

Dissertation: Family structures, trends and prospects in the East-Kazakhstan region.

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The doctoral thesis examines demographic aspects of the family and forms of family cohabitation in one Kazakhstan region. It concentrates on the issue of the length of marriage and termination of marriage but also on new forms of partnerships with children (cohabitation). The goal of the thesis is to explicate fertility rates in defined types of family cohabitations and to identify factors that affect these rates. Family cohabitations are defined in the thesis as: a family with children of women who are still married for the first time, families with a divorced woman, families of female widows, families after the dissolution of cohabitation where in terms of fertility after dissolution it is monitored whether the woman lives or does not live with a new partner after the dissolution of her previous cohabitation (i.e., whether she lives alone as a lone-parent) or whether she has remarried or repartnered.

The submitted thesis is logically structured; the theoretical and methodological introduction is followed by a section analyzing data from a special survey "Family Transformation Survey" using various statistical procedures. This survey was part of a larger project titled "Internal factors of development of the East-Kazakhstan region". The survey was carried out in 2008 and included female respondents from two larger towns in the region and three rural communities. The main findings from the survey are summarized in the conclusion of the thesis.

The theoretical section is comprehensive, and the author analyzes the rich literature related to the topics under study. The literature review is descriptive more than analytical in places; the author does not classify individual approaches or definitions, nor does she link them explicitly to any theoretical approach (i.e., the theory of individualization, the rational choice theory, the social exchange theory, the value theory or the post-material value theory, feminist theories or gender equality and justice theories etc.). Although the author mentions the difficulties related to defining many elementary terms such as 'cohabitation', 'the family' or 'household', 'one-parent family' and 'single-parent family' etc., she uses the term 'traditional family' unproblematically. It is clear from the contexts where this collocation is used that the author means 'traditionally modern' family, one understood as 'traditional' in modern societies (see for example the definition of the 'traditional nuclear family'). As for the transformation of the family—or rather families—in late modern or post-modern societies (in a culture of a certain type), their diversity and variability, then the term 'post-modern family' is often used in this context (cf. Stacey 1996, D. Cheal 1999, Kelly 2009 etc.). Therefore in the sentence: "These in turn can be evaluated as challenging the traditional nuclear family and creating a post-modern or modern family (J. Stacey 1996, J. Kelly 2009)" (page 25 in the middle), the sequence of the terms should be different; 'modern' should precede 'post-modern.' It is not clear from the theoretical introduction what the author considers to be a 'traditional' or 'modern' or even 'post-modern' family. Furthermore, she does not problematise another term, 'marital status', even though it is clear that in her analyses she works with the variable 'type of cohabitation' (partnership and familial).

The survey on partnerships with children, fertility and factors that influence it among women in various types of family formations is set in the context of Kazakh society, its cultural tradition and recent history which undoubtedly had an impact on the formation of the family and its transformation in the past several decades. In sections dedicated to the sampling



and methodology, the author does not mention (or I must have missed it) why the given region was selected for the survey in a multi-national, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Is the national, ethnic or cultural heterogeneity of the population there higher or lower than in other parts of the country? What influence can this potentially have on the data and findings reached based on such data?

The research sample included 546 women in fertile age, between 15 and 49, who had at least one child under the age of 18. The sample was constructed as a stratified choice according to age, place of residence, ethnicity and marital/partnership status; the representativity was tested in view of the composition of 'the real population.' The information about 'the real population', however, did not include data about the proportion of unmarried people, singles, or 'cohabitating' mothers (see p. 58). With respect to this selection criterion there was no 'exact' support for the choice of units for the sample population. However, based on the representativity of the remaining variables, it is possible to adjudge the representativity of the 'family status.' The author then admits that the questionnaire survey did not ask about the time of the partner's death in the case of widows, and therefore some analyses (such as the length of the marriage, the effect of the time after the spouse's death on establishing a new relationship etc.) could not be performed. In the sections about the sampling it was concealed that a portion of the women who were classified in the sample as 'cohabiting' are considered to be 'married' according to the Muslim religion (see p. 163). Could this not have changed or shifted the results or their interpretation?

The data analysis is very thorough; it has been performed 'in grades' in order to prove or disprove the defined hypotheses and reach more concrete findings. The code 'unemployed' is often used in the analyses it being stated how exactly it is defined in the research study? Are these unemployed persons seeking employment (ILO definition) or persons economically inactive for another reason (i.e., not loss of employment or willingness to work)?

In the description of codes used in the more sophisticated analyses, there are a few minor imprecisions, such as in Table No. 14 where it should not state '3 children' but probably '3 or more children'. Or were responses of women with more than three children not included in the analyses?

With respect to Table No. 15 describing the effects of the marital status, nationality, education and place of residence on selected respondents' characteristics, which showed statistical significance according to the ANOVA test, Tukey's multiple comparison procedure has not been performed for all the statistically significant items (e.g., testing the effect of 'the place of residence' on 'childcare duties in family' or 'religiousness' etc.). Does this mean that, similarly to the effect of 'the marital status' on 'respondents' number of children' (p. 76) where statistical significances were not confirmed among the tested groups using this procedure, the statistical significances among tested groups (according to the 'marital status') were not confirmed in other cases included in the thesis, either?

As to other minor comments or questions I would like to ask whether in the sentence on page 112: "It is obvious that the majority of respondents with at least one child do not want to deliver another one." – there should not be "at least two" instead of "at least one."

Some sentences in the text are not properly formulated, especially those where the author uses the term 'a person' and then develops the sentence further and it is clear that 'a person' can mean both a man (or a boy) and a woman (a girl) but the feminine gender falls out, such as on page 38: "Age limits were not included in this terminology and any person is considered as a child if he lives with his parent in one housing area." Sentences like this one appear in other parts of the thesis.

The number-N is not systematically stated in the graphs and analyses. It is not thus clear how many respondents were included in the descriptions and analyses, whether the women's willingness to respond was not lower in some questions (or it should be considered what the potential reasons for a possible refusal of an answer to a given question may be).

In her analyses, however, the author has reached some important findings which in many cases correspond to the findings from studies performed in other societies. This, for example, concerns (but is not limited to) the factors that can significantly influence the stability of the family where many of them (or rather most of them) were confirmed in many previous foreign studies. In her analyses the author identified the value family which is high for women irrespective of their family status and type of partnership and family cohabitation. If the effect of the dissolution on the likelihood of having a post-dissolution child was determined, it turned out that whether or not a woman has a new partner was more important than whether she was married or cohabiting before this event. Even divorce does not have a clear effect on the probability of having another child. Whether a woman will have another child after divorce is largely influenced by the presence of a partner and another partnership cohabitation (which does not necessarily mean a new marriage). With the exception of two age categories, divorced women with a partner always had a higher average number of children than women who are still married (p. 140). From this perspective, the following generalization thus seems to be quite disputable that "divorce has a negative impact on women's number of children in the East-Kazakhstan region". (p. 146). Nevertheless, statements like these do not otherwise appear in the thesis.

In conclusion the author summarizes the most important findings and identifies problems and new questions that appeared during the research. In analyzing the data from the survey the author used many sophisticated statistical methods and based on them she reached major findings. In her work she has proven the ability to perform independent scientific work. The comments and questions above do not affect the quality of the performed work. The author clearly succeeded in her work and 'passed'.

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