Women become mothers
The transition to motherhood from a biographical perspective

Background
Even if different studies worldwide refer to a link between the biographical background and satisfaction in parenthood, in Germany mainly quantitative studies were published over the last years, which could not solve how exactly biographical experiences influence the transition to parenthood. Besides, many studies within the last years only focused on partial aspects like the position of fathers or the reconciliation of work and family life. The doctorate wants to fill this research gap.

Qualitative Design

Sampling
- 35 women in Northern Germany (ages 25-35)

Method
- biographical narrative interviews based on the method by Fritz Schütze (1983) at two survey periods (first: max. six weeks before childbirth; second: around child’s first birthday)

First results

Process model of the transition to motherhood over the life course

- framework conditions of growing up such as family system, education, perceived satisfaction of parents etc.
- personal health factors, values, self-image and future expectations
- secure job, established love-partnership, right time
- current and expected support from child’s father, family, friends, midwife etc.
- individual opportunities for the realization
- child’s personality, health and development
- information to other and feedback
- birth-related experiences
- dealing with own expectations, flexibility and the willingness to adapt
- preparations for life with the child
- social and familial expectations (pressure)

Typology (data evaluation of the first survey)

- Family formation as a concept of normality
- Family formation as a distinction from experiences in family of origin
- Family formation characterized by a professional habitus
- Risky family formation on the basis of social and/or familial expectations or spontaneous pregnancy

Conclusion
The preliminary results underline the influence of the biographical background on attitudes and expectations towards family formation and a satisfying family life, the decision of having a child and the experience of maternity as well as dealing with one’s own earlier expectations. Based on the study, the transition to motherhood can be interpreted as a process over the life course with a particular influence of one’s own family socialization, biographically formed reference models and pictures of “good” motherhood as well as personal health factors, self-image, social and individual values, current life situation (e.g. partnership, professional activity, housing situation, social integration, leisure activities) and future expectations. Regarding this, the ideas of “good” maternity vary between concepts of intense, biologically founded motherhood or traditional notions and concepts of shared parenthood.

Literature

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