

Abstract for the conference „Alltagswelten von Frauen* im pOST-Sozialismus“

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**Male polygamy and women's resilience:
Emerging trends in gender relations in post-Soviet Russia**

Author: Dr. Tatjana Fenicia

This pilot study reflects on the phenomenon of “male polygamy”, an emerging trend in post-Soviet Russia, where a married economically successful man entertains parallel relationships with multiple women. These relationships often result in the birth of extramarital children and thus can be characterized as “parallel families”. Given that Russia resembles western societies regarding the religious and cultural norms that include the marriage between one man and one woman, the emerging trend of male polygamy in the group of economically successful men seems all the more surprising and indicates a transformation of gender relations within post-soviet Russia. The ultimate goal of this research is to investigate the triggers that motivate the women to accept men's polygamous behavior and to keep the marriage (or relationship) with polygamous men in the position as formal or “parallel” wives. For this purpose, a pilot study was conducted in Russia (Siberia/ Altai region/ cities Barnaul and Novosibirsk) in 2021 and includes qualitative interviews, focus groups, local observations and analysis of local media. The preliminary results indicate that the women's acceptance of the male polygamy can be attributed to the different aspects such as: i) difficult financial situation of the women in Russia; ii) emotional closeness to the men; iii) fear of loneliness; iv) fear of child withdrawal by the economical successful husband in the process of divorce, which is still not legally punishable in Russia and has become very characteristic of post-soviet Russia in recent years; v) limited choice of potential “new” male partners as a result of the demographic gender imbalance with more women than men especially in the peripheral areas of Russia.

The emergence of male polygamy in post-Soviet Russia is little mentioned in the research. However, this phenomenon, that represents men's dominance over the women in private (spousal) relationship, can be contextualized based on several theories such as i) the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” and “women's subordination” (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005) and its implication in the context of post-soviet Russia (Zdrawomyslowa/Temkina 2012; Rozdestvenskaja 2008); ii) the family concepts of marital power (Blood/Wolfe 1960; Heer 1963; Lupri 1970; Safilios-Rothschild 1976) and particularly in the context of the transitional “normative flexible” societies (Rodman 1970)

This study aims to contribute to the thematic focus 4 of the conference: „Lebensentwürfe“ and more particularly „Welche Entwicklungen prägten die unmittelbare Umbruchszeit und welche Brüche bzw. Kontinuitäten konturieren die Gegenwart in den Alltagswelten?“.

About the author: Tatjana Fenicia holds a PhD from the University of Trier, where she worked on her doctoral thesis about »Return processes from a gender perspective: remigrated (late) repatriate couples in Western Siberia« (supervision Prof. Dr. Schönhuth/ Prof. Dr. Oltmer). She is currently preparing her new research project on transformation of gender relations in post-Soviet Russia. Her research interests include (re)migration, family sociology, network analysis, gender and Eastern European studies.

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