

A comparative study of contraceptive behaviour in three European countries: Evidence from the Generations and Gender Survey

A comparative study of behaviour intended to prevent unwanted pregnancy examines contraceptive practices in three European countries that participated in the first round of the Generations and Gender Survey between 2004 and 2006 – France, Georgia and Russia.

Interest in research on contraceptive practices in Europe began to grow after the sharp decline in the birth rates in the 1960s and 1970s. A combination of factors – a desire to reduce the number of children in the family, a desire to control birth spacing, and longer exposure to the risk of unwanted pregnancy after the ideal family size has been reached – spurred wide diffusion of contraceptive practices. In the late 1980s, another key factor was added to the list: AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, against which some contraceptive methods provide effective protection.

Data and methods

This study is based on the data from the first round of the Generations and Gender Survey, conducted between 2004 and 2006 depending on the country. The results of a descriptive analysis are presented, as well as logistic regressions that make it possible to estimate the influence of the individual characteristics of the respondents on their contraceptive behaviour.

The analysis relates to the use of contraceptive methods at the time of the survey, based on the answers to the questions: “Are you or your partner doing or using anything to prevent pregnancy?” and “Please name all of the things you use or do”. The respondent can choose up to four methods.

The question module on contraception was asked of respondents who satisfied the following criteria:

- ✓ Women of reproductive age (18-49) who are not pregnant and men of any age with a non-pregnant female partner aged 18-49;
- ✓ Respondents who have a cohabiting or non-cohabiting partner;¹
- ✓ Respondents who are physically able to have a child with their current partner.

After the selection, more than 11,000 respondents were asked about the current use of contraception (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Number of respondents eligible to answer the questions on contraceptive practices, by gender

France (2005)		Georgia (2006)		Russia (2004)	
<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
1,647	2,043	1,668	1,635	2,051	2,299

Use of contraception: a descriptive analysis

Practically all the respondents surveyed about current use of contraception answered these questions. The highest refusal rates were recorded in Russia: 1.9% of men and 1.2% of women, whereas in France and Georgia all the respondents answered these questions.

Our further analysis is based on the answers given by female respondents. First, it is assumed that women’s answers describe contraceptive practices more accurately, because no method of contraception can be used without a woman’s knowledge,² whereas a man might not

¹ Except for France, where the question on the use of contraception at the time of the survey was asked of all respondents that satisfied the criteria of age and fecundity, regardless of whether they had a partner or not.

² Except for male sterilization, which is not included in the list of contraceptive methods in the GGS questionnaire.

be aware that his partner takes the pill or has an IUD. Moreover, the logistic regression applied to the data to estimate the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the probability of using contraception, showed that for men almost all variables were insignificant.

Contraceptive prevalence

The estimates performed here show a wide range in contraceptive prevalence – the percentage of users of any contraceptive method – between the countries under review (**Table 2**). In France and Russia, the values – more than 80% – are fairly close to the limits determined by the country fertility levels (J. Bongaarts, E. Johansson, 2002: 29). The indicator has the potential to increase in Georgia, where the contraceptive prevalence rate is around 50% while fertility rates are the same as in Russia.

Table 2. Contraceptive method used by the respondent or his/her partner at the time of the survey, by sex (%)

Method	France		Georgia		Russia	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Do not use contraception	19.4	15.4	46.0	47.0	17.2	15.8
Use contraception	80.6	84.6	54.0	53.0	82.8	84.2
<i>Among them:</i>						
Condom	11.8	11.2	8.7	8.4	27.0	21.5
Pill	45.9	48.9	7.4	10.1	10.3	11.1
IUD	16.9	18.5	8.5	13.6	16.7	18.4
Local women's method	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.5	1.7	2.3
Implants	1.9	1.5	-	-	-	-
Morning after pill	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.5
Withdrawal	1.7	1.5	0.8	1.8	9.9	11.1
Periodic abstinence	0.9	1.2	7.0	15.2	12.2	13.5
Other method	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.3	2.9	4.9
Don't know	-	-	21.0	3.4	1.6	0.9

Unmet need for contraception

In populations whose birth rate is below the replacement level, which is the case of the three countries under review, women end their procreative activity relatively early. Some 80% of respondents aged over 35 who are able to have children do not want to have (any more) children (**Table 3**). However, despite their fertility intentions, some of these women do not use contraception. Their contraceptive need is therefore unmet.

The standard definition of unmet contraceptive need is based on the number of fecund women, regardless of marital status, who either want to postpone the birth of the next child for two or more years from the moment of the interview or want to stop childbearing but who do not use any contraceptive method. A broader definition also includes all users of traditional methods such as withdrawal and periodic abstinence.

According to this research, levels of unmet need for contraception vary in the four countries under review. Applying the first narrow definition shows the same level of unmet need in France and Russia (13% and 14.5%) and a very high level in Georgia (45.3%). However, when one apply a broader definition, the unmet contraceptive need is practically unchanged in

France (rising from 13% to 15.6%), increases by 20 percentage points in Georgia (from 45.3% to 63.4%) and triples in Russia (from 14.5% to 45%).

Estimates based on other surveys, even though they date from the mid-1990s, differ little from our results. In France, in 1994, 8% of sexually active women have an unmet need for contraception (estimates by E. Klijzing, 2000, p.76). In Russia, in 1996, according to the survey conducted on married women living in urban areas, the unmet need for contraception was 14% (1996 Russia Women’s Reproductive Health Survey, 1998). By contrast, for Georgia there is a considerable gap between the results of the GGS and those of previous surveys: according to the Reproductive Health Survey, Georgia 2005, only 16% of married women had an unmet need for contraception, which is much lower than the estimates here.

Table 3. Proportion of women aged 35-49 by physiological ability to have children and intention of having (more) children

	France	Georgia	Russia
Number of women aged 35-49 *)	1,624	1,291	1,997
<u>among them:</u> can have a child	81.2%	66.9%	66.3%
<u>among those who can have a child:</u> do not want to have children any more	78.3%	82.6%	86.8%

*) in all the countries except France, the questions on the ability to have children and the intention of having children were only asked of respondents with a partner (cohabiting or non-cohabiting) at the time of the survey

Relationship between use of modern contraceptives and socio-demographic profile of respondents

As mentioned above, the percentage of users of modern methods of contraception varies between the three countries under review. According to the Generations and Gender Survey, in France, almost 70% of women use the pill or an IUD, compared with 29% in Russia and 23% in Georgia. Therefore in Eastern Europe, the modernization of contraceptive practices, i.e. replacing traditional methods with modern ones, could become an important factor in lowering the number of abortions. For a better understanding of respondents’ choice of modern methods, their socio-demographic characteristics in the four countries and the influence of each of those characteristics were compared.

A logistic regression model incorporating the following variables was applied to the data:

- age;
- marital status;
- number of children;
- place of residence;
- educational level;
- employment status;
- fertility intentions.

The results do not allow to construct a typical profile of the user of modern methods of contraception valid for all three countries (**Table 4**). Use of the pill or IUDs is more widespread in some socio-demographic groups: the youngest women with at least two children more frequently use one of these methods. The probability of using these methods is also higher among working women and among women who want to space births or stop having children. On the other hand, the impact of some variables seems inconsistent. Traditionally, better educated women living in urban areas are considered to be the most receptive to modern behaviour, including contraception. The estimates here show, on the contrary, that in France and Russia, the least educated women living in rural areas more often use the pill or IUDs. That inconsistency could be partly attributable to the impact of the age structure of the socio-demographic groups.

Table 4. Odds ratio of the use of the pill or IUDs by respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Variable	Odds ratios		
	France	Georgia	Russia
<i>Age group</i>			
18-19	0.58	0.40	0.92
20-24 (ref.)	1	1	1
25-29	0.58**	1.40	0.91
30-34	0.36***	0.98	0.75
35-39	0.48***	0.85	0.79
40-44	0.32***	0.69	0.50***
45-49	0.14***	0.25***	0.28***
<i>Type of partnership</i>			
Married (ref.)	1	1	1
Cohabiting	0.88	0.71**	0.94
Living apart together	0.91	0.27**	0.73**
<i>Parity</i>			
0	1.15	0.37	0.55***
1 (ref.)	1	1	1
2	1.96***	1.45**	1.20
3 +	1.64**	1.47*	1.43**
<i>Place of residence</i>			
Urban (large cities) (ref.)	0.87	0.70**	0.75**
Urban (other urban areas)	1	1	1
Rural	1.10	0.61***	1.08
<i>Educational level</i>			
Lower than secondary	0.57***	0.72	0.73*
Secondary (ref.)	1	1	1
Higher than secondary	0.85	1.22	0.97
In educational attainment	1.70*		2.31*
Working (ref.)	1	1	1
Unemployed	0.55***	0.97	0.67***
<i>Fertility intentions</i>			
Have a child in the next 3 years (ref.)	1	1	1
Have a child, but not in the next 3 years	1.26		1.24
Not have children, neither now nor later	1.34	1.32	1.36**
<i>Number of users of the pill or an IUD</i>	1,446	379	884
<i>Total respondents</i>	2,943	1,635	2,299

*** - $p \leq 0.001$; ** - $p \leq 0.05$; * - $p \leq 0.1$

Our analysis shows that the data on contraceptive use provided by the Generations and Gender Survey give a good possibility for a comparative analysis of contraceptive behaviour and The comparison of contraceptive behaviour and highlight the differences in family planning practices in France, Georgia and Russia.

The analysis at micro-level shows that the impact of the individual characteristics of the respondents on the use of contraception does not vary much from one country to another. In all three countries, the youngest and best educated women more frequently use modern methods; marriage and living in an urban environment are also factors that increase the probability of using the pill or an IUD. In other words, the characteristics of the users of modern methods are fairly similar in the three countries, but the numbers of users of these methods vary considerably. Therefore, causes of these quantitative differences need to be looked at macro-level: the attitude of the state towards family planning, the specific features of public health insurance coverage and cultural factors in each country under review.

The authors are aware that the comparison of three countries is not enough for making conclusions about the typology of family planning practices in Europe. Since the data of the GGS Wave 1 from eight European countries are now available for analysis, the authors plan to include Bulgaria, Germany, Netherlands and Romania into the list of countries compared that may give a clearer idea of the types of contraceptive behaviour in Europe.

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