

Life Values of Today's Women in Single-industry Towns of Russia (Adapted from Sociological Studies Done in Magnitogorsk)

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Abstract: The study presents an overview of sociological studies on the subject of life values of women in single-industry towns of Russia. The specificity of social environment of a one industry town conditions the development of personal identity and value system of women. The primary influence determining daily life activities is the system of priorities shaped by day-to-day routine. The latter include, first and foremost, family well-being, health, children and material security. These are universal, closely-related human values which should be regarded as top level priorities and, consequently, as the terminal integrating core of women's basic values. The list of intermediate level priorities includes an interesting job, physical fitness and a successful career. The town-forming enterprise, as the principal employer in a single-industry town, guides the lives of its citizens and conditions labour mobility. A woman's professional activity derives primarily from the need to ensure the family's welfare stays safely above the bare subsistence level. As far as employment, career development, standard wage rates and, by extension, the prospects of property acquisition are concerned, the position of women in a single-industry town is rather vulnerable. Women, taken as a specific group within a society, could not be regarded as a homogenous set due to the difference of age, state of health, class distinctions and characteristic individual psychological traits. Each sub-set within the larger group possesses their own life values and priority needs and consequently, the means of meeting them. Young women tend to place specific value on obtaining a good degree and getting a prestigious job. On the other hand, women of working age often face the problem of having to strike the right balance between their family commitments and job responsibilities. Women of a more mature age are primarily concerned about the problem of maintaining material security as they advance in years.

Key words: Social issues, life priorities, value systems, social well-being, single-industry town

INTRODUCTION

Preface: Today gender studies are in the spotlight of social science. The position of women within a society has always attracted due attention from historians, philosophers and academic thinkers. Gender studies presuppose equal amount of scientific attention to male-orientated and female-orientated gender problematics. However, it is the latter that have been given a particular prominence in the current academic debate. The concept of "values" has often taken the central place in numerous studies undertaken by both overseas and Russian social scientists. Among those researching this subject, one feels necessary to mention the following names: Zdravomyslov A.G., Kon I.S., Luhmann N., Yadov V., as well as some others. Presently, life values are being studied within the framework of the gender approach in social and humanitarian sciences. Among prominent Russian social scientists carrying out gender research, it is worth mentioning Voronin I.A.,

Zdravomyslova Ye.À., Rybtsova L.L., Tyomkina A.V., Yarskaya-Smimova Ye.R. and some others. The following overseas authors concern themselves with the problem of attitude to the role of women in society: Auletta K., Beaujot R., Bryant A., Coltrane S., Edlund J., Kanagaretnam K., Major B., Brown E.R., Clark E.K., Diekman A.B., Johnston A.M. Gender stereotypes form the focus of scientific attention for Davis S.N. and Greenstein T.N. Issues of gender equality are studied in the works of Eagly A.H., Fetterolf J.C., Greenstein T.N., Kellner J., Monique Plaza, Vijayasiri G. and some others. It is worth pointing out that there exists a palpable lack of research on the subject of life values of women. The following Russian social scientists have been studying the issue in question: Batyuta M.B., Meretukova Z.K., Ovsyanik I. A., Pepelyaeva S.V., Rybtsova L.L. and some others.

There is a number of studies concerned with the influence of a town-forming enterprise on life activities of the town population. The following names are worth

mentioning in this respect: Gubina N.V., Ivashina N.S., Kokh O.A., Pirmova S.V., Ulyakina and some others.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Self-determination and the value orientation of women in monopropylene city: One's system of values reflects one's intrinsic interests, subjective social attitudes, outlook on life and moral principles. An individual's ranking of values shapes his/her concept of life and is reflected in the individual's behaviour. The value system forms the cultural core of a society, acting as a sum-total of its needs and aspirations (Yadov, 1975). The contemporary era sees the woman in a wide range of social manifestations. Women are trying on an increasingly wide array of social roles, which cannot but affect their value systems and behaviour. One's priorities and value systems reflect one's intrinsic needs (Zdravomyslov, 1986). Any social work is addressed primarily to the analysis of the most pertinent aspects of the satisfaction of human needs. Besides, an individual's motivation for actions and the prospects of tying up individual and social interests are scrutinised. All human activities aspire to the satisfaction of some needs. An analytic study of the life values of women in a single-industry town is especially relevant inasmuch as these values shape the women's behavior and guide their life activities.

Human behaviour is conditioned by the situation in which the human subject has to act and by the environment wherein the human subject is placed. Magnitogorsk typifies urban settlements of the Urals region. Life conditions define personal identity and value systems of the town population. Workers of Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works (both former and present alike), together with the members of their families, form the most influential and numerous group of the town population. The overwhelming majority of the population are natives of Magnitogorsk, with strong psychological and social attachments to their native town. The town-forming enterprise acts as a specific socio-economic subject directing economic development and social administration of the town. The share of social responsibility of the town-forming enterprise in a single-industry town is incomparably greater than in polyfunctional towns. The influence of the town-forming enterprise pervades through every sphere of urban life due to the fact that the entire population of the town is in one way or another involved with the giant enterprise (Gubina, 2010; Ivashina and Ulyakina, 2012; Kokh, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of sociological research of values women monopropylene cities of Russia: In 2013-2014 the academic staff of the Department of Social Work and

Psychologic-Pedagogical Education from the Nosov Magnitogorsk State Technical University conducted a survey with a view to study life values of modern women in a single-industry town. Six hundred women took part in the survey. Respondents were selected by random sampling.

The primary influence determining daily life activities is the system of priorities shaped by the individual's day-to-day routine, by one's personal experience. The respondents of the survey mentioned the following values: personal health and that of the members of the family – 61 %, family well-being – 43 %, material security – 41,3 %, children – 35 %, an interesting job – 35 %, love life – 18 %, physical fitness and appearance – 14 %, friends and social life – 14 %, career – 11 %.

Let's examine the dependence of value priorities on age (Table. 1). Such values as health, material security and children are universal, interrelated values, common to all humanity. Therefore, these should be regarded as values of the highest priority, as the terminal integrating core of basic human values.

Among top priorities, many women rated health – 60.5% of the respondents. But the issue of health is all the more pertinent to women in their 50s and older (over 80% of respondents rated this value as their top priority). Prevailing health problems may be traced to various causes. But socially and psychologically conditioned stress, poor working conditions and low living standards are the most likely roots of most health problems.

The majority of respondents rated family well-being among their top priorities – about 43%. Family has always occupied one of the most prominent places in human value systems of all times. Family is rated among top priorities for respondents of all age groups. It is quite obvious from the figures that the significance of family values increases with the progress of age. Thus, women aged between 17 and 24 years rated 'love life' 1.5 times higher than family well-being (about 47% and 26%, respectively). Similarly, friends and social life gets a higher rating than family well-being for this age group (29,9% and 26,6%, respectively). But as a woman gets older – from the age of 25 onwards – the importance of family well-being increases. Inasmuch as the majority of people have family commitments of one kind or another, family values form an integral part of their lives.

Family is a significant domain in the life of an individual. A considerable number of women see family as a shelter from the hostility and hardship of the outside world. Traditionally, women have placed special emphasis on the family. Family life – in all its aspects – still remains the most natural mode of existence for the majority of people. The results of our survey conform to the findings of Zdravomyslova and Tyomkina 1998.

Table 1: Life values of women in various age groups, represented as a percentage of the total number of respondents

What matters to you the most at present?	17-24 (%)	25-30 (%)	31-40 (%)	41-50 (%)	51-55 (%)	56-60 (%)	61 and oldär (%)	(%)
Material Security	35.9	50.8	33.6	30.4	43.6	87.5	0.0	408
Family Well-being	26.6	43.6	44.5	50.4	52.3	56.3	45.5	429
Personal Health and That of the members of the family	71.9	45.9	57.7	56.5	89.7	84.4	100.0	605
Children	6.3	32.6	46.0	42.6	25.6	6.3	59.1	339
Fitness and Appearance	20.3	14.9	11.7	7.0	12.8	37.5	13.6	142
Love/Life	46.9	19.3	14.6	8.7	12.8	9.4	13.6	180
Friends and Social Life	29.7	18.8	6.6	11.3	12.8	15.6	0.0	144
Interesting job	9.4	26.5	13.1	13.0	20.5	25.0	0.0	175
Successful Career	12.5	22.7	7.3	3.5	12.8	3.1	0.0	117

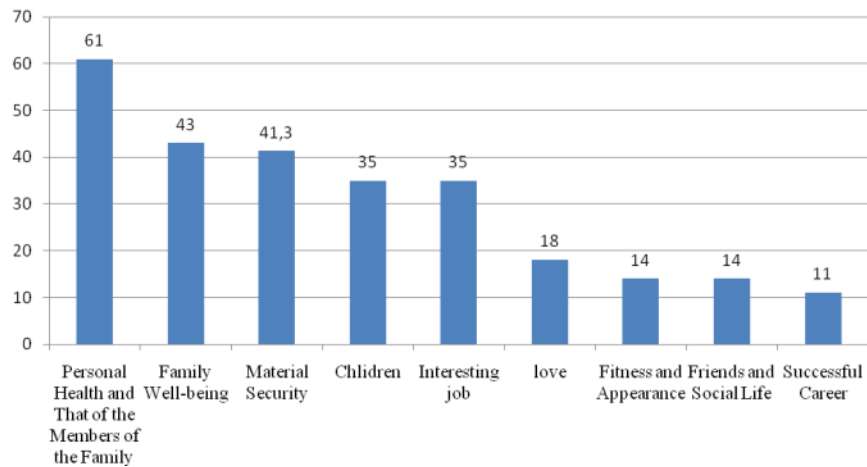


Fig.1 Life values of women represented as a percentage of the total number of respondents.

What matters to you the most at present: The extra significance placed on the material factor by respondents of 56 years and beyond, merits our particular attention. The possible explanation may lie in the change of social status brought about by retirement and the consequent relative fall in the standard of living. This, however, is a natural transition under the conditions of market economy. It is interesting that, for women aged between 31 and 50, the value 'material security' occupies intermediate level of importance, whereas the value 'children' gets a much higher rating. The values of the intermediate level are those that may move on to form a part of the core.

We made a wide use of Yadov's dispositional theory of personality familiar to most social scientists which draws particular attention to the concept of life priorities. Among the values of the intermediate level, we find 'an interesting job' (women aged between 25 and 30 years and those aged between 51 and 60 years), 'fitness and appearance' is given the rating of 37.5% by respondents over 56 years old, while 'successful career' is rated at 22.7% by those aged between 25 and 30 years.

In a single-industry town with only one town-forming enterprise the choice of employment is rather limited. The town-forming enterprise, as the principal employer in a

single-industry town, guides the lives of its citizens and conditions labour mobility and labour market behaviour. A woman's professional activity derives primarily from the need to ensure the family's welfare stays safely above the bare subsistence level. As far as employment, career development, standard wage rates and, by extension, the prospects of property acquisition are concerned, the position of women in a single-industry town is rather vulnerable. Women in a single-industry town have very limited opportunities of professional mobility (Gubina, 2010; Ivashina and Ulyakina, 2012).

A major institutional barrier puts women at a serious disadvantage with respect to the amount of time required for promotion, as compared to men. Women have to exert a much greater effort than men to get professional recognition. The need to juggle full-time job with a family life adds extra complications to the life of a woman. Besides, 63% of our respondents have no chances of promotion (Zdravomyslova and Tyomkina, 1998).

CONCLUSION

To summarise, each category of women has their own life values and priority ratings, as well as their own means of achieving their respective goals. Women, taken as a

specific group within a society, could not be regarded as a homogenous set due to the difference of age, state of health, class distinctions and characteristic individual psychological traits. Every woman should be free to make her individual choices, she should be allowed opportunity for personal growth and self-fulfillment, both in the professional sphere of her choice and within her own family. Thus, in the case of the group of women aged between 17 and 25 years this means opportunities for getting education and, consequently, employment. Women of working age often face the problem of having to strike the right balance between their family commitments and job responsibilities. Women of a more mature age are concerned about the problem of maintaining material security as they advance in years (Ovsinik and Davidian, 2012). Moreover, there are different groups of women who vary with respect to their readiness and reaction to the impact of external factors. Representatives of one of these groups take an active stance in life; they are able to face up to the challenges of the outside world. Women in the other group tend to take up a rather passive attitude and try to adapt to the mutability of external circumstances.

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