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WOMEN IN ONE-PARENT FAMILIES IN RUSSIA

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My paper presents results from the scientific project, "One-parent families in Russia"¹, which analyses changes in family structure, the different problems of one-parent families, and ways of improving their position, in a context of a low level of government financial assistance to such families in Russia. This project will be finished by July, 1997. In this paper I present intermediate results and estimates.

Sex as a biological characteristic is an important variable in demographic analysis, but in modern society gender also becomes significant. Population and reproduction analysis should be based on gender. Socio-cultural analysis² permits us to understand demographic behaviour including family structure, health, fertility, nuptiality and divorce, relations between generations and, in general, quality of life for men and women. High status of women³ and equal access to educational, professional, political and informational structures give greater possibilities in the choice of living arrangements.

Fertility dynamics and women’s status are interconnected with each other, and changes of family structure depend on significant changes in female status. In analysing family structure change, we are interested in the growth of one-parent families, in their characteristics and problems, realities and perspectives. There is a hypothesis that dynamics, problems and

¹ This project is supported by the Russian Human Scientific Fund N 96-02-02203.
² Levels of this analysis are original context (relationships, links, conflicts in households) and gender relations in macrosociety (stereotypes, relations, policies).
³ High status of women entails a legal and a real right to equality in educational, social, political, professional, economic and family spheres, structures and relations.
perspectives of these families are connected with improvements in women's (gender) status.

ONE-PARENT FAMILIES IN RUSSIA

One-parent families (OPFs) are families with one parent and one or more unmarried children (and other relatives). In Russia OPFs constitute 13.4% (1994) of all families. 94% of OPFs are headed by women. The typology of OPFs is presented by number of children under 18 and residence with relatives in Table 11.1. Among children under age 18 every seventh child belongs to a single-parent family. OPFs with only children under age 18 are more than 3/4 of all OPFs.

Table 11.1 – One-parent families according to the number of children under age 18 (Russia, micro-census 1994)\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of OPS: number of children under age 18 (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Causes of OPFs formation are divorce, father's (or mother's) death, and childbearing outside of marriage. Divorce rates have tended to increase and marriage rates to decrease (Figure 11.1). Peaks of divorces "waves" were in 1980 and 1994. Moreover, in 1994, the ratio divorce/marriage exceeded one half, being 51 divorces to 100 marriages. Divorce rates increased mainly among couples with children. From 1988 to 1994, the number of divorces of couples with children increased by 28%.

A maximum of divorces is observed at 20-29 years, when in general one child has already been born (Figure 11.2). The peak of divorces is seen at 1-4 years of marriage duration.

In Russia a pattern of early fertility is evident. The mean age at marriage decreased since 1960; in 1995, it was 22.6 years for women and 24.8 for men. The mean age of childbearing was 24.7 years in 1993. Fertility rates of young mothers (ages 15-19) are superior to those of mothers aged 30 and over. The share of fertility of age groups in total fertility rate is presented in Table 11.2.

\(^4\) Since 1994, year of micro-census in Russia, the basic unit is the household. With the difference of the family, the household could be composed of only one nonrelated person, or several people (nurses, etc.) in so far they take part in the household budget.
The decrease in the mean age of mothers has been combined with a decrease of total fertility. We have "young and low" fertility (in contrast, most Western countries have an "old and low" pattern). It is very difficult to explain it. There was a pronatalist demographic policy during the 80’s, which changed the terms of fertility and age distribution of fertility rates. At that time there was another socio-cultural environment and history of family development (Soviet female full-employment model, social child care, etc.).

The second factor, the level of male mortality rates, is very high in Russia nowadays. It has increased catastrophically. All death indexes (age-specific death rates, life expectancy) demonstrate male disadvantage (Figure 11.3). We can see that the ratio of male/female age-specific death rates is particularly large among those aged 20-34. The main causes of the growth in male death rates are external causes and cardio-vascular ones. With respect to the first causes (suicide, homicide) the gender factor plays a significant role. The old paternal governmental system was destroyed. The "new" breadwinner family model has become very popular now. Men have to find work, and often have to work in a non-supporting environment, sometimes in criminal conditions. Another external cause (poison) links with alcohol, but we should stress more the decreasing quality of alcohol (and food) than increasing quantity of alcohol consumption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35&gt;</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11.1 – Marriage and divorce rates (Russia, 1960-1995)
Figure 11.2. – Number of divorces, by age and gender (Russia, 1994)
Figure 11.3. – Ratio of male/female age-specific death rates (Russia, 1994-1995)

Source: The Demographic Yearbook of Russia. GKS. M., 1996.
Figure 11.4. – Out-of-wedlock fertility (Russia, 1980-1995)
The third factor in OPFs is the proportion of children born outside of marriage. This index doubled from 1980 to 1995 (Figure 11.4). Moreover, in the context of decreasing total fertility, "out of wedlock" fertility has fallen more slowly than marital fertility. For example, from 1987 to 1991, marital fertility fell by 31% and "out of wedlock" fertility fell by 9.3%. We can conclude that there is not a crisis of family, but rather there are changes in family structures and types, including increases in cohabitation and refusal of official marriage. Some estimates (micro census 1994) confirm this. The share of men (age 16 and over) living in cohabitation is 47%, and the corresponding share of women is 39%.

We can see that all the factors contributing to a growing number of OPFs are significant in some degree. They act in a similar direction, increasing the share of OPFs in Russia.

PROBLEMS

The main problems of such families are decreasing living standards, disruption of father-child relations and time conflict due to the double task of childrearing and obtaining income.

Social and economic changes in Russia led to a deterioration in the standard of living of a majority of families. According to data from surveys in different regions in Russia OPFs have the worst material conditions. Some characteristics are worse than those of families with three and more children and families of elderly people. Depth of poverty of OPFs (a measure relating income to the minimum cost of consumer goods) is higher than those of many other types of families. The proportion of OPFs with inadequate income in some regions is higher than that of couples with 1-2 children, although the proportion of OPFs in the number of families is lower than that of couples with 1-2 children (Annex Table 11.1.A).

An important proportion of OPFs are "poor" and "dependent" families. The family is classified as poor if its income per person is less than the cost of the regional consumer basket (Table 11.3). "Dependent" families are families where more than 25% of family income consists of social benefits (the level of these benefits is from $10 per child in type 2 to $20 per child in type 1). We should underline that this dependence is not similar to social dependence in Western countries because in our case it is characteristic of extreme poverty. If the family budget depends on such very small benefits, its material position is very low.
Table 11.3. – Proportion of "poor" and "dependent" families among various types of families, percentage (distribution in Russian regions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of families:</th>
<th>Share of &quot;poor&quot; families</th>
<th>Share of &quot;dependent&quot; families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One-parent families</td>
<td>min: 25.9 - max: 80.2</td>
<td>mean: 60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mean: 18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with 1-2 children</td>
<td>min: 19.3 - max: 73.6</td>
<td>mean: 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean: 40.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with 3 or more children</td>
<td>min: 45.7 - max: 95.6</td>
<td>mean: 16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean: 66.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear families</td>
<td></td>
<td>mean: 3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone elderly people</td>
<td>min: 24.1 - max: 81.6</td>
<td>mean: 46.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of standard living and potentials of Russian population. MSS, 1996.

The main problems confronting one-parent families are:
- shortage of time to engage in paid work (or to do paid full-time work);
- low earnings and other barriers of the labour market;
- shortage of time to engage in childrearing;
- shortage of day care organisations and services;
- low level of father's participation in childrearing.

The origin of these problems is that women have an inferior position in the labour market, while men provide limited assistance in the family. Such indexes as official unemployment, work conditions, gap in wages, employment at high levels of responsibility and career ladders are much worse for women than men. For men, inequalities exist in the household sphere. For example, only a few years ago "maternal leave" was transformed into "parental leave" and some social benefits for the father were made available. But these measures are only proclamations, because men do not interrupt their work because (in particular) of the gender gap in wages. Moreover, children from one-parent families practically always have only limited contacts with their fathers.

OPFs are characterised by factors such as economic "squeezing" and time shortage. The general characteristics of OPFs also are divided into two groups:

- Economic ones:
  - high risk to have the status of a low-income family;
  - mother's earnings are a barrier to exiting low-income status due to gender differentiation mechanisms in the labour market;

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4 We suppose that this classification and characteristics are similar for OPFs from all countries.
- improvement of material status may be attained not only by labour (qualities and potentials), but also by marriage (or existing sexual partner's support inside/outside of marriage);
- relatively higher material status could be achieved with household support or stronger family policy.

- Time-shortage ones:
  - double responsibilities conflict is connected with tasks of obtaining income and childrearing;
  - this conflict could be solved by a strong family policy or by household support (by grandmother or great-grandmother).

It is obvious that economic and time-shortage characteristics are linked with each other. Structural factors are significant ones. Mothers from one-parent families, nuclear families or families with elder generations will make professional re-entry in different ways. Lone mothers and mothers with child care support from a grandmother will return to the work place earlier than mothers from a nuclear family. In Russia, as a rule, mothers from OPFs use support of their mothers and grandmothers (second and third generations of parents could constitute the household unit due to problems with separate housing). Most often this support is in the form of baby-sitting rather than as financial assistance. Another cause of OPF differences (at the regional level) is the type of family policy. If social and family policies provide a sufficient level of income by social payments, the material and time-shortage problems in OPFs will not be so acute.

According to expert estimates (ISEPP, MSS), in modern Russia approximately 70% of women from two-parent families (nuclear families) and 85% of lone mothers are working, with 15% of women from two-parent families and 15-23% of lone mothers having a second job. Very often a second job is the only way to reach middle and high levels of income for OPFs. The high level of female labour force participation is explained as a consequence of the Soviet "full employment" pattern, in which it was impossible to survive only with husband's earnings. The weak social support to OPFs is the cause of the higher labour force participation of lone mothers.

In general, the Russian pattern of female labour force participation is changing now. The level of economic activity is practically the same (51%). Labour force participation rates have decreased among older women (women going out of work) after 50 years. There are changes across generations: working children support their parents because they have more opportunity to find high earnings. During the Soviet period, parents obtained a pension, worked and supported their children. Moreover, there are structural changes in female employment, with a decrease of female participation in modern advantaged branches (for example, the financial sector) (GKS, 1996b).

5 Consequently, women - heads of OPFs - have at minimum two dependent persons: child and mother (because the level of pensions in Russia is low).
PERSPECTIVES OF FAMILY POLICY

What are the priorities for family policies? To improve the position of such impoverished families, there is a need to increase women's employment status, to redistribute responsibility for childrearing between mother and father and to develop "father-child" contacts, to spread social child care support. We say nothing about financial support of one-parent families because it is not significant to change the negative consequences of single-parent status. Moreover, the size of family benefits in Russia is very small. They have only a symbolic character now - approximately $20. Establishment of equal opportunities for women and men (that is for the lone mother and her former husband) to fulfill themselves in the parental and employment spheres is the significant challenge for policy-makers. It is necessary to reanalyse the division of labour in the family to improve women's social status and to reinforce the father's position.

REALITIES

What does happen with realisation of main principles of family policy in relation to OPFs - creation of a self-supporting system and increase of father support? Is it possible to do it?

In the transition period in Russia, a new "positive pattern" of family was formed: men had only work, women had only home work. Mass media propaganda, government laws (for example, prolongation of maternity leave to 3 years), and listlessness among hard-working women led to a "post-socialist patriarchy renaissance". Moreover, official and hidden unemployment involves substantial numbers of women withdrawing from the labour market. The new economic situation in Russia has harmed economic status of women. Unemployment growth, the gender gap in wages, and occupational segregation all influence the competitiveness of lone mothers. The decline of social infrastructure (services and day care organisations) reinforces their positions. We should recognise that development of women's position is a hard task now due to this deterioration.

Moreover, adaptive ways of improving the family's material position in our economy are secondary employment or work in the private sector. These ways demand more time and, consequently, are not well-suited to lone mothers.

6 However, most men could not adapt to the new role of "breadwinner" under conditions of redistribution of property, deterioration of the environment, decreasing of living standards and loss of the old social security system. Consequences of such tendencies are increasing criminal activity, nervous disruption, etc.
Preliminary results of interviews concerning the self-support potential of lone mothers affirm our concerns. Lone mothers prefer to get higher benefits, but they do not want to improve their positions by themselves because in the modern Russian economy it is very hard for women to achieve, especially lone mothers. Due to time-shortage conflict, these families have less chances to become self-supporting. To facilitate this, it is necessary to create a system of privileges in credits, in day care for children, and in flexible work time.

On the contrary, new economic activities in Russia give us additional opportunities to increase "father-child" contacts in one-parent families. First, ways of providing material support have expanded: new models of inheritance involving real estate, share income, etc. Second, the sphere of applications has widened. One of the ways in which this participation has been manifested is direct payment for child care, education and health.

During the Soviet period, the former husband could have financial contact with the mother only by paying some sum of money as alimony. He could not control this sum. In the new conditions he can minimise contact with his former wife and expand contact with his children. Consequently, we should develop the system of father support to improve father-child contact because the environment enabling it is developing.

Another question is the mother's willingness to accept child care support from her former husband, on the one hand, and the father's willingness to provide it. The changes in legislation of father-child support should change the relation of men to it. But in our time we have "inheritance" of old pattern of relations between father and child in lone-mother families: only alimony payments. Moreover, due to the "invisibility" of much income (people do not make labour contracts and do not pay official taxes) the alimonies are calculated and paid only on a small part of income. Preliminary results of interviews show that lone mothers are not highly favorable to accepting physical child care support from their former husbands. They would like to have higher and more stable (more securable) financial assistance, but not help for child care. The only exception to this tendency is in the case where men were initiators of divorce, but women were initiators of divorce in more than 90% of all divorces. After divorce women do not like to trust in the husband, especially for child care.

The father also has low potential for this care if previous relations between the divorced couple excluded men from "father-child" relations. It is necessary to create a policy environment with "father-child" contact advantages to change the stereotype and settings in future.

We should emphasise that changes in women's status and changes in family structure interconnect with each other. On the one hand, growth of one-parent families is followed by women's status improvement. On the other hand, such social strata will obstruct development of a "housewife family" pattern. First, the increase of this type of families leads to the
necessity to maintain active female participation in the labour market. Second, the negative experience of such mothers who are not working will influence the strategies and preferences of other women.

Improved economic status of women could come from the following processes:
- Increased female labour force participation due to male losses during wars and catastrophes or in case of extensive economic development (Soviet period). Female labour force participation needs for the economy developed in an extensive way (Soviet economy). Support of family policy measures (leaves, child care) permits women to not interrupt their work.
- Narrowing of the gender gap in wages and improving of female occupational characteristics (equal exit in various sectors of the labour market, reduce occupational segregation, enhance educational and career possibilities, etc.) or, in general, facilitating the process of changes of gender roles and relations.
- Growth of economic well-being for all citizens in the economy.

Stability in the social position of lone mothers is based on changes of settings in reproductive, sexual and procreative behaviour, and changes of gender stereotypes. In modern Russia the main cause of growth of OPF's is changes in sexual and procreative behaviour, stereotypes and settings. An indirect indicator of this process is the growth of "out-of-wedlock" fertility and divorce. Neither growth of female employment, nor decreasing of gender differences, nor improvement of the standard of living in society are operative now in Russia.

CONCLUSION

The gender factor in demographic analysis is a significant one. Changing women's status has influences on family dynamics (fertility, nuptiality, divorce, etc.), and particularly on changes in family structure. Gender status improvement needs the elimination of gender stereotypes and of gender inequalities in household and outside. The dynamics, problems and perspectives of one-parent families are connected with improvements in women's (gender) status.

The main problems of such families are a decreasing living standard, rupture of "father-child" relations and time conflict due to the double task of childrearing and obtaining income. OPFs have characteristics of "poor" and "dependent" families. Family support and family policy could improve OPFs positions.

On the one hand, growth of one-parent families is followed by women's status improvement. On the other hand, such social strata will obstruct development of a "housewife family" pattern.
The perspectives of family policy are included as a way to increase women's employment status, promote redistribution of responsibility for childrearing between mother and father and development of father-child contacts, and encourage expansion of social child care support.

Single mothers have low potential for self-support in the present economic environment. It is necessary to create privileges for OPFs to include them in a self-supporting system.

Recent changes in legislation improved the conditions to develop father-child contact in OPFs. But many measures have only a "proclaimed" character and they are not used by people. Fathers have low potential for this care due to inertia of the old alimony system and stereotypes of gender relations. Lone mothers do not wish to accept physical child care support from their former husbands. They would like to have only higher and more stable (more securable) financial assistance, but not help for child care, except in the case where men were initiators of divorce.
Abbreviations

OPFs - One-parent families.
INF - Institute of National Forecasts.
MSS - Ministry of Social Security.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


All statistics are obtained and calculated from:
- Micro census data, Goskomstat of Russia, (GKS), Moscow, 1994.
- The Demographic Yearbook of Russia, GKS, Moscow, 1995.
- The Demographic Yearbook of Russia, GKS, Moscow, 1996.
- Family in Russia, GKS, Moscow, 1996b.
ANNEX

Table 11.1.A. – Distribution of families with inadequate income (depth of poverty), for selected family types and by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of family</th>
<th>Region**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPFs</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with 1-2 children</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of OPFs in region</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* - sum is not equal 100% because we do not include other types of families in our table.

** - Regions: 1-Voroneg, 2-Magnitogorsk, 3-Moscow, 4-Orel, 5-Tver, 6-Chuvashya, 7-Astrakhan.

Source: Survey of standard living and potentials of Russian population, MSS, 1996.

Table 11.2.A. – Share of families with earnings from second job or independent incomes, percentage, Tver region, 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of family</th>
<th>Low income*</th>
<th>Middle income</th>
<th>High income</th>
<th>All families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear families with 1-2 children</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear families with 3 and more children</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-parent families</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All families with children</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*poor families.

Source: Survey of standard living and potentials of Russian population, MSS, 1996.