

## **GENDER INEQUALITY IN TODAY RUSSIA: WHO BEAR THE SOCIAL COSTS OF REFORMS?**

The 15 years of socio-economic reforms have shown that all the changes happening in our society, have different and contradictory impact on men and women. One cannot assert for sure that market reforms certainly lead to men being among the winners, while women bearing the social costs of reforms. Below we will try to clarify this statement by analyzing Russian gender situation in different spheres: employment, access to education and medical services, social safety net, and personal security.

### **1. GENDER AND EDUCATION**

#### **1.1. Level of Education**

Over the last 10 years of economic reforms, the educational system, including higher education, has changed a great deal. The number of students at higher educational establishments rose by almost 40%, mainly because of an increase in women students. In 1992—2000, the number of male students rose by 327,000 or 25%, while the number of female students, by 763,000 or 50%. At present we are observing a feminization of higher education with 57% of women and only 43% of men.<sup>1</sup>

Government statistics unfortunately do not include a gender breakdown of the students studying on a for-fee and on no-fee basis. But in view of the fact that it is in the predominantly "female" professions where fees were introduced, while the traditionally "male" professions remained "free", it can be assumed that for-fee education has affected mostly women. This means, that the expenditure of federal budget money allocated for education is becoming more and more gender asymmetric, and not in favor of women.

#### **1.2. Women's access to education**

In access to education gender discrimination is less apparent than in other fields. Thus, according to data obtained under sociological survey in Rybinsk<sup>2</sup>, 77% of women and 82% of men noted equal access to education in general, though 20% thought that women have fewer opportunities to receive education.

As for higher education, an important factor that complicates women's access is growing discrimination policy on the part of educational establishments themselves. The gender factor alone reduced the chances of the female applicants to higher educational establishments by 2.4% in the 1960s, by 6.2% in the 1980s, and by 12% in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, the share of women willing to save money for education is 20.7% as compared with 14.6% among men<sup>4</sup>. In their efforts to receive higher education men are motivated mainly by a wish to escape army service.

#### **1.3. Material return from education**

In all countries women lag behind men in regard to wage levels, but in practically all of them, this gap is narrowing as educational levels rise. The reverse trend is observed in today's Russia. For example the 1998 survey from the RLMS<sup>5</sup> showed that for the seven identified educational levels, from "no secondary education" to "higher education," a woman's average wage varies from 53% to 66% of a man's. Only the small fraction of women who have completed a postgraduate course enjoy practically the same salaries as men with the same education, i.e., 94% of the men's. The lowest material gain from education was noted in those professional groups where women predominate, and the biggest one - in traditional "men's" professions.<sup>6</sup>

### **2. GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT**

#### **2.1. Employment rates**

According to State Committee on Statistics of the Russian Federation (GOSKOMSTAT) in 1990s the total number of the employed in Russia decreased from 71.1 million (as on October, 1992) to 57.9

million (as on October, 1998), i.e. by 13.2 million of persons<sup>7</sup>. This decline which at first involved the women's portion of the workforce, then affected men as well. For men the shrinkage took place at the expense of the older, while for women – at the expense of the younger within the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups.

As regards to the employment rate for Russian women of 25-54 years old, their rate is among the world's highest, the fact accounted for by both the Soviet system heritage, economic reasons (the impossibility to provide for the family by one breadwinner), and socio-demographic factors, including high possibility of divorce, to become a widow, alcoholic addiction of the spouse, etc.

## 2.2. Gender Segregation in Employment

Gender segregation shows in an asymmetrical distribution of males and females within a sector of economy, within an occupation/profession, and within a position hierarchy.

**Sectoral segregation.** A rather fast growth of the Index of Dissimilation was observed in the initial period of economic reforms (1992 – 1995)<sup>8</sup> As a result, the current degree of sectoral segregation (33%) in Russia is comparable with the values of this indicator observed in the late 1980s in such European countries as Germany, the UK, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, and Italy.

**Occupational segregation.** The average level of occupational segregation index constitute 46%, which is much higher than the sectoral segregation level<sup>9</sup>, and is high enough for developed economies.

Occupational segregation contributes significantly to the formation of the gender gap in earnings, which is being observed in Russia today. This tendency become more pronounced on the late 1990s due to the wage gap increase between "male" and "female" occupations, with the "male" occupations becoming more profitable and the "female" ones - less profitable.

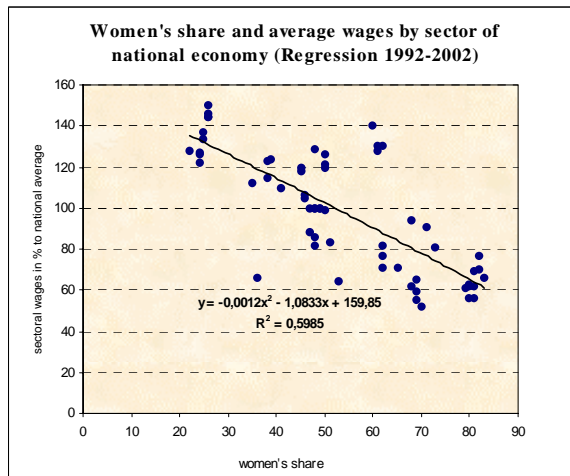
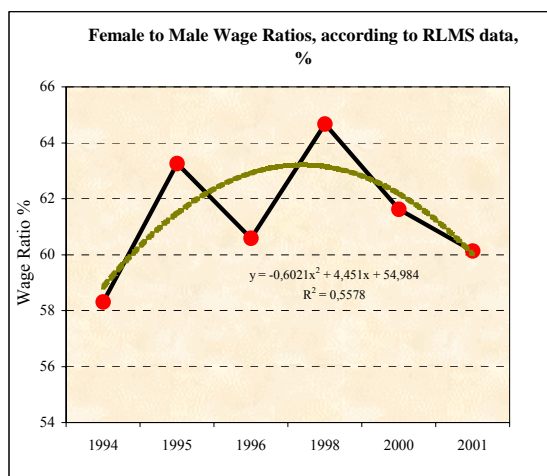
## 2.3. Gender Gap in Earnings

Women were and still are far behind men in earnings, and this gap has been widening in the past decade. While in the 1980s, the wages of women constituted, on average, 70% of men's, by the end of 1999 this figure had dropped to 52%, and in 2000, to only 50%.

The majority of women continue to work in public sector of the national economy. In social services, where females constitute for about 65-80% of personnel engaged, the size of their wages is less than 60% of the minimum subsistence level and represent about 60-70% of the national average. This has eventually led to the appearance of a new category – the “working poor”.

Recent years have seen the accelerated exclusion of women from the sectors, which were considered as "feminine", and which become high-paid in the years of economic reforms. The most illustrative example of this kind is the banking and insurance sectors, where the share of women had decreasing from 90 to 70 per cent over 11 years (1990-2001) and the wages have risen during this period from 95% to 287% of the average nationwide wages rate.<sup>10</sup>

This example illustrate the gender asymmetry of labour mobility, which leads to different economic results for men and women. As soon as the occupation becomes profitable, male labour force starts to flow into it and vice versa.



## 2.4. Discrimination by sex, age, and attractiveness

Most employers think the burden of family duties reduces value of women as labor force and prefer to hire workers who are ready for harder and overtime work (i.e. males). Equal professional skills and qualification provided, 23% of the employers questioned would have preferred to dismiss a woman while only 12% - a man.<sup>11</sup>

An analysis of job vacancy advertisements shows that up to 30% of these advertisements indicate a desired gender of applicants<sup>12</sup>, even for professions for which distinguishing between the two sexes is not required at all.

As for women themselves, they have their own stereotype complexes, which are related to how they may be perceived by their potential employers. This results in the so-called “self-discrimination”, i.e. in refraining from applying for high-paid professions or positions. According to the RLMS data, more than half (54%) of the females believe that they do not have enough qualities valued in the existing economic situation. As to the males, there were only 45% of them thinking themselves to lack valuable qualities.

## 2.5. Gender structure of unemployment

There are now in Russia 1.5 times more women – registered unemployed than men. They represent 72% among unemployed people staying without work for 12 months or more, and in 2003 the average duration of unemployment among women reached 8,6 months.<sup>13</sup> Because of its long-term nature, women's unemployment is one of mechanisms of women withdrawal from the labour market.

Women are more disposed to register as unemployed as compared with men. This fact is related to the lower competitive position on the labour market, which is the reflection, among other factors, of discrimination practices of Russian employers.

## 3. HEALTH AND ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES

### 3.1. Men's Health

There is a great gap in life expectancy between men and women in Russia, which constitute 12-13 years and is unique for world demographic situation (with 72 years for women and 59 – for men in 2003).<sup>14</sup>

High men's death rate is a result of the integrated effect of many factors: accidents, diseases of blood circulatory system, alcohol consumption, infectious diseases, tuberculosis. In the age group of 15-59 years, the men's death rate is 3,8 times higher than that of women.

A significant negative contribution to the health condition is caused by the alcohol consumption and drug addiction. Another negative contribution is related to a very high level of suicides in Russia, with 1-2 place in the world by this parameter. The suicides are registered to happen 5 times more often among men than among women, and in the age group of 25-39 — even 8 times more. As for women, they take first place with the number of parasuicides (attempted suicides), which are registered more often among women (60%). One of the most essential suicide factors is alcohol consumption. For alcohol addicted persons, the suicide risk is 9 times higher.<sup>15</sup>

Conditions of work are another factor to account for this ‘over-mortality’ of men. Share of fatal accidents among men is 24 persons per 100,000, while only 2 – among women.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2. Women's Health

Level of maternal mortality in Russia is one of the highest worldwide (32 per 100 000 live births)<sup>17</sup>. According to some assessments, 84% of all maternal mortality cases could have been prevented.<sup>18</sup>

During the last ten years health of pregnant women degraded with number of anemia cases grown more than six fold, kidney diseases – two fold, and cardiovascular diseases – 1.8 times.<sup>19</sup>

Despite gradual decrease of the number of abortions during the last decade, abortion is still the most commonly used mean of birth control. In 2003 r. around 1,8 million abortions were registered, the figure being 1.3 times more than the number of births.<sup>20</sup> This Russian indicator is second highest in the world after Romanian.

In fact exploitation of one's own health has become the most common behavior pattern in today Russia. Nevertheless recently men started to improve their behavior in terms of attitude towards their health while for women the contrary tendency is observed. These developments are reflected in women's alcoholism growing at faster pace than men's, women's suicide growth, rising feminization of drug addiction<sup>21</sup>, etc.

### **3.3. Access to medical care**

Degrading free health care service and limited financial capabilities of households are now the main factors restricting access to high-quality medical care.

According to experts' opinion, governmental programs cover only 20% of women's health care needs. People with incomes lower than the minimum subsistence level, among whom there are 1.2 times more women than men (or even 4 times more, if elder age groups are observed), spend on medical care and drugs three times greater part of their incomes than persons with high incomes.<sup>22</sup>

Among all paid medical services those of highest demand are consulting services for pregnant women, of which 41% of the questioned women availed themselves, half of them were unable to be consulted free of charge.<sup>23</sup> Around a half of the girls noted that professional medical aid from the obstetrician could be received only for pay and was inaccessible for them for the lack for money.<sup>24</sup>

Long distance between home and health care facilities is an additional factor reducing access to health care services. Shrinking governmental financing caused closure of many health care facilities in small towns and rural districts. As a result, women living in small towns and rural districts are among those who most rarely attend health care institutions. It is this category of women which is characterized by relatively greater number of births without obstetrics and higher death rate at the active working age.<sup>25</sup>

High prices of medicines is another gender problem in the field of health care services. After the age of 50 spendings on medicine become lower, especially for women, which is accounted for by the lack of money after retirement. In 2000, according to data of RLMS, 63.4% of men and 72.2% of women had not money enough to buy prescribed medicine. As regards to young people, they cannot afford to buy contraceptives due to their high prices.<sup>26</sup>

## **4. SOCIAL SAFETY NET FOR WOMEN**

### **4.1. Access to child care services**

For the last decade number of child preschool institutions declined from 87,900 in 1990 down to 50,000 in 2001. In 1990 66.4% of all the children attended preschool institutions, in 1995 — 55.5%, in 2001 — 57.2%.<sup>27</sup>

In early 90s 10% of all families with children at the preschool age could not afford to send them to preschool institutions. In 1999 only 42% of the households with children of the corresponding age could have recourse to child preschool institutions. In 1998 the average pay for these services constituted 16% of the minimum subsistence level. According to the 1997 Rybinsk survey data, average monthly earnings of a woman under 30 were less than 300 Roubles while monthly pay for the kindergarten – 600 Roubles. Such a ratio of earnings to costs on preschool institutions made it unreasonable for the young mother to seek employment.<sup>28</sup>

### **4.2. Child support and alimony**

Child allowance does not even cover the child minimum subsistence level. In 1998 monthly allowance paid for each child was 11.7% of the minimum subsistence level, in 2001 – 4.6%. Allowance paid for children of lone mothers was only twice as higher, and allowance for children whose parents avoid paying alimony, was equal to 17.5% of the child minimum subsistence level in 1998 and only 7% in 2001.<sup>29</sup>

After breaking-up of a family there is a 99% probability that the child would live with the mother, father's sole part to pay alimony. In late 90s only in 20% of all such cases amount of alimony exceeded the child's minimum subsistence level. Alimony covers on average only a half of the child's food costs. Only 5% of fathers pay for their children's education, 12% of them render assistance in organizing rest of their children. Just a third of the divorced men sees their children frequently, a half – meets them occasionally, and 17% - do not see them at all.<sup>30</sup>

## **5. SECURITY OF PERSON**

### **5.1. Rape and sexual harassment at work**

The level of violence in Russia is extremely high, the parameters relative to the violence death rate are 3 times higher than the world's average ones.

According to the data of the Interregional Institute of the Researches of criminal justice attached to UN (UNICRI), among the people inquired in Russia in 1996, 7,6% of men and 4,2% of women were victims of violence or threat of violence and another 2,1% of women were victims of incidents of sexual violence.<sup>31</sup>

The dynamics of number of rapes and attempted rapes indicates a certain decrease during last years. But in many cases the victims do not apply to the law enforcement authorities. Only 15% of the declared rapes were concealed by the law enforcement authorities.<sup>32</sup>

Another serious problem is sexual harassment at work. More than half of men and the absolute majority of women consider that in case of refuse of the sexual harassment at work a woman has a real chance to lose the job, it may also cause the impossibility to make a professional career, or loss of the salary.<sup>33</sup>

### **5.2. Family violence**

In case of family violence women are the victims in 93% of the cases.<sup>34</sup> The data of the survey of 1996 prove that 25% of married women exposed themselves to the physical violence, up to 30% of divorced women had cases of violence in the previous marriages. And in the rural regions the family violence has spread in a greater degree.<sup>35</sup>

According to the data of the survey, conducted in 2000-2002 in 7 regions of Russia, 41% of women were beaten at least one time by their husband, and 3% of women are beaten by the husband one time a month or more often.<sup>36</sup> The respondents from the "working class" indicate more often the appearance of all forms of violence in their families, and the frequency of "brute" forms of violence in such families overcome five times the average level.<sup>37</sup>

Nearly a half of the respondents assumes that if the husband beats the wife, it is their private business. According to the respondents, the list of the people and organizations to which a person should apply in case of family violence is headed by relatives and friends, then follow the psychologists, crisis centers, and only then the law enforcement authorities and lawyers.<sup>38</sup>

## **Conclusion**

During the Yeltsin period the restructuring of the economy and social sphere was officially based on liberal principles and free market concepts. Under Putin administration, reforms of the social and employment protections and services are also following the liberal course of marketization, but in light of statehood building and ideology of welfare state, with references to the communist background of Russians. In fact until now the above scenarios of reforming resulted in increasing of gender inequalities and degrading of living standards of both sexes.

Thus, during 15 years of socio-economic reforms there were new challenges, faced by Russian women and men, and both sexes share the social costs of the reforms, though not equally. For women these costs meant a sharp decline in standards of living, worse social protection and personal security, while for men they resulted in a critical decrease in life expectancy, self-destructive behavior patterns and alcohol addiction.

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