

# Recent Marital Trends in Georgia

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## *Abstract*

*Substantial changes in nuptiality have been observed in Georgia in the last 15 years. The transition to market economy has an enormous impact on the demographic behavior of the population. Georgia is leaving the traditional marriage pattern for a new one. Two-three decades later than the western European countries, Georgia is entering the Second Demographic Transition. Today there is a high spread of the European style of marriage taking place in Georgia. Contemporary type of marriage in Georgia is characterized by late marriages, decrease of the number of marriages, spread of cohabitation, low fertility, increase of extra marital births. Marital structure of the population has changed greatly. The number of marriages has decreased considerably. The difficult economic situation begun in 1990s has caused a certain delay of marriages. The main priority of young people is not the creation of the family, but the development of the economic basis. More and more people enter marriage at later ages, compared to the years before. The mean age at marriage is increasing constantly. This means that marriage “gets old”. In Georgia decrease of number of officially registered marriages are compensated by non-registered relations. Since 1990s marriage forms have been changing in Georgia, especially in recent years and among young people. It will be shown what forms of marriage Georgian youth prefer according the results of the demographical research. It will be also shown the role of the migration processes in the transformation of a marriage pattern in Georgia. The paper will present the analysis of the family and marriage institution changes, whereas focusing on positive and negative consequences of family transformation.*

Substantial changes in nuptiality have been observed in Georgia in the last 15 years. The transition to market economy has an enormous impact on the demographic behavior of the population. Georgia is leaving the traditional marriage pattern for a new one. Two-three decades later than the western European countries, Georgia is entering the Second Demographic Transition, and in the foreseeable future returning to the previous model of family formation is hardly possible.

Contemporary type of marriage in Georgia is characterized by late marriages, decrease of the number of marriages, spread of cohabitation, low fertility, increase of extra marital births. The drop of birth rates and the decline of marriage rates have

started already in the 1990s, but these changes increased in speed after 1992 and reached values never observed before in the history of Georgia. The number of marriages has decreased considerably, from 38,3 thousand (1989) to 21,0 thousand (2006). Noticeably, while in 1989 on 1000 person every 7,1 were getting married, in 2005 this indicator fell till 5,0.

Not only the crude marriage rate has reduced but marital structure of the population has changed greatly either. During the 20th century the proportion of married population was the highest only in 1989 and now its proportion is the lowest. According to the General Population Census of 2002, 64.6% of men and 56.8% of women aged 15 and over are married. In between the last two Censuses (1989-2002) the number of married men aged 16 or over per 1000 persons was reduced from 699 to 662, and women – from 609 to 579. Such unfavorable tendencies were mainly caused by socioeconomic conditions in the country. For the same reason, the number of people marrying in the most active age was sharply reduced in 2002 from the 1989 figures. For instance, among the male population, the number of people marrying in the age range of 16-29 dropped from 335 to 247 per thousand persons, and among women - from 522 to 429.

According to the First National Population Census of Georgia 2002, the proportion of divorced people was the highest in 2002. The majority of divorced women are at the age of 20-29. It has a negative influence on fertility level, because divorced Georgian women remarry seldom in comparison with European women. The nuptiality decline among young women accelerates even further, and the additional marriages are insufficient to offset it. In 2002 because of divorces about 2620 children were not born. If we take into account existing fertility level, we'll see that demographic losses caused by divorces are considerable. But it should be indicated that the crude divorce rate has reduced (1989-2005) from 1,4‰ to 0,4‰. Such decrease resulted from the hard economic situation in the country. That lowered the standard of living for a large part of the population and as a result, the people did not register divorces legally. From the above mentioned reasons, it is possible to say

that now Georgia passes the process of divorce accumulation. In reality the crude divorce rate must be higher.

The marriage structure of the population is also disadvantageous because of high proportion of never married people. In the same period (1989-2002) the size of the single population increased from 248 to 284 among men and from 174 to 202 among women. If we take into account the deformation of marriage structure of the population the great proportion of women will still remain single and this proportion should continue to rise.

The difficult economic situation begun in 1990s has caused a certain delay of marriages. People are marrying later and less often. The main priority of young people is not the creation of the family, but the development of the economic basis. Marriage is postponed because of difficulty in acquiring a dwelling, inadequate income, situation of the youth on the labor market. More and more people enter marriage at later ages, compared to the years before. The mean age at marriage is increasing constantly, by the year 2005 the mean age at first marriage for women was 25,5 instead of 23,7 (by the year 1990), and for men it was 29,5 instead of 27,0 (by the year 1990). This means that marriage "gets old". Laypersons believe that people in the South Caucasus, especially women marry at an early age, but statistics show the opposite situation.

Precisely the South Caucasus and first of all Georgia is distinguished with late marriages. In Georgia the youth, especially young men after graduating from the university try to develop economic basis and then create the family. But today even the majority of women are not dependent on men. They also prefer receiving a high education, create hard economic basis and then have a family and children. And of course all these reasons cause delaying marriages. As for early marriages, they were common for Georgia before the 20th century. But even at that time less Georgian women got married at an early age in comparison with other nationalities living in Georgia.

It is supposed increasing the mean age at first marriage in the future. The results of the demo-sociological research held recently in Georgia have confirmed this

statement. According to the mean age at first marriage Georgia is close to some European countries (Portugal, Hungary, Estonia), while still behind Western and Northern European countries, but surpassing Central and Eastern European countries, especially Lithuania and Latvia.

In Georgia decrease of number of officially registered marriages are compensated by non-registered relations. The evidence of such situation are extra-marital births. The number of children born without marriage has increased from 17,7 % (the year 1989) till 54,4 % (the year 2005). Among the children born in non-registered marriages 48,8 % were children who are registered according to the declaration of both parents and 5,1% according to the declaration of mother. This means that these mothers have to grow up their children alone.

At some point, the growth of extra-marital births can be explained while taking into consideration that some marriages are registered in the confessional way. Indeed, the majority of newly married couples do not address the judicial form – nowadays common way of marriage registration. Of course, this situation reduces artificially the number of registered marriages. In fact 5,1 % of the new born are illegal children. In Georgia extra-marital births always existed, but it was sternly inadmissible by the society and its scales were not large. But at the end of the 20th century the attitude towards the extra-marital births became more liberal.

The increase of extra-marital births is also caused by the disposition of the youth about extra-marital births. Their attitude towards extra-marital births is very liberally. For showing their opinion and disposition regarding this matter we conducted the demo-sociological research in Tbilisi in 2006, 771 students were interviewed. The results of the research have shown that the young people have tolerant approach towards the extra-marital births. 12, 1 % of students consider extra-marital births justifiable, 17, 1 % of them consider them justifiable in the point of view of the nation's reproduction. At the same time, 30 % of the respondents consider them unjustified at early ages and justified at late ages; 42, 8 % believe them morally unjustified. The results of this research have a forecast meaning. If we take

this into account, in the future the extra-marital births will still increase because of such disposition of the youth.

It follows from analyzing the data of extra-marital births that since 1990s marriage forms have been changing in Georgia, especially in recent years and among young people. Modern generation prefers both forms of marriage registration – judicial registered and registered by confessional way.

It is very disturbing that about 44, 7 % of the young generation have neutral attitude towards increasing non-registered marriages and 3, 5 % of them appreciate the increase of their number positively. Perhaps in the future their outlook will facilitate the number of non-registered marriages. In general it should be indicated that 70,8 % of the youth appreciate decreasing of number of marriages neutral and 27,6 % negatively, 1,6 % - positively. The most interesting is that much more young women appreciate the decrease of marriages neutral than the young men. i.e. the women who must provide the population growth in the future have indifferent relation towards the low level of marriage rate. Thus, it seems that the great part of the young people can't realize the hard demographic situation of the country and hence it follows that they have the passive attitude towards the existing condition.

Changes in nuptiality have a negative influence on the fertility rate. The number of births has reduced twice from 92,8 thousand (1990) to 47,7 thousand (2006). Total fertility rate has decreased from 2, 15 to 1, 35. The prevalence of cohabitation life-style has caused the transition to quite low fertility. This set of changes resembles strongly the ones, which are known as the second demographic transition. So Georgia has entered the path of a long-term transformation of a marriage pattern and tempo of family formation.

As for factors preconditioning the alteration of the family, some of them are specific, the others – fundamental. Social losses when the changes caused by transferring to the market economy influence the part of population, belong to the specific factors. The intensive emigration processes have contributed to the expansion of western marital behavior. This condition has become one of the factors for family transformation in Georgia. The people, who are of age 16-49, not married or are

divorced, present the main flow in intense emigration processes. It's obvious that the young people going abroad in order to improve living conditions, are unlikely to create families and rarely have children. Emigrants are considered to be extra source of European life-style and different forms of marriages widely spread in Western countries. This situation assists to spread western marital behavior in Georgia and the result of it is that the majority of the people adopt such behavior very fast.

So negative marital trends exists in Georgia. It will be impossible to improve demographic condition unless a reasonable demographic policy is elaborated and conducted.

The research is mainly based on different quantitative and qualitative resources, including statistical yearbooks and surveys, the First National Population Census of Georgia 2002, and the information data provided by Georgian and foreign experts and demo-sociological research held in January-February, 2006 by the author of this paper.

