

GENDER RELATIONSHIPS AND GENDER POLICY IN CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS

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Abstract. The paper deals with gender equality issues in Russia. The paper proves that there is total ignorance of gender issues at the top of society, but there are positive trends in gender policy development in Russia. The aim of the paper is an analysis of the situation in Russia in terms of gender inequalities in politics and economics and to present the main challenges of addressing gender issues in the governmental policies of the Russian Federation. The paper gives examples of horizontal segregation (“glass ceiling”) which characterizes differences between male and female occupations and wage discrimination as well. The paper reveals also women’s discrimination is women’s inequality in family relationships and worse individual health of women in Russia. Multiplicative effect of gender asymmetry causes poverty among women. The elimination of poverty can be successfully realized only through the gender policy development and introduction of ministerial bodies dealing with these issues.

JEL classification: J1, J12, I3.

Key words: gender equality, gender relationship, gender policy.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: lyčių lygybė, lyčių santykiai, lyčių lygybės politika.

Introduction

Today there are no official structures on gender equality in Russia. But still there is hope that education and science will give positive results in the nearest future. Despite the fact that there is total ignorance of gender at the top of society, special gender courses are taught in 115 higher educational establishments. 30 gender centres organize regularly conferences and seminars, publish books and magazines. Dozens of doctoral and PhD defences take place every year. This brings hope that due to active work at the bottom of society positive changes will occur.

1. Women in Politics and Economics

Socio-economic transformations at the end of the 20th century have broken the old state political structures which kept the whole totalitarian bureaucratic system of the Soviet System; however destruction was much more active than construction of democratic society based on market relationships. Gender disparity of political reforms can be characterized by the following indicators. Women constitute only 10 per cent of the State Duma members (*Women and Men in Russia*, 2004). In the higher chamber of the parliament—Council of Federations—this percentage is even lower—5.7 per cent. In the Moscow Duma there are 6 women out of 35 deputies.

Women's participation in elections and their representation in legislative bodies show that we are far behind democratic society and that we need to overcome conservative mentality. Advancement of women in politics meets lots of institutional and cultural barriers and there are mainly women's NGOs and women in political parties who have to promote the situation (Tiuriukanova, 2005).

From the early 1990s to present day an important evolution took place—demands towards the political elite to advance women in politics were replaced by the proposal of real institutional schemes of women's advancement to parties and parliaments. It became clear that political process is not a place to express female and male perceptions of the world or male and female ways of self-realization, but a space for working with laws on elections, laws on parties, participation in budget process and public hearings, developing lobbying technique and other procedures which are crucial for democracy per se, including its gender dimension. Women understood the role of the “administrative resource” and that their success needs a shift from political statements to political deals (Malysheva, 2007). The most significant practice was NGOs lobbying of the Law on the norm of women's political representation in parties and parliaments (introduction of quarter), which might have led to the real gender equality in politics (Kochkina, 2007).

Gender stereotypes also determine asymmetry in the economic life of our society. There are two stable opinions about gender stereotypes among employers: women's labour force is less profitable and demands bigger investments than men's. This stereotype is mainly based on the current legislation which provides maternity benefits and different social guarantees to women. This makes women as workers less attractive in comparison to men. This stereotype is also supported by the fact that these are mainly women who continue to fulfil most of the housework and children's upbringing

The view that there are “male” and “female” occupations still dominate society. This, in turn, causes segregation of the labour market. Below is the list of the most important and sharp consequences of gender stereotypes under the market conditions.

First level: the double burden—work and family—slows down the social mobility of women. Women rarely raise their qualifications. Thus they become a less attractive source for the labour force or, according to the popular saying, the labour force of the “second sort.”

Despite the high professional education of women, discrimination practices in the labour market lead to the fact that they have lower status which can be represented in

the form of a “social pyramid”: the higher the position at this pyramid the lesser the representation of women inside this position.

Thus among rectors of the higher educational establishments there are only 7 per cent of women and 93 per cent of men, while among senior professors there are 68 per cent of women and only 32 per cent of men (*Women and Men in Russia*, 2004). The same situation is in the health care establishments and also in any other institutions of the national economy.

There is metaphoric definition of obstacles to women’s career advancement—the so-called “glass ceiling.” As an expression it emerged in 1970s to mark the artificial barriers which exist in the form of prejudices and institutional bars and prevent women from getting higher managerial positions. In fact, this formula reflects gender inequality, particularly at the higher layers of the hierarchy. Men and women have different access to the resources, to labour employment opportunities and to status positions. Women’s professionalism and women’s specific capacities are used insufficiently at different levels of management. As a result, the economics, which are based exclusively on the male force, is not as effective in Russia as it could be.

There is also horizontal segregation (“glass ceiling”) which characterizes differences between male and female occupations. Men keep positions which are better paid off, have higher responsibility and are higher qualified. Women keep less important positions and skip to the flexible labour schemes with different limitations and narrow opportunities. Thus the industrial branch segregation emerges and forms a set of male and female spheres of occupations. Among feminized spheres are health care and physical culture, education (80% of women), social provision, finances, credit and insurance and pension provision (68%) (*Women and Men in Russia*, 2004). Gender dynamics of the current process in this sphere show that gender segregation is only increasing in Russian economy.

Men predominantly became owners of enterprises. With bigger power and resources in their hands they became the rulers of privatization and the key employers. Women make up only 35 per cent of employers (*Women and Men in Russia*, 2004).

As former heads of the key governmental posts and directors of large enterprises, men have in their possession the biggest part of state property. Often they show an aggressive style in their professional activity and consider tyranny as the most effective means to pursue their goals.

In the private sector situation is quite similar. Women have narrow and lesser paid off occupations in the executive professions. Employers often try to reed off women. According to their views, worker’s skills have high correlation with gender and age; they often ignore concrete indicators of education and qualification. As a result, the socially passive position of women is spreading down.

As for unemployment, there are more unemployed men than women (6.4% among women and 7.5% among men) (*Socialnoje polozenije I uroven’zhizni naseleniya v Rossii*, 2009). However the proportion of unemployed women with secondary and higher professional education is higher than of men. Thus the primary particularity of the women’s labour force is that it has “qualified” character or women, who lost jobs, are better educated than men.

What is the result of gender segregation and discrimination in economics and politics? The main result is that the human capital and intellectual potential of women is missed or is not used at all despite its high quality. Society has big losses connected with this obstacle. It means that gender stereotypes are not as inoffensive as may seem at first glance. They may not only break equal rights and equal opportunities, but also disuse specific psychological women's capacities.

Finally there is a question for all of Russian society—to which extent discrimination and segregation of women is dangerous? Where is the benchmark which makes division between women's inequality caused by their physiological particularities and gender asymmetry caused by mentality?

The second level of consequences caused by women's subordination is discrimination in wages. The difference in wages stems mainly from wages differentiation between branches of the economy which do not always have objective basement.

Together with the change of wages in particular branches of the economy, the number of women also changes: the higher the wage, the lesser the proportion of women at the enterprises of this branch and vice versa. In 2003 the proportion of women's salary to men's salary in our national economy was 64 per cent. This estimation is close to the indicators of the beginning of the 1990s (*Women and Men in Russia*, 2004).

Economic reforms only increased reduction of the wage temps in feminized branches. Thus, in 2008 the lowest wage level in comparison with the national wage level in the economy as a whole constituted: 43 per cent in agriculture, 40 per cent in textile and sewing production, 65 per cent in education and 75 per cent in health care (*Socialnoje polozhenije I uroven'zhizni naseleniya v Rossii*, 2009).

Meanwhile there are no foundations to insist that the level of education and qualification in health care is lower than it is required in construction.

It is worthy to note, that gender equality of wages contributes a lot into formation of spouses family positions, provides equal access to family spending, lays the basis to economic independence of women. However in majority of cases the average salary of women is considerably lower than of men even in the same occupation.

Gender difference of incomes among self-employed is even higher. Distribution of incomes shows that only 32 per cent get less than the average, while among women this proportion is 58 per cent (Statistical bulletin, 2004).

What is the basis of the difference in wages? It is determined by the existing patriarchal values in society. Women traditionally were concentrated in the feminized branches of the economy and in the services sector where labour is cheaper. It is historical tradition in Russia that the consumption industry was regarded in Soviet times as less valuable for the national economy, wages were lower and the number of men among employed was lower. The majority of employed were women and it was easy to keep their wages lower because they were the second breadwinners in their families. Thus the "vicious circle" appeared in gender relations and unjustified low salaries in health care and education.

In 2004 27 per cent of the working population got only minimum living wage or even less (*Women and Men in Russia*, 2004). Who are they, who works 8 hours per day

and cannot get even the living wage formed at a level of physical survival? In education, light industry, trade and public nutrition these are mainly women and there are 12 million of them.

What is particularly important that the amount of income defines the level of pension benefit? In Russia the proportion of women in retiring ages is 3 times higher than of men; their life expectancy is 12–13 years longer. At the same time the proportion of gender benefits varies very slightly by gender and constitutes only 10 per cent. This is defined by the obstacle that our pension system takes poorly into consideration wage differentiation and the duration of labour activity. Pensions are just old ages benefits.

Women over 70 years get the lowest pension. The total number of pensioners who get extremely low pensions according to the estimates of the Institute on socio-economic studies of population (ISEPN) is about 15 million. Most of them are women.

Among the poorest groups of the population are one-parent families, which are constituted of women with children and families with disabled children. According to the estimation, the number of women with such families is 4 million.

Thus, according to ISEPN estimations about 31 million women are in a considerably worse position than men. This is the half of all women or about 2/3 of economically active women.

This data has expert character and may differ from state statistics. None the less they allow concluding that poverty has women's face (Ovcharova, 2002). It becomes obvious that gender stereotypes and gender discrimination define everything in the society from employment sector to pension benefits.

Then the more general question emerges: what society Russia is establishing—social or absolutely liberal? If this is only market society, then women have to survive and to find solutions by themselves. However according to our Constitution we are the social society. It means that the task of poverty eradication exists. Then the struggle against gender discrimination and gender stereotypes is important.

The low level of wages among young women is strongly connected with all forms of anti-social behaviour—alcohol consumption, drug addiction, prostitution, including export forms of it (Tiuriukanova, 2005).

There is also the phenomenon of women's poverty multiplication, when a woman is working in a feminized branch of the economy, her occupation is at the bottom of the occupational pyramid, she is the only breadwinner in non-complete family and gradually she goes down to marginal layers of the society. This phenomenon of multiplication leads to stagnation of poverty and it is even harder to eradicate this kind of poverty.

The third level of negative consequences determined by women's discrimination is women's inequality in family relationships and worse individual health of women. The latter leads to the declining level of children's health during child delivery.

Within the last two decades the position of men and women changed differently in different family groups: women in rich families, as a rule, lose their jobs and became servants of their husbands. In poor families the household burden has increased dramatically. There emerged a thin layer of women entrepreneurs, whose family burden decreased.

In general women became more engaged in families; they “plunged” into family life. This withdrawal of women from the productive sphere during reforms and the decline of women’s material well-being increased gender asymmetry in house holding due to a greater domestic burden. This inevitably makes distortions and destabilization in family relationships. Meanwhile, all reproductive functions of a family depend on stability and reliability of marriage and its qualitative characteristics.

Research shows that the main factor which defines the quality of marriage is satisfaction with the division of labour in house holding, child care and care for elderly people (Rimashevskaya, 1998). However in our society mainly women fulfil most of the care work and “emotional work.” Under the new conditions of life the family fulfils not only consumption, but also productive functions and this brings additional burden. Housekeeping labour expands. Also there emerges family businesses and entrepreneurial agricultural firms which are based on family labour. In fact, women have to fulfil all functions of child care, because child care centres and kindergartens are an immense deficit and there is a new phenomenon of the absent “Russian babushka” (grandmother). The family budget more frequently is guided by the woman, so the family climate mostly depends on her.

We may conclude that under socio-economic transformations oriented on market relationships the “renaissance” of patriarchy took place and it reinforced gender asymmetry.

Worsening of women’s position in a family and society leads to marriage instability, decline of its quality and finally to divorces as the final result of destructive processes. Dynamics of divorces during the last 10 years is the following: in 2006 there were 4 divorces for each seven marriages (*Women and Men in Russia*, Moscow, 2004). Women can’t often accept the position which men propose in their families. As in previous times, 70 per cent of divorces in Russia are done under the initiative of women. Under these conditions intra-family relationships often cause domestic violence which comes even more actively than ever before to the open scene.

In general, the matter of things in a Russian family is similar to the other social institutions. There is no foundation to make statements about family crisis, but it is important to observe family transformations.

The “spouses” family emerged which is based on egalitarian family relationships with mutual interests and wishes of spouses. This model is more stable than the others and it is in fact a product of liberalism which defines personal independence of a wife and a husband. First of all it corresponds to the interests of a woman who wants to have stable economic sovereignty. This is a woman who is making a choice of her partner and looks for gender equality in employment. Above this type of marriage, cohabitation became very popular (or partnership without marriage registration). This partnership develops extensively among young people.

2. Women and Health Issues

The all-embracing crisis of Russian society, together with flourishing gender stereotypes, caused decline of physical, psychological and social health both at the population level and at the individual level.

Despite the fact that life expectancy is shorter among men, the indicators of individual health in all age groups are lower among women, both according to self-esteem, indicators of chronic diseases and multiplicity of various pathologies (Rimashevskaya et al, 1998).

The explanation of this paradox can be found in biological and social spheres. A women's organism is more resistant to negative disease factors and it is defined by women's birth function. Meanwhile her low characteristics of individual health can be explained by high loadings: child birth and child rearing, everyday life hardships, declining level of life, frequent abortions (Rimashevskaya, 2001).

This situation is slightly compensated by comparatively higher vital behaviour among women: they are more attentive to their health, they visit doctors more often, and they spend more money on medicine. Men, on the contrary, don't like to visit doctors; they lead more pathological way of life (alcohol consumption, smoking). As a result they die earlier. Above that, men often can't compete with each other in the labour market legally. They commit criminal actions, while the state is not capable to provide appropriate regulation. Above that the primary breadwinner role causes constant disturbance and depression among men. They often can't sleep well. Instead they constantly think how to provide the necessary level of life to their relatives. As a consequence men have bad heart and nervous systems. Heart diseases often end up with heart attacks and insult. It is no surprise that market reforms were accompanied by extra death rates among men.

3. Social consequences of gender asymmetry

Analysis of gender asymmetry in contemporary Russia allows making of several conclusions. The main conclusion is that deviations from equal rights and equal opportunities had negative influence primarily on women. Women more often become losers. However in the final end this is a man who suffers seriously from inequality, particularly in the sphere of health.

In political and economic life, gender segregation and discrimination grows under the pressure of gender stereotypes. As a result, society endures significant losses of human potential and human capital; which is connected with the women's labour force.

Gender asymmetry at the micro level in a family context and housekeeping causes family conflicts, instability of spouse's relationships, relationships of parents and children and among children themselves.

This leads inevitably to the decline of the quality of marriage relationships and then to the decline of health among mothers first of all because they have primary responsibility for family wellbeing.

Multiplicative effect of gender asymmetry causes poverty among women. In the final end it means that to eradicate poverty without elimination of gender stereotypes is impossible. This elimination can be successfully realized only through the development of the special national machinery in Russia (introduction of ministerial bodies).

Constant and gradual activity is necessary in all spheres of social life with the purpose to change not only gender ideology and people's mentality, but to provide real shift in women's position, to destroy patriarchal picture of the world not only with the help of legislation but the whole reconstruction of social relationships (Zdravomyslova, Kagai, 2005).

Conclusions

Women's professionalism and women's specific capacities are used insufficiently at different levels of management in Russia and as a result, the economics, which are based exclusively on the male force, is not as effective in Russia as it could be. The main result of gender segregation and discrimination in economics and politics is that the human capital and intellectual potential of women is missed or is not used at all despite its high quality.

There is horizontal segregation ("glass ceiling") which characterizes the differences between male and female occupations. Women have narrow and less-paid occupations in the executive professions and the socially passive position of women is spreading down in Russia. The discrimination of woman in the labour market and women's inequality in family relationships has impact on worse individual health of women in Russia.

Multiplicative effect of gender asymmetry causes poverty among women. The elimination of poverty can be successfully realized only through the gender policy development and introduction of ministerial bodies dealing with these issues. Constant and gradual activity is necessary in all spheres of social life with the purpose to change not only gender ideology and people's mentality in Russia, but to improve legal and institutional structures and to reconstruct the whole social relationship in Russia.

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LYČIŲ SANTYKIAI IR LYČIŲ POLITIKA ŠIUOLAIKINĖMIS APLINKYBĖMIS

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Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami lyčių nelygybės klausimai Rusijoje. Parodoma, kad Rusijoje iki šiol yra ignoruojami lyčių lygybės klausimai net aukščiausiuose visuomenės sluoksniuose, tačiau jau atsiranda pažangių lyčių lygybės politikos įgyvendinimo Rusijoje tendencijų. Straipsnio tikslas yra išnagrinėti lyčių nelygybės apraiškas Rusijoje tokiose srityse, kaip politika ir ekonomika, bei atskleisti pagrindinius iššūkius, susijusius su lyčių lygybės politikos įgyvendinimu Rusijos Federacijoje. Straipsnyje pateikti horizontalios ir vertikalios lyčių segregacijos darbo rinkoje pavyzdžiai, atskleistas moterų diskriminacijos šeimoje fenomenas bei moterų sveikatos blogėjimo tendencijos. Moterų diskriminacija tiesiogiai veikia moterų skurdą, ir skurdo likvidavimas yra galimas tik vystant lyčių lygybės politiką bei stiprinant įstatymų bazę ir institucijas, dirbančias lyčių lygybės politikos įgyvendinimo srityje.

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