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photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

FAMILY AND

GENDER

WHAT FAMILY IS

It is protection and suppression. Happiness and desperation. Kingdom and slavery. Love and hatred. That is what family includes. It also is a management institute, of course. Because it is hard to take care of all of us separately. But once you have a head of the family and grant him special rights, life becomes easier. Life is easier, when you have a rule of obeying those who are older, stronger, wiser. You will here have various traditions to assist you in family building. But sometimes things change. Today, the family situation becomes different. There are no more those nice great huge dinners with white table cloth. It used to be good, but hard to be kept in our tiny apartments and busy work schedules. Who now has the time cooking for dinners like that? Who has the time preparing the table, the dishes, the white table cloth? "Just go find something in the refrigerator, dear," we

say, forgetting all those traditions. Life has changed. Family is something that reflects all the challenges that take place in the today's society. That's why the family deforms and changes its components. Some of us don't even like the perspective of marriage and having children. There appear more and more ways of simple living-together, of non-traditional life. Non-tradition has already become a tradition. There are smaller families, polygamy families, gay families, childfree families, officially unregistered families, etc. At the post-Soviet space, the family is in the status between yesterday and tomorrow; it is being transformed from one drama to another; it keeps losing and finding, and changes into something new. What is that new?

Tinatin MZHAVANADZE,
Georgia

every day's chronicle



photo by Diana Petriashvili, Georgia

Yesterday I went to see Tanya. That girl, who has four children, state conservatory diploma, mom aunt Sofa and mother-in-law from remote mountainous and traditional Svaneti region.

After that visit I felt like I spent the day in a loud shop of huge metallurgic plant: too much noise, too many voices.

Two mothers-in-law continued loud argument, while, Saba played his music, Dito kept continuously asking for something special to eat, Shio tried to find player batteries under the table we set at, and the smallest Anastasia spilled out soup on her and ran away. Me and my friend kept pretending that there was nothing extraordinary about that situation, and continued our dialogue about some Scottish woman who arrived here to study Georgian polyphonic singing, which, as she puts it, recovers psychological traumas of children. I think, that's Sisyphean toil: when you first make traumas to children, stably, on the regular basis; and than begin searching for the ways to recover them.

My son Sandro and his class went to an orphanage to show theatre and to share chocolates with the kids living there. He said that they felt

so sorry for the kids that could not even talk to them. My husband Dato listened to it and finally got mad. He said that everybody is equal in God's eye, and that teachers are stupid as they traumatize the kids of both parties.

We have nothing to do with it, I told him, leave us alone, please.

He did not reply, because TV program showed a boy, who was taken away from his deported mother in Moscow and sent to an orphanage.

I thought of Stanly Kramer and his Bless the Beasts and Children film.

I would watch again that impossibly hard movie, that tears your heart into parts, but gives you a hope that once in an age, there appear people who are so talented and love children so much that they are ready to go with them any place where children get insulted, beaten and killed.

I would ask God to keep that crazy noise in my friend's house; let them all be healthy and strong, let them be so lucky that they manage to buy a separate apartment. I will visit them once in a while, feeling terribly tired, and I will keep praying for all the children in this world. They are the only we should ask God about.

Diana PETRIASHVILI,
Georgia

pure truth

LOVE IS PREGNANCY

primitive standards
of the society

Would you tell me please - is family an obligation? Is it really obligatory for all people to get married once they grow up? And to have children right after the marriage? This perspective is exactly what the society wants from us, each of us.

I was 16 when I first heard "it's-time-to-get-married." Maria, my next door neighbor, who haven't seen me for three years I was away from Tbilisi, was the first person to announce the verdict:
- Wow, you've become a pretty and smart girl! It's time to get married.

I graduated from high school, went to the university and started a job; at each of these stages, I had to listen to the same request - for some reason everybody wanted to see me wearing a wedding dress.

The strangest and somewhat insulting appeared to be the fact that even my relatives (not the most traditional people in my community) shared the wish to see me married sometime soon.

"So, when you guys plan to have a family?" they'd ask me after each date.

Me and my husband (then just a boyfriend) kept dating for several years, but finally failed to resist the society's pressure and - yes, we got married.

First time after the wedding, I kept feeling some sort of horror: so, what do I do, if I eventually start hating all this marriage situation? The society, that pushed me towards the marriage, would not forgive me divorce...

But as the time passed, and two years since the wedding were left behind, me and my husband had to admit: definitely, it was not a bad idea. We are still in love and still ready for compromises. I guess, we were just lucky.

But even now, the society does not consider us as a family. Is it is family with only two members? No way!

"So, when do you, guys, plan to have kids?" I hear this question from my parents, my neighbors, grocery store salespeople, taxi drivers, street vendors, and coffee house waiters.

I should actually stop them:

"It's nobody's business!"

But I keep making silly jokes in response, and I feel that traditional embarrassment, when saying something like: well, sorry, not yet, not yet...

I am quite a disciplined girl - I visit my gynecologist and mammologist twice a year. Neither one, nor

another has any grounds for suggesting me to have a baby as soon as possible. But every time I see the gynecologist, he complains that delivery after 25 years old is viewed as "late". Mammologist in his turn, keeps informing me that chances of breast cancer decrease dramatically, if you have a baby "on time."

I don't really understand the reason why they tell me this, and ask:

"Are there any medical prescriptions? In my particular case?"

They say "no." And ask me again, after a short pause: "So, when do you plan to have a baby?"



which is better - one baby now, or three later?

photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

WHY DO I LOVE MY MOM?

internet folklore

That evening, my parents were watching TV. It's late, mom said, I better go to bed. She got up and went to the kitchen. She did the dishes and cleaned the table. She prepared tea and sugar for the next day's breakfast. She cut the bread and removed meat from the freezer.

She took clean laundry from the washing machine and filled the machine again. She ironed a shirt and attached a button to it. She watered flowers. And started walking towards the bedroom.

When passing through my brother's room, she stopped at his table to write a note for his teacher. She counted money and put some in his bag for tomorrow's class tour in the city. She looked through his homework, checked it and put it back into his bag. She made the list of groceries he should buy on the way back from school and put it in his pocket. Then, she cleaned her face with night lotion and brushed her teeth. When the father asked: "Aren't you going to bed?!" She replied: "Yes, already coming." She filled jug with water, checked the locks at the entrance door, stepped into my brother's room again, turned off his computer, collected

his dirty socks and took it to the washing machine. Than she looked into my room and said: "It's already late. You'll have plenty of time to work tomorrow." She went to the bedroom, set alarm, looked through her to-do list, and added three new tasks.

My father turned off TV-set and mumbled: "I'm going to bed."

And he went to bed.

sent by Vafa SALEH,
Azerbaijan

EDITOR'S NOTE: at the very end of this text, there was a well-familiar notice: "Now go ahead and send this letter to all women you love. Let them know you care!" Suddenly, I realized how weird the title of this letter is: WHY, DO YOU THINK, I LOVE MY MOTHER? I think, alike question could be asked by a wolf: "Why, do you think, I love sheep?" Or, maybe, by a sheep: "Why, do you think, I love hay?"

What I want to say is that sometimes our relatives love us just as we would be "sheep," "hay," or a good kitchen equipment....



*family marathon can be
very tiresome.
But women tend to keep running it.*

Photo by Polina Miloradovich,
Georgia

Alma BEKTURGANOVA ANDERSEN,
Denmark

new style

what does

PARTNER FAMILY mean?

As a rule, partner families are not created in young age. These families respect opinion, life-style, age, and hobbies; this respect is not declared, but actually imposed by every family member. But for this kind of relations, people need to have life experience and certain practical skills, that are gained with age. That's why in a families like this, children appear only when parents are in their 30es.

Partner families are strong. They are strong because they are created not as the result of emotions, but as the result of tested - I guess that's the right word - mutual life. Yes, this is normal for Denmark's youth to start sexual life at the age of 15-17; some couples try to live together already when they are 20. Probably this is the reason why the youth does not care too much about sex, and why nobody would decide to build a family and have children only because they wish to have sexual relations. Abortions in Denmark are quite rare; one of the reasons is that the youth feels responsible about sex and knows how to avoid unwilling pregnancy.

After living together for some time, young couples gain experience, they learn how to consider the perspectives of living with a partner for their entire lives. Only after all questions are answered, the couples decide to register their marriage officially. However, there are a lot of couples who continues living in a common-law marriage. Language centers for immigrants even introduce special topic, "types of family," that describe nuances like this, as many immigrants tend to believe that the only possible marriage is that registered in mayor's office or in the church.

Partner marriages are strong even in the circumstances, when parents decide to live separately from each other. In the case of divorce, there are no kids without father's or mother's care; there are no mothers or fathers who bring up the kids alone; it happens not only because the court properly protects the interests of children. It is indeed rare that partner families address to the court when considering future care about their children, the couples simply agree when would kids live with mother and when with father.

A lot of my fellow citizens do not understand this situation. "Poor kids," they say, "they have to tear themselves apart, trying to live with both divorced parents." We grew up in completely different culture and we do not realize that in the situation like this, a child does not tear apart at all, he continues loving both parents, and sees the respect of his parents to each other.

Some difficulties are hard to be avoided, however. But these difficulties are minor, compared to the problems a child faces when loosing one of the parents as the result of divorce.

Those who arrive in Denmark, find many things strange. For example, when both spouses take care of the house. Both of them lay the table, light candles. In Denmark, it is a tradition, to say: "Det var so hyggelig," when leaving the hosts' house. This phrase means "your house is very cozy"...

Making your guests feel cozy is very important in Denmark. This is why, perhaps, hosts never launch joint conversations at the table. Generally, only those who sit next to each other talk.

When Danes sit at the table, one of the spouses explains in details how he (it is not necessarily that wife is the one who cooks) prepared all the dishes. Generally, this is the first and the last joint conversation during the evening.

It very easy to recognize Russian parents in Denmark, even if they are fluent speakers of Danish. They always use prohibitive intonations when talking to their kids - no, don't do it, you are not supposed to, behave! - they tell the kids.

Despite divorces are quite frequent in Denmark, there are no abandoned kids there; communities, at the same time, are in lines expecting children to be adopted from the developing countries. Presently, the number of divorces in European countries does not increase, and even reduces.



...actually, this type of families happens to be not only in Denmark.

Photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

Vafa SALEKH,
Azerbaijan
the truth

YOU
ARE



GOOD WIFE
AND MOTHER,

Photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

UNLESS
YOU ARE NOT BEHIND BARS

In an average Azerbaijani family, man is considered the head, while woman is only his assistant. In reality, oftentimes women play the most important role, combining the duties of maid, manager, teacher and finance minister. In many cases, women are also the main bread winners in their families. There is an Azerbaijani saying which goes: woman is the basement of the family.

Sudaba-Khanum is the mother of 5 children. She is in prison for heinous crime she committed when protecting her children. The society considers her as a woman who lost her dignity. After being imprisoned, her family changed its attitude towards her; presently, relatives do not come to the prison to visit her at all. Her husband married another woman, and despite her children love her they come to meet her very seldom, as their father wants them to avoid her.

Because of the imprisonment and loneliness, she has lost the faith, and began hating the life beyond the bars. The attention of her relatives is needed not only for her moral well-being, but also for material assistance. Relatives are the main source for getting bare reserve of consumption goods. However, in prison there are a lot of women abandoned by their relatives. The absence of family and attention intensifies their severe psychological state.

I think that woman is in need of love even more than a man; no matter where she stays, she wants to be understood and supported by her family. Imprisoned women should be granted a possibility to meet their relatives in the conditions that foresee privacy and dignity. Unfortunately, nobody in our country thinks about this.

Sudaba used to be a regular housewife. But once she made a mistake, the society turned its back to her. I am sure, that if her husband would appear in an analogous situation, she would never refuse from him.

Today, there are hundreds of women in Azerbaijani prisons. They keep hoping that someone would visit them, and that someone waits them at home. After all, they used to have families.

Tinatin MZHAVANADZE,
Georgia

mothers

BUYING ONE'S BABY

sometimes the price
is too expensive



Photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

Let's begin with the fact that in Georgia a family without child is considered defective - let's leave alone the arguments of such postulate. It just exists. Childless spouses at least regret, and they, as a rule, are eager to have children. I can tell you thousands of stories about what women can do for having a baby, I witnessed so many cases during two months of my stay in a department of a pathology in a maternity home. Women agree to go barefoot on beaten glass and to be fried in infernal fire in the name of motherhood. Sometimes men are also ready to do a lot.

Besides freakish exclusive cases of getting the successor (for example, the father of six daughters has adopted his first grandson; with the consent of parents, of course) there are more civilized ways also:

- adoption of child from children's home. There is a risk to adopt the child with unpredictable genetics;
- adoption of 'an extra' child of relatives or friends. There is a risk of the subsequent claims from biological parents;
- at last, to use extracorporal (artificial) pregnancy. Huge plus is that the child, probably, will be entirely "yours" genetically.

But in this case there are plenty of risks for all parties: substitute mother can just run away

with the money she gets for surrogate motherhood and make abortion, she can give birth without giving the child to his biological parents, while the parents can change their mind not taking the baby, or to refuse paying money to the surrogate mom.

I had to stay on preservation in maternity house during that unpleasant period when usual delivery passed at light of nine kerosene lamps, and Cesarian section was done with twelve lamps lighting at the operation; only really wealthy people could afford filling hospital's generator with gasoline. So, here is the story:

Once upon a time there was a married couple. They lived fine and loved each other, and really wanted to have a child. But twelve years passed and the couple decided that there were no more reasons to wait for favor of mother Nature.

The childless couple decided to be creative: they employed a young and healthy refugee from Abkhazia as a maid, watched her for a while and finally suggested to become substitute mother for their future baby.

Actually, she was not surrogate mother at all, - because conception was very simple, very regular one.

She was supposed to follow all necessary instructions to stay well and healthy during the pregnancy, in respond the couple promised to take proper care of her during the pregnancy. Everything seemed to be fine, but suddenly... When the baby was born, the girl became stubborn and has refused to give him to mommy and daddy. Well, it is all quite understandable: a parent instinct and so on. We understand it and even we sympathize. But far from it! She had offered to the couple her own solution of the problem - the husband should get divorced in order to marry her, the new mother. Poor spouses were coming to the maternity home thousands time a day; they tried to convince the girl to shame her, to persuade, to threaten - but nothing ever changed. I don't know what happened eventually, the girl was signed out from the hospital. I do not include any morals to this story: none of its heroes were right and for each of them I feel sorry. There is a disputable opinion, that high moral principles are a luxury which is not presumed by the despaired people. ...During the same period of time, our neighbor offered us a healthy baby (who, however, was not yet born by that time). He was casually conceived by mother of family, who worked in Turkey. The price was very good - only one thousand dollars.



How should we now share?!

Photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

APROPOS

in Ukraine

It looks like East-European countries become the center of surrogate motherhood. Childless couples from Western Europe go directly to Ukraine to search surrogate mother for their future children there.

Now in Ukraine there are 19 specialized clinics that not only diagnose, and operate delivery, but also help to find substitute mother. This service is much cheaper, than in any other countries of the world - Ukrainian women agree to become surrogate mothers because of low incomes.

The agency or medical clinic provides future parents with flights, hotel accommodation and selection of substitute mother. In Ukraine such "business" is quite legal, while in Germany, for example, the similar practice is forbidden. According to the resolution of European Parliament, human cells can be offered only on voluntary basis and gratuitously. Bruxelles declaration of the World medical association (1985) also speaks about banning of "commercial" surrogate motherhood.

In Russia

The substitute motherhood is also popular in Russia. Because of shortage of money women agree to become alive "incubators". Basically, the services offer single mother from the Russian regions. However, recently cost of services of substitute motherhood has decreased. The number of those who wish to bear "someone's " child it is so high, that the cost has made 15-20 thousand dollars. Previously, surrogate mothers could afford buying an apartment in Moscow for their 'honorarium.'

*Selected by
Azerbaijan Gender Information Center*

Valetnina POLEVAYA,
Ukraine

breaking line

17 'ITALIANS' in one sky-scrapper, but their wives are not in Italy only

I met a friend of mine, Orest.

- How are you doing, Orest?
- Well, I am just like a widow, you know.
- What happened? - I got scared. - Something wrong with Ira?..
- No, she's fine. But what other word could I use? Its more than seven years that my wife works abroad.
- But she comes once in a while, doesn't she?
- A couple of months ago she visited us, for two weeks.
- Why doesn't she come back? She won't be able to earn all the money.
- Oh no! She earned money for only one apartment, for an older son, the younger one also wants one. That's why she doesn't come back.
- And how are you without her?
- I am not the only 'widow,' you know. We are 17 in our house. People call us the Italians, but our wives are not in Italy only. Some of them work in Spain, in Greece, in Israel... We, the 'Italian' men are just like a family. We meet each other very often.
- Don't you miss women?
- We do have women around us. Besides mothers, mothers-in-law and daughters, every 'Italian' has a girlfriend. It's impossible to pretend that a 30-50-years old man can live without it all for 6-8. Actually, nobody believes that our women don't act in the

same manner. We know, that they know that we know. And who, do you think, does not know about the situation? My teenage niece had just visited me. "How is aunt Ira?" she asked. When I came home from work, she informed me: "Aunt Nelya called you. She will come here a bit later." Nelya is my girlfriend. It is sometimes hard for us, the 'Italians,' not to get confused with the others' wives and girlfriends.

- Do the wives get jealous?
- What are you talking about! Wives know that we here take care of parents and children. At the same time, we don't have a right to reproach our wives. They had to go abroad to earn the money, because they needed to take care of our kids. Because we, the men, can not provide our families with appropriate care, earning 200 dollars per month. Recently, one of my friend's wife came home for vacations. She came together with her foreign employee, she works as a maid at his house. He wanted to see Ukraine, she said. And both, her official man and non-official one, and the entire family kept pretending that his purpose was only to travel abroad. But all of them knew that he was simply afraid that his 'maid' would never return to him. Actually, it is surprisingly good that none of 17 'Italians' became alcoholics, but these sad cases also exist in our society.



COMMENT BY VLADIMIR KHANAS, LEADER OF
MEN'S ADAPTATION CENTER:

"Unfortunately, this tendency in Western Ukraine does not decrease. There are certain communities, where men dance with each other at wedding parties. In Ternopil district, for instance, there are 1000 women per 846 men. The efforts of non-governmental sector is not enough to improve this situation.

To be honest, we are not very happy. But have plenty of issues to talk about.

Photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

Victoria PANFILOVA,
 Kyrgyzstan

well-forgotten past

WIVES UNDER NUMBERS

polygamy as the factor of social security???

according to very rough estimates,
 there are over 10 thousand women who live in families
 with polygamy

Kyrgyz non-governmental organizations working at women's issues consider this situation as threatening. The issue was studied at the international conference on the perspectives of women's development in the CIS countries, held in Bishkek in September. Leaders of women's NGOs from Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan participated in the forum organized by Soros-Kyrgyzstan foundation.

Cholpon Jakupova, the leader of non-governmental organization Adilet said that "the number of polygamy marriages in Kyrgyzstan increased significantly throughout two years."

"This is very threatening for our country. Among those who has several wives, there are certain well-known representatives of political and economic sectors. All the country knows about the number of wives of this or that popular figure," Jakupova said, but did not name anyone.

Human rights activists note that women themselves do not care too much about their status. Traditionally, the situation is explained by the fact that the country faces difficult economic situation, and that in circumstances like this women do not think much about the equality they were granted back during the Soviet times.

"It is hard for a woman to find a job with proper income. Some of women prefer becoming the second or the third wife of a well-doing businessman or a politician, who can provide them and their family with an appropriate income, the head of Adilet NGO stated.

The possibility to legalize polygamy was several times discussed in the parliament. In early 1990s, after the country gained independence, parliament members even prepared a draft law, however it was not supported by the majority of MPs. But even today the public opinion regarding this issue differs. Even some women demand legalization of polygamy. "It can be explained by the fact that the majority of men have several wives illegally, which means that they do not undertake any responsibility," Jamal Frontbek kyzy, leader of Muslim women's NGO said. According to the current legislation, it is impossible to legalize polygamy, as the 11 Article of the Criminal Code reads: "marriage is prohibited for those persons who are already in a registered marriage."

According to Kyrgyz political analyst professor Zainidin Kurmanov, "polygamy exists in Kyrgyzstan

historically. However, only aristocracy could afford having several wives. This tradition appeared today again. But instead of aristocracy, high ranking officials and business figures are those who practice it." Professor Kurmanov believes that the main threat of the tradition is that polygamy became popular because of islamization of Kyrgyzstan. Islam allows a man to have up to four wives and many men simply start 'nike' marriage, registered by mullah.

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 Source: Nezavisimaya Gazeta
 Full text in Russian available at:
<http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1158897900>



if you have dignity and believe in yourself, you are out of question.

Photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

Alexander TRIFONOV,
Russia

simple logic

RUSSIAN MEN NOT READY

multiple wives and multiple husbands

The possibility of introducing polygamy in Russia is being voiced periodically by the countries certain social organizations and Muslim unions.

This possibility was described in historic documents, however, that issue was popular for particular parts of the society only. For example, the Tales of Bygone Years include evidence about wives and lovers of Prince Vladimir. The chronicler counted 5 wives and 800 lovers. However, political situation changed and Prince Vladimir became Christian, thus refusing from polygamy. There are no mentions of polygamy in any church literature and descriptions of ancient Russian customs.

However, there is a paradox: either genetic memory or simply dreams about polygamy remain in Russia. Public opinion polls demonstrate that 30 - 60% of Russian men do not mind having harems, while the overwhelming majority of women is categorically against this idea. Certain social and political powers support these dreams of Russian men, bringing up the issue of polygamy to the agenda. Who are these activists who lobby polygamy, what do they propose?

Alexander Kurdumov, MP of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), deputy head of the committee on regulations and organization of State Duma work, told us that polygamy is necessary because of several reasons. First of all, demographic situation in the country is threatening, he explained, adding that mortality rate is higher than the birth rate, which means that in perspective Russians might become a national minority in Russia. While polygamy can be a proper solution of the problem. The second reason, according to the MP, is that polygamy would enable lovers to register their relations with married men. The MP admitted, however, that each case should be studied individually, nobody should be forced to start polygamy, he said, but an appropriate legislative base should be prepared already today.

Representative of mufti council of Russia Rasul Kurbanov had also voiced his position. Introduction of polygamy, i.e. legalization of Islamic norms of life, would prove that the state considers interests of 25% of its citizens, the Muslim part of the Russia's population. "this would be a friendly policy towards us," Kurbanov said. His other argument coincides with the argument voiced by Kurdumov: demografic situation should be changed. "The draft laws were not initiated by Muslims, Kurbanov said, every person and every nation has instinct of self-preservation - Russians die, and part of them realizes that polygamy could become the only salvation." It is interesting that Kurdumov suggests to the lawmakers to avoid mentioning any guarantees and duties imposed for polygamy practicing men. Kurbanov, in his turn, insists on inserting detailed norms on providing wives with an appropriate income.



To become the second, you must have an iron heart.

Photo by Ulmida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

Sergey Agarkov, PhD, secretary general of the Regional Social Movement is among those who oppose the idea. "Social-patriarchal traditions do not consider the possibility of polygamy for Russians. Sexual relations in the community used to be regulated by the community's head. But no simultaneous marriages with several persons were practiced." It is impossible to insert elements of one culture, Muslim in this case, to another, Agarkov said, adding that it would seriously hamper the development of the society. Another important aspect of this problem is the ruin of family values, Agarkov believes. At last, polygamy is unacceptable because all developed societies tend to introduce gender equality, and, in the case Russia introduces polygamy, it should be introduced for both genders, meaning that women should also be able to have multiple husbands.

Despite of the men's dreams about polygamy in Russia, Russians are not ready for it, as the majority of them are unable to afford living with several women at a time.

Received through the Woman and Society portal listserve, for full text visit:

<http://www.utro.ru/articles/2006/04/03/536193.shtml>

APROPOS

INTRODUCTION OF POLYGAMY IN RUSSIA

might solve many moral and demographic problems, the co-chairman of Russia's mufti council mufti Ismagil-hazrat Shangareev. One of the parliament member from Sverdlovsk supported the proposal in his televised interview to the first channel. The MP's dream will probably come true in Chechnya: Supreme Mufti of Central Spiritual body of Russian Muslims мусульман Talgat Tjuddin voiced the full support of this idea by the first vice-premier of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov.

Received through the Woman and Society portal listserve, more information: <http://www.owl.ru/content/urgent/p58472.shtml>

Mehriban ZEINALOVA,
Azerbaijan

too early

THEY DON'T WANT TO THEY ARE FORCED TO

percentage
of underage marriages
increases

The tendency of increase in number of child marriages is obvious in our country. The problem is especially acute in the regions where women have no perspectives rather than getting married. Mainly, early marriages are contracted in Southern parts of Azerbaijan: in Masally, Lyankyaran, Nakhchyvan. Early marriages are registered in the villages of Absheron, and even in Baku, but they are quite rare in the country's capital.



Making their daughter get married at the age of 14, they say they care about her?!

Photo by Umida Akhmedova, Uzbekistan

Previously parents were doing their best to educate their daughters, but now they do all efforts to marry her, thus providing her with better economic status. Besides this, some of the parents who support early marriages motivate their decision as saying that child marriage would prevent their daughter from pre-marriage sexual relations. early marriages result from social problems. Significant part of alike marriages are unhappy, as an underage wife has practically no rights in the case of divorce, as this kind of marriage can not be registered officially. 13-14 years old girls are not ready for marriage neither morally, nor physically; it is a big psychological trauma for them.

According to the Family Code of Azerbaijan Republic, marriage age for women is 17 and for men 18. This is why for registration of an early marriage couples use kyabin, a religious marriage. In this regard, Caucasus Muslims Board issued a decree demanding from couples an official state marriage contract. However, this decree keeps being violated and kyabin takes place without corresponding documentation. Let us remind that marriage to an underage girl is a crime, as described in the Criminal Code articles 152 and 153 (imprisonment for 2-3 years is envisaged as the punishment).

Besides this, religious marriage does not have legal power, which means that the sides do not have officially declared responsibilities.

UNICEF about underage marriages

Annually, millions of underage girls contract marriages. UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) demanded to stop alike marriages. One of the UNICEF reports states that in several countries, as many as the half of all girls under 18 years old are already married. Generally these girls are forced to marriage by their parents, national customs and poverty. It is prohibited for the young brides to go to school, which is the violation of their right to get education.

Early marriage causes early pregnancy, which worsens the health of underage girls. In the entire world, the death at the delivery or during pregnancy is the most common reason for death among girls aged 15-19.

Child marriages are most frequently contracted in Africa, where sexual relations before marriage are prohibited, while the local societies face extreme poverty and high number of HIV infected. Parents believe that early marriages of their daughters can improve their economic status at the same time preventing their daughters from unwilling sexual relations.

UNICEF estimates that child marriages are most spread in Democratic Republic of Congo (74%), Afghanistan (54%) and Bangladesh (51%). In Nepal, seven percent of girls get married under age 10, and 40% under age of 15. In Egypt, 29% young wives get beaten by their husbands and their relatives.

Domestic violence makes the girls to run away from homes, in some countries husbands find and kill them in order to avoid shame.

It is obvious that underage marriages severely violate the rights of girls, as in many cases the girls are not even asked to give agreement to marriage. UNICEF calls on the governments of all countries to start fighting child marriages, educating parents about the possible consequences.

Nurjan TULEGABYLOVA,
Kyrgyzstan

pitched

“NO PLACE FOR ME IN THIS CULTURE”

he did his best to create a traditional family

If your internal world is in harmony with your external one, you are a happy person. But if your internal state does not correspond to the common norms, you turn into an outsider

A friend of mine, who is gay, appeared in this situation. He feels very uneasy in the society, that does not follow progressive attitudes. This friend of mine used to be married, he has a daughter. Why did he decide to create a family? How did he manage to build family relations with his wife? I got interested in these issues, as I am a researcher of gender problems.

"I was born in a intelligent family that followed national traditions. I grew up as a regular boy, but was not fond in sports, I liked to interact with girls. I did fine in school, but tried to stay aside from my classmates. After I graduated from school, I had to go to the Legal department of the Institute, because my father wanted me to do so. I really wanted to study foreign languages, as I knew that I should go abroad - only abroad I could live this life with someone I really wanted to. Finally, I changed departments and went to study foreign languages.

After the institute I started working for an international organization. I had no private life at all, I could only dream about living with a man. During my first trip to the states, I visited gay club and felt so happy about it. For the first time in my life I was myself there. That gay club was the place where I met my boyfriend. My relations with him turned out to be the happiest days in my life.

My parents loved me more than anyone else, I am the only child. This is why I followed their request and married a girl that my mom found for me. It was very hard for me, because I loved another person. In our society all the families created should be 'normal' and that's why I could not ignore my parents' wish. I had to follow the family roles the society dictates. My role was "the bread-winner", while the role for the woman I married was "a housewife". I felt very badly, and kept writing letters to my US boyfriend. My boyfriend wanted me to quit everything and to come to the States. But I could not do that.

Me and my wife were living quite well, as each of us was separately. I played my role and she played hers. As one year passed, I realized that this situation was impossible for me. I respect my wife, she is a good friend of mine. But she wants different type of relations, she told me that several times. I learned a lot when living as a married person - I know how to take care, show attention, be responsible and solid. I've become a friend for my wife and her friends; our relations became beyond of the family frames.

Then we had daughter. I felt desperate about that. I love my daughter very much, and the feeling of responsibility and wish to earn money so that she grows up properly is something that helps me stay alive. Finally, my wife started having nervous breakdowns. I could not satisfy her sexually, and she thought that I have a lover. Finally, I did not refute it, as I wanted to divorce. I just left the family, but left everything to my wife. I see our daughter once in a while. But I feel impossible pain when thinking that she needs another father. My parents were shocked, when they found out about our divorce. But still, I've become free. Our society does not have space for people like me."

He admits that there were periods when he wanted to commit suicide. And this is understandable, as our moral is very repressive, especially when there is a sexual "difference". This friend of mine lived in a traditional family for three years, and had to follow someone's norms and unacceptable relations. Despite he divorced, he keeps being a very unhappy person. He does not have enough lifetime to wait until the society changes.



Plenty of nuances in this life! But for some reason we believe that only one scenario is appropriate for all of us.

Photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

Natalia DOMAGALSKAYA,
Kyrgyzstan

just life

HOUSEHUSBAND



Photo by Polina Miloradovich, Georgia

The phone connection was bad, but he managed to hear his wife's voice. Meet me tomorrow at the railway station. He looked at the clock - 3 a.m. What does she do that late! She must be not alone, I bet you.

He had plenty of things to do, before she arrives. It was necessary to throw away all the empty bottles, to pay the power bills, to wash the car

Long time ago, before Perestroika, Igor Vasilyevich worked as a supplier at a small but quit well-doing plant in Frunze. He had a stabile income, stabile business trips and stabile hobbies - drinking beer once in while, playing billiards, and having lunch in a pretty small cafe of one of the towns he used to go for business trips the most often. From that town, he used to bring some goods that were in demand in his home town, the deficit goods. Now people have already forgotten what does 'deficit' mean. But back then Tatiana, his wife, was very happy counting the chocolate bars he'd bring. She knew that he had to do a lot to buy all that chocolate. Tatiana used to sell the goods to her friends, doubling its initial price. They were buying it, even feeling lucky.

But everything is different today, it's market economy and no deficits. There appeared a lot of goods from Turkey, China, India; later the plant Igor worked at had died. And his wife undertook the responsibility of earning money.

Igor just hated her phone conversations on sizes and prices! And hated her laugh during these conversations. And hated all those men who'd call her. Tanya explained: they are partners, they go abroad together to buy cloths; they help her to lift heavy bags. He could not prohibit her going abroad for those stupid clothes. It was impossible to find arguments for saying "no" when Tatiana was arriving with dollars, with expensive home wear. She brought a good TV-set, good leather jackets for all family members, including small daughter Lenka, and some very nice kitchen equipment, that bakes and boils and washes.

As Tatiana goes abroad, Igor starts drinking. He recovers once in a while to fry some potatoes, without all that modern staff in the kitchen. Daughter had practically moved to her grandma. They visit him once so often, do the dishes, clean the house, make something to eat,

take his dirty cloths with them and leave. And Igor is again alone. Just as if he would be tied in the house.

Igor hated everything. Once Tatiana arrived from her trips and decided to take care of the house. She painted the kitchen, washed carpets and curtains. She looked happy and having fun. "What a bitch," Igor thought, watching his wife, "she practically broke up with me!" He never felt happy about the perspective to buy a new modern foreign car instead of his old Soviet half-broken vehicle. Neither he like that his son studies in a good college after army. That was also Tatiana's merit - she managed to earn money to pay for his studies. Igor's last effort to change the situation was his request to take him to the United Arabian Emirates, where Tatiana goes to buy goods. She laughed: "It will be to expensive for me to take you with me. But you can go to the market to sell the goods, so that we don't have to pay to the vendors..."

Igor just left the house swearing. He came back after two days. He saw Tatiana sitting watching TV together with their neighbor, Luda. She did not feel sorry that her husband left, she did not worry at all!

He does not remember the remaining clearly. He entered the room carrying an axe. Luda looked at him and began yelling; Tatiana grabbed his hand, while Luda kept screaming that she'd call the police. "Stop it! Don't you see that he'd been during for to days, he must've went crazy!" Tatiana replied her.

Tatiana was visiting the hospital everyday, bringing food, fruits, and juices. He did not care about her at all. To take him to this hospital, Tatiana changed his name, so that he does not get in trouble, does not loose his driving license.

Later Tatiana went abroad again. She explained: no money, she can't stop working. She did spent a lot of money for the hospital, besides official fee, she was paying to the personnel, so that they'd take proper of Igor... Once Igor gets away from the hospital, he'll go to Perm, to his uncle. All he needs is to sell the car. People say, there are jobs for men in Perm. And there are plenty of good fishing places there.

Svetlana BEISOVA,
Kazakhstan

duties

BATHING PRINCESS

I really wanted my daughter to stay with me for forty days after the delivery. I thought it would be better both for her and for the new baby, as it is very hard, both physically and psychologically for young mother to take proper care of the baby right after the delivery. I really wanted to help, and kept requesting this, but my daughter's mother- and father-in-law denied this possibility, which is considered unacceptable in the traditional Muslim society.

I was very nervous from the beginning, but it turned out to be unnecessary.

Everything worked out fine, and I decided to tell about this using the example of an everyday procedure - bath of the baby.

It is a special important ritual for the family members! Each of them has his own duty.

The main participating figures are grandfather and granddaughter.

Others are allowed to: attend it, help, clean, or add water. By the time for bath all family members should be at home. The important ritual includes several stages. The first is preparation. It begins long before actual bathing. From the beginning the baby needs to be properly fed, and grandfather makes sure that the baby is in a good mood. As soon as she wakes up, mom starts feeding her. That's quite a complicated process. Little 'princess' takes her time eating, while grandma and daddy prepare the bathroom for the ritual. First of all they warm the bathroom. Than they place a small bath into a big

tank. Grandma heats the water and makes herb decoction, keeping necessary temperature of it.

As the baby feels full, the next stage begins. Mom gives the baby to grandfather, and here the solemn performance begins. Grandpa undresses the baby, talking to the 'princess.' Granddaughter seems to understand what she is being told: she smiles, turns her head, and spread her arms.

Grandpa does not start bathing until he makes sure that the baby urinates. Both of them do some gymnastics and take air-bath.

All others wait patiently.

Finally, all participants move to the bathroom. The process of grandpa-baby interaction continues here as well, grandpa talks to the baby, supporting her head. They 'swim' for a while , before the bathing stage ends. Grandpa gives the baby back to her mom, so that she puts baby oil on her and feeds her again.

After being fed, the 'princess' goes back to grandpa to 'watch TV,' which means sleeping when grandpa sits on the couch. Grandma takes a rest getting ready to continue taking care of the baby in night time, so that her daughter-in-law could sleep until the morning. Daddy cleans the bathroom taking away all the bathing 'equipment.'

Everyone has his own duty.

When I see it, I really hope that this distribution of roles will be taking place always, and I think that probably our society with eastern mentality is not as bad as it seems.



An average man gets ready for fatherhood by the time he retires.

Photo by Svetlana Beysova, Kazakhstan

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