

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Title: **SLOW FERTILITY TRANSITIONS IN CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS**

Author: **Marie LADIER-FOULADI (CNRS - INED)**

Contact details:
EHESS - CADIS
54, bld. Raspail
75006 PARIS
FRANCE
Email: ladier@ehess.fr

There was a strong regional disparity in fertility transition in the former Soviet Union Republics even though its political system was homogeneous and the country was politically unified. In general, the former USSR can be divided into three regions characterized by three distinct histories of fertility evolution:

The first region comprises of European Republics of the former USSR (Federal Republic of Russia, Lithuania, Estonia, Leetonia, Moldavia and Georgia). The fertility level in this group was already low in the 1950s and continued to decline since then.

The second region consists of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Kazakhstan where fertility was high and started to decrease in the 1960s. The Kazakhstan case, however, is very specific. This will be elaborated further down.

Finally, the third region covers Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz, all situated in the Central Asia where the high fertility level, about 5-6 children per woman, began to decline only in the mid-1970s and continued to decrease very slowly comparing to Iran and other countries in the MENA region in such a way that 10 years later, in 1984, the periods for which data is available, the total fertility rates remained still high, between 5.5 and 4.1, depending on the Republic.

As a result, after more than 30 years, the process of fertility transition is not yet achieved in any of these Republics. It is important to note that the Republic of Kazakhstan, also situated in the Central Asia, has to be added to theses Republics. Indeed, in Kazakhstan the fertility decline

started earlier compared to the four other Republics of Central Asia even though the fertility behavior among its Kazak population was consistent with other Central Asian people. The reason for this aberration is the already low fertility rate among its Russian portion of this Republic's population, which makes up almost half of the entire population of Kazak Republic.

For many observers the delayed and slow fertility transition in Central Asian Republics is due to religion factor: Islam. Although the influence of religion cannot be denied, in our opinion, it doesn't constitute the main cause. For instance, even though the majority of Azerbaijani people are supposedly Muslim, fertility transition in this Republic started in 1960s concurrently with Republic of Armenia. Today the process of its fertility transition has already achieved. More important is the case of Iran. The fertility transition in Iran began under the Islamic Republic's regime in mid 1980s when Islam re-emerged on the political and legal scene. Since then the total fertility rate in Iran declined from 6.4 children per woman in 1986 to 2.1 in 2003, a 70% reduction in only 17 years.

Based on Iranian experience of declining fertility, we explain the delayed beginning of fertility transition and its slow rate by domination of patriarchal traditions and poor socio-economic environment in these Republics.

Thus we put forward the hypothesis that the Soviet regime instead of radically changing the existing traditional social structures in these Republics, propped them up in order to control these Republics more efficiently. Furthermore, these Republics did not benefit of same socio-economic development process that the European Republics of the former USSR did.

Patriarchal traditions can be summed up by dominance of the male gender over female. Yet we have to remember that Islam doesn't have the monopoly over these traditions. Due to their dependent position in the family, the close relatives of women decide about their education and marriages. They determine when they have to get married and with whom. According to these traditions, the role of women is limited to being submissive spouses and fit mothers of numerous children. And yet, we put forward the hypothesis that in these five Republics, in spite of improvements in women's statute, they are not yet liberated from patriarchal traditions. In our point of view, this constituted and still continues to constitute, one of the main causes of the slow rate of fertility transitions in these Republics.

The aim of this paper is to study fertility trends from 1970 and on. According to our hypothesis,

we examined fertility trends in the light of developments in social, cultural, and economic progress, especially with regards to women. Therefore, a number of proximate determinants (age at first marriage, contraception, abortion) and remote determinants (infant mortality, literacy, female labor force participation, urbanization, etc.) have been analyzed to demonstrate the effects of patriarchal traditions on fertility evolution.

Data used:

Principal Data used for this study are as below:

Kyrgyz Republic DHS 1997

Uzbekistan Republic DHS 1996

Kazakhstan Republic DHS 1999

Turkmenistan Republic DHS 2000

Tajikistan census 2000

Data provided in Statistical Yearbooks of these Republics