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# CILVĒKS, TEHNOLOĢIJAS UN IZGLĪTĪBAS KVALITĀTE

Proceedings of Scientific Papers

Rakstu krājums



UNIVERSITY  
OF LATVIA

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# UNSpoken TRUTHS IN NARRATIVES OF CONTEMPORARY MOTHERS TOWARDS THEIR MOTHERS IN LATVIA

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## ABSTRACT

Soviet propaganda promised liberation of women from household shackles, glorifying them as 'heroines', who embody love for family, work and communist ideals. Behind ideology, the 'second shift' burdened mothers with tedious housework, childrearing, and professional workload. Nowadays their daughters, who were born in the turmoil of collapse of USSR, experience motherhood differently, with the aid of information and technologies, that seemingly ease childcare and everyday life in democratic Latvia. Although mothering is a subjective experience and each next generation questions decisions of the previous one, contemporary motherhood favours different childrearing methods, rooted in evidence-based sources, Western medicine practitioners, and democratized family models in contrast to Dr. Spock's advice, home remedies or physical punishment. 'Intensive mothering' ideology adds to the pressures of modern motherhood, deeming the mother entirely responsible for social, psychological and cognitive well-being of her children. By employing the theoretical framework of Arlie Hochschild, this article explores the unspoken truths, doubts, and grievances of 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers towards their 'mothers-heroines' of USSR. The 'deep story' has been constructed, intertwining narratives, gained from eight phenomenological semi-structured interviews with new mothers. The 'deep story' has been supplemented by a case study of a viral post (*Facebook*, March 2021) by a contemporary mother, reflecting on advantages of modern motherhood in comparison to mothering in 1985, sparking a heated debate. The 'deep story' of contemporary mothers unfolds the layers of unarticulated feelings – from resentment to gratefulness, from anger to love. Inner conflict between respecting parents, and following an individual path is also present.

**Keywords:** *motherhood, intensive mothering, communication, deep story, narrative, phenomenological interviews, case study*

## Introduction

Even though the primary goal of parenting – happiness of one's child – has not altered, mothering and child-rearing has changed and continues to change with each new generation. Differences in socioeconomical

background and in pedagogical approaches, as well as overall prosperity, new opportunities and technologies contribute to differences between mothers, raising children in Soviet Union, and contemporary mothers now, raising children in democratic Latvia.

The significance of traditional values in Latvia is steadily diminishing, especially among younger people, who are developing more liberal views as opposed to previous generations. For instance, during the last 50 years, the number of childless couples has increased and the number of families with 3 children – decreased (Trapežņikova et al., 2019). The close bond between generations is also dwindling, as new couples build their lives separate from their parents and only 14% of respondents with children under 14 have received regular support in childcare from relatives, friends or people living outside their household (during a 12-month period) (Trapežņikova et al., 2019). Young couples tend to find their own path and build their family's nest without help and support of previous generations.

With the regaining of sovereignty and independence of Latvia in 1991, the rapid transformation of motherhood and family models as well as other factors, several conflicting discourses have formed in Latvian society: the 'spoilt generation' of new, contemporary parents versus 'survivors of Soviet occupation', who have had to provide childcare without help in form of baby formulas, disposable diapers or washing machines; as well as the 'emotionally available' new parents who value respectful parenting techniques, rooted in emotional intelligence, versus the 'broken generation' of parents, who place value on strict discipline and more authoritarian parenting methods.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the 'deep story' of emotions of new, contemporary mothers<sup>1</sup>, living in Latvia, in respect to parenting techniques and child-rearing methods of previous generations, e. i., their mothers and other women, who brought up children in Soviet Latvia<sup>2</sup>. The research questions of this paper are:

1. What are the feelings of contemporary mothers *towards* their mothers – 'mothers-heroines'<sup>3</sup> who have had to raise children on the brink of collapse of the Soviet Union?

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<sup>1</sup> The author speaks of 'contemporary mothers' or '21<sup>st</sup> century mothers' when referring to women, who are born in 1980s and currently have small children in pre-school age.

<sup>2</sup> The author speaks of 'Soviet mothers' or 'mothers of previous generations' when referring to women, who have given birth in Soviet Latvia or the first half of 1990s.

<sup>3</sup> "Mother-heroine" – an honour bestowed to those women who had more than 5 children (Āboliņa, 2016).

2. How do contemporary new mothers see motherhood *nowadays* in comparison to motherhood in Soviet Latvia (which they themselves have experienced only as children)?

### **Mothering in Soviet Latvia**

During the Soviet occupation of Latvia, propaganda created a 'new type of family'. An illusion, constructed through real or fictional family stories, took the form of an 'ideal family' that was materially and morally well-off and did not resemble a family *per se*, but more a 'friendly collective, with love and support of all members at its core' (Jansone-Ratinika, 2013). In this 'family' or collective, 'liberation of mother' (Kestere et al., 2020) was key, as it was crucial in Soviet Union that everybody was equally engaged in the construction of communism and victory over capitalism. "Metaphorically speaking, the perfect New Soviet Man was endowed with the body of a woman and the mind of a man," concludes Kestere, Stonkuvienė and Rubenė (2020). The woman would be portrayed employed, riding a tractor, fusing metal, teaching children etc., except that, in fact, the New Soviet (Wo)man would still be burdened with household-chores.

Solidarity and egalitarian family models, equal rights in public and at home regulated by Soviet rules were present only in theory; in reality such regulations were used for control and manipulation (Jansone-Ratinika, 2013). The dominant discourse of Soviet propaganda supported dualism and the falsification of reality; despite the ideological promises of gender equality and equal distribution of household chores, Soviet gender system implied patriarchal traditions. Even though the woman is equally employed, household tasks and child-care were completely her responsibility due to 'natural talent'; role of father in the family – miniature (Jansone-Ratinika, 2013). In most Soviet states "regimes took measures to induce women to work"; however, they did not tolerate discussions about such issues as patriarchy or the lack of gender equality within the family' (Saxonberg & Szelewa, 2007).

According to a survey done in 1975, men had had a 2–3 times smaller workload at home than their spouse (Jurciņa, 1975), causing women exhaustion, stress and premature ageing. Furthermore, in a 1986 survey it was concluded that girls had spent 2.1 times more time doing chores at home than boys, which later was 'transferred' into adulthood (Jurciņa, 1986). As Schuster concluded in 1971, dispersing the myth of equality for women in USSR: "The majority of women in the Soviet Union are still engaged in back-breaking physical labour" (Schuster, 1971). In 1980s 'glasnost revealed the terrible weight of the double burden imposed on women' (Kay, 1997). The problem of 'masculinisation of Russian women

and emasculation of Russian men' was brought to attention in the late 70s (Kay, 1997; Zitmane, 2016)

### **Mothering in democratic Latvia**

Fast forward to 30 years later with the benefits of democracy and opportunities of the free world, the dominant discourse in 21<sup>st</sup> century in Western European societies is of 'intensive mothering', that still holds the woman accountable for everything to do with the household. 'New-momism' as coined by Douglas and Michaels (2004) or 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) provides guidelines for preferable actions, as well as emotions that a mother should express (Hays, 1996; Hallstein, 2006; Murray & Finn, 2012). This 'correct' mothering implies forever loving affections towards the child, automatically classifying their struggles with tasks of motherhood and other emotions, including sadness, fear or anger, as inappropriate (Murray & Finn, 2012); it also implies for the woman to have total satisfaction with the mother's role (Orton-Johnson, 2017). Motherhood is idolized, and even if being a mother is not assumed as a woman's primary goal anymore, it is still perceived as immensely important.

'Intensive mothering' insists that the mother is "entirely responsible for the social, psychological and cognitive well-being of her children" (Feasey, 2017). Moreover, parents, especially mothers, are urged to invest "more than usual amounts of physical and emotional energy into specific activities and practices with children", as well as put their own needs and interests last or take upon 'enormous risks' (Das, 2019, p. 499). The child has become an asset that needs to be nurtured for future gain; thus, for instance, Steiner and Bronstein (2017) speak of 'investment parenting' as a new trend in neoliberal societies.

Lastly, 'intensive mothering' also reinforces traditional gender norms, even idealizes them (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2017); moreover, it supports the pro-natalist position and medicalisation or motherhood experience (Tiidenberg, Baym, 2017). Hence, traditional gender norms, enforced by the pressures of 'intensive mothering', ensure the presence of a 'second-shift' (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) for mothers, despite of transformations in society and improvement of women's rights after the collapse of USSR. According to a survey done by the Ministry of Welfare of Latvia, the mother is the main caregiver in 1/3 of families with children under 18; both parents participate in raising children with the mother investing more of her time in 46% of cases, while only 13% of respondents had confirmed that both parents participate equally (Snapshots, 2020). Another in-depth survey reveals that 68% of respondents feel that women can take care of children better than men (Trapeznikova, et al., 2019). Therefore, despite of improvement of socioeconomical background and overall prosperity, new

opportunities and technologies available to 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers, ‘stalled revolution’ (Hochschild & Machung, 1989) at home and the unequal burden of household chores is still a pressing issue of motherhood in the contemporary world.

## Methodology

First of all, a call for volunteers to participate in a study about the feelings, everyday life and views on motherhood was posted in the author’s personal social media profile on *Instagram*. The post (*Instagram Story*) contained information about the core theme of the study (motherhood and comparison regarding childrearing methods in Soviet Latvia and contemporary Latvia) (Figure 1). The call was addressed to mothers, not specifying the age or number of children. Eight mothers replied and showed initiative to participate in the study and all were included in the sample.



Figure 1. Open call for volunteers on Instagram.

Second, a phenomenological approach to unstructured interviews (Cope, 2005) was employed to data gathering, as phenomenology truly captures the essence of experience and the hidden meaning (Priekhidko & Swank, 2018). While conducting a phenomenological inquiry, the researcher must take a neutral position and try to describe the phenomena only through the eyes of the interviewee, bearing in mind the phenomenological question that should pervade all the stages of the research (Champlin, 2020).

Third, interviews with the eight contemporary mothers, reflecting on the relationship with their mothers regarding raising children, were analysed through narrative analysis. Narratives aid individuals understand and explain themselves to others. The stories we tell help us apprehend the social life and praxis: as human beings are not simply ‘actors’, but also ‘authors’ of their lives (Miller, 2005). Narrative analysis concentrates

on revealing the experience of an individual through stories; conducting narrative analysis, one searches for similar themes and their relationships in order to create a general narrative, based in empirical evidence, that embodies unique aspects of each individual story (Kim, 2016).

Forth, after narrative analysis a ‘deep story’ was created – a ‘deep story’ is a web of narratives that helps to apprehend conflicting powers in a particular social context (Palmer, 2019), escaping rationality and concentrating on how injustices are felt and maintained (Kantola, 2020). Hochschild’s ‘deep story’ concentrates on feelings by speaking through symbols; it bears no judgment or facts as it speaks of pure emotions (Hochschild, 2016).

Lastly, to supplement the data, a thematic analysis of comments on *Facebook*, LA.lv and Cālis.lv was conducted, following the discussion of a viral *Facebook* post, supposedly comparing the benefits and problems of contemporary motherhood and motherhood in 1985.

The study considered all ethical research standards in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); participation of authors of interviews completely voluntary and transcriptions of interviews were anonymized.

### Mothers’ profiles and data

In Latvia, the mean age of woman at childbirth is accounted for 30.7 years, while the age of mother at her first childbirth is 28.1 years; 49% of new mothers have higher education and live close to the capital, Riga (Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia, 2020). The mean age of mothers of first-born children is still one of the lowest in EU, though steadily increasing (Trapeznikova, et. al., 2019).

**Table 1.** Mothers’ profile

Respondent’s name (alias)	Age	Age of children	Education	Age of mother	Residence
Eliza	38	4y, 2y, 3m	Higher	60	Salacgrīva
Uma	31	6m	Higher	53	Rīga
Laima	34	10y, 8y, 6y, 4y	Higher	60	Sigulda
Māra	29	4y, 1y	Higher	51	Rīga
Arta	32	3y, 1y	Higher	63	Rīga
Emma	39	3y, 1y	Higher	65	Rīga region
Aina	28	1y	Higher	66	Rīga
Sarmīte	28	7m	Higher	52	Rīga

Therefore, the sample of woman participating in the study (see Table 1. *Mothers' profile*) roughly coincides with the average characteristics of a new mother in Latvia, as almost half of new mothers have higher education (49% in 2020) or general secondary or secondary professional education (34%) according to the Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia.

## Results

Women share their thoughts, regarding parenting in Soviet Latvia, that is, their views on how they themselves were raised, their current relationships with their mothers, as well as how they feel they and their mothering techniques are perceived by women of previous generations in general. After narrative analysis, a thematic analysis of comments on a viral *Facebook* post regarding parenting nowadays and in 1985 has also been carried out.

### Women's narratives and 'deep story'

According to the sample of contemporary mothers, parenting during Soviet times – to their mind – was undoubtedly **physically difficult**, more difficult than nowadays. Women had to deal with tremulous times, poverty, lack of appliances and modern technologies, lack of trustworthy information sources, etc. Almost all contemporary mothers agree that “It was definitely harder for [mothers]”. Māra says: “How they toiled with nappies... My mother didn't even have hot water in her flat. [...] So they brought us up like they brought us up – everything took so much time.”. Laima stresses that they “had to work harder”, thus, there was less time to spend with children.

Sarmīte acknowledges the **power of Dr. Spock**: “There was only Spock, [...] relatives, grandmothers and doctors”, insisting that there was hard work and almost no scientific, evidence-based information on child-rearing, except for Dr. Spock's book. As Chernyaeva (2013) writes, this was a ‘revolutionary’ book for the time that “provoked the intense and diverse public reaction of various social actors”. This ‘raising by the [Dr. Spock's] book’ gained popularity, despite being produced outside the Soviet tradition of child-care advice (Chernyaeva, 2013). This book is mentioned also by Aina and Emma, expressing doubt on the ‘quality’ of this kind of information. Aina stresses the **discipline** and **fear of spoiling children**, inspired by the book and norms in society, her mother faced raising her. Laima says that “You couldn't express your **emotions**.” While Eliza shares:

“If the child misbehaved, he was spoiled [...], no one searched for a deeper reason. [...] My mother advised me to look into Spock's book – ‘you won't like it, but read it, perhaps something useful. [...] She was proud she had used that book while raising me.”

As contemporary mothers put it, parents, raising children in Soviet Latvia, loved their children, but had **no time** or lacked motivation to spend qualitative time with them, were **strict** and perhaps even cold. Sarmīte says that her mother loved her, but “had to distance herself” from her; Laima says that she “did not like the way I was raised”.

According to 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers, in Soviet Union, **the child was “not a person”** with views or wants. As Arta puts it: “It was more important, how the child seemed from afar – ‘what will people think, if the child starts yelling in the street?’”. Sarmīte says that the child was more like a ‘thing’, and the aim of child-rearing was to “create good, hardworking people that conform with the system”. Aina says, that there was “**was no emotional upbringing**” and the child was supposed to express only ‘convenient emotions’ and all other were ‘shushed’. Uma expresses that the children were ‘raised as small machines’, which coincides with Emma’s thoughts that “it wasn’t important how you felt, you had to be obedient, to comply with a standard”. All mothers share that, during Soviet times physical punishment was key and **complete obedience** had to be established.

However, according to 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers, even though parenting in Soviet times demanded more from the mother physically, parenting nowadays is still a handful, although not everyone recognizes it. Aina recalls a row with her mother:

“[My mother has said to me] In my time I could manage it all. How come you can’t? [And I replied] But were you happy, managing it all? [...] Did you spank me because you were happy with yourself and with your life?”

Emma thinks that in Soviet times “people ‘stuck it out’”, but nowadays she is “not game to suffer, we stand tall”. Uma stresses that her mother thinks she is **not grateful enough**:

“We are not valuing everything we’ve got and with our whining we do not appreciate what they’ve gone through. [...] It could be received as ungratefulness; that we’re not saying ‘thank you’ every day for living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Thus, Laima says that the challenge of modern-day mothering is “**the emotional pressure to be a great mother**, give love, education, activities, balance the rhythm of the day, balance the diet, etc.”. Democratic Latvia provides both means and possibilities to treat the child as a human being when he/she is even still in mother’s womb. **Respect for the child** nowadays is key, bearing in mind his/her desires and needs and searching for a considerate compromise. Therefore, 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers do not hold their mothers or women of previous generations as unquestionable role models. As Sarmīte puts it: “[In Soviet times] older women became elders, from whom younger women gain knowledge. Now it’s completely

different". This sentiment echoes in almost every narrative. Arta says "I think they're [grandmothers] a little annoyed about young mothers and that they think they know everything better", while Eliza says "My grandmother had a saying – you have to swallow that toad. That's how they lived – swallowing toads and resentments, and pain, and suffering." 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers do not wish to live this way.

Contemporary mothers feel that some Soviet mothers want **recognition from their daughters, gratitude**, while some feel **envy**. Emma shares:

"I don't have to do *copy + paste* like she did, she's not my idol, [...] and that is hard for her, because we don't put her on a pedestal. [...] She wants to hear that she has been a mother-heroine, as she has raised five children, but I cannot lie, [...] I don't feel that way about her."

Māra says "I suffered, my mother suffered, so you should suffer' [...] We have to suffer, otherwise it's not fair in their minds". An inner conflict in the hearts and minds of 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers may be felt; as Uma puts it "On one hand, I do feel grateful, that our parents raised us in such hard tumultuous times. [...] On the other hand, I feel 'not completely loved'."

Some contemporary mothers would like an **apology** from their mothers for their parenting style. Aina says that she harbours some **resentment** towards her mother for the way she was raised, but she **tries not to blame** her. Sarmīte feels that her mother did the best she could; Emma says "I don't blame her for anything". However, Māra would like an apology from her mother for some of her actions as a mother that she still remembers vividly.

21<sup>st</sup> century mothers reserve the right to choose their own path in mothering; however, they experience a **sense of guilt or need for defence and explanation**. Laima says that "At the moment [grandparents] are a great help, but we have gone through a long period of quarrelling." Sarmīte says that she doesn't have open conflicts about parenting styles but she feels the pressure, as does Uma: "We want to give our children everything we did not receive – [...] time qualitatively spent together."

Therefore, despite the fact that 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers recognize the physical toll and difficulties raising children their mothers and mothers of previous generations faced, there is a **strain on relationships and hierarchical disbalance in their relationships**. The level of this strain differs – it is a spectrum, but it is visible in all narratives. Aina says: "[Previous generation] thinks that we fuss and whine over nothing", while Emma expresses her courage to voice her thoughts to her mother: "Only now I feel I can stand up to my mother, to speak up about things I don't like [...] and I feel a resistance – 'how can you come across me, I'm your mother'." Māra feels that there is no respect for her from her mother, while Laima regrets that her mother thinks that "that emotional hardships don't

count; robots, washing machines and everything – [we have] nothing to complain about, we conjure problems and solve them, because we don't have a real life and real problems". The theme of '**spoiling children**' and **lack of discipline**, as well as facing 'fake problems' or having 'a fuss over nothing' as main complaints from previous generations echo in some level in all narratives of 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers. Uma concludes: "Grandparents criticize those young parents for spoiling their children. [...] And we are spoilt because we whine about everything."

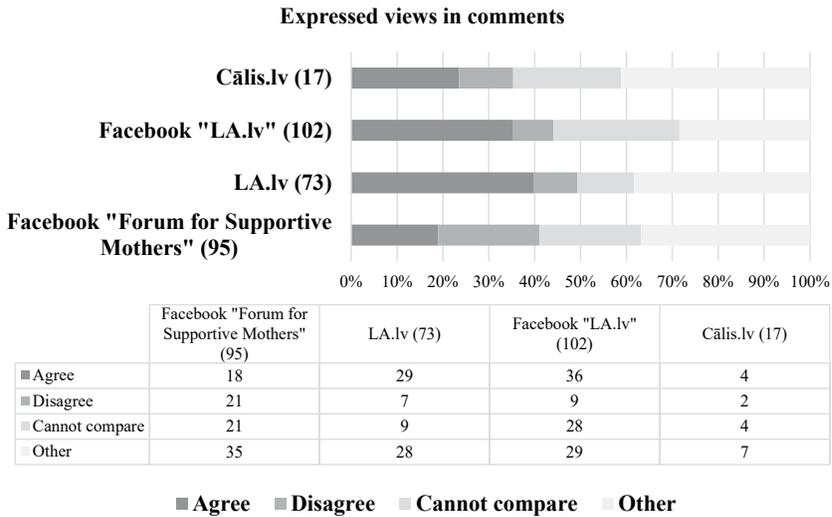
Therefore, the '**deep story**' of the relationships of 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers with their mothers and women of previous generations is filled with inner conflicts between gratefulness and remorse, between love and guilt. Contemporary century mothers feel that their mothers have overcome enormous physical difficulties and challenges caused by socio-economical instability and overall poverty at the brink of collapse of the USSR. However, in Soviet Latvia children were not raised but rather 'attuned' like small machines or miniature soldiers – without proper respect and a lack of affection due to pressing times, the dominant ideology and teachings of Dr. Spock, with presence of strict discipline enforced by physical punishment. Contemporary mothers feel that their mothers are eager for appreciation for raising children during hard times, whereas 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers would like acknowledgment for their efforts despite the differences in socioeconomical background, and even perhaps an apology for past pains. However, the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers seem miniscule and unworthy in the eyes of (some) women of previous generations. Lastly, contemporary mothers do not hold Soviet mothers as untouchable idols, therefore, upsetting the traditional hierarchal family models. They want to raise children 'with respect' and 'as equals', triggering some worries for 'spoiling children' and 'fussing over nothing' from mothers from previous generations.

### **Thematic analysis of a viral *Facebook* post**

In addition to qualitative analysis, a quantitative element was added to the study as well, following the life of a viral *Facebook* post (Facebook, March 2021). This post was originally posted on a private profile of a mother (Santa, no last name), and quickly gained popularity, spreading through social media groups and forums, reaching traditional media as well (Figure 2) – LA.lv (LA.lv, 2021) and Cālis.lv (Cālis.lv, 2021).

Thematic analysis was done on comments under four different sources, where this particular post had gained popularity: news portal "Cālis.lv", news portal "LA.lv", *Facebook* post on the page of "LA.lv" and under the shared post on Supportive Mothers' Forum (*Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums*) on *Facebook*. The post was shared on numerous other *Facebook* profiles

and groups, but due to privacy restrictions the comments on these posts were not analysed. The post (Facebook, March 2021) speculated on the advantages of modern motherhood seemingly comparing to mothering in 1985. However, the view expressed on the post concentrates on the benefits of technologies and wealth that eases mothers' burden, skipping other aspects, as well as indirectly pointing to the 'whining' of modern, 'spoil' mothers.



**Figure 2.** Expressed views in comments

Figure 2 illustrates the expressed views on the comments on the various sites. On the more conservative media portal “LA.lv” more comments tend to agree that contemporary mothers ‘whine’ and ‘fuss over nothing’, and do not appreciate, how motherhood has been eased by various new technologies, household appliances etc., stressing that modern mothers ‘spoil’ their children. Whereas on social media, the views distribute more evenly, saying that these experiences simply cannot be compared, or even that the pressures of ‘intensive mothering’ make it harder for contemporary mothers to raise children. A large portion of comments marked as ‘Other’ addressed other themes, not relevant to the study, as these online discussions tend to drift off course.

The comments also illustrate parallel and conflicting discourses, as well as the clash between the ‘spoil generation’ of contemporary mothers, who ‘do not appreciate the efforts of previous generations’ and ‘survivors’ of Soviet occupation, as well as the contemporary parents, who value emotional intelligence and respectful parenting techniques versus the

'broken' generation, who are afraid to show emotion or weakness, for instance, prohibit boys from crying etc. Lastly, the results from this sample of comments also coincide with results from a 2021 SKDS survey of 1001 parents, concluding that 46% of contemporary parents with children under 17 feel that it is more difficult to raise children nowadays than when they themselves were children (Latvijas Radio, 2021).

Concluding, the author interviewed the leading expert, Vice Dean of Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art, University of Latvia, Head of the Doctoral Study program "Education Sciences", prof. Zanda Rubene to gain deeper insight into the research theme. She argues:

"[In the Soviet Union] the purpose of parenting was obedience. Obedience is achieved by the acclaimed Benjamin Spock theory of childcare that was aimed at upbringing with discipline. Its basic thought is that you should not "spoil" the child. If you take him in your hands and respond to the child's needs, you "spoil" him. It is a tradition that comes from a society where human needs are not taken into account."

The sentiment of Soviet parenting is echoed in the narratives and 'deep story' of contemporary mothers in the sample of this study. Moreover, prof. Rubene highlights the dilemma of contemporary motherhood: "At the moment we live in a child-centred society where the child's needs are taken into account. [...] The child has needs, but the adult also has needs that have to be respected." New mothers, on one hand, fearing to repeat negative experiences from their own childhood, try to be empathetic and listen to the child's needs, and, on the other hand, occasionally fail to set boundaries for the child and forget to take care of her own needs. Regarding relationships with previous generations prof. Rubene comments:

"[Nowadays] the age hierarchy in society is collapsing in the digital era – younger is smarter. Parenting has always occurred with a view to the past – *How did you, Mom, do it?* This is not the case today in digital culture."

As a result, the strain on relationships between mothers and their mothers is inevitable; new mothers have the opportunity to quickly educate themselves, gain evidence-based information on child-rearing that may not always coincide with traditional techniques, passed down for generations.

## Discussion

The 'deep story' of new, contemporary mothers, living in Latvia, in respect to parenting techniques and child-rearing methods of previous generations, e. i., their mothers and other women, who brought up children in Soviet Latvia, is of inner conflict – a struggle between gratitude and

resentment, guilt for not following the footsteps of one's mother and spite for doing things one's own way. Contemporary mothers do not hold women of previous generations as 'idols' for parenting styles, and want to pursue a more gentle, respectful and child-centred approach to child-rearing. While in general they value the toil of their mothers and acknowledge the physical difficulties they had to face, they do not consider contemporary motherhood to be any easier – even with technological advances of 30 years, motherhood still is hard. However, contemporary mothers feel that a large part of society considers them 'whining' and 'fussing over nothing'. Motherhood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century faces new problems ('intensive mothering', societal norms and pressure from society etc.) while having to deal with many obstacles that are familiar also to women, who raised children in Soviet Latvia ('double shift', etc.).

The feelings and emotions of contemporary mothers – their fears and resentments, as well as gratitude and respect for mothers of Soviet Latvia – echo in the thematic analysis of comments of a viral *Facebook* post, expressing a subjective view on 'spoilt' contemporary mothers in comparison to the back-breaking hardships of a mother in 1985. Conflicting discourses emerge, as some feel that contemporary women 'have it easy' and 'do not know what real problems are', some insist that these experiences simply cannot be compared, and some express the stress and pressure of modern motherhood that exceeds the physical difficulties in Soviet Latvia.

The study gives qualitative insight into the emotional world of new mothers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Latvia in respect to relationships with previous generations of parents. Bearing in mind (1) the low, even diminishing birth rates (CSB, 2020), (2) high percentage of divorce rates (CSB, 2020), which, especially regarding families with children, are more often initiated by women (Trapeznikova, et al., 2019), (3) still pressing load of household and childcare chores, (4) lack of support to young families from close relatives (only 13% of new families with children not living together with close relatives receive regular support in form of childcare (Trapeznikova, et al., 2019), and other factors, motherhood is still a hard challenge for women. As the struggles of contemporary mothers are not always acknowledged by society, all the while the pressures of 'intensive motherhood' are accumulating and traditional family roles are still cause for argument at home (Putniņa et al 2015), women are left to deal with burdens of motherhood often alone, in silence – so not to 'whine', offend or sound 'ungrateful', thus, slowly 'burning out'.

The study has limitations as the sample of women participating in the study could be broadened, including women from more rural regions, with secondary education etc. The thematic analysis could also be extended to more *Facebook* posts, to enrich the results and elaborate on the motivation

behind agreeing or disagreeing with the premise that ‘contemporary motherhood is easy in regard to motherhood of previous generations’. The study also may be transformed into longitudinal research, measuring the ‘temperature’ and possible changes in regard to pressure from society in a few years’ time. Lastly, it would be fruitful to extend the sample and include views of women, who have mothering experience in Soviet Latvia, to understand their feelings towards motherhood then and now.

## Conclusions

The unspoken truths of contemporary mothers towards their mothers unfold in a ‘deep story’, filled with conflicting emotions and subjective pondering. In the hearts of (some) contemporary mothers, the hardships mothers of previous generations had had to bear were physically more difficult, but the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century motherhood are not dismissable as well. The pressure of ‘intensive mothering’ – devoting all of mother’s free time, energy and resources to the wellbeing of the child, while leaving one’s own needs often unattended –, practising respectful parenting, based on trust and emotional intelligence, as well as the burden of ‘second shift’ at home, leaves 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers as exhausted as women 30 years ago. Contemporary mothers want to raise their children differently that their mothers had raised them; some feel resentment towards their own mothers, some would even like an apology for past wrong-doings, but some are convinced that their mothers did the best they could with tools at their disposal. Still, 21<sup>st</sup> century mothers feel that part of society and even their own mothers judge them as failing to employ discipline, ‘whining’ about nothing, and not appreciating the ‘good life’ they have. However, many feel that these mothering experiences cannot be compared by different generations. Motherhood is a hard, but gratifying journey, and mothers need emotional and physical support no matter what.

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