



Different experiences of children living in two-parent and single-parent families: Comparing generations born in the 1950s-1980s in Russia and in France

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Abstract

This paper examines the life-time measures and trends of children's experiences in single-parent and two-parent families in Russia and France, within the context of generations. The study was conducted using two panel waves of GGS-Russia (2004, 2007) and GGS-France (2005, 2008). The results indicate that despite the Second Demographic Transition starting later in Russia than in France, and with approximately equal proportions of children born to single mothers, Russian children born in intact families are more likely to live in single-parent families later in life than French children. However, children born outside of a union in Russia have an advantage over French children in terms of their experiences and time spent living in two-parent families. The study of intergenerational dynamics reveals an obvious trend in Russia of an increase, from generation to generation, in the time such children spend living in two-parent families, while the same indicator in France has remained practically stable.

Keywords

Russia, France, children, life course, single-parent family, single-parenthood, two-parent family, international Generations and Gender Programme, Generations and Gender Sample Surveys

JEL codes: J11, J12, J13

Introduction

Fundamental changes in family life organisation have occurred over the past four decades in developed Western countries and for about three decades in Russia. These include an increase in the age of first marriage, a growing number of divorces, remarriages, nonmarital

births and institutionalisation of cohabitation as a new form of marriage/partnership union. These changes are explained by the theory of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe 2010). The actual social acceptance and normalisation of cohabitation and non-marital births has been studied in detail by both international and Russian researchers (Prioux 2006; Kalmijn 2007; Zakharov 2007, 2008; Hoem et al. 2009; Mitrofanova and Artamonova 2016; Andreev et al. 2022). It is obvious, however, that, as the life course has become more variable, family breakdowns or entry into new marriage/partnership unions occur more frequently (Andersson 2002; Andersson and Philipov 2002; Andersson et al. 2017) and models of family and partnership relations become more diverse. Therefore, the study of the marital status of individuals alone, without considering the impact of its dynamics and variability on the individual and his/her family members, cannot provide a complete picture of the possible variability in the organisation of family life of people today.

The dynamics of change in the marriage-partner status are usually studied within the context of adult women and men, revealing the diversity of marriage and family pathways and the variation in the duration and probability of change in the marriage-partner status. Much less often researchers examine the family composition of children from birth to adulthood. However, international studies reveal that living with a single mother throughout or for a large part of childhood, experiencing parental divorce, or losing a parent can have a short- or long-term impact on various aspects of a child's later life, such as health, academic performance, behaviour, and future family relationships (see reviews, e.g. Amato and Spencer 2010; Bernardi et al. 2013; Härkönen et al. 2017).

Prevalence of child poverty has traditionally been associated with an increased number of children being raised by single mothers (Duncan and Rodgers 1991; Eggebeen and Lichter 1991). Given the current variability of forms of family life organisation, which has replaced the “one marriage for a lifetime” model, we can assume that such changes have also affected the frequency and duration of a child's living in an intact family or with a single mother. Thus, we can assume that both in France and Russia a higher probability for a child to be raised by a single mother may be somewhat offset by an increased chance of the mother's re-partnering. Compared to the past, modern societies are much more tolerant and may even support the marriage of a woman with a child or the re-entry of mother women into a partnership, if not a formal marriage.

Thus, the study of the change of family forms during childhood, estimation of the average duration of the exposure to “two-parent”/“single-parent” family statuses in France, which is more favourable for families, and Russia, which is less so, is important to understand the specificity of living conditions, raising and socialisation of children at different stages of their lives as diversity of family forms has grown in modern societies.

Exploring the dynamics of family forms from the children's perspective is a challenging and therefore rare task for researchers to undertake, as it requires the data on all changes in the mother's marriage/partnership status since the birth of her child. Such information can be available from retrospective or longitudinal studies. Unfortunately, such studies are extremely rare on Russia¹, unlike other countries, while we can only use one sample study that

1 Russia currently has only one panel survey available, the *Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey — HSE* (see: <https://www.hse.ru/rllms/>) interviewing the same respondents year after year, which enables a consistent study of changes in their socio-economic characteristics, health indicators, etc. This survey does not focus on detailed monitoring of changes in the marital and family status in connection with childbearing among respondents, which prevents from using its database for our purposes. A more suitable study of family and fertility “Parents and Children, Men and Women in the Family and Society”/GGP-Russia, whose data are used in this paper, was discontinued after the third wave in 2011.

meets the requirements for international comparisons. We have analysed the experiences of children changing family forms using the unique opportunity of unified and harmonised databases of the international comparative research conducted under the “Generations and Gender” programme (Gauthier et al. 2018) for Russia and France. The authors of this paper set the following objectives: to study the distribution of births by the mother’s marital status by generations of children, to compare and assess the trends in the experiences of children living in two-parent or single-parent families, as well as the time of life spent by an average child in a two-parent or single-parent family.

We proceed from the life course theory, according to which the events that a child experiences in childhood influence their future and demographic behaviour (Elder 1998). We consider the marital status of the child’s mother at the time of birth as the first event that may influence the child’s socialisation later on. Although most births, despite the prevalence of cohabitation, occur within marriage, estimates of the proportion of births outside of marriage or partnership vary. For example, K. Kiernan estimates the prevalence of first births in Western Europe by the mother’s marriage/partnership status, arguing that the practice of having children before entering into a first cohabiting union is low in countries with both high and low rates of non-marital births (Kiernan 2001, 2004). G. Andersson and D. Philipov, based on the data from the international comparative research programme “Family and Fertility Surveys (FFS)”, break countries down into three groups: countries with low rates of births outside of marriage/partnership unions (marriages or stable cohabitation¹), including such Catholic countries as Italy, Spain and the Flemish part of Belgium; countries with an average proportion of births to single mothers, including, for example, Latvia, Austria, and France; and countries with a high proportion of births outside of marriage/partnership unions, including the USA (Bumpass and Lu 2000; Andersson 2002; Andersson and Philipov 2002). One would assume that Russia belongs to the countries with an average proportion of births outside of stable cohabiting unions (see estimates based on the GGP-Russia data: (Rozhdaemost i vosproizvodstvo..... 2009: 124-36)), and we are discussing this matter in detail in what follows.

E. Ivanova and A. Mikheeva classify situations leading to the registration of children as fatherless as reasons for single motherhood as follows: 1) having a child for oneself; 2) maintaining cohabitation without establishing paternity; 3) unforeseen situations such as widowhood or divorce during pregnancy (Ivanova and Mikheeva 1998; Mikheeva 2012). At the same time, international experience is evidence that availability of government support for single mothers also influences the prevalence of births outside of marriage/partnership unions (Gonzales 2005, 2006).

A continuing cohabitation allows considering that the child is being raised in a two-parent family, whereas a birth of a child in the absence of the father will create what is a single-parent family from the outset. According to empirical studies, a certain proportion of women who initially raise a child alone will start cohabiting with the child’s biological father later on (Ivanova and Mikheeva 1998; Gurko 2008). And, although single-mother families account for a significant share in the structure of Russian families with children, single motherhood is a temporary state for a considerable proportion of women (Zakharov and Churilova 2013).

1 According to the methodology adopted, a minimum of three months of cohabitation used as a criterion to define a stable union without a formal marriage for all countries participating in the comparative research programme.

The consequences of a child living in a single-parent family are manifested both by the worse academic performance (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994), earlier dropout from school and employment, and by earlier starting of a family, having a child at an early age, more often outside of marriage (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988; Kiernan 1992). Experiencing a divorce, depending on the speed of adaptation to the new life circumstances, has a short- or long-term impact on the welfare, health and well-being of both the former spouses and children (Amato and Spencer 2010). Children who have experienced parental divorce are more likely themselves to dissolve their first marriage or partnership (Kiernan and Cherlin 1999).

Studies reveal that European countries and the United States differ significantly in the proportion of children being raised in single-parent families (Andersson 2002; Andersson and Philipov 2002). For most children, the family structure changes one or more times during their childhood. At the same time, the family life courses differ significantly for children with different status at the time of birth. The consequences of living in a single-parent family and the extent to which those are manifested depend on the reason for the child to be raised in a single-parent family, and empirical data show that children who lost a parent to death do not differ much from children from two-parent families, while children of divorced parents are at their most vulnerable, even compared to children born to single mothers (Kiernan 1992).

D. Breton et al. compared the probabilities of parental union breakdown in France and in Russia, concluding that in Russia children more often live in single-parent families than in France, the likelihood of parental union breakdown varies across different birth cohorts, and it is at its maximum for Russia for children born in the 1990s (Breton et al. 2009, 2010). A.S. Barashkova, based on her studies of families in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Russian Federation, notes that single-parent families very rarely become two-parent families and young women have the best chance of finding a father for their child. If a single mother is over 35 years old, her chances of starting a two-parent family are low, which is explained by the shortage of potential partners on the marriage market (Barashkova 1998). C. Zabel made a similar conclusion that single mothers in Russia with small children or several children are less likely to enter into new relationship than childless women. However, those single mothers who find themselves in a tough economic situation are likely to enter into a partnership sooner than they would have done under other circumstances (Zabel 2008).

Data

To study the questions posed, we used the results of two waves of nationally representative sample surveys for Russia and France, conducted according to a unified methodology under the International programme of comparative longitudinal surveys “Generations and Gender Programme (GGP)” (see: <https://www.ggp-i.org/>). We used the microdata databases harmonised for international comparative studies¹.

The Russian survey “Parents and Children, Men and Women in Family and Society” / GGP-Russia was conducted as part of the Generations and Gender Programme by the Independent Institute for Social Policy (IISP, Moscow) in 2004 (first wave) and in 2007 (sec-

¹ The databases for the countries participating in the GGP programme are free and open to researchers and are coordinated by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI): <https://www.ggp-i.org/data/methodology/>; <https://www.ggp-i.org/data/>.

ond wave). The concept and tools of the survey were adapted to the Russian context by IISP with the participation of the independent research group Demoscope and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Rostock, Germany). See (Zakharov et al. 2007) on the methodology and programme of the survey.

The French survey under this programme was conducted in 2005 (first wave) and 2008 (second wave) by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Paris, France). The concept and tools of the survey were developed by the French Institute of Demographic Studies (INED, Paris, France) with the participation of the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. See details on the survey at <https://erfi.web.ined.fr/index.htm>.

France was chosen as a country for comparison for two reasons. Firstly, the Second demographic transition and, consequently, the changes in demographic behaviour began in France in the late 1960s, i.e., two decades earlier than in Russia. Secondly, the French policy of supporting families with children differs from that of Russia: in France, throughout the period under consideration, there was a rather extensive system of various family allowances, including that for single mothers (Zubchenko 2009); while in Russia during the Soviet period, although single-parent families did receive some financial support, such a form of family organisation was condemned ideologically and its inferiority and educational failure were emphasised (Gurko 2008). During the economic transition period of the 1990s, due to deterioration of funding of social programmes, single mothers faced an increased risk of poverty, while in today's Russia single mothers receive but little support (Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov 2004; Dankovcev and Maskalyanova 2020) while divorced fathers often fail to fulfil their alimony obligations (Rzhanitsyna 2012; Antonov 2023).

Information on the first-born children was used to address the objectives of the study. Panel data were used to study the biographies from birth to age 18 of 3,335 children from the Russian sample and 1,612 children from the French sample, all born between 1950 and 1989. The analysis only relied on the data on children for whom all information was available about when they started or stopped living with or without a father. Generations of children born before 1950 and after 1989 were excluded from the analysis, the former because of their low representation in the sample, the latter because they were too young to construct their complete biographies. All the children were divided into four groups by the decade of birth: 1950-1959, 1960-1969, 1970-1979, and 1980-1989.

Hereinafter, a two-parent family is defined as a family consisting of one or more minor children and two cohabiting parents who are in a marriage or partnership union: i.e., who are formally married or cohabit for at least three consecutive months. A single-parent family is defined as a family consisting of a mother and one or more children under the age of 18. Other relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) living together are not considered.

Results

Distribution of births in generations of children by mother's marital status

The distribution of births by the mother's marital status allows to trace the dynamics of changes in the proportion of births to single mothers, in marriages and consensual unions (Figure 1). In the first post-war generations of children born in 1950-1959, both Russia and France had a relatively high proportion of children born to single mothers, 23.1% in France and 17.3% in Russia. These high levels can be explained by the fact that women of

reproductive age, who had to postpone marriage and childbearing because of the war, faced a shortage of men on the marriage market after the war. The 1960-1969 generation of children were born to mothers from the generations born in the 1930s-1940s, and they are also characterised by a high proportion of children born to single mothers, 15.4% in France and 16.4% in Russia. The picture is quite different for children born in the 1970s and 1980s: about 90% of them were born in two-parent families in both countries, and the proportions of children born to single mothers in both the 1970s and 1980s generations are equal.

Furthermore, France saw a clear impact of the Second demographic transition which began in the late 1960s: whereas only 2.3% of children were born in an unregistered union of those born between 1950 and 1959, the same indicator amounts to 6% for children born between 1960 and 1969 and 20.7% for children born between 1980 and 1989.

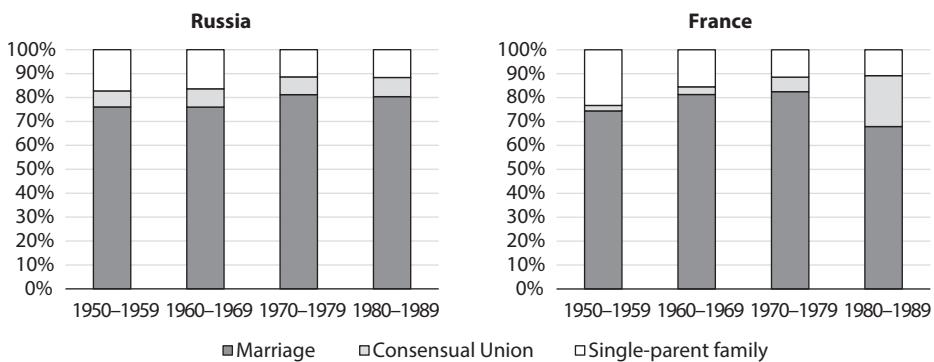


Figure 1. Distribution of births in generations of children by mother’s marital status, generations of children by year of birth, Russia and France. *Source: authors’ calculations. Note:* Hereinafter, the authors used the harmonised international GGS database (see: <https://www.ggp-i.org/data/>).

Experiences of children living in two-parent families

The experience of living in a two-parent family is measured by the cumulative proportion of children who by a certain age have lived in a two-parent family with their birth father and birth mother or with their birth mother and a stepfather (Table 1). The proportion represents a share of children born in marriage/partnership unions and increases due to the experience of living in a two-parent family of some of the children born to single mothers. In Russia, the proportion of children born in a single-parent family who have never lived in a two-parent family during their childhood was decreasing with each generation. At the same time, the age up to which half of such children experienced living in a two-parent family has remained stable from generation to generation, being equal to three years. A similar trend can be found in France, and the age of first experience of living in a two-parent family for children from a single-parent family is the same in both countries.

Experiences of children living in single-parent families

While there are similarities in children’s experiences of living in two-parent families in both countries and only a slight difference between the cohorts of children by the year of birth, the cumulative proportions of children who have experienced living in a single-parent family

by a certain age are quite different. Table 2 shows the cumulative proportions of children who had experience of living in a single-parent family by a given year of age in each of the generations considered. This indicator is a sum of the proportion of children born to single mothers and the proportion of children who have experienced at least one divorce, parental separation or father's death.

Table 1. Cumulative proportion of children by generation, with experience of living in a two-parent family from birth to 18 years of age, Russia and France.

Year of birth	Born in a two-parent family	By the age of 1	By the age of 3	By the age of 6	By the age of 10	By the age of 15	By the age of 18
Russia							
1950-1959	82.7	84.3	85.4	87.1	87.9	88.4	88.6
1960-1969	83.6	85.4	87.1	88.1	88.3	88.8	89.2
1970-1979	88.6	90.1	91.5	92.5	93.6	93.8	93.9
1980-1989	88.4	90.3	91.6	92.7	93.5	94.2	94.3
France							
1950-1959	76.1	80.5	81.7	82.4	82.8	82.8	83.2
1960-1969	84.1	86.3	88.3	89.0	89.8	90.3	90.5
1970-1979	87.4	89.5	91.0	91.9	92.6	93.7	94.4
1980-1989	86.8	90.2	91.9	92.3	92.9	93.3	93.8

Source: authors' calculations.

Table 2. Cumulative share of children by generation, with experience of living in a single-parent family from birth to 18 years of age, Russia and France.

Year of birth	Born in a single-parent family	By the age of 1	By the age of 3	By the age of 6	By the age of 10	By the age of 15	By the age of 18
Russia							
1950-1959	17.3	18.6	20.3	24.0	28.5	32.5	35.3
1960-1969	16.4	18.3	21.2	26.5	31.6	37.0	40.8
1970-1979	11.4	14.2	18.7	25.8	31.7	36.7	40.5
1980-1989	11.6	15.2	20.8	26.5	32.1	38.0	41.9
France							
1950-1959	23.3	24.0	24.4	25.2	26.0	29.4	30.9
1960-1969	15.5	16.0	17.7	19.0	21.2	26.7	29.2
1970-1979	11.4	13.0	14.1	15.7	20.0	25.8	29.1
1980-1989	10.2	11.7	14.5	18.4	22.7	29.1	33.2

Source: authors' calculations.

In Russia, the proportion of children who have lived in a single-parent family at least once during their childhood is much lower in the generations born in the 1950s, at 35.3%. In the following three generations of children, it ranges around 41%. Note that the generations of the 1950s are those with the highest proportion of children born to single mothers. This means that the proportion of children who have experienced parental divorce/separation or father's death is lower in that generation than in the following generations of children, at 18.1%. A change in the age by which half of the children born in a two-parent family and being raised in a single-parent family at some point in their childhood had their first experience of living in a single-parent family can be traced across generations of Russian children. In the generations born in 1950-1959 and 1960-1969, that is between 6 and 10 years of age, and in the generations born in the 1970s and 1980s it is close to 6 years of age.

The experiences of children living in single-parent families in France only remotely resemble those of Russian children. The cumulative proportion of children with experience of living in a single-parent family is lower in France across all generations of children: by 4.4 percentage points (p.p.) in the 1950s, by 11.6 p.p., 11.3 p.p. and 8.7 p.p. in the generations born in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, respectively. Generations of children born in the 1950s are similarly characterised by the highest proportion of children born to single mothers and the lowest proportion of children who experienced parental breakdown or death of the father — only 7.6%, which is about 2.4 times lower than in Russia. In those generations, half of the children born in a two-parent family who experienced living in a single-parent family acquired this experience before the age of 15; the same is true for the generations of the 1960s; the generations of the 1970s, before the age of a little over 10; and in the generations of the 1980s, before the age of 10.

Thus, we observe approximately the same proportion of children born in a single-parent family in the generations under consideration in both countries. The Second demographic transition started to show in France by the early 1970s, while in Russia, in the mid-1990s, which, it would seem, should have led to a larger proportion in France of children with experience of living in both types of families. But the proportion of children with experience of living in a single-parent family was actually lower in France than in Russia. A possible explanation lies in the differences in marriage and divorce-related legislation: divorce in families with children in France, unlike in Russia, is complicated by a mandatory period of separation from the former partner and significant legal expenses. In Russia, a higher likelihood of divorce under more liberal legislation is complemented by a particularly pronounced male overmortality at working age.

Experiences of children living in different family types

Figure 2 shows the distribution of children by type of family in which they have ever lived during their childhood. In Russia, with each generation, fewer and fewer children spend their childhood in either exclusively single-parent or exclusively two-parent families. On the contrary, the proportion of children who have experienced living in both types of families has increased significantly, from 23.6% in the 1950s to 35.6% in the 1980s.

A similar trend is characteristic for children born in France: from generation to generation, the proportion of children with experience of living in both types of families has increased, while the proportion of children who have lived throughout their childhood only in a two-parent family or only in a single-parent family has decreased.

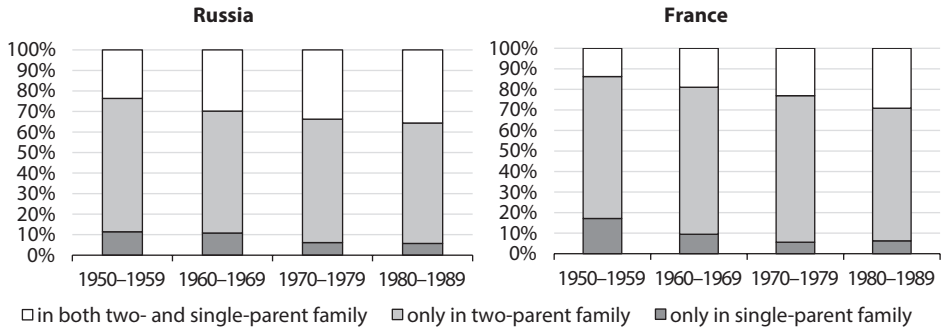
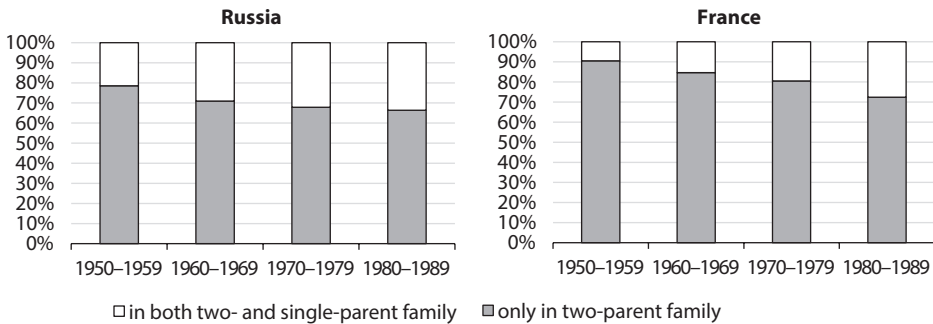


Figure 2. Proportion of children living in only two-parent, only single-parent, or both single-parent and two-parent families, generations of children by year of birth, Russia and France. *Source:* authors' calculations.

However, while in both countries the proportions of children with experience of living only in a single-parent family are approximately equal amounting to approximately 6%, the proportion of children with experience of living only in two-parent families is lower in Russia across all generations of children under consideration.

The changes are even more obvious if those born in marriage/partnership unions are considered separately from those born in single-parent families. (Fig. 3A, 3B).

(A) Children born in a two-parent family



(B) Children born in a single-parent family

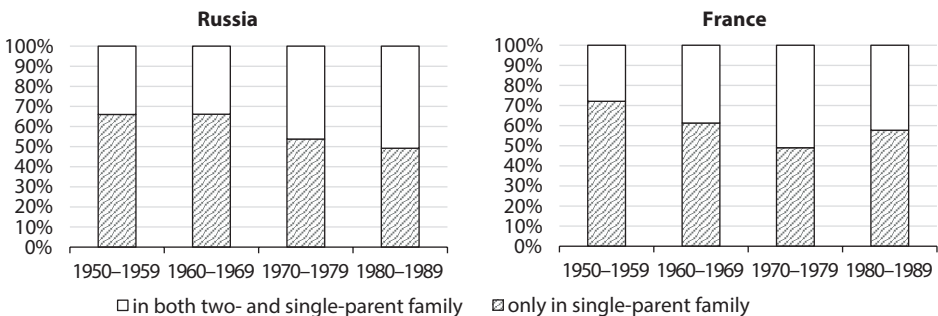


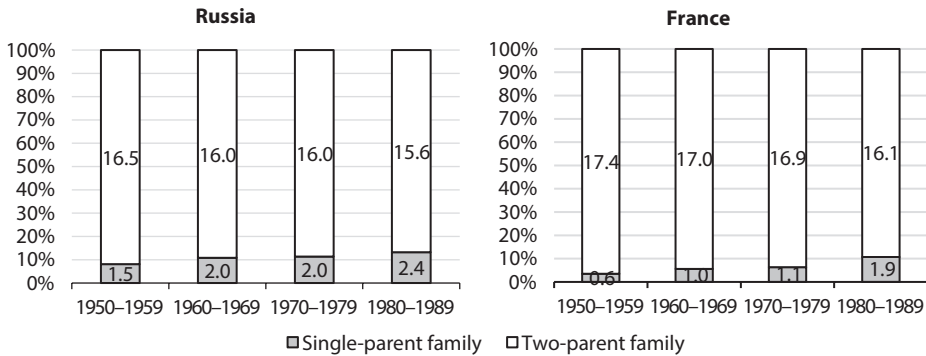
Figure 3. Proportion of children living only in a two-parent family, only in a single-parent family, or both in two-parent and single-parent families among those born in a two-parent family (A) and single-parent family (B), generations of children by year of birth, Russia and France. *Source:* authors' calculations.

While 21.5% of children in Russia and 9.5% of children in France who were born in the 1950s generations lived in a single-parent family at some point in time or had this experience several times before the age of 18, in the 1980s generations 33.6% of children in Russia and 27.6% in France were born in such families. Among children born in a single-parent family, the proportion of those who were raised in a two-parent family for at least a certain period of their childhood increased in Russia from 34% in the 1950s to 50.8% in the 1980s, and in France, from 27.9% to 42.3%, respectively.

Childhood time spent by children in different types of families

As mentioned above, with each generation an increasing proportion of children born in a two-parent family live in a single-parent family at least once during their childhood, and, conversely, an increasing number of children born to single mothers live in a two-parent family at least once during their childhood. An analysis of the time period of childhood presented in Fig. 4 both as an average number of years and in percentages of childhood time allows to assess the duration of socialisation of children born in a two-parent family or to single mothers in families of different types.

(A) Children born in two-parent families



(B) Children born in single-parent families

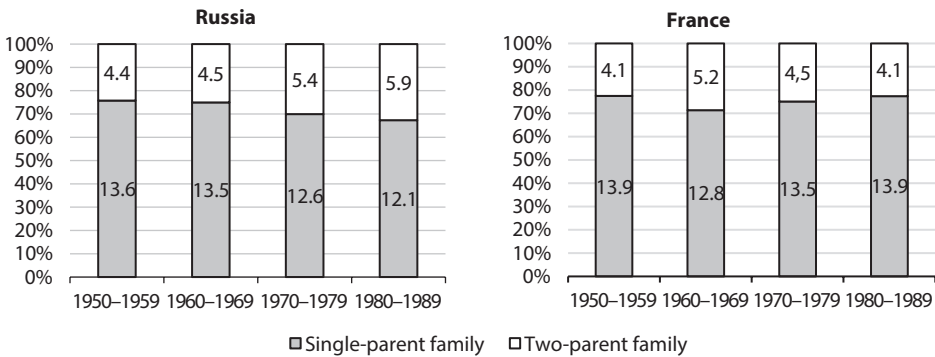


Figure 4. Average time (values in years are shown in columns) and proportions of childhood time up to 18 years of age spent by children in a two-parent or a single-parent family, among children born in a two-parent family (A) and a single-parent family (B), generations of children by year of birth, Russia and France. *Source:* authors' calculations.

Children born in a marriage/partnership union, on average, spend more and more time with each generation in a single-parent family. In Russia, the average duration of living in a single-parent family increased from 1.5 years for generations born between 1950 and 1959 to 2.4 years for generations born between 1980 and 1989; in other words, the first post-war generations of children spent 7.3% of their total period of childhood up to the age of 18 in a single-parent family, while their children born in the 1980s, 13.3%.

Similar changes occurred in France: children born in a marriage/partnership union in the 1950s lived in a single-parent family for an average of 0.6 years, or 3.5% of their total childhood time, while generations born in the 1980s spent an average of 1.9 years, or 10.7% of their childhood time in a single-parent family.

Thus, the trend for children born in a two-parent family to live longer in a single-parent family is characteristic of both countries. Although in France the average duration of fatherlessness is shorter than in Russia, if slightly; this is explained by the fact that French women's two-parent families tend to turn into single-parent families when their children are, on average, older.

For Russian children born to single mothers, a steady downward trend is clear in the average time spent in a single-parent family during childhood: while children born in the 1950s spent an average of 13.6 years, or 75.8% of their total childhood time in a single-parent family, in the generation of the 1980s, the same was already 12.1 years, or 67.3% of childhood time.

The trend towards living less time in a single-parent family for children born to single mothers is not so obvious from the French data: for 1950s generations, this time is 13.9 years, or 77.5% of the period of childhood in a single-parent family; for the 1960s generations, 12.8 years, or 71.3%; and for the 1970s and 1980s generations, 13.5 years, or 75.1%, and 13.9 years, or 77.4%, respectively.

Conclusion

This paper examined the experience of post-war generations of children living in a two-parent or a single-parent family in Russia and France using the data from the comparative sample surveys conducted under the international programme "Generations and Gender."

Our results confirmed the general direction of changes in both countries concerning family conditions of children's socialisation in the context of changes that are most generally conceptualised as the Second demographic transition: family organisation is becoming more complex and diverse in both countries due to the growing diversity of forms of marriage-partner relationships and the possibility of making individual choices of marriage/family trajectories. Accordingly, children are raised in more dynamic conditions of family socialisation and at a growing risk of the mother changing (repeatedly) her marriage/partnership status.

At the same time, the study revealed not only similarities but also significant differences in the trends observed in Russia and France, including when comparing generations of children born from the early 1950s to the late 1980s.

Our analysis revealed similarities between Russia and France in the distribution of first births by the mother's marriage/partnership status. In both countries, the proportion of children born to single mothers was high in the 1950s and 1960s birth cohorts, over 21% in

France and 17% in Russia (according to the sample surveys considered). In the generations born in the 1970s and 1980s, the above proportion decreased to around 11% in both countries.

If we consider the experiences of children born outside of marriage/partnership unions, initially to single mothers (i.e., women who did not declare their living with a partner at the time of childbirth, including divorced and widowed women), then the differences between Russia and France are also small: the proportions of children with only a single-parent family experience are roughly equal in both countries, at around 6%. However, children born to single mothers in Russia fared better than French children in terms of the total time spent before age 18 living in a two-parent family with a stepfather or other mother's partner. In Russia, there is an obvious trend for the time spent by such children in a two-parent family to increase from generation to generation, while in France this has remained practically stable. A plausible reason for the difference lies in the different levels of social support: in Russia, it is less substantial than in France, which probably encourages more Russian single mothers to try to find a new partner to bring income into the family as soon as possible.

The experience of living in a single-parent family is very different for Russian and French children. Although in both countries there has been a growing proportion of time spent living in a single-parent family for children born in a marriage/partnership union, in France more children spent their entire childhood in a two-parent family, and those who lived in a single-parent family acquired that experience at a later age compared with Russian children.

Thus, our results allow to compare the experiences of children living in different types of families in two countries, France, a West European country that entered its Second demographic transition in the late 1960s, with generous government policies to support families with children, and Russia, an East European country where signs of the Second demographic transition showed in the late 1980s and early 1990s and whose policies for supporting single mothers were less generous overall than in France and were more markedly affected by the specificities of certain periods of the past, including in the context of economic development. We have demonstrated that the two nations, so different one from the other, are both characterised by the increasing variation in the family conditions in which children live and different experiences and lengths of time children have lived in two-parent or single-parent families, despite the same premise of the equal proportion of births outside of a marriage/partnership union.

This analysis did not distinguish between such forms of marriage/partnership union as marriage and cohabitation, as we were limited by the sample size and, accordingly, a small proportion of children from the generations under consideration born in consensual (other than formal) unions. Their specific influences on the dynamics of family forms during childhood in the two countries remain open for research.

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