

THE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON FAMILY PLANNING: CASE OF BULGARIA

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The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the entire world. The reflections are in all spheres of life – social, economic, medical and personal. The pandemic also illuminated many of the problems in the health systems of individual countries that have been negligible, such as the shortage of medical professionals. The Covid-19 pandemic also affected the decision of families or couples to have children, i.e. affected family planning. Some of the research initially focused on reproductive behaviour in Africa, where there was an increase in unintended pregnancies by 1,4 million (UN, 2021). In a sense, expectations in some countries in Europe were related to the "baby boom" during the pandemic, but these expectations did not happen. In some countries in Europe, birth planning was limited due to the pandemic situation (closed clinics for a certain period of time, postponement of IVF procedures (ESHRE, 2020)), as well as the decision of couples to postpone having children.

According to the National Statistical Institute data of Bulgaria on the number of children born in 2020, the decrease amounts to about 2,500 children, which does not indicate a significant decline, given the trends in the birth rate in recent years. In Bulgaria, IVF procedures (as part of family planning) were not stopped during the entire period of the pandemic, but under special conditions.

Aim: The aim of our study is to examine the influence of Covid-19 on the decision of families or couples to have children in Bulgaria, related to their demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Methodology: We are using data collected by interviewing patients at a reproductive health clinic in Sofia, Bulgaria. Women who undergo IVF procedures or become pregnant during the pandemic were questioned according to their decision to have children despite the pandemic, and according to their demographic, social and economic characteristics.