



The majority of Soviet men and women get married; only 2.6 percent of men and 3.5 percent of women in the 45 to 49 age bracket have never been married. There are about 70,000,000 families in the Soviet Union today, with about 3,000,000 couples getting married annually. These figures might be seen as an indication that Soviet women place family above all other important values. Recently the age of marriage has dropped as young people have tended to marry younger. At present, 80 percent of women and 70 percent of men get married by the age of 25, whereas 20 years ago these figures were 70 percent and 60 percent respectively.

Recent polls indicate that women's desire to marry arises mostly from emotional and psychological factors — from their wish to care for those near and dear to them, from their need for mutual help and psychological support and from their desire to feel independent.

Economic considerations are secondary, although young girls are apparently more practical in this respect than men. In one of the latest studies, the financial position of the potential partner led 14 percent of the girls polled, and only 2 percent of the young men, to form a family.

The wish to have children is still a serious consideration, and this motive is evidently of equal importance for men and women. However, low birth rates are characteristic of 80 percent of the USSR's population. Half of all urban families have only one child; in fact, the total birth rate for the urban population is 1.88 children. Yet in a country with more than 100 different nationalities, ethnic differences in the demographic processes are more clear-cut than other social and cultural factors. The maximum birth rate figures are between 2 and 2.5 times higher than the minimum; the highest is still in the republics of Central Asia. At the same time, the birth rates in the republics of the Caucasus (Armenia and Azerbaijan in particular) have started to decrease rapidly. Why so?

Previously, Soviet demographers believed growing prosperity should result in a higher birth-rate. But experience has proved them wrong. Growing prosperity has brought new interests and pleasures which have proved to be rivals to parental,

The Soviet Family Mirrored in Statistics

BY YEVGENIYA CHERNYAK

and particularly motherly, feelings. The growing number of pre-school establishments has also freed the family of many childcare responsibilities. But at the same time warmth and closeness between parent and child have in many cases begun to diminish imperceptibly, resulting in new problems.

However, at the close of the 1970s, a new phenomenon began to emerge in Soviet society: more and more young mothers were choosing to stay at home with their child until s/he turned two or even three. That was not an easy process. Young mothers had to leave their jobs or get jobs outside their field which were less demanding and had more convenient work schedules. Social acceptance of this trend seemed to be high. A number of governmental measures were worked out with a

view to increasing state assistance to families with children. In the early 1980s working women got a number of privileges, including the right to a partially-paid leave to nurse a newborn child until the age of one, and a non-paid leave till the age of eighteen months (in the near future such leaves will be extended by another half year); financial assistance to families was increased, and not only to large families, as before, but to all

families with at least one child. Birth rates immediately increased, though not significantly: the overall birth rate for the country has grown from 17.4 to 20.0 in the past few years. The number of second and third childbirths has also increased, particularly in cities.

Most married Soviet women under pension age are employed. Women in general constitute 51 percent of the gainfully employed population in the USSR. In many areas of the economy their role is decisive; for example, in trade and public catering, and in the health services and social insurance agencies, they account for more than 80 percent of those employed. About three fourths of all teachers, 69 percent of physicians, about half of the agronomists, engineers and technicians, almost two thirds of economists,

and 40 percent of all judges are women.

Women account for about half of those employed in industry, particularly in the leading fields. For example, the percentage of women in precision engineering and radio-engineering industries ranges from 65 to 67. In new computer occupations, such as programmers, coders and operators, they are also in the majority: from 50 to 60 percent.

Women's ac-



tive participation in skilled physical and intellectual work is explained, to a considerable extent, by their high educational level. Women account for 56 percent of the students of higher educational establishments and for 58 percent of those attending specialized secondary schools. The percentage of women-specialists with higher or specialized secondary education in the national economy stands at 60 for the country as a whole.

Both husband and wife in the family are employed, as a rule. This affects the family budget, the distribution of household chores, and family duties. Sociological studies have shown that women place an interesting job towards the top in the hierarchy of life values. Since legally getting equal rights with men in 1917, female psychology, traditionally oriented only towards family and motherhood, has undergone a certain change. The combination of vocational and family roles is regarded by most women as an indispensable precondition for personal happiness.

Asked by sociologists about their plans for the near future, Soviet girls answer: "to get an interesting job in a good field," and "to improve my education."

Women's drive for social activity and work is linked with the close interconnection between the material and moral incentives to work. Economic independence is a vitally important factor in women's lives in socialist society. In investigating married women's motives for seeking employment, our research has established that first of all women work to improve their family's financial situation and to feel financially independent.

Another major incentive for women seeking employment is the wish to make life more diversified and interesting, to be of use to the society and to enjoy prestige in their relationships with their husbands and children. Many women are afraid of losing their authority in the family if they leave employment. As a rule, an employed woman enjoys greater prestige in the family than a housewife. Our talks and interviews with women have shown that conflicts or differences of opinion between husband and wife over the necessity of the wife's being gainfully employed hardly ever arise. The husband looks upon the wife's having a job as natural, necessary and reasonable.

There is evidently a certain relationship

between satisfaction in marriage and in work for both men and women. People who consider their marriage to be happy are more often those who say that their job suits them completely than those who are unhappy in marriage. A further connection between family and employment is demonstrated by the fact that two thirds of all would-be husbands and wives say they would prefer their spouses to come from the same socio-vocational group as themselves. More than 80 percent of would-be husbands and wives think that the family should exert a beneficial influence on the vocational advancement of both spouses.

In view of women's consistent orientation towards gainful employment and their large-scale participation in industrial, social and cultural work, the distribution of household labour between spouses and among parents and children is a vital aspect of family relations. A rather controversial situation has arisen: in many families, the woman shoulders the main burden of all the chores, working, in fact, double hours: at the workplace and in the home. Housework takes up to about 30 hours a week. But the woman's share of the chores is two or three times more than that of the man.

This problem has been debated constantly in the press in the last few years. Many scholars and journalists try to brush it off and declare that all the work in the house should be taken care of by the service sector. They regard all forms of chores as uncreative and as a loss of precious leisure time. This stand undoubtedly does great harm to the cause of bringing up and preparing young people for marriage. On getting married many young women consider it beneath them to do housework. But another group of scholars argue that work in the house and family duties are indispensable elements of family life.

Sociologists have observed an interesting regularity: the higher the husband's educational level, the more readily he shares in the housework and family duties; the father's role in the upbringing of the children increases and the family tends to acquire greater stability.

The sharing of housework is a necessity for the modern family with such large-scale involvement of women in work. As a rule, in families with well-organized co-operation, the relationship between man and wife is good and they regard their

marriage as a success.

In marriages which the spouses describe as friendly, men's and women's views on the distribution of chores coincide, whereas in unstable families the differences in the husbands' and wives' views on mutual duties are considerable. Today matrimonial compatibility rests on the identity of views on the main values of life. Sociologists have discovered that only 5 percent of spouses with well-organized co-operation look upon their marriage as a failure.

Many women believe that they should have a shorter working day to relieve overstress at work and in the home and to bring down the incidence of women's illnesses. A definite change has also occurred in this field recently. Until recently, there were only two ways for a woman in the USSR: she either worked in the same way and at the same time as men or remained at home all the time. It is precisely because the society knew only these two ways that persistent appeals have started sounding to "bring women back to the family," although most women do not want to give up their active role in the society at all. And so the third, essentially new, model of employment for women is in the making now.

Its history is as follows. Generally, Soviet laws provided the possibility of shorter working hours for women. But individually it was only possible "on agreement with the management." As a result, many women who tried to get easier labour conditions got a refusal instead. Essential addenda have now been introduced into the legislation and the decision rests with the women alone.

Having attained actual equality with men in the right to education, to an interesting job and promotion, women are now striving for equality in the family. Masculine leadership, in the sense of taking all the decisions and allocating the family finances, has now disappeared from the statistically average Soviet family. Man is no longer the only provider. The development of democratic relations in the family is associated with the levelling out of the social and class differences and the general democratization of social relations.

Socio-psychological factors have started playing the main role in the family. Family conflicts often arise from the fact that men are not psychologically prepared

for a just distribution of the family duties. More often than not men formally welcome women's emancipation; but, when it concerns their wives directly, they take a conservative stand. This duality cannot but give rise to a drastic protest from the wives, who have grown accustomed to a respectful attitude at their place of employment. On the other hand, the unpreparedness and even the unwillingness of many women to organize their home duties well and their eternal references to being too busy, put a strain on relations within the family.

In a number of cases the wife alone takes care of the family budget. In such families men withdraw from family affairs of their own accord and their wives do the daily spending and are the sole holders of the family purse. "The woman's monopoly" often deforms such important character traits as femininity, complaisance, patience. The woman becomes sharp and over-demanding in relations with her husband and children. Psychologists make note of the more critical tone of the women's evaluations of their husbands. When a husband and wife constantly criticize each other's behaviour, an atmosphere of bitterness, exasperation and mutual disrespect arises. Divorce may not be far off.

Sociologists point out that the nature of family conflicts is more often than not connected with contradictions of a moral and psychological nature and the aggravation of such conflicts frequently leads to divorce. The average annual number of divorces per 10,000 people is 33-35 in the USSR. Although this is a rather high figure, it is somewhat lower than in a number of Western countries. As many as 1.4 percent of married couples get divorced annually in the USSR.

Heavy drinking and alcoholism is a classic motive for divorce in all countries. The problem of alcoholism has become particularly sharp in the Soviet Union in the past few years. Driven out of the workplace to a considerable extent, drinking is still closely associated with home life. As many as 40 percent of the divorces in big cities are attributed to drinking. An active anti-alcohol campaign is under way in the USSR. The traditional forms, such as press campaigns, narcological services and tem-

perance societies, are greatly helped by women's councils at enterprises and in residential areas. Attempts to provide more diversified possibilities for spending one's leisure time are rightly looked upon as an important element of the anti-alcohol campaign. Working on garden plots has become a widespread family occupation of late. As many as 15,000,000 Soviet factory and office workers are members of fruit-and-vegetable-growing cooperative societies. Nine million families keep busy on their plots of land. Whereas previous families joining these cooperative soci-

SOVIET CRIMINAL CODE ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND LESBIANISM

Homosexuality is considered a criminal offence; the punishment being specified by laws in constituent republics. Article 121 of *The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation* provides for five years of imprisonment, or even up to eight years if there are aggravating circumstances — if a minor is threatened or raped.¹

In the opinion of several Soviet law experts and representatives of the public, homosexuality should not be considered a crime. Many others, however, believe that because of the spread of AIDS, homosexuals present a "risk group." According to Soviet laws, lesbianism is not a crime.

¹*The Criminal Code
of the Russian Federation.*
(Moscow, 1986), pp. 79-80.

eties did not have any particular economic aims in view, this has now become an important socio-economic phenomenon. On the one hand, this convenient way of passing one's time satisfies the demand for outdoor recreation and gives aesthetic pleasure in growing fruits, flowers and vegetables. On the other, this undertaking helps to improve the family's financial position. The average income brought by fruit and kitchen-garden plots comes to 10.4 percent of the total family income.

According to sociologists' figures, men spend from 8 to 9 hours daily working on their plots on days-off and during their leaves. They are unanimous in stating that this pastime is good for the health, mood and general fitness. Polls have brought out an interesting fact: women give much

less of their time to working on these plots of land than their husbands. Here men get a good opportunity to do traditional man's work: building, repairs, fuel procurement, land tilling, etc.

Studying families' ways of spending leisure time, sociologists have also discovered that the average time given to the cinema, the theatre and museums, to meeting friends, visiting and receiving guests is the same for married women and family men, polled separately. The equal time given to leisure is an important guarantee of a good state of affairs in the

family. Studies have shown a certain regularity: the higher the spouses' educational and professional level, the more varied their pastimes: reading, sports, museums, the theatre and the cinema, excursions. Characteristic of these families is their members' intensive upgrading of their educational and cultural standards.

People doing non-skilled work tend to spend a considerable part of their leisure passively: watching TV, visiting and receiving guests. On the average, family people spend 10 times more time watching TV than playing sports. Society, naturally, has been concerned with the question of improving the quality of family leisure, and of overcoming such passivity. A certain change has become evident, due to the development of various amateur activities and clubs uniting people with the same interests. Family clubs, family reception-rooms, family universities and domestic-science courses have made their appearance. Many community centres (palaces of culture) arrange traditional days of family leisure and evening get-togethers for the families of workers in the same shop. Parents bring their children to these get-togethers, arrange cooking competitions and drawing contests for the kids. Family sports games, quizzes and other amusements are also organized.

Valuable experience has been gained in organizing leisure activities in residential areas. Voluntary associations of people with the same interests are appearing, some of them on a co-operative basis. These pastimes are good for the people, making their leisure more interesting, useful and conducive to strengthening family bonds.