5% for the male sub-sample).

Since men tend to overestimate their level of involvement in the performance of household tasks (Kiger & Riley, 1996) and the GGS relies on self-reporting without interviewing the partners, the risk of bias arises in the data. While this factor has implications in terms of the interpretability of the data, it is not inherently problematic with concern to the analysis, given that individual perceptions of the division of household work and their congruence with gender values are more relevant for fertility than the actual, unbiased division of labour (Riederer et al., 2008, 2019).

4.2.3. Control Variables

Regarding age: Respondents were divided into three age categories: (a) 18–25 years; (b) 26–35 years; (c) 36–45 years. It was expected that the highest age category would be negatively associated with fertility intentions, given the minimal tempo effect on fertility in Belarus in recent decades, which implies that intended fertility has, in most cases, been reached by the age of 36 (Ishchanova, 2022). The distribution of age and the other control variables is reported in the Supplementary File.

The number of co-resident children was categorised as follows: (a) one child; (b) two children; (c) more than two children. It was expected that the number of co-resident children would be negatively associated with fertility intentions since higher parity acts to close the gap to desired parity, while it also influences the intensity of childcare and housework tasks.

A three-level categorical variable was applied for educational attainment. The lower category comprised individuals with a lower secondary education, the middle category those who had completed an upper secondary education and a post-secondary but non-tertiary education, and the third category those who had completed a tertiary education. The ambiguous effect of education was anticipated: while a higher education potentially increases the household income of women and reduces the degree of economic uncertainty, which potentially positively affects their fertility (Perelli-Harris, 2005), it may also act to

increase the opportunity costs of having an additional child (Amialchuk et al., 2014). Conversely, the attainment of higher education by men may act to reduce the opportunity costs for women of having another child. Lower male educational levels were expected to be associated with higher fertility intentions since lower-educated men are more likely to support traditional norms that favour larger families, and face lower opportunity costs concerning childbearing (Axinn & Barber, 2001; Tragaki & Bagavos, 2014); moreover, they tend to enter partnerships and fatherhood at earlier ages.

The self-assessed ability of respondents to make ends meet was also considered, as recoded into three categories: (a) difficult (respondents who can make ends meet with difficulty or with great difficulty), (b) somewhat difficult (respondents who can make ends meet with some difficulty or fairly easily), and (c) easy (respondents who can make ends meet easily or fairly easily). This variable was included since economic constraints are the most frequently cited reason for the decline in fertility and since the Belarusian government's family policy measures focus predominantly on the provision of financial benefits. The subjective self-assessment of the household economic situation better reflects perceived financial constraints than reported income, tends to yield less missing data, and relies on the overall perception of respondents, thus reducing the measurement error (Lačný, 2020; OECD, 2013; Whelan & Maitre, 2009). Moreover, previous research has shown that subjective economic well-being is often more strongly associated with fertility intentions than objective income since it captures how the financial capacity of individuals is related to their expectations of the costs of raising additional children (Philipov, 2009; Testa & Basten, 2014; Vignoli et al., 2020).

Three categories were considered with respect to determining how employment status is related to fertility intentions: (a) employed (respondents who indicated that they were employed, helping a family member on a family farm, engaged in business, or self-employed), (b) not employed (respondents who indicated that they were unemployed, homemakers, or students in school or vocational training), and (c) respondents on parental leave (i.e., maternity leave or parental leave). It was expected that female employment would be negatively associated and male employment would be positively associated with fertility intentions.

The employment status of the partner used the same categories as above: (a) employed, (b) not employed, and (c) respondents on parental leave. This variable was included to account for gender-differentiated labour market participation.

On value orientations and attitudes, the following statements were considered concerning the roles of men and women: For whom is having a job more important, men or women? For whom is looking after children more important, men or women? Whose task is it to look after the home and children, men or women? Whose task is it to earn money for the family, men or women? A variable was then created from these four statements with the following categories: (a) women (respondents who answered "women, definitely" and "women, slightly"), (b) both sexes equally, and (c) men (respondents who answered "men, definitely" and "men, slightly"). It was expected that gender-egalitarian views on the participation of women in the labour market would be negatively associated with fertility intentions and that gender-egalitarian views on men's involvement in household tasks would be positively associated with fertility intentions in line with the expert literature on gender-egalitarian values (Aassve et al., 2015; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015).

In addition to the bivariate correlations and the logit regressions, robustness and sensitivity analyses were conducted aimed at testing the stability of the analysis results. Each input variable was excluded from the mean index from which the independent variable “housework tasks” was derived, while the other input variables were retained so as to test for heterogeneities based on how the construct of the men’s involvement in housework was defined. Secondly, the self-assessed economic situation was replaced by the income in order to account for potential differences between perceived and objective economic well-being. Thirdly, additional analyses were conducted in which either respondents aged 18–25 or respondents aged 36–45 were excluded. Fourthly, respondents with step-children were excluded; thus, only those respondents with co-resident biological children were considered. The tendencies remained robust with respect to housework tasks, childcare tasks, and socio-economic characteristics across all the iterations, with one notable exception: No significant associations were observed in the sub-sample of male respondents after removing respondents aged 36–45 from the sample. Furthermore, aimed at enhancing the understanding of the data used in the analysis, the sex-specific frequencies of all the dependent, independent, and control variables are provided in the Supplementary File.

4.3. Limitations

The design and the results of this study must be understood in the context of its limitations. Perhaps most importantly, the study relies on 2017 data since no more recent data has yet been published. More recent developments in fertility and in the wider policy and socio-economic environment are, therefore, not considered in the study. Secondly, since the second wave of GGS data is not yet available, it was not possible to conduct a longitudinal analysis. Thus, the study was limited to examining associations rather than causality, and fertility intentions rather than fertility. Thirdly, although the sample is nationally representative, some of the subgroup cell sizes were relatively small. This pertained in particular to men who usually or always do childcare or housework tasks. Since small cell sizes may act to reduce the precision of estimates, this factor should be considered when interpreting the results. Finally, the data used for the analysis may be subject to bias since the GGS relies on self-reported measures. Although previous research has highlighted that individual perceptions may in fact be more relevant in terms of fertility than objective measures (Riederer et al., 2008, 2019), it follows that the variables included in the study, e.g., those on the distribution of household work or the self-assessed economic situation, may not fully reflect objective reality.

5. Empirical Results

A summary of the analysis results is provided in Table 1. Separate analyses were conducted for the male and female respondents. The dependent variable comprised short-term fertility intentions, with the reference category set to those respondents who intended to have another child. The main independent variables comprised childcare and housework tasks, whereas demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and gender values were included as control variables. The left column of each analysis represents bivariate correlations between short-term intentions to have another child and the independent and control variables; the numbers represent the percentage of respondents with a given condition who have fertility intentions. The right column of each analysis presents the logistic regression results; the numbers represent the odds of having fertility intentions.

The descriptive statistics indicated that 19.7% of mothers who engaged in housework alone had short-term fertility intentions compared to 36.3% of mothers who shared the housework tasks with their partner and 0.0% of mothers whose partner was exclusively responsible for performing housework tasks; 48.6% of mothers in the youngest age group had short-term fertility intentions compared with 37.2% in the middle age group and 10.1% in the highest age group. A similar distribution was observed for the fathers: 66.7% of fathers in the youngest age group, 52.3% in the middle age group, and 16.2% in the highest age group had short-term fertility intentions. Around half of the mothers and fathers with one co-resident child had short-term fertility intentions to have another child compared to 10.9% of mothers and 16.8% of fathers who had two co-resident children, and 6.9% of mothers and 8.7% of fathers who had three or more co-resident children; 16.7% of mothers with a low education level, 26.2% with a medium education level, and 31.6% with a high education level had short-term fertility intentions. With regard to the self-assessed economic situation, 22.9% of mothers and 25.2% of fathers with a difficult economic situation, 27.0% of mothers and 36.8% of fathers with a somewhat difficult situation, and 39.7% of mothers and 42.0% of fathers with an easy economic situation had short-term fertility intentions. About 29.4% of fathers intended to have another child if their partner was employed, compared to 37.0% whose partner was not employed and 45.0% whose partner was on parental leave. With respect to value orientations and attitudes, 53.8% of fathers who reported that it is the task of women to earn money for the family had short-term fertility intentions compared to 39.3% of fathers who reported that it is the task of men to earn money for the family and 24.5% of fathers who reported that it is the task of both men and women to earn money for the family.

The results obtained from the logistic regression models validated most of the tendencies detected in the descriptive statistics. Being exclusively responsible for childcare tasks was positively associated with the fertility intentions of the fathers (OR = 13.68), whereas the shared involvement of mothers and fathers in household tasks was positively associated with the short-term fertility intentions of the mothers (OR = 2.33).

Secondly, sociodemographic characteristics were confirmed to be strong predictors of short-term fertility intentions for both genders. The fathers and mothers aged 36–45 exhibited lower odds of having fertility intentions than the fathers and mothers aged 18–25. Likewise, the more children parents already had, the lower their odds of having fertility intentions. In addition, the mothers have lower odds of having short-term fertility intentions if they were currently on parental leave than employed mothers (OR = 0.59) and if their partner was not employed compared to having an employed partner (OR = 0.32). In contrast, those fathers who had a partner on parental leave exhibited higher odds of short-term fertility intentions than fathers whose partner was employed (OR = 1.76). Having a high level of education reduced the odds of having fertility intentions for the fathers compared to the fathers with a low level of education (OR = 0.52).

Thirdly, the self-assessed household economic situation was positively associated with the fertility intentions of the fathers: the odds of reporting short-term fertility intentions were higher for those with a somewhat difficult economic situation (OR = 1.97) and those with an easy situation (OR = 3.44) than for fathers who reported difficulty with making ends meet. Furthermore, the fathers who stated that it is the task of both women and men to earn money for the family tended to exhibit lower odds of having positive fertility intentions than those fathers who reported that this is the task of women.

Table 1. Bivariate correlations and odds ratios of intentions to have another child in the next three years in Belarus, by sex.

	Females		Males	
	Descriptive statistics	Logistic regression	Descriptive statistics	Logistic regression
	%	OR	%	OR
Childcare tasks				
Woman	26.2	1 [Ref.]	36.5	1 [Ref.]
Both sexes equally	29.6	0.85	33.7	0.90
Man	0.0	0.00	33.3	13.68*
Housework tasks				
Woman	19.7	1 [Ref.]	34.1	1 [Ref.]
Both sexes equally	36.3	2.33***	37.5	0.95
Man	0.0***	0.96	10.0	0.15
Age group (in years)				
18–25	48.6	1 [Ref.]	66.7	1 [Ref.]
26–35	37.2	1.23	52.3	1.05
36–45	10.1***	0.19***	16.2***	0.28*
Number of co-resident children				
1	53.1	1 [Ref.]	59.4	1 [Ref.]
2	10.9	0.11***	16.8	0.14***
3 or more	6.9***	0.07***	8.7**	0.05***
Education				
Low	16.7	1 [Ref.]	35.2	1 [Ref.]
Medium	26.2	1.44	35.1	0.64
High	31.6**	1.31	34.9	0.52*
Self-assessed household economic situation				
Difficult	22.9	1 [Ref.]	25.2	1 [Ref.]
Somewhat difficult	27.0	1.25	36.8	1.97*
Easy	39.7*	1.35	42.0*	3.44**
Employment status				
Employed	27.5	1 [Ref.]	35.3	1 [Ref.]
Not employed	29.2	0.56	32.3	0.80
On parental leave	27.1	0.59*	0.0	0.00
Employment status of partner				
Employed	27.9	1 [Ref.]	29.4	1 [Ref.]
Not employed	16.7	0.32*	37.0	1.58
On parental leave	25.0	1.83	45.0***	1.76*

Table 1. (Cont.) Bivariate correlations and odds ratios of intentions to have another child in the next three years in Belarus, by sex.

	Females		Males	
	Descriptive statistics	Logistic regression	Descriptive statistics	Logistic regression
	%	OR	%	OR
Value orientations and attitudes				
For whom is having a job more important				
Women	38.5	1 [Ref.]	41.7	1 [Ref.]
Both sexes equally	25.1	0.54	32.5	1.44
Men	30.8	0.82	38.1	1.18
For whom is looking after children more important				
Women	29.4	1 [Ref.]	35.3	1 [Ref.]
Both sexes equally	25.0	0.81	34.6	1.21
Men	50.0+	2.68	40.0	1.79
Whose task is it to look after the home and children				
Women	27.9	1 [Ref.]	38.5	1 [Ref.]
Both sexes equally	26.8	1.17	32.7	0.73
Men	33.3	0.94	40.6	0.81
Whose task is it to earn money for the family				
Women	18.8	1 [Ref.]	53.8	1 [Ref.]
Both sexes equally	24.0	1.25	24.5	0.28+
Men	29.6	1.55	39.3***	0.58
<i>n</i>	804	804	662	662
Nagelkerke pseudo R2		0.44		0.43

Source: Author's calculations based on the 2017 wave of the GGS for Belarus. Note: The values of $p(\text{Chi}^2)$ for the descriptive statistics are reported next to the final category of variables: + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Fathers' involvement in household tasks is widely acknowledged as an important—though contested—factor in the analysis of fertility intentions. The case of Belarus provides an opportunity to revisit expectations surrounding the role of men's involvement in fertility transitions from first to second parity, given that the country's fertility dynamics are characterised by high first-parity fertility, low second-parity fertility, and only moderate postponement, or tempo effects, and that universal institutional childcare is provided. This study examined whether and how fathers' involvement in childcare and housework tasks is related to mothers' and fathers' intention to have another child, employing GGS data from Belarus. The study controlled for sociodemographic characteristics, economic well-being, and gender values. The analysis revealed that fathers' involvement in housework tasks was positively associated with the fertility intentions of the mothers but not of the fathers. Conversely, the exclusive responsibility of fathers for childcare tasks was

positively associated with the fertility intentions of the fathers but not of the mothers. The results of the study also showed that the self-assessed household economic situation was positively associated with the fertility intentions of the fathers and that those mothers whose partner was unemployed were less likely to have fertility intentions. Gender values were not statistically significantly associated with fertility intentions.

The results support the core claim of the Multiple Equilibrium Framework that fathers' involvement in household tasks has the potential to increase fertility intentions (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; McDonald, 2000). However, they also challenge the assumption that gender-role symmetry drives fertility and fertility intentions. Instead, the findings provide support for alternative explanations, i.e., that the relationship between fathers' involvement and fertility is contingent upon the type of household task and whose fertility intentions are being analysed (Neyer et al., 2013; Riederer et al., 2019). Since housework is usually seen as less enjoyable than childcare, the fertility intentions of mothers increased when the fathers were involved in housework (Koster et al., 2022; Poortman & Van Der Lippe, 2009; Sullivan, 2013). The finding that fathers who are solely responsible for childcare are more likely to intend to have another child can be read in either of two ways: Either their engagement in childcare influences their intention to have another child, or their engagement in childcare is influenced by their intention to have another child. Though more research is required so as to form a more complete understanding of the nature of this relationship, it is consistent with the analysis conducted by Leocádio et al. (2024) in other countries.

Furthermore, the results suggest that fathers' involvement, though relevant, is not able to sufficiently explain fertility intentions in Belarus. The significance of the self-assessed household economic situation and of male unemployment suggests that economic well-being and uncertainty play an important role, in line with neoclassical theory after Becker (1991) and the literature on socioeconomic uncertainty (Matysiak et al., 2021; Vignoli et al., 2020). This finding corroborates the finding of Amialchuk et al. (2014) that economic well-being and stability are important in terms of fertility in Belarus.

In the Belarusian context, the study findings illustrate that while the universal provision of childcare may act as an important institutional adjustment that reduces the workload of women (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015; Goldscheider et al., 2015; McDonald, 2000), the double burden borne by women with regard to housework continues to act as a barrier to fertility. This finding is consistent with emerging evidence from other countries (Leocádio et al., 2024). Institutional childcare alone is unable to offset this imbalance. Since women spend more than twice as much time as men on household work, and greater male involvement in household work increases the fertility intentions of women, the findings of the study suggest that there is an insufficiency of strong political and cultural mechanisms in place that serve to normalise fathers' involvement in domestic work (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2020; Saxonberg, 2014). Furthermore, the study highlights that economic insecurity and uncertainty continue to act as structural constraints on fertility in Belarus, for which child allowances do not sufficiently compensate (Amialchuk et al., 2014; Sharilova & Bandarenka, 2022; UDF.BY, 2021).

Two important policy recommendations were derived from the study. Firstly, policymakers should promote fathers' involvement in housework tasks. Given the seemingly important role of this factor, related policy measures should include both paid parental leave and employment law regulations that limit working hours so that fathers have more time to tend to their family duties, accompanied by social behavioural change campaigns. Policy measures aimed at promoting behavioural change among men and young people to support

women in the household could also play a valuable role in this respect. Secondly, family policy should be embedded within a wider welfare regime that aims to increase socioeconomic well-being and certainty among young parents, including, for example, increasing the minimum wage and providing affordable housing options.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

This article uses data from the GGP data archive on the 2020 Generations and Gender Survey, Belarus, wave 1 (see Sakalova & Rotman, 2020). The data can be accessed under the following link: <https://ggp.colectica.org/item/int.ggp/eb4823d8-30b2-44df-8541-2d68ea91b55c/1>. Further details and methodological notes on the data and the underlying survey can be found in Gauthier et al. (2023) and Vikat et al. (2007), as well as on the GGP website: <https://www.ggp-i.org>

Supplementary Material

The supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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