



WORK AND FAMILY: THE REPUBLIC OF KYRGYZSTAN

EVOLVING SITUATION WITH FAMILY STRUCTURE IN KYRGYZSTAN

Urbanization, internal and external migration has resulted in rapid weakening of family ties in Kyrgyzstan in recent decades. According to the most recent population census, a nuclear family consisting of parents (a parent) and children or merely of a husband and a wife is now the dominating family type (60.8%), with only 26.2% of families being the extended ones.¹ Today, fewer and fewer families are able to resolve the “family or career” dilemma with the use of traditional models which assigned the task of child care and upbringing to grandmothers or other female relatives.

The economic depression aggravated by changed ownership relations, decreasing numbers and privatization of social security facilities, as well as the influence of groups espousing a traditional division of household caring responsibilities between women and men is creating a greater load on working women. Such problems became evident in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and affected health and social and political status of women.

Together these economic and social factors made an impact on further deterioration of situation of women which manifested itself particularly in an increasing gender pay gap (in 1999 the average wage of women was 72% of that of men, while in 2006 it was 65.8%),² increased occupational segregation in education and employment, high maternal and infant mortality. Various forms of female self-employment and the use of female labour in informal economy are widespread now. Virtually no social assistance is provided and no consideration is given to workers with family responsibilities in these sectors.

Men have been also affected by economic reforms and prevailing gender stereotypes concerning their roles of a “breadwinner” and a “true” man. One indicator of the

higher general level of stress among men is the suicide rate, which is 3.8 times higher than among women. Another one is male life expectancy which constitutes 63.5 years (female life expectancy is 72.1 years), i.e. men live 8.6 years less³ than women.

Meanwhile, household work in Kyrgyzstan is done, as before, primarily by women who spend on average 18% of their time for domestic tasks. As for men, they spend on average 5% of their time for this purpose. Therefore, the time spent by women for household work and for child upbringing is respectively, of 3.6 times and 2 times longer than that spent by men. Men have almost 6 hours of free time per day, i.e. 1.2 times more than women.⁴



¹ Домохозяйства и семьи Кыргызстана. Итоги Первой национальной переписи населения КР в таблицах. Национальный статистический комитет. Бишкек, 2001. С. 15. [Households and Families in Kyrgyzstan. Tabulated Results of the First National Population Census in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan].

² Женщины и мужчины Кыргызской Республики. Сборник гендерно-разделенной статистики. Бишкек, 2007. С. 25. [Women and Men in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. Gender-Disaggregated Statistical Data Book].

³ Ibid, pages 53, 44.

⁴ Ibid, page 107.

IMPLICATIONS OF WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT



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It was discovered that the working conditions in the organization took actually no account of the needs of workers with family responsibilities. This situation was a result of such factors as irregular working hours, systematic recalling from leave, negative attitude towards sick leaves due to sickness of employees or their children, disregard of the needs of nursing mothers and parents with small children.

When even the State – which should be a “model employer” and an example for other sectors – gives virtually no attention to the needs and problems of its employees, the statistical data on the share of children born by officially unmarried women in Kyrgyzstan in 2007⁶ do not seem surprising – 32.4% of all children.

A survey conducted in one of the national ministries in 2006⁵ helps to understand the scope and nature of the effects produced by this conflict on the lives of people in Kyrgyzstan. The survey found that women climbed up the career ladder much slowly than men in all subdivisions of the ministry. For example, men become heads of departments or divisions at the age of about 30 years, while women – after the age of 45 despite the fact that their educational levels and professional skills are virtually the same.

At the same time, there were many more single women among female employees of the ministry – 70 persons, i.e. about one half of all female employees of the ministry. Only 19 male employees at the age of 23–29 were unmarried when the survey was made.

I was admitted to our ministry by competitive examination and signed a temporary employment contract. Fearing that the contract would not be renewed, I had to resume working as soon as my paid maternity leave expired, that is after 56 days only, leaving the two-month-old baby with my mother. In summer and autumn my mother brought the daughter in a stroller and I had a chance to breastfeed in the street – on Erkindik boulevard. And I had to split the lunch time in order to feed the baby twice a working day. Then winter came and I had to discontinue nursing.

Ms. Erkina, public employee, 31 years old

KYRGYZ LEGISLATION ON PROTECTION OF WORKERS WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

In 1992, Kyrgyzstan ratified the following ILO Conventions: Equal Remuneration Convention (No.100), Maternity Protection Convention (No.103) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No.111). Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No.156) and Maternity Protection Convention (No.183) have not yet been ratified.

In 2007, an amendment to the Kyrgyz Constitution was adopted that guarantees men and women both equal freedoms and rights and equal opportunities to exercise them. This amendment opens up new vistas for the review of existing legislation with a view to provide for special measures including those intended to support workers with family responsibilities.

The *Women Labour* section in the Labour Code of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan was renamed to become *Regulation of Labour of Women and Other Persons with Family Responsibilities*. The Code prohibits the refusal to hire women on the grounds of their pregnancy or having children; provides for pre-childbirth and post-childbirth leaves with maternity benefits, as well as breaks for feeding for mothers with young children, and limitations on their night or overtime work.

A number of benefits and guarantees in the area of labour relations apply to both women and men with family responsibilities: job retention and non-discrimination, standard duration of maternal and parental leaves, standard amounts of maternal/parental allowances and responsibility of the State to pay allowances.

⁵ Гендерный анализ кадровой политики в Кыргызстане на примере Министерства экономики и финансов Кыргызской Республики, Агентство Социальных Технологий при поддержке ПРООН. Бишкек, 2006. [Gender Analysis of Manpower Policy in Kyrgyzstan: Example of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy and Finances].

⁶ Женщины и мужчины Кыргызской Республики. Сборник гендерно-разделенной статистики. Бишкек 2007, стр. 48 [Women and Men in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. Gender-Disaggregated Statistical Data Book].

MATERNITY LEAVE

Duration of maternity leave: 70 days before delivery and 56 days (70 days in case of a complicated delivery or a birth of two or more infants) after delivery. The duration of leave is not subject to change and the leave is provided in full, irrespective of the number of days actually used before delivery. The maternity benefits are paid in the amount established by the Kyrgyz legislation.

Duration of maternity leave for women who works in the conditions of highlands:

- Normal delivery – 140 days (70 days prior to and 70 following the delivery);
- Complicated delivery – 156 days (70 days prior to and 86 following the delivery);
- Birth of two or more infants – 180 days (70 days prior to and 110 following the delivery), with payment of the maternity benefit in the amount of full wage, irrespective of employment history.

Article 307, Labour Code of the KR

MATERNITY BENEFITS

The payment of the maternity benefit (as well as the benefit for adoption of infant under age of three months) is made in the following modality:

- in the amount of 100% of wage for the first 10 working days, from the employer's funds (the wage fund), and starting from the 11th working day, from the state budget in the amount equal to the 10-fold amount of the benchmark indicator;
- to persons who permanently work and reside in highland and remote areas, in the amount of 100% of wage for the first 10 working days from the employer's funds (the wage fund) and starting from the 11th working day, from the state budget;
- to persons who have the official status of unemployed and are registered with authorized offices on migration and employment, allowances are paid from the state budget for all working days in the amount of the established unemployment benefit, and to those who are not eligible to receive such benefit, in the amount of the basic unemployment benefit (para. 28).

The size of benefits may be increased if such increase is provided for by a regulatory document adopted by employer or by a collective agreement concluded between workers and employer (para. 29).

The benefits are calculated on the basis of worker's actual wage at the main workplace (para. 32). The amount of a benefit is determined as the product of daily average wage by number of working days during temporal incapacity period or maternity leave, according to paras 27–28.

Resolution of the Government of KR #414 **On the procedure for eligibility and payment of temporal disability benefits and maternity benefits** dated July 31, 2008

CHILDCARE LEAVE

A working woman is entitled to an additional **childcare leave** until the child reaches eighteen months without pay, but with retention of the job. Upon agreement between the parties of labour contract, the childcare leave may be extended until the child reaches 3 years of age. Working women who have a child under age of 1.5 years are entitled, along with normal breaks for rest and nourishment, to additional breaks for breast feeding at least every 3 hours of work with the minimum duration of 30 minutes each.

Childcare leaves may be used in full or by parts also by **the child's father, grandmother, grandfather, other relative or custodian** who actually takes care of the child. The abovementioned workers retain their job and position during the childcare leave. These norms are also extended to cover workers who adopted newborns too.

Article 137, Labour Code of the KR

The Labour Code does not specifically mention **paternity leaves**. However, the guarantees and incentives the Labour Code provided for mothers cover also both fathers who bring up motherless children and custodians of minors.

The new Law of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan on the State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women adopted in 2008 pays much attention to reconciliation between career development and family responsibilities of both female and male workers. The law includes a provision that obliges employers to provide an opportunity for both female and male workers to balance work and family responsibilities (Article 18).

Kyrgyzstan has made a number of positive steps to improve its legislation in order to attain greater gender equality, however further efforts will be required to implement the legislative requirements. This is evidenced in particular by the situation of childcare facilities, community and social services.

Men should not take a paternity leave. Yes, I took it once, but I had to be on the sick list, because I was in hospital with my son, while my wife had just delivered the second child. But this is an extraordinary situation, and if my colleagues know about it, they will not understand me and hold me up to ridicule.

Mr. Turdubek, engineer in a household appliances selling company, 41 years old

Photo from "A & A Studio"



CHILDCARE FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan had 1696 day-care centres. At the present time, the republic has only 448 operating preschool facilities that accommodate 54.4 thousand children, i.e. only 11% of total number of children of the appropriate age. Childcare facilities are available to 27% of children in urban areas and to 4.7% of children in rural areas.⁷

It is obvious that the number of childcare facilities is insufficient even in big cities. For example, Bishkek has now only 75 day-care centres, with 10 of them being “specialized”, i.e. intended for children with some or other anomalies. These centres are designed to accommodate 10 thousand children, but in fact more than 16 thousand children are enrolled or cared for there. In public day-care centres, each group consists of 45–50 children. Private facilities, where the monthly fee is at least \$200, are too expensive for most parents.

For these reasons, many children under six years are left for a whole day in the charge of their elder brothers or sisters, or alone. It is quite clear that this situation results in a greater number of child injuries and produces a negative effect on physical and mental growth and development of children.

As a result, only 40 out of 100 urban children are adequately prepared to come to school. In rural areas, the percentage of children adequately prepared to enter school is as low as 8%. Children who first come to school have different levels of initial training, however the educational programme is the same for all of them. Learning is difficult for some children and boring for others, and as a result everybody becomes less eager for knowledge. In many respects, a declining level of general education in the country can be attributed to this reason.

The medium-term National Development Strategy for 2007-2010 recognizes the decreasing numbers of childcare facilities as one of the problems that impedes development of Kyrgyzstan. The document includes important objectives, such as “to provide support for the

existing network of childcare facilities” and “to provide regulatory and legal support, as well as guidelines for home centres, community kindergartens”.

My daughter is 4 years old. We live in the centre of the city. When I started to choose a day-care centre, it turned out that there were no vacant places in any public day-care centre near our home. I could only find a place in the 7th microdistrict. Now my daughter and I make a long trip in a crowded shuttle bus every morning on working days. But this is not even the worst thing. The day-care centre closes at 16.30. But my working day (as well as a working day of all those who work) lasts till 17.30-18.00. So, I have to ask permission to leave every (!) day in order to pick up my child. We told the management of the day-care centre about this problem many times, but always received one answer – if you don't like it, you are free not to use our services. I think, I will be fired soon...

Ms. Elnura, international organization employee,
30 years old

To reconcile work and family responsibilities, both available and affordable day-care centres and a well-developed network of community services that facilitate household work are important. The sector of community services is underdeveloped in Kyrgyzstan now. For example, among 23 types of enterprises that offer social services, only three can be classified as those facilitating household work: dry-cleaners, laundries and baths.⁸ A total of 45 dry-cleaners' and laundries have been officially registered throughout the country, with the absolute majority of them being in Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan has 668 bath-houses, most of them can be found in the Zhalalabad and Naryn regions and in Bishkek. Unfortunately, a network of infant-feeding centres and special services for parents with small children has been virtually destroyed.

The Kyrgyz society still has a long way to go in order to ensure reconciliation between successful career and family responsibilities. Formulation and implementation of a high-quality national policy of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women in employment are vital during the transition period. Those who formulate such a policy should remember that the reasons behind discrimination against women on the labour market are often rooted in the way the work itself is organized. Another reason is the challenges that women face trying to reconcile professional activity with family obligations.

To resolve these problems, cooperation of many actors, especially trade unions and employers' organizations is required. Gender issues, including maternity protection and interests of workers with family responsibilities, should be an integral part of collective bargaining and collective agreements. The importance of the women's movement and gender experts' contribution can scarcely be exaggerated. Initiatives taken by these circles often started cooperation between the key stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan to promote effectively gender equality.

⁷ Женщины и мужчины Кыргызской Республики. Сборник гендерно-разделенной статистики. Бишкек, 2007. С. 29 [Women and Men in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. Gender-Disaggregated Statistical Data Book].

⁸ Сфера услуг в Кыргызской Республике. Национальный статистический комитет. Бишкек, 2005. С. 31 [Services Sector in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan].