

Chapter 2. Transition, Gender Roles, and the Private Sphere

2.1 Gender Roles in Tajik Society

Modern Tajik women are influenced both by the recent Soviet experience, with its strong emphasis on gender equality in the public sphere, and traditional Tajik values where women played a central role in the private sphere of the family.

2.1.1 Historical Background

Information on pre-Soviet Tajik society is relatively sparse. The recorded history of Tajikistan dates back at least to the second millennium BC and differs from the other CARs, which are generally Turkic, in its Aryan heritage. Tajiks (ancestors of the Indo-Iranian or Aryan ethnic community) are the oldest settled nation in the Central Asia. Their first states of Bactria and Sogdiana were described by Herodotus (484-425 BC). In the fourth century BC the ancestors of today's Tajik people were governed by Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and the Great Silk Road, which ran through Tajikistan, linked the civilizations of East and West. By the end of seventh century, Central Asia had been conquered by Arabs and its people were converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam. A revival of Tajik governance and culture was achieved in the Samanid Empire (874-1005 AD) during which time the process of formation of the Tajik nation was completed with the emergence of a common language, territory, and culture (UNDP 2000).

Unlike its neighbors in the Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan, with their nomadic way of life, Tajikistan had an urban culture, and many of the cities were famous as centers of Muslim scholarship. The focal point of the social and religious life of the community was the mosque and traditional customs were inextricably intermingled with Islamic practices (Akiner 1997). Large extended families were the norm. Marriages were arranged by close relatives in accordance with the rules of Islamic law and often neither party had any say in the choice of their future spouse. Large differences in age between husband and wife were common as men had to wait to marry until they had accumulated sufficient wealth to afford the payment of the "bride price" (*kalym*). Girl children were considered as only temporary members of their own family and upon marriage women became members of their husband's family. The status within the family of newly married daughter-in-laws was very low; and the only way to raise this status was through childbearing, preferably bearing sons who would become permanent members of the household.

At the lower end of the social scale, women did not have much autonomy. However, it is clear that among the ruling elite women did enjoy a greater degree of freedom. By the early twentieth century, there were some educational facilities for girls, primarily religious schools

run by the wives of the local mullah. There is also evidence that in some regions women who were skilled artisans, such as the potters in the mountains of Tajikistan, could acquire a certain degree of autonomy (Akiner 1997). However prior to the twentieth century, the majority of women were illiterate and excluded from public life.

2.1.2 Changes Brought About by the Soviet System

Most of modern-day practices in Tajikistan had been brought about under the Russian rule at the end of the nineteenth century. Under Soviet rule, Tajikistan underwent an intensive process of modernization. From the outset, the "emancipation" of women was a strategic priority. In part this was a response to the perceived "enslavement" of women, but perhaps more importantly it also acted to aid the war against religion, and to supplement the labour force by bringing women into socialized production (Akiner 1997).

Following the October Revolution and subsequent civil war, Tajik society was secularized. Islamic legal and educational institutions were closed and traditional culture was pushed underground and confined to the private sphere. Between 1921 and 1923 laws were passed banning traditional Islamic practices such as polygamy, the payment of *kalym*, and marriage without the consent of the bride. The minimum age for marriage was set at 16 for girls and 18 for boys. In 1927 the emancipation campaign intensified with the mass unveiling of central Asian women. Special privileges were given to women who discarded the veil, while the husbands of those who did not ran the risk of fines or imprisonment. By the mid-1930s it was increasingly rare to see a full-veiled woman, although women, especially in rural areas, continue until the present day to cover their heads with brightly colored headscarves.¹

Another priority of the Soviet period was education, both for men and women. In the early 1920s literacy among the Tajiks was just over 2 percent, and for women it was scarcely above 1 per cent. Primary schooling was made compulsory for both boys and girls around 1930, and by independence in 1989 literacy was 93 percent, with the majority of the illiterate aged over 60.

Efforts were also made to involve women in the political and administrative process. Women's unions were set up and female delegates were elected (appointed) to represent their communities at all levels. This process was accelerated by a quota system, under which women were allocated approximately a third of the posts in government. However, they were rarely appointed to senior positions. Women were also increasingly involved in all spheres of economic life, but most notably in the agriculture and social sectors.

¹ It should be noted that although the veil was seen by the Russians to symbolize women's oppression and ignorance, for Central Asians themselves the veil had a very different set of associations. It provided a symbol of the distinct between public and private space and also indicated a woman's social status. Furthermore, it served to provide women with protection both against unwanted contact with strangers and against the physical grime of the environment (Akiner 1997).

However, although the Soviet period resulted in a dramatic improvement in the participation of women in public life, in the private sphere traditional patterns of behavior continued to dominate gender relations. Some aspects of Soviet culture actually served to *reinforce* traditional norms, most notably the focus on women's reproductive role. The crude birth rate was already high in Central Asia. High fertility was then underwritten by the Soviet pro-natalist system of allowances and incentives. There were one-off payments on the birth of each child, generous child allowances that rose disproportionately with each additional child, statutory maternity benefits, and entitlement to unpaid maternity leave for up to three years. In addition, the state provided a wide range of other supports, including nurseries, kindergartens, and after-school programs, which allowed women to combine their productive and reproductive roles.

The Glorification of Motherhood

The status of motherhood was institutionalized within the Soviet Union by the award of honors and privileges to women with large families. The highest rank of "Hero Mother" was awarded to those who had borne and raised 10 or more children. Those with 7-9 children were bestowed with the title of "Mother Glory", and the "Medal of Maternity" was given to those women with 5-6 children. As well as being symbolic, the awards were accompanied by enhanced family allowances and other benefits. Such women were also allowed to retire early and were entitled to special pensions.

2.1.3 The Changing Status of Women in Transition—The Shifting Balance Between Tradition and Modernity

Since independence traditional cultural and social values have enjoyed a renaissance. Although Tajikistan remains a secular state, there has been a revival of Islamic practices. It is too early to assess the impact of this on gender roles. However, as we shall see there has been a marked withdrawal of women from political life and the balance between women's roles in the public and private spheres achieved during the Soviet period appears to be changing.

An increasing number of young women, particularly outside the main cities, have begun to wear the *hejab* (Muslim headscarf), although it is very rare to see women fully veiled. There is also a growing tendency for men to impose their view of Islamic norms on women. A number of young women in Dushanbe stated that they cover their heads due to fear of abuse from young men. Women are now more vulnerable, both because the protection offered by the State is now much weaker, and also because in most cases women do not know their rights in Islamic law and as such are unable to argue their case on these grounds (Akiner 1997). Another indication of the shift in values is a greater readiness to admit to the existence of polygamy. Although still illegal, there is a growing recognition of the practice and in some circles it is regarded as an acceptable informal coping strategy to deal with the increase in the number of young childless widows that resulted from the civil war.

Economic and political transition has also resulted in the discontinuation of many of the state structures and benefits that supported women in combining their reproductive and productive roles. Universal child allowances have been abolished, maternity benefits are often not paid, and many nurseries and kindergartens have been closed. Increasing charges for health and education mean that family finances are coming under even greater pressure, and there is evidence that a gender-gap is opening up in post-primary school education. As some of the old large state enterprises have closed and job losses and unemployment have risen, there has been a renewed emphasis on women's domestic responsibilities. As we shall see in subsequent sections, many of the advances that were made with regard to gender equality during the Soviet period are now at risk.

2.2 Changes in Family Formation

The economic and social transition in Tajikistan has been accompanied by changes in the patterns of family formation, marriage and childbirth, and family dissolution, which themselves amount to a transition within the family.

2.2.1 Population Change

Tajikistan has a relatively young and rapidly growing population, with 48 percent of the population aged under 18 and a rate of natural population increase of just under 2 percent per annum (Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1). This is the result of a high birth rate combined with relatively low infant and adult mortality rates.

Table 2.1 Selected Demographic Statistics for Tajikistan, 1991-1998

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Total population (thousands)	5,358	5,571	5,572	5,704	5,786	5,884	5,970	6,067
Crude birth rate (per 1,000)	38.9	32.2	33.1	28.2	28.6	24.5	25.0	20.9
Crude death rate (per 1,000)	6.1	6.6	8.7	7.0	5.9	5.4	5.8	4.8
Natural rate of increase (%)	32.8	25.6	24.4	21.2	22.7	19.1	19.2	16.1
Net migration rate (per 1,000)	-5.2	-17.1	-13.3	-7.9	-6.5	-4.6	-2.7	-2.6
Annual population growth rate (%)	2.8	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.7	1.4
Infant mortality rate (%)	40.6	45.9	47.0	40.6	30.9	31.3	30.7	na
Maternal mortality rate (%)	na	na	na	87.6	93.7	87.6	65.5	na
Life expectancy (all)	70.5	68.3	66.1	66.1	68.3	69.6	68.3	na
Men	67.6	65.4	63.4	63.5	64.4	64.4	65.5	na
Women	73.2	71.1	68.7	69.1	70.4	70.4	71.2	na

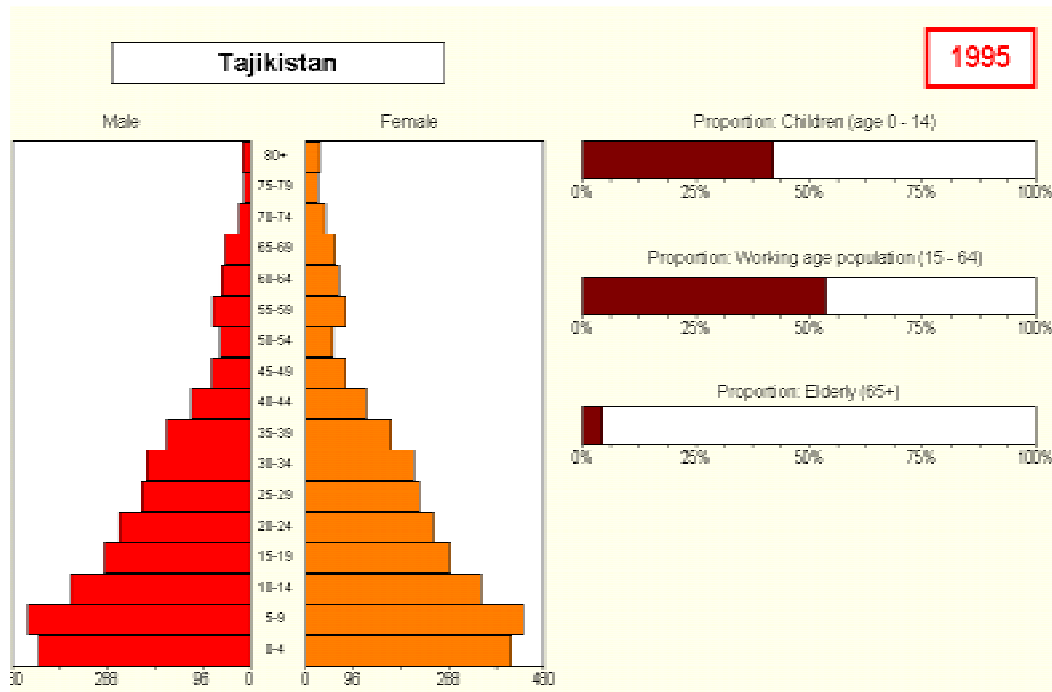
Source: SSA 1999.

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Since Independence, the birth rate has fallen from 38.9/1,000 in 1991 to 25.0 in 1997. In 1998 alone, registered births and deaths declined by 16-17 percent. However, much of this recent decline, especially in infant mortality, may be a statistical artefact—the result of an

increase in under-coverage following the introduction of a fee for the registration of births and deaths. In 1998, the official population growth rate was 16.1 per 1,000, although informed estimates are that the real rate of annual population growth is 18-20 per 1,000. This is still high by international standards, even though it has fallen from 33 per 1,000 in 1991.

Figure 2.1 Age and sex structure of Tajikistan, 1995

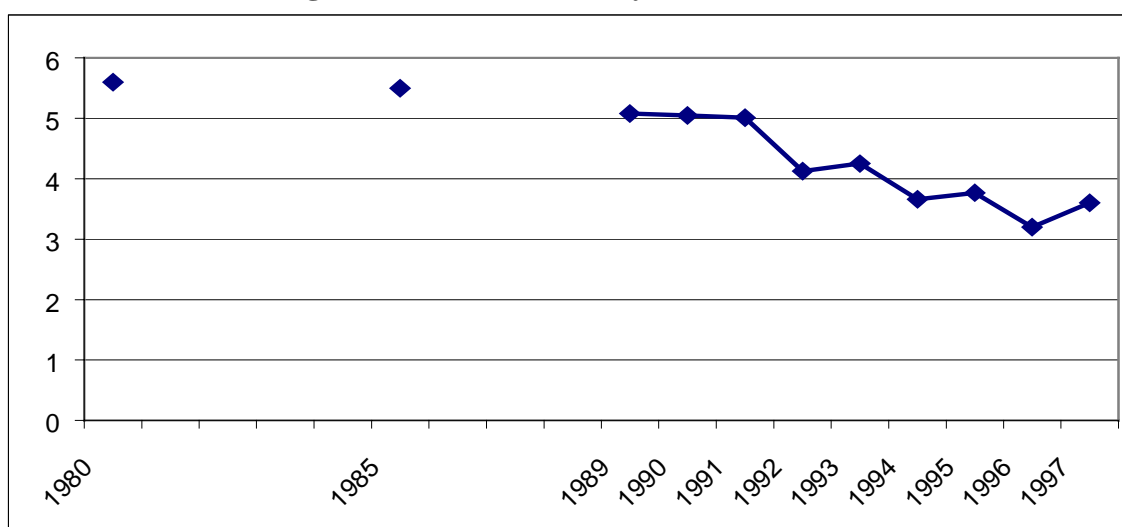


Population growth has been tempered by out net migration, with the result that the population grew at just over 1.4 percent per annum over the last decade. Although low relative to rates in Tajikistan's recent past, this is still equivalent to the population doubling in size every 50 years. Since 1991 an estimated 580,000 people have left the country, compared with 267,000 who have arrived. The majority have migrated to other countries of the FSU, and most were of non-Tajik ethnic origin. It is estimated that the ethnic Russian population in Tajikistan is now only one fifth of that prior to 1991. This migration does not include the mass movement of people during the civil war, when it is estimated that as many as 800,000 people were displaced.

2.2.2 Fertility in Transition

Traditionally the Tajik family had many children. One of the most dramatic recent demographic changes has been the decline in fertility. Although fertility was already declining in the decade prior to independence (from 5.6 in 1980 to 5.1 in 1989), since 1991 it has fallen by nearly 1.5 births, to 3.6 in 1997 (Figure 2.2).² A decline in fertility is usually to be welcomed, both in terms of reducing the rate of population growth and improving reproductive health. However, such a *rapid* decline in an agrarian country like Tajikistan, which places a high value on children, is a sign of a population under economic and social stress. There is clear evidence that women have adjusted their reproductive behavior in direct response to the economic hardships currently facing most families.

Figure 2.2 Total Fertility Rate, 1980-1997



Source: SSA 1999.

In a survey of women in 1,008 households conducted by the State Statistical Agency in conjunction with the Women in Development Bureau in 1998 (hereafter referred to as the SSA/WID survey), two in five women of childbearing age reported that economic factors had influenced the number of children they had had. Interestingly rural women were more likely to report economics being a factor (43%) than urban women (37%). The proportion also varied by age, with a much higher proportion of younger women reporting that they had adjusted their family formation. Only 26 percent of women aged 18-24 reported that they were *not* influenced by economic factors, compared with 67 percent of women aged 50-54.

² The total fertility rate (TFR) is a measure of the number of children a woman would have if she gave birth at the prevailing age-specific rates across her entire reproductive lifetime. Thus, it is a hypothetical measure as in reality women do not live their entire reproductive period in one year. Nevertheless, it provides a useful summary measure.

It is also clear, however, that younger women would prefer to have a smaller completed family than their mothers or grandmothers; and urban women want smaller families than rural women (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Desired Number of Children by Age of Woman
(%)

	1	2	3	4	5	6 and more	Total
Urban settlements							
17-24	4	46	11	26	12	2	100 (57)
25-29	2	15	15	29	11	29	100 (66)
30-39	4	19	24	29	15	9	100 (96)
40-49	5	21	21	28	12	13	100 (92)
50-54	2	16	29	18	20	16	100 (101)
Rural settlements							
17-24	-	15	15	35	11	25	100 (55)
25-29	1	4	13	38	18	25	100 (99)
30-39	-	6	13	25	30	27	100 (101)
40-49	-	3	5	29	15	50	100 (102)
50-54	-	-	12	27	22	39	100 (95)

Source: SSA, *Gender Statistics in the Republic of Tajikistan 1999*.

2.2.3 Marriage and Divorce

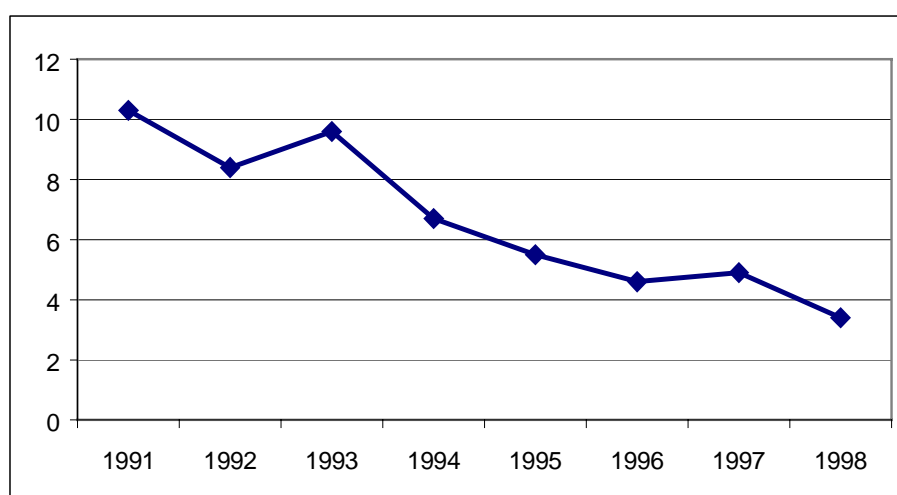
Another sign of a community under duress is the trend in the marriage rate. In Tajikistan traditionally marriage is almost universal and people marry young. The average age at first marriage in 1991 was 24.5 for boys and 21.6 for girls. In 1991 the annual number of marriages registered was 56,505, but by 1994 it had fallen to 38,820 and by 1997 was 28,836 (Figure 2.3). This does not include the couples who live without registration or only by religious blessing.

There was a sharp decline in marriages in 1992 during the civil war. The resurgence of marriages in 1993 may be accounted for by the desire of parents to settle the life of their children in the following peaceful period (the average age at marriage for girls fell to 20.8). Since then, however, the marriage rate has continued to decline, both as a result of increased uncertainty due to the renewal of conflict and the lack of financial resources.

Unlike elsewhere in the FSU, there has been no sign of increasing family instability and rising divorce. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the crude divorce rate has been fairly constant at around 1.3 divorces per 1,000 population (UNICEF 1999) and according to the State Statistical Agency (SSA) it has actually fallen to less than one per thousand. Nevertheless there is some evidence that relations between women and men have become more strained over time. Qualitative research conducted in Gorno-

Badakhshan (GBAO) in 1999 found that nearly half (48 percent) of women questioned thought that economic stress had led to more arguments and tensions within the household, while only 7 percent felt that women and men were pulling together more now to make ends meet (Kanji and Gladwin 2000). Furthermore, 36 percent of women reported an increase in violence against women, mainly linked to the frustrations that men felt with unemployment and the lack of income. The link between increased economic stress and tension and violence at the household level has been found elsewhere (Chant 1994; Kanji 1995; Moser 1996) and is further discussed in section 2.3 below.

Figure 2.3 Marriage per 1,000 Population



Source: SSA 1999.

2.2.4 Household Composition and Female-Headed Households

The majority of Tajiks continue to live in large extended families (Table 2.3). According to the recent UNDP-World Bank Tajikistan Living Standards Survey (TLSS)³, two thirds of the population live in a household with three or more adults and children, and mean household size varies between 5.2 in Dushanbe to 8.3 in Regions of Republican Subordination (RRS), with households averaging 7.0 people in GBAO, 6.1 in Leninabad, and 7.7 in Khatlon.

It is estimated that over 50,000 people died during the Civil War, leaving many young women to look after their children without a male breadwinner. Although single parent households are relatively uncommon, constituting just three of all households, 18 percent of all households are headed by a woman, i.e., approximately 155,000 households.

³ This is a nationally representative household survey of 2,000 households and 14,142 individuals carried out in May 1999. Respondents were asked about a range of socio-economic characteristics, including their income, expenditure patterns, economic activity, education, health and health service utilization.

Table 2.3 Household Composition by Region

	Dushanbe	GBAO	RRS	Leninabad	Khatlon	Urban	Rural	Tajikistan
1 adult, no kids	4	1	1	2	-	3	1	1
1 adult plus kids	4	3	2	3	3	5	2	3
2 adults	7	-	2	4	1	6	2	3
2 adults, 1-2 kids	18	9	2	9	5	11	5	7
2 adults, 3+ kids	26	16	17	18	26	20	22	21
3+ adults	9	4	3	7	3	8	4	5
3+ adults, 1-2 kids	17	31	19	29	15	23	20	21
3+ adults, 3+ kids	16	36	54	29	47	23	46	40
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean household size	5.2	7.0	8.3	6.1	7.7	5.7	7.6	7.1
Percentage female-headed households	23.3	22.5	24.3	19.1	10.2	24.6	15.0	17.6

Source: Author's own analysis, TLSS 1999.

GBAO - Gorno-Badakhshan, RRS - Regions of Republican Subordination.

Table 2.4 presents some basic information on the characteristics of female-headed households (FHHs). Although the proportion of FHHs in Tajikistan is high in comparison with elsewhere in Central Asia, the majority contain at least 2 other adults as well as children. Thus the majority are living in extended families with other adults with whom to share the burden of childcare and the costs of daily living. However, 13 percent of FHHs are lone mother households. This is equivalent to over 20,100 households nationwide. About 35 percent of lone mother households live in Khatlon, where the fighting during the civil war was most intense. About 5 percent of FHHs are single-person households; this compares with less than 1 percent of male-headed households. Two-thirds of these 8,000 FHHs are aged over 65, and 80 percent of them live in urban areas, mainly in Dushanbe or Leninabad.

Table 2.4 Characteristics of Households by Sex of Household Head

	Female-headed Households	Male-headed Households
1 adult, no kids	5	<1
1 adult plus kids	13	-
2 adults	4	2
2 adults, 1-2 kids	5	7
2 adults, 3+ kids	7	25
3+ adults	6	5
3+ adults, 1-2 kids	22	20
3+ adults, 3+ kids	38	40
Head aged 16-64	67	84
Head aged 65+	33	16
Urban	38	25
Rural	62	75

Source: Author's own analysis, TLSS 1999.

Both of these groups may be particularly vulnerable as a result of the changes during economic adjustment. In the past pensioners occupied a privileged position within Soviet society. Pensioners were paid at a rate almost equal to wages and there were significant in-kind benefits such as free coal to heat the home during winter and free holidays in sanatorium in the summer. Since Independence pensions have failed to rise in line with prices; in 1998 the average pension was worth less than \$4 a month, well below the minimum subsistence basket of around \$26 a month. In addition many pensioners fail to get any regular payment at all. The average period of arrears for old age pensions was four months in 1999 (Falkingham 2000a). Without other adults of working age with whom to pool the risk of inadequate and intermittent income, lone female pensioners are more likely to be socially excluded, and in poverty, than other groups.

In the past a relatively generous system of cash benefits provided support for lone (usually widowed) mother households. Again the value of such benefits has been eroded by inflation and increasingly the benefits are not paid at all. With the closure of state nurseries and kindergartens, and a general growth in unemployment, lone mothers are less able to supplement what little cash benefits they receive with paid employment and may be at particular risk of poverty. In addition FHHs in general often face discrimination in securing access productive resources, such as credit or land, that have the potential to facilitate income generation. Many FHHs were excluded from receiving land during the recent privatization of the old collective farms (*kholkhoz*) on the grounds that they lacked the "manpower" with which to work the land. The gendered impact of changes in the labor market and alternative livelihood strategies are further explored in Chapter 3.

2.3 Violence Against Women

The UN Declaration on Violence Against Women adopted in 1993 defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

Violence against women and threats against women is a major barrier to the empowerment of women and their equal participation in society. Gender-based violence of all forms is a serious violation of the human rights of women and girls and can have a lasting impact on mental and physical health. However, such violence often goes unrecognized and unreported and therefore unaddressed.

Despite the official rhetoric of gender equality during the Soviet period there was a notable silence concerning violence against women. Although undocumented, it is likely that violence was not unknown, if not commonplace. The changes triggered during transition can be expected to have increased the levels of stress, insecurity, and violence in society in general, and women's safety in the home, workplace and community is likely to have been seriously affected (UNICEF 1999).

Any discussion of violence and its impact upon women during transition in Tajikistan is complicated by the fact that, following Independence in 1992, the country experienced a brutal civil war and an extended period of civil unrest, which only ended with the signing of the peace agreement between the government and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) in June 1997. The violence that took place during the civil war in 1992-93 must be distinguished both from the climate of fear and intimidation that pervaded Tajik society in the period following the war, and from gender-based violence within Tajik society more generally.

There are also real problems with data (or lack thereof) concerning violence both during the war and after and difficulties in defining what is meant by violence. Some forms of violence are clear, such as rape, however as we shall see other forms such as domestic violence and emotional abuse are more difficult to define and may be viewed differently by men and women.

2.3.1 Violence During the War

By definition, violence against all citizens within Tajikistan was intensified beyond all reason during the civil war in 1992-1993. While the vast majority of deaths were to men, women were also subject to pernicious forms of violence, including rape, torture, and verbal abuse.

In a number of conflicts around the world rape has changed from a side-effect of war to an offensive weapon employed to create an atmosphere of terror, destroying dignity and pride and undermining community bonds (UNICEF 1999). Although rape as a war crime was not as widespread in Tajikistan as has been the case in the former Yugoslavia, there were numerous reports of armed bands looking for women to rape in the *kishlaqs* (villages).⁴ Tales of atrocities that focused on crimes against women were used by both sides to fuel the fighting and to exacerbate guilt on the opposing side (Tadjbakhsh 1994).

There are no estimates of the number of women raped during the 1992-93 conflict. However, the trauma of wartime rape does not end with the conflict. The consequences are both long-lasting and life-changing (Box 2.1). Women face immediate reproductive health risks associated with unwanted pregnancy, gynaecological problems and sexually transmitted diseases. Abortion may result in longer physical health problems, and there are also attendant risks to the woman's mental health associated with depression, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Women who have been raped have difficulty in returning to normal life and are often rejected by their own community.

Rape during war also impacts upon the wider society. Families may be shunned within the community, and villages that have been unable to protect their women may lose their sense of community. The rape of unmarried women was a devastating blow to the *nomusi tojik* (the

⁴ Among such reports were those of Raymond Bonner in *The New York Times* (26 November 1993) and *Human Rights Watch/Helsinki Watch Report* (December 1993).

chastity of the Tajiks) (Tadjbakhsh 1994). Reconciliation between neighbors on different sides of the conflict where rape occurred has been difficult and the scars may take years, if not decades, to heal.

Box 2.1 Multi-dimensional Consequences of Violence

Unit	Physical	Social	Economic
Individual	↓ Mental health ↓ Physical health ↓ Reproductive health	↑ Isolation ↑ Absence from school	↓ Qualifications and ↑ insecurity lead to lower wages/lifetime income
Family		↑ Withdrawal from society	↑ Loss of breadwinner ↑ Economic deprivation
Society	↑ Health expenditures	↓ Community bonds ↑ Anomie	↑ Loss of able-bodied males and decline in labor force; ↑ Disruption to economic activity

In addition to the direct threats of violence, women also faced an increased risk of violence and harassment as refugees. It is estimated that 40 percent of Tajikistan's 6 million inhabitants were directly affected by the war, with 600,000 displaced, 60,000 fleeing to other countries, and 500,000 emigrating. The experience of displacement alone involved a substantial trauma, reflected in letters published in the *Sadoi Mardum* newspaper from women in refugee camps in Afghanistan. In addition Tajik women, with their bright rainbow Atlas dresses and multi-colored headscarves, often stood out from Afghan women who wore a full veil and face lace and as such were open to verbal, and occasionally physical, abuse from Afghan men (Tadjbakhsh 1994).

The greatest cost of the violence of war was in the loss of human life. An estimated 50,000 men died as a result of the civil war. The death of their menfolk had a direct impact on women as mothers lost their sons, wives their husbands, children their father, and families their breadwinners. There are an estimated 55,000 orphans and 20,000 widows as a direct result of the war. This has resulted in a significant increase in the number of FHHs.

The increase in the number of young, often childless widows, has also resulted in the revitalization of the tradition, banned during the Soviet period, of Tajik Muslim men taking a second wife. Although still illegal, officials have often turned a blind eye as this has been seen as one solution to the problem of a shortage of men of marriageable age. Often women's status is still defined in terms of her traditional role of wife and mother and therefore it is

thought better for her to be a second wife than not a wife at all. However, many women's NGOs are increasingly concerned about the vulnerable position of second wives and their children who have no legal status and no rights to protection under the law. The problem however has received little, or no, recognition at the governmental level.

In general there has been little recognition of the long-term physical and psychological impact of the war on the population. The Government and the international community have concentrated on the rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure—rebuilding the roads, bridges, homes, hospitals, and schools damaged during the war. The damage to the human infrastructure is more intangible and harder to address. A Centre for Psychological Rehabilitation was established in Dushanbe by a local NGO in 1996 and since then crisis centers have been set up in Khojand and Khatlon. But Tajikistan still lacks trained personnel in trauma counselling and there has been no large-scale effort as has been seen elsewhere in post-conflict situations.

2.3.2 Insecurity, Harassment, and Corruption

One of the legacies of the war and civil unrest has been the breakdown of law and order within Tajikistan and the subsequent growth in corruption and harassment. A social assessment carried out by the World Bank in June 1996 found that one of the main factors sustaining poverty was the unlawful harassment of poor people (World Bank 1996). One of the most common forms of harassment is being stopped at frequent and illegal checkpoints on the major trunk roads, particularly to Garm and GBAO. Often bribes are demanded and goods or money stolen. The situation with respect to travelling has improved significantly since the signing of the peace agreement in June 1997, but unofficial checkpoints remain. Harassment is also commonplace in the market. Market trading has become an important livelihood strategy for many households. However, many traders are subject to illicit demands for money and goods from police, criminals, and market authorities.

Increasing Burdens for Women

A common coping mechanism has been to shift the burden of travel and marketing onto women, children, and the elderly who are perceived to be less vulnerable to physical abuse. This has been especially true for Garmi and Pamiri women whose menfolk are more afraid of harassment. The upshot of this has been to increase the burden of women's work in the fields, and at home, with travel to and work in the market. This represents a radical change of role for many, and is distressing for those from families where in the past it would have been shameful for women to take on such roles, giving rise to further physical and psychological stress.

Restricted Access to School for Girls

The legacy of the civil war is still marked in certain regions of the country, and fear of harassment has restricted girls' access to school. The number of girl students from rural areas has fallen over time as parents are afraid to send their daughters to the city. It is reported that in Garm town a large proportion of girls now finish school at grade 6. One of the main reasons is parents' fear that their daughters will be harassed or assaulted by soldiers at checkpoints in the town. Fear of physical violence, and of being beaten up by other children was cited as two of the main reasons why children of Garmi and Pamiri origins do not attend school in some areas of western Khatlon.

Another outcome of the general feeling of insecurity is the tendency towards the rejuvenation of marriage. Given the perception that society can no longer ensure the safety of young girls, some parents prefer to have their daughters married as, in their opinion, it guarantees their protection and safety.

There are considerable difficulties in tackling the problem of harassment in a country such as Tajikistan where many public officials now depend on bribery for their living. Tajikistan is rated as the most corrupt country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and bribe-seeking is now an integral part of most police work. This situation is unlikely to improve until the pay of public servants is brought up to a level that is sufficient to allow an acceptable standard of living.

One of the main difficulties in improving law enforcement is that few people are aware of what laws currently apply and what they actually stipulate. Improved public knowledge of new legislation and the basic rights and obligations of citizens is another essential first step in combating corruption.

2.3.3 Violence in the Daily Lives of Women

The transition period has been characterized by many factors that may influence the level of violence against women. Increasing unemployment, poverty, and income inequality and the resultant insecurity and uncertainty may be directly related in a rise in violence in society in general, including violence against women. Furthermore, these factors may also indirectly increase women's vulnerability by encouraging more risk-taking behavior such as alcohol and drug abuse, the breakdown of social support networks, and increased economic dependence of women on their partners (Box 2.2) (UNICEF 1999).

Gender-based violence is endemic within Tajikistan, but it is only recently that it has been recognized as a social problem, amenable to policy intervention. In 1998 the issue of violence against women was explicitly recognized by its inclusion in the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women.

Box 2.2 The Health Consequences of Violence Against Women

Mental health	Depression Fear Anxiety Low self-esteem Sexual dysfunction Eating disorders Sleep deprivation Post-traumatic stress disorder Suicide
Physical health	Death Disability Injury Headaches Asthma Alcohol or drug abuse Destructive health behaviors (smoking, unprotected sex)
Reproductive health	Unwanted pregnancy Gynaecological problems Sexually Transmitted Diseases Miscarriage Low birthweight Pelvic Inflammatory Disease Chronic pelvic pain Maternal mortality Maternal morbidity

Source: Adapted from Table 5.3 UNICEF 1999.

There is little data available on the extent of violence in Tajikistan. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently conducted a nationwide survey, but the results are not yet publicly available. Some information can be gleaned from a study conducted by the Women of Science of Tajikistan. The study interviewed some 1,600 women in Dushanbe, and across the Republic in Kurgan-Tube, Kulyab, Kofarnihon, and Tusunzade, on their understanding and experience of violence.⁵ A broad definition of violence was adopted, including physical, psychological, and economic violence. Overall the study found that two-thirds (67 percent) of Tajik women are regularly exposed to some form of violence within the home.

In Kofarnihon, 14 percent of women reported that they experienced some degree of psychological violence (ranging from verbal abuse and demeaning remarks to prohibition of communication with friends and relatives) every day, 26 percent reported that they had experience such violence within the last year, and 16 percent said that they had been "morally harassed" during civil war.

⁵ The results of the surveys have been published in a series of booklets entitled "Community and Violence" with financial assistance from the WID Bureau.

There was a marked reluctance among women to report *physical violence*, and only 18 percent of women in Kofarnihon reported being victim to such violence. About 4 percent were beaten by their husbands, 6 percent by their father, and 6 percent by their mother-in-law. The latter figure is a stark reminder that a significant minority of violence against women is perpetrated by other women.

Sexual harassment is fairly widespread. Over half (52 percent) of women reported that they had been sexually harassed. About 26 percent had been physically harassed by men outside the home, 16 percent reported being harassed while using public transport, 8 percent in the market and other places, and only 2 percent in the work place. Most harassment and assault is likely to go unreported. When asked whether they would appeal to the militia or medical institution for aid, an overwhelming majority (70 percent) of women reported they would not. Trust in the ability of the police and the judiciary to take such cases seriously was found to be very low.

This mistrust in authority, along with the fear of revenge and bringing shame on the family, is reflected in official statistics on rape and sexual assault. In 1997 just 102 cases of rape were reported (up 15 percent on the 88 reported in 1996), of which 71 were registered and only 54 investigated and directed to court. The under-reporting of sexual assault is common throughout the world and it is estimated that the number of rapes is 5-10 times higher than the number reported.

2.3.4 Men's Attitude to the Problem of Violence

The same study referred to above also interviewed 200 men in order to shed light on men's attitudes towards violence. Two groups of questions were asked. The first group concerned general attitudes towards violence, including the forms of violence men thought existed (psychological, physical, economic, etc.) and how men understood the manifestations of these forms of violence (physical abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination, etc.). The second group of questions concerned the attitude of men towards women as individuals. In particular men were asked whether girls were considered to be temporary or permanent members of the family; whether they supported equality between the sexes; whether they allowed their wives to have hobbies; who in the family is responsible for birth control, etc. Although the sample size is too small to be statistically significant, the survey findings provide some useful insights into gender relations within Tajikistan.

The findings indicate that men generally adopt a very narrow approach to the definition of violence. Only a third of all men interviewed admitted the existence of any form of gender-based violence, and the vast majority of these cited only physical violence. Economic violence was identified by less than 1 percent and psychological violence by less than 10 percent. Opinions varied by age, marital status and educational level, with younger and more educated men being more likely to recognize violence in a multiplicity of forms.

The answer to the question "Do you think that wife beating is physical violence?" is particularly revealing of Tajik men's attitude towards violence. About 57 percent of bachelors under age 30, 64 percent of those married under 30 and 73 percent of men aged over 30 agreed with the statement. However a sizeable minority disagreed, and reported that beating one's wife is an acceptable form of behavior. The status of women within the Tajik family is still surprisingly low, despite half a century of Soviet influence. About 64 percent of bachelors under 30, 59 percent married under 30 and 20 percent of older men thought that girls and women were only temporary members of the family.

The low social status of young women means that women sometimes resort to violence against themselves, including suicide by self-immolation. On average about 30 women a month are admitted to hospital with severe burns. Suicides of young women have been increasing, mainly among recently married women. In Khujand alone 54 suicide attempts were registered between January 1996 and September 1997. No action was taken by the local authorities responsible for investigating suicides and attempted suicides.

2.3.5 Towards Prevention of Violence Against Women

Until recently there has been little awareness of the problem of gender-based violence within Tajik society. Many forms of violence are accepted as part of everyday behavior. However there is now a growing awareness among both policymakers and NGOs that violence is a problem that needs to be addressed before progress towards equality can be achieved. A number of NGOs are active in this area and the National Plan for the Advancement of Women has the prevention of all forms of violence against women as one of its six central themes (see Appendix A). In February 2000 a new coalition of 14 NGOs working in the sphere of violence against women was formed, led by the Director of the association "Open Asia" Muborak Sharif. The main goal of the coalition is to raise the issue of violence against women at all levels of government and to establish a constructive dialogue with the mass media. The coalition is also committed to developing real approaches towards the prevention of violence against women in Tajikistan and a draft national plan for prevention of violence and support of victims of violence against women has been submitted to the Government for consideration.

A first step in achieving the prevention of violence is the recognition of its existence within society. The SOROS Foundation through the Tajik Branch of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation has recently conducted a number of training courses for key decision makers including judges, lawyers, and doctors. A mark of the success of this awareness raising exercise has been the establishment of a new NGO "The League of Women Lawyers," which continues to highlight the issue of violence within the judiciary.

A local NGO "Women of Science of Tajikistan" has set up a telephone hot line for victims of violence in Dushanbe. This service has recently been extended to its branch offices in Kofarnihon and Aini. Crisis Centers offering counselling have also been established in Dushanbe, Khojand, and Khatlon. However, there is a long way to go. The reach of such

initiatives will necessarily be limited to those urban women with both access to the information about the services and the means to use them. Only one in 10 women in Tajikistan live in a household with a telephone. Thus other interventions will be necessary, especially for rural women and poorer groups in urban areas.