

Popular Beliefs and Magic Promoting Fertility in the 20th Century and beginning of the 21st Century: The Case of Lithuania

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Abstract. The article examines and analyses magic concerning fertility in Lithuania in the 20th and 21st centuries. The aim is to answer the following questions: What means stimulating fertility are and were used today and in the past? Which have continued from the past and what new ones have emerged, either borrowed from other cultures or taken from contemporary medicine? The article is based on analysis of ethnographic sources and research, and on data from field research conducted between 2020 and 2022 collected using the in-depth interview method with 60 informants in Lithuania.

Content analysis, comparative, and interpretation methods were used, enabling me to trace the development of magic, and the popularity and origin of beliefs diffused in contemporary society. Information gained from the mass media has also contributed to the definition of fertility magic, as given by members of modern society.

Keywords: beliefs in modern society, childlessness, fertility magic, infertility, modern Lithuania

Introduction

With the decreasing birth rate in Lithuania the topic of infertility has become a prevailing theme of discussion among demographers, sociologists and the mass media. More articles are written on the topic of infertility and its treatment, conveying couples' efforts to have children. When conducting the field research in the two main cities of Lithuania (Vilnius and Kaunas), interviews highlighted another aspect of the topic, i.e. religious and irrational means as a point of reference when medicine fails to treat infertility.

The article aim is to survey and analyse beliefs and magic concerning fertility in Lithuania in the 20th and early 21st centuries.

This article attempts to answer the following questions: What were the means used to promote fertility in the past, and what means are pursued today? Which ones are still practised, and what new ones have been borrowed from other cultures or adopted from modern medicine? The objectives to be accomplished are as follows: 1) to examine Lithuanian ethnological sources which provide material concerning magic related to fertility; 2) to review previous ethnological research on the traditional rituals and magic promoting fertility; 3) building on the empirical material collected by the author to analyse the popular beliefs and magic practised in modern Lithuania.

The article refers to the analysis of ethnographic sources and research, as well as in-depth interviews collected by the author in 2020–2022 during the field research based on the questionnaire made by the author. When conducting field research in Vilnius and Kaunas, 60 in-depth interviews were conducted. Analysis of the material collected during the field research uses the method of content analysis, as well as comparative and interpretation methods.

The term 'magic' used in the article is understood in its general meaning based on definitions presented in dictionaries: 'Magic describes supernatural actions performed to achieve certain ends, such as acquiring love or money, punishing an enemy, or protecting a friend. It seems to rely on causal connections which a rational observer would describe as irrational; that is, it asserts causal connections that have no demonstrable existence in the natural world (Barfield 1997: 298). Ramūnas Trimakas, who researched popular medicine in Lithuania, has made a distinction between rational and magical means of treatment. Rational means include pharmacy and popular surgery, i.e. the

mechanical treatment of illnesses, and veterinary medicine. Magical means include incantations (disease prevention and treatment using magic verbal formulae) and acts of magic performed in order to protect someone from, or cure them of, a disease (for example sprinkling them with holy water, using herb smoke) (Trimakas 2008: 21–22).

It should be noted that any distinction between new and old methods of treatment is conditional, as often all means are used interchangeably.

Fertility magic in ethnographic sources

Lithuanian ethnographic sources reveal the identity of woman and mother is strictly defined, and that there is a negative attitude in society to childless families (or mainly to women) and their status. One of the most significant sources reflecting the complexity of birth and related customs is “Childhood and Marriage”, by Jonas Balys, one of the most famous Lithuanian interwar ethnologists (Balys 2004), which presents ethnological material gathered at the beginning of the 20th century in Lithuanian villages. The paper discusses the following topics: attempts at pregnancy and attempts to avoid it, various guesses and magic predetermining the baby’s sex, birth and taking care of the baby. The author presents examples of preventative magic, rituals predetermining fertility meant to help childless people, as well as recipes for popular medicine, for example women used to drink special herb teas or eat the ashes of burnt pigeon eggs, while childless parents were advised to scrape ox horns, boil the scrapings and drink the pap (Balys 2004: 8–9). The majority of the means presented in the ethnographic sources cannot be called medical because they are rooted in old popular beliefs and superstitions: “in order to have a child you should smoke yourself with the belt from your trousers”, or “break the ‘witch’s broom’ with your left hand without looking at it backwards, tie a green thread around it and drag it home without looking at it. Then you have to open all the doors, drag the broom into your bed and cover it with a feather duvet without casting a glance at it”. People believed that after sleeping on the ‘broom’ for three nights, an infertile woman would become pregnant (ibid.). Sorceresses and gypsy women are mentioned as special helpers, able to address the problem of infertility. People used to follow the advice of wandering beggars, and later doctors or priests.

Albinas Kriauza, the author of an article published in 1943, presenting an overview of child-rearing in the environs of Kupiškis, discusses the differences between boys and girls, the prejudices supposedly determining the sex of the child, advice on the ways a pregnant woman should carry herself, and customs related to fertility. The author accurately discusses the problem of society's attitude towards childless families, presents the means used in order to prevent childlessness and indicates ways infertility was cured (Kriauza 1943: 203–235). The analysis of the source testifies to the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century village communities used to prepare girls to carry out their function in advance, training them as future mothers including playing with dolls and taking care of them. Even when weaning their daughters, mothers used to think about their grandchildren: “she was breastfed longer than a year... so that she could be strong enough when giving birth... They used to wean their daughters on a Sunday – thus they will have more children” (Kriauza 1943: 205).

Lots of information concerning customs in different regions can be found in the journal *Gimtasai kraštas*, published during the interwar period. The 1938 issue contains an article titled “Legitimate/illegitimate Children and Matrimony”, by Jonas Baldauskas (Baldauskas 1938), who discusses the prohibition of sexual intercourse before marriage, defines the purpose of marriage and analyses wedding rituals related to fertility. The urgency of the topic is proved by the ‘recipes’ for the treatment of infertility presented by Marijona Čilvinaitė in an article titled “Bobų lekarstvos” (‘Remedies of Women’) published in the 1939 issue, No. 22–23, of the same journal (Čilvinaitė 1939) (‘Treatment remedies by Barbora Bagvilienė-Dauskuraitė written down in the parish of Upyna, Tauragė region’). Doctors were seldom consulted, although there were women who were able to treat infertility. For a certain payment they used to perform birching treatment in a steam bath and were known not only in their environs but also in more remote districts (Kriauza 1943: 208). Such women and their methods of treatment are mentioned in subsequent research. Bathhouse customs were the key topic of Stasys Daunys, who accurately analysed the role of these customs as they related to the education of girls and the life of women as well (Daunys 1991: 145–173).

Analysis of ethnological sources reveals the popularity of the Christian faith and prayers to the saints, who were expected to help with the problem of infertility. One of the sources presents the story of a woman who relied on the help of saints:

A woman from the village of Viržiai in the district of Leipalingis was childless. She made a promise to visit the church of Seirijai with its altar of St Anthony during the feast of the saint for 10 years running if she had a child, a boy. St Anthony heard her prayer and she gave birth to a boy. She has been keeping her promise for 6 years already. (Balys 2004: 9)

Some other ethnological sources also testify to the help of the saints. Inhabitants of Kampiškės, Darsūniškis and Kruonis visited the the image of St Anthony; in Kalviai, inhabitants of Kruonis district in the Kaunas region, visited the image of St John in Zapyškis. These places were considered to be miraculous. The faithful would pray here and have their herbs blessed, thus acquiring the power of treatment so that the herbs could be used to treat “any ailment” (Petruolis 1955).

There the faithful used to make general confessions, receive Communion, make offerings, pay for Mass to be celebrated and would take pledges to visit a certain place, to give somebody money, or make an offering to the church. If a child was conceived, the promise had to be kept, otherwise the foetus might perish, become lifeless and die. (Kriauza 1943: 208)

The influence of the Catholic Church was strong enough that to subvert it people used to refer to their pagan inheritance, i.e. the old beliefs that natural objects (springs, stones or oaks) have magical power. For instance, the 1934 edition of the weekly newspaper “Sunday” contained a message that a spring had sprung out from under the roots of an oak and that the water helped to cure infertility. This oak was said to be miraculous. The power of the oak was described again in an article in the 1940 edition of the same newspaper, which said that the oak was ‘Especially popular among childless women, who used to go there with the intention of imploring the spring for better health. (This was done at night in order not to attract other people’s attention.) The case of the Kelpšai family, who did not succeed in having children for 10 years, was presented. Someone advised the couple to erect a cross by the oak. Shortly afterwards a boy and a girl were born.

The source analysis shows that doctors were consulted rarely, and that childless couples blamed themselves, or others who sent them bad luck or gave them an ‘evil glare’. Magic, trust in gypsies and witches, as well as old practices reminiscent of magic rituals prove how determined people were to try all possible means of having children. They also show the concern that couples

had about the future, about their descendants. In effect, it is quite difficult to evaluate how popular the magic was as it was generally practised secretly. In addition, the traditional rural community was under the strong influence of the Catholic Church, which had an extremely negative attitude towards magic, giving another reason people were not inclined to share their experiences of the use of magic or popular belief in the quest for children. However, quite often these were the only means accessible to childless families in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Fertility magic discussed in ethnologists' works

Lithuanian ethnologists have not presented more research on the phenomenon of childlessness, nor on the magic used to have children. However, we can refer for information to the research on family customs in traditional rural culture as they present society's attitude towards married childless women (Dundulienė 1991) highlighting the customs followed from the birth of a child to his/her marriage and death (Dundulienė 2019; Yla 1978; Račiūnaitė 2002; 2006; Paukštytė-Šaknienė 2004, 2007, 2008). Building on analysis of ethnological sources we can maintain that women who wanted to get pregnant used different means to accomplish this: apart from drinking special teas they would give raw eggs, pepper and onions to their husbands. They chose the time of the day and week for intercourse, and paid heed to the phases of the moon. They asked an experienced woman to whip them with brushwood in a steam bath (Račiūnaitė-Paužuolienė 2006: 164–181). In her monograph 'Birth and baptism in Lithuanian village life' Rasa Paukštytė points out that in the 1920s–1940s childless families were treated less severely, besides, women had better access to doctors whose professional knowledge enabled them to help women (Paukštytė 1999: 29–30).

The childless urban family is another field of research in which Lithuanian ethnologists have been engaged since the 1960s. The first research in the field was oriented to the families of workers and focused on analysis of material culture, comparing it with rural culture (Merkienė 1965; Merkienė 1966: 167–183; Merkienė 1967: 137–156; Daniliauskas 1970, 1978; Dobrovolskas 1961). These researchers analyse tendencies of reduced family size during the Soviet period (Daniliauskas, Kalnius 1983) and discuss factors that

predetermined the demographic change (Daniliauskas, Kalnius 1983: 95; Kalnius 1995). In the monograph “Lithuanian Family and Customs” Petras Kalnius (Kalnius 1995: 168–199) presents the most explicit analysis of urban family structure in the second half of the 20th century, which provides knowledge on the topic of childlessness as well. The change of the urban family and its values are discussed in the monograph “The Lithuanian Family at the Crossroads of Values” by R. Račiūnaitė–Paužuolienė (Račiūnaitė–Paužuolienė 2012), which analyses the changes from third decade of the 20th century to date. When summarising the research of ethnologists dealing with the phenomenon of childlessness in Lithuania, it is essential to emphasize that they present the model of a woman and mother characteristic to traditional rural culture, i.e. being a woman is inseparable from being a mother.

The phenomenon of childlessness in the 21st century again came to the attention of scientists working in different fields of research. Some research deals with analysis of childlessness in the demographic (Mirtikas 2006: 61–75; Stankūnienė, Baublytė 2016: 175–241) and sociology contexts (Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė, Tretjakova, Ubarevičienė 2019: 96–111; Šumskaitė, Rapolienė, Gedvilaitė-Kordušienė 2019).

Analysis of the effect of magic and modern people’s belief in witchcraft is closely interrelated with the works of ethnologists who research folk medicine and superstition (Trimakas 2003, 2008; Kulakauskienė 2002; Balikienė 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Tilvikas 2019; Savickaitė 2008, 2010, 2013).

The effect of magic and witchcraft on reproduction in the 20th and 21st centuries: Analysis of field research

The object of the field research conducted between 2020 and 2022 is the phenomenon of childlessness in Vilnius and Kaunas, two major cities of Lithuania, thus questions concerning magic or beliefs related to fertility were not included on the questionnaire. However, during the interviews with the informants, it became clear that this issue was important to them, so it naturally led us to look into it.

During the ethnological field research 60 respondents from Vilnius and Kaunas were interviewed: 49 women and 11 men. The oldest respondent was born in 1923 and the youngest in 1999. The dates of birth of the respondents

can be categorised accordingly: seven born between 1923 and 1949, six born between 1950 and 1959, seven born between 1960 and 1969, 13 born between 1970 and 1979, 17 born between 1980 and 1989, 10 born between 1990 and 1999. There were 50 respondents with tertiary education, three with higher education, four with secondary education, two with basic education and one with elementary education. Twenty respondents had children and 40 were childless. The reasons for childlessness enumerated by respondents were infertility, social issues (partner's absence, dysfunctional family and divorce), voluntary decision not to have children. Some respondents explained their childlessness with more than one reason not related to voluntary or involuntary factors.

It has been noted that the oldest respondents were more hesitant about taking part in research dealing with reproduction. They would open up and tell their own stories and those of their relatives and friends only after a trust-based relationship had been established. The narratives of the elder generation highlighted how a certain image of a woman as mother was strongly formed in their minds: "Somehow I don't believe those who say they don't want children. It seems to me they are not sincere saying that. Well, have at least one child. I think a woman is created for that, she is meant to experience the joy of motherhood, the suffering of delivery" (Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Kultūrų studijų ir etnologijos katedros Etnologijos rankraštyno byla (abbreviation VDU ER B) VDU ER B 2741/74).

Men of the oldest generation tried to evade certain questions, such as those dealing with contraception or infertility treatment, maintaining that this is women's business. However, all of them admitted that having children is important for both men and women. The younger participants were much more open when reflecting on their experience. Although both male and female respondents of the middle and youngest generations said that they discussed plans to have children with their partners, they were uniform in declaring that having children is primarily the woman's choice because she gives birth and her life changes most afterwards. Women confessed that even today they are targeted by questions concerning this matter. Some respondents opened up about the pressure of having children without delay. One woman said her mother-in-law, who does not discuss the matter with her son, constantly reminds her she is willing to have grandchildren and is worried about her daughter-in-law being infertile (VDU ER B 2741/48).

The field research revealed the tendency of wishful enquiry into other people's experiences when dealing with the problem of infertility or voluntarily deciding on childlessness. Respondents belonging to the latter category admitted they read comments by online community members and articles published on web portals both for information and to encourage hope. Respondents solving the issue of infertility confessed they were looking for people with common experiences and were interested in success stories shared by couples whose efforts were rewarded with children. It should be pointed out that the field research was partially conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic under conditions of limited socialising and web portals together with social nets were the only means of connecting with the outside world, therefore in analysing the results we decided to take into account information found in the Lithuanian mass media.

All the respondents who faced the issue of infertility and were eager to solve it said they consulted doctors. However, those who were undergoing the process of treatment were not willing to talk openly about it nor to disclose if they were looking for some other kind of help. Most often the respondents explained their refusal to talk on the matter through a fear of tempting fate, their desire to maintain hope, or because of how sensitive the topic is, although they shared their feeling of pain when other people asked them about being childless. People who solved the issue positively, or could no longer receive medical treatment because of their age, were more open as they could view childlessness from the perspective of time. Members of both groups shared the experiences of their friends or acquaintances. A tendency revealed itself showing that respondents who had received unsuccessful medical treatment, or their friends, tried other means by, for example, turning to God, herbalists or extrasensories, or they went to mythological places.

Similar approaches with the aim of ensuring the couple's fertility were observed in the Lithuanian mass media, which contains articles and interviews with women or couples who did not succeed in having children for a long time. People spoke about the effects of the faith and magical means that they used. Quite often these were presented as an alternative to the traditional medicine of the West and proof of their strong desire and hope when traditional medicine fails. On Jan 14, 2021 the Delfi internet portal published a woman's letter under the heading Citizens' Stories. The woman introduces herself: "I'm a woman who didn't succeed in having children for 20 years. The never-ending struggle

... with a diagnosis of unexplained infertility. I've seen all the best specialists in Lithuania, Istanbul, have taken lots of medicine, even seen the sorceress... I went to church, sat on fertility stones, drank water from miraculous springs" (<https://www.delfi.lt/pilietis/voxpathuli/po-20-metu-nevaisingumo-pagaliau-pavyko-pastoti-sakau-tai-kitoms-su-sia-baisia-diagnoze-susiduriancioms-moterims.d?id=86186025>).

Another woman shares her experience on 15 min, another popular internet portal, after unsuccessful attempts at artificial insemination. She tried all possible means to increase her fertility including massage, sitting on a fertility stone, making love at noon as she was told it was the best time to get pregnant, etc. "It seems funny now, but then it was serious.... We prayed. We lit candles in practically all the churches we went to" (Saukienė 2021). She calls her pregnancy and birth a miracle and maintains that you have to try everything possible as you never know what could help (Saukienė 2021).

The protagonist of another article said that, disappointed in infertility clinics, she consulted a homoeopathist. After the visit, the two of them, she and her husband, went to St Ann's church in Vilnius to light a candle for the wellbeing of the family. "Right then there was an overseer, a very pleasant woman, who approached us and started talking about fertility and the family. We burst out laughing and told her that was exactly the reason we had come to the church to pray" (Saukienė 2018). At the end of the article the woman discusses what helped her with pregnancy, i.e. homoeopathy, faith, the placebo effect or the woman she met in the church.

The articles highlight the tendency that childless women are inclined to use both rational and irrational means. However, the field research data reveal that respondents who identified themselves as believers talk about God's help and the support of their community, but did not mention the other means they used. A respondent from Kaunas born in 1976 noted that apart from medical treatment she used to go to church and repented the abortions she had in her young years, and later she prayed with the intention of having a child. The respondent mentioned that her religious community constantly pray for childless couples. (Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Kultūrų studijų ir etnologijos katedros Etnologijos rankraštyno byla; VDU ER B 2741/6). Respondents who introduced themselves as believers, gratefully acknowledged a child as God's gift. Viewing their childlessness from the perspective of their life journey, some respondents considered it God's will, or their destiny: "Such was the will

of God”, “That’s my destiny”. A woman born in 1951 told us that her husband was unfaithful to her and had children with other women. Doctors confirmed she was healthy, however, she did not succeed in having a child. Later she divorced her husband and explained that being childless spared her from other misfortunes (VDU ER B2741/25).

A woman born in 1983 said that both she and her husband had fertility treatment. Doctors did not give her much hope and she considers her child to be the fruit of her prayers, as she had asked her deceased grandmother to intercede on her behalf (VDU ER B2741/40).

The meaningful effect of religion and faith was mentioned even by those respondents who were not inclined to talk about their obstinate efforts to have children, arguing that it was too sensitive a topic at the moment. They said all they could do was “pray, asking for their wish to come true”. People who identified themselves as believers used to make a difference between medical treatment and the effect of faith, and did not mention other means such as prayer, going to church or burning candles in sacred places. This can be partly explained by the church’s negative attitude to magic, which is traced in church publications of the 21st century warning people against wizardry and reminding them that believers should not indulge in magic, nor consider these or occult practices worthy of referring to (Lietuvos vyskupų laiškąs 2005).

Our research showed that respondents were not willing to talk about magic practices, as they are sneered at or viewed negatively by some in society. Others said that spells and magic require secrecy and one cannot talk openly about them before the wished outcome. People are much more open about popular treatment and magic that their friends or acquaintances have used. A man born in 1977 told us about a relative who did not succeed in having children with his wife. As the medical treatment was of no help, they addressed magicians, extrasensories and even went to Siberia to see a shaman (VDU ER B2741/7).

Another respondent feared for a friend who had spent an abundant sum of money on fortune tellers who promised she would have children in the future. The friend refused to take part in the research, arguing that the rituals she had to follow on the advice of the fortune tellers had to be kept secret. She would tell her story only after a successful outcome.

One more respondent of elderly age said her mother-in-law persuaded her to see a sorceress who had been successful in helping people have children.

However, as the mother-in-law did not like her, she was afraid it might cause harm (VDU ER B2741/64).

Stories like these, told during the interviews, serve as an illustration that sometimes people who find themselves in a hopeless situation behave irrationally and turn to extreme solutions. The respondents did not trust such means and considered them foolish, although they know it makes sense to their friends and acquaintances.

Modern people confess to drinking various teas chosen on the advice of pharmacists. Some homoeopathic preparations are used for relaxation or have some other specific qualities that are acknowledged by modern medicine. An endocrinologist born in 1934 told us that she was often asked to consult childless women. Although none of them confessed to having used strong herbal medicine, the doctor was sure these were at fault because they are injurious to the endocrine system (VDU ER B2741/26). A woman born in 1936, who shared her experience of unsuccessful fertility treatment, mentioned that a friend who had the same problem had persuaded her to try a mixture of herbs; however, she became ill and ceased drinking the tea (VDU ER B2741/28).

The research revealed that respondents who faced the problem of infertility in the second half of the 20th century tend to talk about the inadequate efficiency of treatment means and the helplessness of doctors. In their opinion, there were not enough means to help infertile couples then, and concerning male infertility doctors had almost nothing to offer. In such cases people willing to have children had either to put up with the situation or try other means. A respondent born in 1936 said of a friend:

She was such a person, with a higher education, a mathematician, and used to say that the treatment is all right if it does no harm. And if there's the slightest chance of having a baby, one has to try it. She tried lots of things: she saw sorceresses and took certain remedies and lit candles secretly.... However, those teas must have really done harm, as later she underwent treatment for problems with other organs (VDU ER B2741/28).

Since the beginning of the 21st century the Lithuanian mass media has kept informing the public about miraculous stones (Rušėnienė 2013) or springs. One of the stones, which has the form of a phallus, is located on the mound of Lopaičiai in the Rietavas region. If a woman sits on it for some time, and asks

for favour, she can expect to get pregnant. The place is said also to be visited by people from abroad (Stoškutė 2020; Šukauskas 2021).

Websites contain lists of miraculous springs the waters of which heal people from all illnesses (Keršys 2019). For example, one such spring is the so-called Bobos daržas, the source of the Skroblus river in the village of Margioniai (Varėna region), which is also known for the fertility powers ascribed to it (<https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000201314/uz-vilniaus-vaiku-negalincia-susilaukti-pora-stebuklingu-saltinio-vandeniu-pavaisinusi-etnografe-netrukus-sulaukiau-kvietimo-buti-kuma>; <https://www.delfi.lt/keliones/naujienos/lietuvos-vietos-kurios-isgydo-ligas.d?id=68903168>).

Quite often such articles are written in order to make certain places better known and attract visitors, and thus it is difficult to estimate how much people believe in the power of miraculous stones or springs. A woman who could not get pregnant for six years laughs when telling the story of how she sat on the fertility stone. “However, when I could not get pregnant, I kept thinking that perhaps I should have concentrated on the matter and fervently asked for the favour”. In spite of this, she never went to the stone again and relied on doctors’ help (VDU ER B2741/24).

Another respondent maintained that when travelling round Lithuania she and her husband visit all such special places, although she argues that whether they will have a child or not, depends on medical treatment (VDU ER B2741/43).

It is interesting to note that miraculous natural objects were mentioned exclusively by the youngest participants in the research, i.e. those who have dealt with the issue of fertility treatment in recent decades. None of the older respondents spoke about stones, springs or mythological places. This can be explained not only by the vast possibilities of travel and of having information on various tourist objects that the younger generation has today, but also by the influence of the mass media, which presents the old and creates new legends around it concerning the miraculous powers of such places.

Thus, the material of the ethnological field research shows that people of the 20th and 21st centuries who face the problem of infertility, first of all consult doctors, which is the prevailing means of treatment. However, this takes time or bears no fruit, people seek alternative means of treatment associated with faith (individual prayer, visiting sacred places, lighting a candle in a church, prayer and support of the religious community), popular medicine and even magic.

Respondents of all generations are more inclined to talk about medical treatment, to share their religious experiences and stories of success rather than confess the irrational means they used – at least not until they have had children. Rather, they talk more openly about their friends and acquaintances and their efforts to have children. It was the oldest participants in the research who emphasised the ineffectiveness of medicine in the past, pointing out that it has made a huge progress today, and thus the younger generations do not experience the helplessness the older generation experienced. Respondents born between 1923 and 1959 tended to view irrational means as an important aid to which people who were unable or unwilling to put up with the diagnosis of infertility resorted. Quite often medicine was said to be helpful only in as much as it could diagnose infertility and explain the reasons, it was not always able to provide treatment enabling couples to have children.

Conclusion

Analysis of ethnological sources shows that childless families of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century usually had access only to irrational means of tackling the problem. Consulting a doctor was a rare occurrence, and so people who were unable to have children could only blame themselves or others, wishing them ill. They used to rely on Church advice and prayers, magic, the effects of various preparations, or they resorted to gypsies and sorceresses. It is difficult enough to evaluate the popularity of magic as many such means required secrecy, in addition to which the traditional rural community was strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, which had an extremely negative view of magic.

Magic means used by those willing to have children are a taboo topic even today. People argue they do not really believe in magic, they are afraid to scare away success or be sneered at as such practices are not becoming for a modern person. Interviewees were more inclined to talk about the experience of other people, family members or friends than speak about themselves. Only those respondents who had successfully undergone treatment for infertility opened up about their experiences and reflected on their choice to try nonmedical means of treatment.

The topics concerning reproduction were a real issue for the older respondents, who opened up only after a close relationship based on trust had been established. Older men tended to ignore certain questions dealing with having children. The prevailing opinion was that the final decision to have children, and the time of having them, remains the prerogative of women. Respondents of the youngest generation said they consulted their partner, which means that men take part in family planning, and openly shared their views concerning the topic during the interview.

The data of the ethnological field research revealed that in 20th and 21st centuries people prioritised medical treatment, and only if it lasted too long or was ineffective did they resort to other means. Even the respondents of the oldest generation who maintained that medicine was not effective enough during their reproductive period pointed out they hoped for treatment based on medical achievements and considered other variants only after science was of no help. When comparing the data gathered from ethnographic sources and that gathered in modern Lithuania of the 21st century one can notice an invariable which is the power of prayer and the church's influence on the faithful.

The process of social modernisation can be traced when analysing the beliefs and means used to stimulate the reproductive system. Village sorceresses are substituted by extrasensories and magicians. Often new, modern notions are used, for example people travel to other countries, including exotic lands. The results of the research show that the use of belief and magic is becoming more universal, i.e., with the growing awareness that biological infertility is not restricted to women, most means are treated as suitable for both sexes. Although the ethnographic sources contain information about magic trees and springs that can enable a person to have children, when analysing the results of the field research we have noted that mythological non-Catholic places as destinations were first mentioned only by respondents born between 1980 and 1999. It is difficult to evaluate how much people believe in the magical power of such places, but there is no doubt that information about them has spread due to increased mobility and articles in the mass media that advertise certain places together with natural objects that have magic powers ascribed to them.

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