

## Sociology and Demography Session

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## ORIENTATION OF SIBERIAN YOUTH TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD

Extended abstract

*Background.* The transition of the Russian society from Soviet to another social order and changes attending it cannot but affect people's mentality and their private life, in particular, their system of values and orientations in the sphere of family giving meaning and direction both to individual and group existence and behaviour. The transformation of the functions of the family, changes in marital, reproductive behaviour including the spread of extramarital couples and out-of-wedlock births is a natural phenomenon at the present stage of social evolution, the form of family adaptation to social changes.

In Russia, according to the 2002 census data (when for the first time the percent of illegal couples was recorded in Russia), the percentage of cohabitations among all unions was about 10 %. In West Siberian population it was 12% to all couples. The percentage of out-of-wedlock births was 28.5% of all births.

The paper presents findings from two empirical studies of a reconnaissance kind by which I wanted to find out the reasons underlying the high incidence of illegal conjugal unions among young people in Siberia.

One survey was devoted to family value orientations held by people in the Novosibirsk academic centre (Akademgorodok). The second was devoted to motives for official registration among young bridegrooms and brides in Berdsk, a Siberian city.

*Theoretical Premises.* A significant problem for scientific investigation raised up by specialists in connection with the high frequency in many countries of illegal marital unions, out-of-wedlock births is the loss by family and marriage of their institutional meaning.

In considering changes that are taking place in the social institutions of marriage and family it is necessary to establish criteria according to which these changes can be defined as a decline (degradation) or transformation (evolution). Such a criterion for the above mentioned institutions is the adherence to the social-cultural norms, values, orientations,

patterns which make up the basis for the functioning of these institutions. With respect to marriage, it is norms regulating sexual behavior; with respect to family, it is norms regulating reproductive, socializing behavior, the role of relatives in the providing housing, food, clothes as well as care of weak and disabled members. And if in the bound of XX-XXI centuries the changes have become faster it is not against the needs of society but just because the society takes on itself the complicated functions of the family household.

Method and Data. In this work the object of investigation is the direction of changes in orientations, values and preferences in the sphere of marriage and family among the young people in the beginning of the 2000s. The respondents are young people of Novosibirsk-Akademgorodok of 17-30 years of age (N= 104 , modal group: 17-24 years of age, single, university graduated or attended), and the young inhabitants of Berdsk registering their marriage (N=82, modal group: 21-26 years of age, secondary special education). The method was questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview.

Results. The youth of the Siberian Akademgorodok give preference to love, tenderness, mutual understanding, harmony in family relations. At the same time, they are not against (or even prefer) a possibility of divorce if the relations in the family do not satisfy if only one partner. As to unregistered (illegal) marriage unions, 63 % of the surveyed think it normal and acceptable to live with a partner without official registration. But the motives for entering a free union slightly differ between the surveyed men and women: young women are inclined to look at free union as a “trial marriage” which most probably will become real after some time or after certain events in the woman’s life (for example, pregnancy and expected birth), then it will be registered. For young men more frequent is another motive for a free union: for them it implies more freedom and less coercion in relations which in this case can be more easily discarded. It seems that just for this reason that among the motives for marriage legitimation women indicated “desire for more definite relations, higher partner’s responsibility in the legal marriage”. Therefore, the young people of Akademgorodok see illegal unions as “trial marriages” until the possibility of child birth emerges. For this group of the respondents the hypothesis that preferences of civil (unregistered) marriage imply orientation to more democracy in the family structure has been confirmed.

In marriage motivation we should differentiate the motivation to marriage proper from motivation to marriage legitimation. With respect to marriage proper, we can speak about replacement of exogenous by endogenous behavioural motivation when individual’s actions are guided by internal, personal desires and goals.

Motivation for marriage legitimation does not seem as unambiguous as that. The explanation is that marriage registration as such in any form has been always a prerogative of the community which always has tended to control individuals’ behaviour, including the sphere of marriage and family relations. This tendency is based, in the first place, on that the family as a social institution is in charge of such an important function as reproduction and socialisation of citizens.

Conclusions. Our surveys have shown that traditional preference to legal marriage is strong among the surveyed young Siberian people. And notwithstanding all changes in the views on marriage, it is possible to state that on the people’s decisions to register their marriage a greater influence is made by what Young would have termed “the collective unconscious” than by what is called freedom of choice.

The collected sociological data though obtained on a small sample allow to treat the revealed relationships as regular. It is also possible to assume that the ongoing changes in the family sphere can be described more as modernisation of the institution of family than its decay. In essence, it is a process of reinforcement of the institutional substance of family, it is its answer to the requirements of the *contemporary* society which is performance of those functions which the society has «left» to family.