



## Families in Eastern Europe

FAMILIES IN THE UKRAINE: BETWEEN POSTPONED MODERNIZATION, NEO-FAMILIALISM AND ECONOMIC SURVIVAL  
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# FAMILIES IN THE UKRAINE: BETWEEN POSTPONED MODERNIZATION, NEO-FAMILIALISM AND ECONOMIC SURVIVAL

Tatiana Zhurzhenko

## THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The experience of the first decade of state independence changed the mood of the Ukrainian people from hope and enthusiasm to frustration and apathy. The reasons for this are manifold, including widespread corruption and the evident failure of Ukrainian democracy. For most families, the major challenge was the severe economic crisis of the 1990s. A combination of factors led to economic decline and stagnation, a dramatic decrease in the standards of living, and economic and social insecurity. Firstly, the Soviet system and its common economic space of which the Ukraine was a deeply integrated member, collapsed. Following this downfall, there was a persisting dependence on Russia in terms of oil and gas supplies. What is more, Ukrainians lacked a clear strategy for economic reforms and a political will to enforce them. Finally, a business elite, interested in suspending privatization and in blocking the implementation of a viable rule of law, was formed. Although the official unemployment rate is rather low (3.8% in 2002), the estimated rate according to the ILO (International Labour Office) methodology is over 9.8% (*Uryadovy Kuryer*, 28.02.2003). Estimations including those who are employed but on “administrative leave” raise the total unemployment rate to almost 24% (ILO, 2001). Permanent delays in the payments of salaries, pensions and social

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allowances became normal practice during the 1990s. Moreover, inflation and monetary reform devaluated the saving of most families. Economic insecurity forced many to look for low wage jobs and to enter informal and often illegal businesses. Between 1.5 and 2 million Ukrainians are working abroad, most of them in the low-skilled labor force.

Since the end of the 1990s, the decline of the social infrastructure was partly compensated by private initiatives. However, in some sectors, which normally fulfill the basic needs of the population, the authorities failed to prevent a collapse. For example, the lack of electricity supply, permanent difficulties with the heating in winter, serious problems with the canalization system and water purification. Since 2000 the government has been reporting economic growth, and in 2002 they even reported increase in the real income of population and slight reduction of poverty. Current surveys show that a growing proportion of the Ukrainian population evaluates the current situation as tolerable, but the majority still feels insecure (KIIS, 2001). There are, however, some signs of economic stabilization, including the normalization of electricity supplies, and the gradual liquidation of debts in salaries and social payments. Despite bureaucratic obstacles and widespread corruption, market reforms have created a legal and institutional basis for private initiative, and millions of Ukrainians are now engaged in new business activities. Due to economic liberalization, the market was filled, for the first time, with a wide variety of goods. Western standards of mass consumption affected people's expectations and life choices, even among those with low incomes. However, the social costs of market reforms were unexpectedly high, which meant that the majority of the population could not fully enjoy the achievements of the transition.

A new phenomenon can be observed in Ukrainian society. That is, a social differentiation based on the growing income gap between the richest and the poorest. According to UNDP (2003) statistics, the Gini index (which reflects the degree of income inequality) for the Ukraine was 29 in 1999. This was higher than in Hungary (24.4) and the Czech Republic (25.4), but similar to Poland and the Baltic states (UNDP, 2003). According to IMF (International Monetary Fund) analyses, during the first eight years of the transition, the Ukraine registered the highest increase in income inequality in the region, combined with a GDP falling 11% per year (compared to Poland, these are opposite dynamics) (Keane & Prasad, 2001). Due to growing inequality, there is a wider gap between Ukrainian families in terms of their economic strategies and lifestyles than was the case under the Soviet regime. Through the privatization process, financial speculations, the re-export of Russian gas and oil and privileged access to state contracts, the new class of Ukrainian capitalists has accumulated a significant share of the national wealth. The new middle class of managers and highly paid specialists are a relatively

small group, which enjoys Western standards of mass consumption (e.g. holidays abroad, private schools for children).

Contrastingly, the majority of the families have been negatively impacted by the economic transition. Even having both parents employed does not guarantee a minimum standard of living. In 2000, 49% of the Ukrainian population lived on less than \$1 a day, and 26.7% of the population was categorized as living in poverty. According to an ILO/UNDP survey, 46.8% of the Ukrainian population identified themselves as “poor,” and an additional 36.9% identified themselves as being “not well off” (UNDP in the *Ukraine*, 2003). According to the Ukrainian government, the share of those employed who earn less than the official living minimum was 63.6% in 2002, indicating a high level of poverty among the working population (*Uryadovy Kuryer*, 28.02.2003). A growing number of homeless people and street children, the declining health standards, and the spread of alcoholism and drug addiction, indicate a dramatic social marginalization of many Ukrainian families. This is illustrated most strikingly by the decrease in life expectancy between 1989 and 1995 (it dropped 5 years for men and 2.6 years for women). While this indicator has improved since the second half of the 1990s (in 2001, the life expectancy was 63.4 years for men and 73.7 years for women), it still has not reached the level of the 1980s (*Children, Females and Family in the Ukraine*, 2002).

Certain groups (retirees, families with young children) are especially vulnerable under the present economic conditions. According to a representative household survey conducted since 1999, the risk of poverty increases with the number of children in the family (*Social Indicators*, 2002). Most families with children are concentrated in the low-income group, and those with three or more children have limited possibilities to enter the middle-income group. In 2001, households with one child spent on average 60.6% of their budget on nutrition, families with two children 63%, with three children 68.3%, with four or more 71.2% (*Social Indicators*, 2002). Consumption of more expensive food (e.g. meat, fish, eggs, vegetables) was almost twice as low in families with more than two children. Only the consumption of the cheapest products (bread and potatoes) remained the same in all categories.

The neoliberal economic reforms in the Ukraine were too incomplete and inconsistent to create a market economy. They also dismantled social guarantees and undermined social security. In the new Constitution, the Ukraine declares itself a social state guaranteeing basic social rights to its citizens. However, in reality the responsibility of the state has been reduced to limited support of the most vulnerable categories of the population. The family is expected to take full responsibility for the well being of its members, to ensure the development of children, and (given the low level of pensions in the Ukraine) to also support its senior members. Employment guarantees and social benefits for working mothers have not been

officially abolished, but remain a symbolic façade of a democratic state without any legal mechanisms of enforcement. The existing recreation, sport and leisure time facilities for families, which before independence were provided by state-owned enterprises and trade unions, have been privatized or even abandoned due to the lack of money. In the absence of a modern system of medical insurance, health care has become increasingly commercialized. This means that the population has unequal access to medical services, and is highly dependent on family income. The cost of education, even in state schools, places a substantial burden on the family budget and access to higher education also depends on income. State-supported housing construction has stopped, and young families have to buy apartments for full market prices, with loans available only for people with a high guaranteed income.

During the transition, the family provided the Ukrainian people with the necessary economic, social and emotional resources (Zhurzhenko, 2001, p. 151). The costs of childbearing were to a large extent transferred to the family. Under conditions of economic crisis, the family became an important site of collective survival based on the solidarity and mutual support of its members. At the same time, families reacted to the social and economic stress through a dramatic decline in birth rates, postponed marriages and high divorce levels.

## THE NEW POLITICS OF THE FAMILY

The process of nation building and the implementation of democratic institutions have brought serious changes to the politics of the family. During the Soviet era the family was interpreted as a “cell of society” and a mediator between the state and individual. However, under the new conditions it was transformed into a symbol of national revival. The neo-familialist tendency in the Ukraine contributed to the reinvention of national origins and helped to establish a distance from the communist past. Mythologized images of the “traditionally strong family,” the “Ukrainian habit of having many children,” and the “traditionally high status of women in Ukrainian society” became very popular in the rhetoric of state officials, academics and women’s leaders. This model of the traditional family is often presented in public and academic discourse as something between the idealized Ukrainian family of the pre-Soviet past, and the American middle-class family of the 1950s. A common assumption is that stable marriage and high birth rates are fundamental to the Ukrainian ethnos, and that these were lost as a result of anti-Ukrainian communist politics (Chyrkov & Vinnychenko, 2000, p. 120).

In this context, the family is often presented as the very basis for national revival, as it is responsible for biological reproduction and for the education of children as members of the national community. It is within the family that national identity is

formed and where love for the native language and culture emerges. For example, an Ukrainian expert in children's education defines the national character in an essentialist way (hospitable, generous, hard working, searching for truth) and claims that the aim of parents is to support and develop these characteristics in their children (Shcherban, 2000, p. 39).

The discourse on strengthening the family can also be found in the election programs of political parties, in speeches of pro-presidential and oppositional leaders and in parliamentary debates. Virtually every political party in the Ukraine placed family issues among the priorities of their election programs. They admitted that the economic crisis had a very negative effect on families, and all promised more or less the same measures. That is, the support of low-income families, raising social benefits, pensions, stipends, improving the quality of medical services, and so on. In the current Ukrainian political situation, the political parties often use family politics and women's issues for populist purposes. By referring to such issues as pensions and family support, the party of power tries to gain more legitimacy, while the national-democratic opposition uses these issues to denounce the current regime.

Women's NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are playing an increasing role in formulating the agenda of family politics in the Ukraine. With the exception of few feminist groups, which consider any preoccupation with the family a symptom of traditionalism, most Ukrainian women's NGOs identify with the idea of a strong family as a specific tradition of Ukrainian society. For them, this pro-familial attitude does not contradict the feminist idea of women's empowerment. The popular image of the strong Ukrainian woman is reinforced by the historical myth of the traditional matriarchal character of Ukrainian culture. According to this myth, in the past, women lived in a society in which both genders had complementary roles of roughly equal value. They enjoyed equality in difference, and their natural female roles were highly respected (Rubchak, 1996). This discourse evokes the ancient image of the Berehinia (a pagan goddess-protectress of the fireside and the home), which is widely used today as a female symbol of the Ukrainian nation. The popular view is that Ukrainian women are strong and independent, but at the same time family oriented. They are committed to their maternal duties and respectful of their husbands. Therefore, they assume leadership in their families.

Despite neo-familialist tendencies, the women's movement became an important factor in the modernization of Ukrainian society. By addressing issues of discrimination, gender inequality, access to political life and decision making, women's organizations created a space for new discourse and challenged the traditional approaches. The influence of this global feminist discourse increased especially after the World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1994. Its resolutions

obliged Ukrainian state institutions to incorporate gender equality and a women's rights agenda into national politics. In cooperation with a group of women's organizations, the *National Plan of Actions for 1997–2000 on Improving the Status of Women and the Rise of Their Role in Society* was developed. In 1995, parliamentary hearings on the implementation of the UN Convention on liquidation of all forms of discrimination against women took place in Ukraine. This increased the awareness of politicians, state officials and the general public concerning the issues of gender equality and challenging traditional attitudes.

At the same time, conservative forces in Ukrainian civil society expressed opposing viewpoints. For example, during the International Congress on the Family, which took place in Kyiv in 2003, the head of the All-Ukrainian Charity Foundation "For Human Dignity" came out against the official legalization of abortion, sexual education of children, and the public advertisement of contraception (*Caritas Spes the Ukraine, 2003*).

The mixture of discourses adapted by the state rhetoric results from various factors: new social and political forces concerned with family issues, global influences, the Soviet heritage, and the search for a national tradition. Their presence helps to explain the mixture of discourses adapted by the state rhetoric. The current state ideology of family is heterogeneous and transitional, as seen for example in the *Draft for a State Family Policy* adopted by the parliament in 1999. It formulates the main principles of the state-family relationship. Firstly, it declares the sovereignty and autonomy of the family while minimizing the interference of the state and of self-administration bodies, political parties, public organizations and religion. Secondly, the state only provides social protection for disabled citizens. The third principle presumes "parity" and "partnership" between men and women in all social spheres, the provision of equal opportunities and even the "fair distribution of family duties." The fourth principle proclaims the "social partnership between the family and the state" thus replacing the compromised "state paternalism." The fifth principle guarantees the opportunities for the free development of every child. It appeals to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and ends the old Soviet approach of the "protection of childhood." Finally, the sixth principle defines the role of the family in the nation-building process, which consists of contributions to the continuity of the generations and of passing on national and cultural traditions, values and customs to the children (*Draft for a State Family Policy, 1999*).

## FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE UKRAINE

Traditionally, the Ukraine was a country characterized by early marriages and a high marriage rate. In terms of these indicators, at the beginning of the 20th

century it was fifth among European countries, led by Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. Most of the population consisted of peasants, and early marriages were an economic necessity in these households. Revolutions and wars in the first half of the 20th century, as well as industrialization, forced migrations and the mass repressions under Stalin's regime destabilized the traditional institution of marriage. The Soviet legislation abolished religious marriage, legalized abortion and guaranteed full rights to illegitimate children. Divorce was allowed and it became readily available to men and women. These innovations led to a dramatic increase in the divorce rate. In 1925, almost one in five marriages was terminated by divorce and Ukrainian indicators were amongst the highest in the world. Young marriages were the most unstable, and in the countryside more so than in the cities (Pribytkova, 1995, p. 214). At the same time, the Ukraine remained a country with a high marriage rate. Despite fluctuations caused by World War II, this rate was still high during the second half of 20th century. By the beginning of the 1990s, there were 9.5 marriages per 1,000 people, and in 1991 the Ukraine had the highest rate in Europe, but then it was decreasing and finally dropped to 5.5 (the lowest level after World War II). In 2002 the marriage rate increased again to 6.6 (State Committee of Statistics of the Ukraine, 2003). Officially registered marriages have become less popular.

The divorce rate in the Ukraine was influenced by state policy. In 1944 a new law was adopted in which only officially registered marriages were recognized by the state. Also, the divorce procedure became very complicated and the divorce rate dropped. In the 1960s, legislation was liberalized again and the divorce rate increased. It seems that there is no direct correlation between economic crisis in the Ukraine and the divorce rate, which has been steadily growing since the beginning of 1970s. In 1989 there were 3.7 registered divorces per 1000 people and 3.8 in 2002 (Children, females and family in the Ukraine, 2000). The divorce rate is traditionally higher in the eastern, more urbanized regions of the Ukraine. In the western part, this rate was always low due to the absence of the experience of early Soviet modernization and a stronger church influence. From 1985, the divorce rate has also started to increase in the west (Children, females and family in the Ukraine, 2000). This tendency can be partially explained by the growing labor migration of Western Ukrainians abroad, which affects the stability of marriages.

On the one hand, the stable divorce rate may indicate that economic hardships encourage people to stay together. On the other hand, people often start a new relationship without going through a divorce process, and live for years in informal marriages. The perspectives of marriage for the middle aged and older generations are distorted due to a misbalance in the age and gender structure of the population. From the age of 29, the number of women exceeds the number of men of the same age (in developed countries this starts happening from the age of 50) (On the Situation of Families in the Ukraine, 2000).

Marriage and divorce rates during the decade of transition show that many Ukrainians postponed their marriage plans until better times, or preferred to cohabit. The main reasons for this were the lack of separate housing and insufficient income (Lavrinenko, 1999b). Another reason, especially among the young generation in the cities, was the growing influence of alternative values (professional career, leisure time), which competed with family values. The high marriage rate in the Soviet Ukraine can be explained by persisting traditional patterns of an agricultural society. However, more importantly, high social stability and employment guarantees contributed to the high rate. Although the standard of living was low in comparison to Western countries, people accepted it as a sufficient basis for family life. Marriage was considered by young people as a means of gaining independence from their parents (although economic dependence could persist for a long time). This is why the average age at the first marriage remained low in comparison to other industrial countries.

Today, as the family is fully responsible for its well-being, and consumption standards have increased, marriage is perceived to be a more serious decision. In 1997, the average age at the first marriage was 24.7 for men and 22 for women. New opportunities in education, business and professional careers compete with traditional family values, and seem to offer a quicker way to independence. Young people have become more emancipated in their sexual behavior and less oriented to the search for a potential marriage partner (which is also due to the previously unimaginable availability of contraceptives). Meanwhile, parents have become more tolerant of “testing” marriages, or informal cohabitation of their adult children. Despite these changes, early marriages remain characteristic of the Ukraine, especially in the countryside. In 2001, in 40% of marriages the age of the bride was 20–24 and in 18% of these 18–19 years. Another 6% were women under 18. This corresponds to early motherhood, as the average age at childbirth in the Ukraine is 24, the lowest in Europe (*Children, Females and Family in the Ukraine*, 2002).

## FAMILY STRUCTURE

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Ukraine experienced a disintegration of the traditional multigenerational peasant family. Instead, the nuclear family emerged as the dominant form. This process started in the Ukraine earlier than in Russia due to some peculiarities of agrarian relations. In 1926, the average size of a blue collar worker’s family was 3.91 persons, among white collar workers it was 3.61, and among various categories of peasants it was between 4.04 and 4.79 (Prybytkova, 1995). The number of families with children was more than 75%.

Today, the average size of the family is 3.2 persons. Elderly people (retirees) represent 80% of the one-person households. More than 2 million (around 14%) families consist exclusively of retirees, a fact which illustrates the aging of the family in the Ukraine. This has created new challenges for the state's social policy. According to the same study, 55% of families have children (up to 18 years), most of them (60%) have only one child, 34% have two children, and 4% have three. The average number of children per family is 1.5 (1.3 in the cities, 1.7 in rural areas) (*On the Situation of Families in the Ukraine, 2000*).

The decline of the birth rate occurred during the last century as a result of the increasing modernization and urbanization of Ukrainian society. Progress in women's education and rising employment also contributed. Additionally, the economic crisis of the 1990s affected reproductive behavior. The birth rate decreased from 12 (in 1990) to 7.7 per 1000 people (in 2000) and only in 2002 it increased to 8.2 (*State Committee of Statistics of the Ukraine, 2003*). The total fertility rate dropped to 1.1 in 1999 (half of what is required for population replacement at the same level) (*Children, Females and Family in the Ukraine, 2000*). Other indicators (for example, the growing share of first births among the total number of births) show that families are not having a second or third child. According to a survey conducted in 1996, around 60% of young couples intended to have two children and around 10% more than two (*Chuyko, 1999, p. 257*). Economic and social insecurity affect the decisions of young families concerning the number of children.

Women often assume maternity and family obligations before they finish their studies or find a job. To some extent, this is a remnant of Soviet reproductive culture under conditions of full employment. During this time, many women were oriented not to a professional career, but to a job which could be easily combined with motherhood. Furthermore, the lack of modern contraception and the popularity of abortion created a specific pattern. That is, couples tried to regulate their reproductive activity only after having their first child. In the countryside the level of early maternity is twice as high, and not only because of traditional attitudes. The problem of housing is not as dramatic as in the cities, expectations concerning the level of income are lower, and the young couple can rely on the support of parents.

According to national data, 10.6% of families in the Ukraine consist of single mothers with children and single fathers represent 1%. While most single parent households have one child (71.1%), many single mothers still live with their relatives and rely on their support (*On the Situation of Families in the Ukraine, 2000*). These families have a low income and the level of poverty among them is higher (42.9%) than in the rest of population (32.5%). Women earn 70% of the average male salary, and for most single mothers this is the main source of

income. Social transfers to these families are very low. The contribution of the ex-husband to the family depends on personal agreement, rather than on official regulations. One of the rarely discussed problems in Ukrainian society is the lack of communication and contact between the father and his children following divorce. Ukrainian legislation does not discriminate against either parent, but in practice it is the mother who makes all the decisions concerning the child. Communication with the father is often discouraged. In many cases, fathers themselves do not insist on having an opportunity to communicate with their children and do not take on the financial obligations of supporting their former family.

As well as divorce, births to unmarried women are a source of single parenthood. In the Ukraine, the rate of births to unmarried women has risen from 11.2% in 1990 to 19% in 2002 (*Children, females and family in the Ukraine, 2002*; State Committee of Statistics, 2003). Again, regional differences are important as this indicator reaches 20–26% in the east and south, and only 6–9% in the west (*Children, females and family in the Ukraine, 2002*). There are no estimates of how many children are born to single mothers and how many to women cohabitating with partners. Unlike some western European countries, the low level of social benefits for single mothers does not make this status economically attractive.

During the 20th century, the tendency towards the nuclear family has a long history in Ukrainian society, and this model has remained dominant until today. However, under conditions of economic crisis, and more importantly, with the deficit in housing it is more difficult for young families to start an independent life. According to a 1996 survey on young families, 36.2% lived with their parents, 30.5% in a separate house, part of the house or apartment, 10.6% in youth residences, 9.4% rented a room or an apartment, and 3.3% shared apartments (*Chuyko, 1999, p. 262*). Even if the young family lives separately, the support of the parents is often considerable and family ties are important. More than 60% of young families receive regular financial support from the parents, 2/3 receive food and consumption goods, more than 1/3 get help in solving housing problem, and 60–70% of the young families get regular help in the household. In addition, elderly people are usually economically supported by their children (because pensions are very low), and in the absence of special state institutions for seniors, it is the family who has to provide care for them. Therefore, it is not only low living standards, but also the lack of social support for young families with children and for seniors, which impedes the movement towards the nuclear family.

## GENDER ROLES

In the Ukraine, gender roles and gender inequality in the family have not been studied systematically. This section is based on data from the 2002 survey, “For

equal rights and opportunities” (UISR; Gender Mainstreaming, 2002). According to this survey, almost the same proportion of men and women considered their profession to be “important” or “rather important” (women 53/25%; men 63/22%). The same consensus applied to the importance of the family (women 85/10%; men 80/14%). Seventy-four percent of women and 78% of men agreed that “for a child of preschool age it is not good if the mother works,” 63% of women and 75% of men agreed that “women’s duties are connected first of all with the family, and men’s duties with the profession.” At the same time, 62% of women and 50% of men did not feel that “higher education is more important for men.” Almost all of the participants (96% of women and 93% of men) were convinced that both parents are equally responsible for the education of children and family decisions. Interestingly, 55% of men thought that they should be privileged over women in cases where there is a deficit in jobs (among women, 37% agreed and 56% disagreed with this idea). The different responses of men and women represent a certain mixture of Soviet egalitarianism (for example in education issues) with a strong conviction regarding “natural” gender roles (the responsibility of women for the family and the natural priority of men in the professional sphere).

The survey shows that the status and authority of both parents is relatively high in Ukrainian families, although that of the mother seems to be granted more respect. Women showed higher awareness of children’s problems and interests than men. They also help their children with homework more often, read books with them, visit museums, cinemas and exhibitions, discuss their problems and involve them in housework. Men seem to be responsible for sports, hobbies and excursions into nature. Among the duties to be fulfilled almost exclusively by women, are taking care of the child when sick and visiting doctor with them. About 70% of the respondents state that it is the mother who takes the child to the kindergarten or school and back, as well as puts the child to bed at night. Thus, it can be concluded that women do the majority of family duties connected to education and childcare. As a result, the relationship between children and their fathers is more distanced.

Apart from the children, the woman is also in charge of most other family responsibilities. According to the UISR survey, women do most of the cooking, washing, ironing, cleaning and dishwashing. The male contribution is mainly in the area of shopping. However, in the countryside men perform many household activities, in addition to their farm work. On average, a wife performs 63% of the housework, a husband 16%, a mother/mother in law 13%, a father/father in law 1%, children 4%, other relatives 2% and paid services 1%. Traditionally, the grandmother provides a significant level of support to the family, while the grandfather’s contribution is reduced. The contribution of men to the household depends on their age and education, with those younger than 24 and older than 49 helping their wives most often. Middle-aged men invest more time and efforts in their professional career and in earning money. Men with a higher education

are more active in the household. However for women, age and level of education have no influence on their share of housework.

In general, the division of gender roles in Ukrainian families remains rather traditional, despite the high level of female employment. Only a small number of men manage to be breadwinners under the current economic conditions, and women still carry most of the responsibility for the family. This leads to physical and psychological stress for many women, and challenges their professional development (*Gender Mainstreaming, 2002*). However, gender inequality in the family has not become an issue in Ukrainian society and it is only recognized as a problem by some feminist groups. Paradoxically, most respondents said they were “satisfied” or “rather satisfied” with the distribution of duties in their families (27/41% among women, and 31/43% among men). Still, the percentage of women who are not satisfied with the distribution of family duties is 19% against 11% of men.

## FAMILY TRADITIONS

The Ukraine is a multinational state and numerous nationalities have lived on its territory for centuries. These include Russians, Jews, Crimean Tatars, Karaims, Gagaus and many others. The focus of this section will be the family rituals of Ukrainians. Most of them have an archaic, pre-Christian basis, which was later influenced by the church (Catholic or Christian Orthodox, depending on the region). Due to the turbulent history (foreign invasions, revolts, and massive migrations), family relations in Ukrainian local communities were initially regulated by common law. The church came to impose its authority relatively late, around the 17th century. In certain periods, “civic” marriages without a church ceremony were widespread. For the community, a wedding celebrated according to Ukrainian customs was important for legitimizing the new couple. Without such a celebration, a church wedding was not valid. In some regions, civic marriage formed a part of the resistance of Orthodox peasants to the forcefully imposed Catholicism and to Polish dominance. Divorce was relatively easy, although common law discouraged people from terminating their marriage (*Polishchuk & Ponomariov, 2000*). The situation changed in the 18–19th centuries, when the growing authority of the church introduced the idea of divorce as a sin and a source of shame for the family. The role of the Church in regulating family life was (and still is) especially important in the western part of the Ukraine. In the Eastern and Central regions some attitudes were less rigid (for example, attitudes towards pre-marriage sexual relations and illegitimate children). They became even more liberalized due to the more intensive capitalist development and industrialization in the second part of 19th century (*Polishchuk & Ponomariov, 2000*).

In the Soviet Ukraine, the role of the church in family life was reduced to a minimum. Through educational and medical institutions, youth and women's organizations, the state fought against what it considered to be "superstitions." To some extent, the Party replaced the church in its function of controlling the family and sexual behavior. New Soviet marriage and family rituals were introduced and gradually accepted, especially in the cities. Apart from the regular registry offices, special wedding palaces were offered to make the ceremony more attractive to young people. Official registration was usually followed by a visit to one of the Soviet memorial places. Elements of Ukrainian folklore were integrated in the official ceremony of marriage registration (e.g. the use of *rushnyki*, i.e. embroidered towels). In fact, this secularized wedding ceremony persists in the post-Soviet Ukraine, with Soviet symbols being replaced by national ones (portraits of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, national flag). The non-official part of the wedding is usually celebrated at home in the villages, and in cafés or restaurants in the cities. Despite the economic difficulties faced by many families, a lot of money is usually invested in the wedding. It integrates important elements of the traditional Ukrainian wedding, which is performed as a play according to certain rules. For example, the groom and his guests go to the bride's home to pick her up before registration, he negotiates her "price" with her siblings or neighbors, and the special bread (*korovay*) presented to the couple by the groom's mother plays a symbolic role. The party itself is often organized with the help of a professional, who arranges speeches, dancing and entertainment according to a scenario. The married couple has a passive role in this scenario, and often it is not until the second day that the young people are able to have their own party and are not disturbed by their parents. In less traditional environments (among intellectuals) these customs are often ignored.

Among family rituals the most significant is probably the child's baptism, which is celebrated as an important event together with relatives and friends. This ceremony was even practiced during the Soviet era, although it had to be hidden by parents who were active in public life. According to tradition, the godparents are responsible for the child's education and become close relatives of the family. Godchildren are supposed to visit their godparents on Christmas Eve in order to offer ritual food.

There are also traditions related to death in the family. The last fifteen years have seen a shift from a secularized funeral ceremony in the cities, often in a crematorium, to the traditional funeral with the priest presiding. As in other cultures, the priest is supposed to help the dead in his/her transition to the other world, and to protect the rest of the family from the dangerous contacts with death.

The role of religion in Ukrainian society has increased considerably over the last fifteen years. There influence of non-traditional religions and sects has also grown.

At the same time, reanimation of national traditions and customs are encouraged in schools and by the media as a way to establish Ukrainian identity, which was lost under Soviet rule. There are still persisting cultural and religious differences between the urban and rural areas, as well as between the eastern and the western regions of the country.

## CHILDREN AND PARENTING

There have been several changes that have made parenting in contemporary Ukrainian society more problematic. These include the economic and social instability of the transition period, the conditions of the market economy, informal employment, and some of the effects of postponed modernization in the private sphere (liberalization of sexual relations and differentiation of family patterns). According to data a significant portion of Ukrainian society is quite skeptical about the ability of the family to provide an appropriate education under the current conditions (*Education in the Family*, 2002). Mentioned among the obstacles to fully-fledged education in the family were a lack of time (49% of the women, 46% of the men) and overwhelming economic problems (83% of the women, 81% of the men).

The economic crisis in the Ukraine has not only curtailed the material basis for the education of children, but it has also affected family relations with the outside world and posed new challenges for parenting. There are four factors involved:

- (1) A lack of time for communication with children. This concerns those parents with a low income who have to combine two or more jobs, as well as those who are run a relatively successful private business. Further difficulties arise for those parents who regularly work abroad and are absent from home for a long time.
- (2) The growing income gap combined with the growing influence of Western mass consumption standards. Many families cannot afford to satisfy their children's expectations concerning clothes and entertainment. Family income often becomes a basis of inclusion/exclusion in peer groups, creating a social hierarchy.
- (3) The debasement of the social environment (e.g. the rise of criminality). Parents with a higher economic and social status try to isolate children from the street, to prevent them from trying drugs and alcohol. At the same time, today's parents have less control over the social contacts of their children.
- (4) Cultural factors have created an existential gap between generations. These include rapid changes in the official ideology, the growing role of religion, and

the re-evaluation of the country's history and of social experience during the last fifteen years.

In the Ukraine, there is almost no reliable systematic research on issues of education in the contemporary family. However, the results of surveys, conducted by the UISR and the Institute for Problems of Education at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, and "Education in the family in contemporary situation" can be drawn on. The data shows that parents prioritize the qualities they try to develop in their children in the following way: independence and self-confidence, perseverance, the ability to act in any situation, respect for the parents, diligence, religious values, the ability to save money, healthy way of life, respect for the traditions, awareness of the national culture, patriotism, honesty and openness, tolerance and respect towards others (*Education in the Family, 2002*, pp. 45–46). These reveal the educational priorities of Ukrainian parents, as well as the changes to their own system of values. Obviously, those qualities that are necessary in a liberalized market society take the leading positions. Traditional values are only second, and old-fashioned qualities (honesty and tolerance) are even less popular.

As previously mentioned, while in most families the authority of the parents is respected, it is the mother who was recognized by a higher percentage of the respondents. Sixty percent of the mothers, compared with only 46% of the fathers confirmed that children share all their problems and secrets with them. According to the children's survey, the older their age, the more difficult communication with their parents becomes, especially with the father. Seven percent of 11–12 year olds admitted they have difficulties in communication with their mothers, and 20% with their fathers. Among the 13–14 year olds it was 10 and 31%, among the 15–16 year olds 17 and 40% (*Education in the Family, 2002*, p. 55). Two thirds of children agreed they have as much support from their mothers as they need. In terms of their father, only 51% of the 11–12 year olds and 42% of the 15–16 year olds gave this answer (*Education in the Family, 2002*). The report indicates that in the Ukrainian family the father is often alienated from education, and it is the mother who mainly provides support, control and a point of communication for children.

The data also reveals that parents prefer authoritarian childrearing methods to liberal ones. Traditional differences between urban and rural families are most evident in common family labor activities. In the countryside, in 96% of families the children work together with their parents in the household and in the garden. In addition, they help with taking care of cattle and selling products at the market. In the cities, children regularly help in the household in only 47% of families, and in only 11% of the families are children involved in other labor activities (e.g. help in private business) (*Education in the Family, 2002*).

To conclude, the conditions for parenting have changed significantly since the end of the Soviet system. Under the previous regime, parents had more support from the state, but at the same time they were expected to share the official communist ideology and values. Moreover, the state and its institutions competed with the family. Soviet schools claimed control over educating children and leading and enlightening parents on these issues. The whole system of Soviet institutions was designed to provide paternalist support. Today, parents have a more flexible range of choices, and they possess the right to follow their own system of religious, cultural and political values. They can also choose between various schools, pedagogical approaches and methods of teaching. However at the same time, the family is fully responsible for performing its educational role, and in addition it has to resist the growing social anomie. If the family fails in its educational efforts, the consequences for children are considerable. The programs for homeless children or drug addicts are designed not to support or replace the family, but to deal with the consequences of what is referred to as family failure.

## RESEARCH ON FAMILY

Initial attempts to collect knowledge on families in the Ukraine were made by historians, geographers and ethnographers in the 18th and 19th centuries. Systematic research was organized for the first time in the Soviet Ukraine, when the Institute of Demography at the Academy of Sciences was established in 1919. Among the works of the Ukrainian school of demography, which played a leading role in the development of this field in the USSR, was the first significant research on Soviet families by Khomenko (*Family and the Reproduction of Population*) published in the 1930s. However, the institute and its staff eventually fell victim to Stalin's repressions. New demographic research was organized in the 1960s and was concentrated mainly at the Institute of Economics at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. One of the most important works on the Ukrainian family in the Soviet period is, *Marriages and Divorces* (1975) by Chuyko. Research on families also took place at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, and occasionally some departments of sociology, psychology and pedagogy at the other universities.

After 1991, when the Ukraine was proclaimed an independent democratic state, a national strategy and political agenda emerged on such issues as family, youth, women's rights, and child protection. The negative economic and social tendencies of the transitional period, the worsening of the situation of most families, and the decline in birth rates made the development of a family policy even more urgent. Some new institutions were established (and old ones invested with new functions) to organize research, monitor and support family issues. In

the framework of the *National Plan of Actions for 1997–2000 on Improving the Status of Women and the Rise of Their Role in Society* adopted by the government in 1997, the State Committee on Statistics started to regularly publish a special collection of data on “Children, females and family in the Ukraine.” Three of these collections containing information on demography, employment, household incomes and expenditures, health care, education and other subjects were published in 1998, 2000 and 2002. Since 1999 a representative household survey has been conducted annually using international methodology, which reveals living standards, household expenditure and income.

The State Institute for Family and Youth Affairs was founded by the [Cabinet of Ministers of the Ukraine in 1991](#). It aimed towards providing the government and general public with research, and educational and consultative services on the issues of family and family politics. At the same time, a group of members of the institute also registered a non-governmental organization (NGO) called the Ukrainian Institute for Social Research (UISR). Both are in fact two faces (state and public) of the same organization. This is a popular strategy in the Ukraine and usually helps to diversify the sources of funding. Throughout this text, the name UISR will be used for this organization. Among the aims of the Institute are the theoretical and applied studies of the family, women, youth and children. In addition it will explore the processes related to young people’s integration into society in the context of social and economic transitions, and the development of economic, social, administrative and legal mechanisms of family policy ([Ukrainian Institute for Social Research, 2003](#)). Among its research priorities are social support of young families, children with special needs, prevention of alcohol and drug abuse by children, and reform of the childcare system. The Institute conducts several large-scale opinion polls and is involved in international projects. Together with the State Committee on Youth Policy, Sport and Tourism (which is also in charge of family policy) the UISR prepares the official annual reports on the Situation of Families in the Ukraine. Five reports have been issued thus far. Among them are reports on education in Ukrainian families and on problematic families. UISR is the only research institution in the Ukraine that focuses primarily on the family. It is also involved in comparative international projects on youth and family.

The Institute of Pedagogy and the Institute for Problems of Education at the Academy of Pedagogical Science conduct research on education and on the relationship between family and school. The Institute of Sociology at the Ukrainian Academy of Science lacks a special department or a research project on family. Lavrinenko, a member of the Institute, published a book on the social status of Ukrainian women, which also contains a chapter on family ([Lavrinenko, 1999a](#)). The [Kiev International Institute of Sociology \(KIIS\)](#) conducted some research

projects on issues related to the family. This is a private institution founded in 1991 and is heavily involved in international projects. The research work of the Institute is focused on poverty, employment, political orientations, and socio-cultural parameters of the Ukrainian population (Kiev International Institute of Sociology, 2003). Although the KIIS does not conduct research on family, its projects are sometimes relevant to this subject (e.g. women's reproductive health).

The development of gender studies in the Ukraine after 1991 was one of the factors that stimulated a new interest in the family as a site of gender inequality and power relations. Research institutions of a new type, i.e. women's non-governmental organizations (NGO), initiated a number of projects such as "Gender Analysis of Ukrainian Society" (Gender Bureau, in cooperation with UNDP, 1998) and "Gender Mainstreaming in the Context of Social and Economic Transformation" (UISR, in cooperation with the Canadian-Ukrainian Gender Foundation, 2002). Apart from problems of gender inequality in economic and political life, these publications focus on gender roles, distribution of duties, and decision-making in the family. The all-Ukrainian organization "League of Women Voters 50/50" with the support of UNDP initiated a project entitled "Gender Expertise of Ukrainian Legislation." In the framework of this project, family legislation was also analyzed from the point of view of providing gender equality (Romovska, 2001). The author of this chapter studied the new relationship of the family with the state and with market institutions as a gender issue under conditions of economic transformations in the Ukraine (Zhurzhenko, 2001, 2004).

Although since 1991 a few projects and opinion polls have acquired information about the family under post-Soviet conditions, there has been no systematic research on family processes. This is due to the incipient state of social sciences, limited financial support, sociological studies completed for political purposes, the underestimation of the family as a secondary subject, and insufficient contact with the international academic community.

## FAMILY POLICY

Family policy in the Soviet Ukraine was not a separate sphere of state interest, but was primarily a part of labor market regulations. Its object was the working mother, rather than the family itself. Traces of this approach can still be found in the new family policy. For example, despite several amendments, the Labor Code has in fact been in force since 1972 and still reflects the Soviet model of the relationship between the working women and the state-employer. It contains a significant amount of social guarantees for working women, which exceed International Labor

Organization (ILO) recommendations. That is, prenatal and postnatal leave (56 and 70 days respectively) and three years childcare leave with the right to keep one's position during this period. The Labor Code provides health protection for pregnant women in the work place, employment guarantees and protection against dismissal. It also enforces restrictions on the use of female labor for heavy or harmful work. The Law *On the Employment of Population* provides guarantees of resettlement for women with children and for single mothers by reserving 5% of all enterprise vacancies (quota) for this category. One of the first documents representing state family policy in the independent Ukraine, the *Long-term Program for the Improvement of the Position of Women, Family, the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood* (1992), was based on the same approach. However, under conditions of redundancy and hidden unemployment, unofficial labor arrangements and the difficult financial situation of many enterprises, the enforcement of these rights and privileges is rather problematic.

The *National Program on Family Planning* adopted in 1995 reflects a growing concern about worsening demographic indicators. It attracted public attention to the high level of maternal and child mortality, to the deterioration of public health, and to the high rate of abortions due to lack of knowledge about modern contraception. To encourage some positive achievements, another program *Reproductive Health 2001–2005* has been implemented. The “*Children of the Ukraine*” Program (1996) defined the new concept of state policy towards children and undertook urgent measures of support for certain groups (e.g. those who lack parental care or who live in unfavorable conditions).

Faced with the worsening demographic situation, the state paid special attention to the problems of young families. The Law *On the Promotion of Self-fulfillment and Social Development of Youth in the Ukraine* (1993) established the principles of state youth politics under the new conditions. This followed the abolition of the Komsomol (Soviet youth organization, controlled by the Communist Party). The Law included some guarantees for employment, as well as special measures to solve the problem of housing for young families. Among other programs to be mentioned is the *National Plan of Actions for 1997–2000 on Improving the Status of Women and the Rise of Their Role in Society*. This was designed to introduce the issue of gender equality to the discussions on family policy.

In 1999, the Ukrainian parliament adopted the *Declaration on General Fundamentals of the State Policy in the Ukraine Concerning Family and Women*, and the *Draft for a State Family Policy*. These documents defined the main principles of family policy in the context of national consolidation, democratic transformation and the market economy. In 2001, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a new program, *Ukrainian family*, which is based on these earlier documents. In 2002, the new Family Code was adopted by the parliament.

According to the Law “*On the State Assistance to Families with Children*” the following allowances and payments for families with children are offered (as of January 1, 2002): onetime assistance for pregnant women (78.2 hryvnia; 1 U.S. Dollars = 5.5 hryvnia), onetime assistance connected with the birth of a child (121 hryvnia), childcare allowances (until the age of 3) (29.1 hryvnia per month), allowances for parents with three or more children (until the age of 16) (35 hryvnia per month), assistance for single mothers (12.8 hryvnia per month), for parents with disabled children (45.5 hryvnia per month) etc. In comparison, in 2002 the average wage was 391 hryvnia per month, whereas the living minimum was officially fixed at 329 hryvnia. At the end of the 1990s there was a rising debt in social payments to families with children. In 1996 it was 20.1 million hryvnia, and by 2000 it had grown to 61.5 million. This debt started to decrease in 2001, and the situation now seems to be under control. In general, this assistance list corresponds with the legislative standards of most welfare states. However, the problems are: (1) the small amount of payments; (2) the frequent disregard of the declared social guarantees; and (3) the constant delays in the distribution of payments.

Until 2001, most payments for families with children were calculated as a percentage of the officially established minimum wage (50–100%). However, the minimum wage was far lower than the actual living minimum, which demonstrated the inability of the government to provide essential guarantees. In 2001, the minimum wage rose and state social assistance to families was officially reduced to 25–35% of the minimum wage. In 2000, the *Law on State Social Standards and State Social Guarantees* established the living minimum as an official social standard and as a basis for calculating salaries, pensions and social allowances. However, due to economic instability the new standards based on the living minimum have not been implemented. In 2003, the minimum wage was reported to have grown in 2002 from 38.4 to 45.2% of the living minimum. The government viewed this increase as a big success. The growing problem of poverty forced a transformation in the system of social support to make it more effective. In 1999, the government created a system of targeted social help for low-income families. These families were eligible for assistance if their average income did not exceed an officially established norm. Application for social support could only be satisfied after an evaluation of the living conditions of the family. Since 1999, some attempts have been made to improve this program to make it more available to eligible families.

One of the relatively efficient programs of social support has been that which involves subsidies for housing and compensation for utilities. From the middle of the 1990s the accelerating rise in housing rents and the cost of utilities (electricity, heating and hot water) became a real burden for family budgets. This led to an accumulation of huge debts to service providers. To solve this problem, the program

of subsidies was initiated to cover a part of these payments. Families who apply for subsidies have to meet certain requirements concerning living space and average family income. Recently, the program has become more selective and targets only the poorest families.

In order to provide social support for the most vulnerable groups of families, the *Measures on the Improvement of the Situation of Families with Many Children* was adopted in 1999. The implementation of these measures depends on the financial resources of the local administration. This is an attempt to provide non-monetary privileges and state services for children from these families (e.g. free school uniforms and breakfasts). Compared to Soviet times, the reason for assisting families with many children is not the encouragement of birth rates, but the recognition that these families are the most impoverished and in need of support.

Among other programs are those targeted to special categories of children, such as those who are homeless or without parents (there is encouragement to set up “family type” establishments). In this field there is active cooperation between the state social protection offices and NGOs. The victims of the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster formed a special category of families. In 2002, 1,048,928 children were classified as being affected by the disaster and half of them still live on the territory affected by the nuclear pollution. There are also families whose members are officially recognized as having “participated in the liquidation of the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.” These families have special privileges concerning the use of public transport, health care and recreation. They are also given free housing in cases of insufficient living conditions.

## CONCLUSION

The situation of the family in the post-Soviet Ukraine reflects the complicated dynamics of the transition to democracy, economic liberalization and nation building. This chapter analyses three main factors involved in this process.

Firstly, conditions for most families today are affected by the economic crisis, social and economic insecurity, growing income differentiation and the rise in poverty. While some have benefited from economic liberalization and had new opportunities for private entrepreneurship, the majority of families have to cope with economic survival. This effort affects the reproductive behavior of young couples, who often postpone childbirth. In everyday life, cultural activities have become a luxury. In addition, communication among family members and the time available for children’s education have been dramatically reduced. Rather than strengthening solidarity, the need for economic survival perpetuates gender inequality in the family.

The new political agenda of nation building, which helped consolidate the post-Soviet Ukrainian elite of both communist and national-democratic origins. Additionally, it propagated neo-familialism as the new state ideology. The former communists, now known as “the party of power,” gave up official Soviet egalitarianism and embraced traditional values. Alternatively, the democrats criticized Soviet paternalism and considered the family as an important institution of civil society. However, both agree that the traditional Ukrainian family is an important symbolic resource of nation building. The conservative part of the emerging civil society (even in the women’s movement), as well as various churches in the Ukraine, also support (and benefit from) neo-familialist ideas.

Finally, but most importantly, there are the effects of postponed modernization in the private sphere. These were encouraged by political and market liberalization, the flows of uncensored information and the impact of Western mass culture. There are several factors that have made the young generation of Ukrainians very similar to their western counterparts. These include the availability of modern contraception and literature about sexual issues, which was unimaginable under the puritan Soviet regime, the growing plurality of family models, the emergence of alternative lifestyles, the acceptance of sexual minorities and their presence in the public discourse, western feminist ideas. This postponed modernization might fill some gaps left from Soviet modernization. For example, the previous system was concerned with women’s emancipation in the interest of the state, rather than for the benefit of women themselves. However at the same time, this process poses new challenges for families in the Ukraine.

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