THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD: A LIFE STYLE CHOICE

People who have children in Sweden get governmental support such as paid parental leave, monthly child allowances, subsidised child-care facilities, etc. Even so, in the last decade Sweden has witnessed decreasing fertility rates and postponed parenthood. This is a qualitative study. It draws on focus group interviews with men and women between 24 and 38 years old with a variety of occupational, educational and geographic backgrounds. Approximately half of the focus group participants did within the last year of the interview have or were at the time of the interview expecting their first child. The other half did not have children. How do people in Sweden talk about when, whether and why to have children? How do they describe parenthood in comparison to living without children? How do they define the value children? These are the overall questions directing this paper. The focus group discussions resulted in a large amount of data. This kind of data show how people reason and discuss the decision to have children, the transition to parenthood, parenthood, and life in general, and give indications of how people are influenced by and position themselves and others towards different often contradictory discourses. Recent studies suggest that western world children in time and money compete with leisure activities, travel, high living standard, friends and so forth. This is evident when analysing the focus group discussions. Children and parenthood are looked upon as more or less connected to a certain life, a life that is not necessarily desired. In the late modern society having a child is for many a carefully reflected over choice. The choice is made harder since the outcome and consequences of that choice are unpredictable and imbued with uncertainty. This uncertainty of how life will be when entering parenthood is brought up and reflected over in the focus groups. It is feasible to suggest that this risk is influencing peoples’ decision-making with regard to reproductive behaviour. Will life and life style change? How? How much? Will I as a person change? Will the relationship to my partner change? This paper presents people’s explanations of when the time is right to become a parent. It demonstrates how the value of having children is described, and how parenthood is portrayed in comparison to life without children.

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