

## **Chapter 2      Situational Analysis of Women in Uzbekistan**

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### **Demographic Trends**

Uzbekistan has a population of 24.7 million. Sixty-two percent of the population lives in rural areas and 38 percent in urban areas. Forty-eight percent of the population is of working age (16-65 years for men and 16-60 years for women). The new system of 12 years compulsory education to be introduced in stages will raise the official working age to 18 for men and women. Seventy-one percent of the population are Uzbek, 8 percent Russian, 5 percent Tajik, 4 percent Kazak, 2.5 percent Tartars and 8.5 percent other ethnic groups.

Uzbekistan is a young population, with 45 percent of the population under the age of 16 and only 7 percent of retirement age. Such a young population has implications for the health and employment status of women of childbearing age. The high number of children under 16 and the high rate of marriage mean that most women of childbearing age are involved to some degree in parenting. Furthermore, there are more women of fertile age now than in 1991, the number having increased by 13 percent between 1991 and 1998.

Women make up more than half of the population (50.2 percent in 1999) and 50.3 percent of the female population is of childbearing age (15 and 49). Nearly 66 percent of women over the age of 16 are married and only 10 percent of women over 50 have never been married.<sup>40</sup> The average age for women to marry is around 20, with 75 percent of women marrying between the ages of 20 and 24.<sup>41</sup> About 23-30 percent of babies are born to young women between the ages of 20 and 24.<sup>42</sup>

Both the marriage and divorce rates have fallen since 1991. In 1991, there were around 13 marriages and 2 divorces per 1,000 persons. By 1998, there were around 7 marriages and 1 divorce per 1,000 persons.<sup>43</sup> The fall in the marriage rate is most likely due to economic conditions and people deferring marriage due to the high economic costs involved. However, in some very needy families, the reverse is also true. Early marriage of daughters is a survival strategy meant to optimize both the family's and the daughter's well-being in an environment of limited educational and employment opportunities. In 1996, nearly 46 percent of young women below the age of 20 were married. (The comparative figure for young men was 8 percent.)<sup>44</sup> In 1998, 45 percent of marriages were of women between the ages of 20 and 24 years and 6 percent of marriages were of women aged 17 years or below.

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<sup>40</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>41</sup> "Women and Children," Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics, Republic of Uzbekistan (Tashkent, 1996), cited in report under footnote 6.

<sup>42</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 21.

<sup>44</sup> See p. 40 of footnote 6.

Despite the fall in the divorce rate, there are some indications that the number of female-headed households may be increasing. This is related to increased out-migration of men looking for work. In addition, children born to officially unmarried women grew by 46 percent between 1994 and 1996. There is some speculation that this may reflect an increasing occurrence of polygamy.

In recent years the annual birth rate has slowed from 4.2 in 1991 to 2.8 in 1998. This trend is expected to continue, with World Bank projections of an annual birth rate of 1.3 percent by 2005.<sup>45</sup> Population growth is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (at 3.0 percent in rural areas and 2.3 in urban areas).<sup>46</sup> There are also ethnic differences. For example, in 1994 Russian women had on average two children. In part, this reflects the fact that more Russian women live in urban areas where the birth rate is lowest. It also suggests sociocultural factors such as preferred number of children and socioeconomic status. The size of families remains large, however, with 57 percent of all families having five or more children.<sup>47</sup> According to the Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics, the average family size in 1999 was 5.5 children (that is, 6.1 children in rural areas and 4.6 children in urban areas).

The Human Development Index fell slightly after independence but has since improved to a level higher than pre-independence level, standing at 0.706 in 1999.<sup>48</sup>

### **Social and Legal Context**

Women's participation in the economic and social life of society is directly shaped by the demands of family and community. While there are regional differences—particularly between rural and urban areas—as well as ethnic differences, there are some common characteristics shared by Uzbek and other Central Asian women.

In general, women are associated with the inner, family domain. Such attitudes have implications for young women's opportunities to pursue work and higher education, and also encourage the practice of early marriage for young women. Many Uzbek women believe that family concerns outweigh individual desires to pursue education or professional activity. One study conducted in Namangan and Tashkent provinces found that the majority of teenage girls believed they should put aside professional pursuits after marriage to concentrate on their roles of wife and mother.<sup>49</sup> Women's low economic and political status is directly related to their heavy domestic responsibilities. This is not helped by large family sizes and the fact that 57 percent of all families have five or more children. A desire to have large families and many sons is still prevalent particularly in rural areas. A survey carried out by the Women's Resource Centre in 1995 in Tashkent region found that 70 percent of women with four children still wish to have more, to have more sons. Women's workloads are also made more onerous by the lack or expensiveness of utilities, such as piped water and sewerage. Access to such services is generally lower in rural areas, but is by no means universal in even urban areas. For example, in 1998 only

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<sup>45</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>46</sup> See p. 38 of footnote 21.

<sup>47</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>48</sup> The Human Development Index was 0.679 in 1995, 0.682 in 1996, 0.692 in 1997 and 0.697 in 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Monica Krengel, *Sodeistvie Planirovaniyu Semiy* (Assistance to Family Planning), Project GTZ, Tashkent, 1997, cited in Expert Social Research Center, *Uzbekistan Gender Study in Transition* (October 1998, p. 13).

76 percent and 53 percent of urban households had access to piped water and sewerage, respectively. Only 40 percent and 49 percent of urban houses had a hot water system and bathing facilities, respectively.<sup>50</sup>

In general, the difficult economic situation and the resurgence of Uzbek nationalism following independence have tended to promote what may be called “traditional” gender relations within Uzbek families. The traditional Uzbek family is characterized by complex families (of more than one generation), patrilocal residence and patriarchal authority structures on the basis of seniority and gender. In such families, the father is the head of the family, followed by his wife, and then by their sons in order of seniority, and finally by the son’s wives in order of seniority. The bride of the youngest son in such a family has the lowest status. Patriarchy is maintained not only by men in these families but also by women and in particular by the hierarchical relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. For this reason many Uzbek women especially in urban areas seek to live separately from their husband’s extended family. Such possibilities however are severely curtailed by the current economic difficulties.

In this context, women’s low status in rural society is rooted in stereotypical attitudes about women’s inferiority and the need to control women. Girls are socialized to obey elders and males, and to submit to the authority of older family members. Women’s chastity is also highly valued, and wedding sheets are commonly checked as evidence of a woman’s virginity at marriage. For this reason, women’s freedom of movement can be heavily restricted particularly in rural areas. In strongly conservative families, young women are expected to live within the confines of the household or *ichkari* when not at school or in some activity that legitimately takes them outside the household.

Another party that constantly monitors women’s behavior, particularly in rural or older neighborhoods, is the *mahalla* or neighborhood community. While the *mahalla* has been more recently institutionalized as a local government administrative unit—the *mahalla* committee (*mahalla komiteti*)—the institution of *mahalla* has existed for centuries.<sup>51</sup> *Mahalla* residents, particularly the elders, monitor the behavior of younger people. The *mahalla* elders play a lead role in formulating public opinion on the honor of families in the more traditional and rural *mahalla*. Families try to influence this by making donations to the *mahalla*’s activities as well as by controlling the behavior of their members, particularly the young women in the family, to garner more honor for the family. Issues of honor are paramount in more traditional *mahalla* when arranging marriages for children.<sup>52</sup>

These processes may also be linked to Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan. Reports from women’s NGOs working in the Fergana valley attest to the growing influence of Islam in setting limits and norms with respect to “acceptable” female behavior.<sup>53</sup> As expressed at a one-day gender meeting at ADB’s Resident Mission in Tashkent, a significant number of leaders of women’s NGOs are concerned about the influence of a conservative Islam. Concern was

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<sup>50</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>51</sup> The *mahalla* committee is the basic organ of local self-governance in Uzbekistan. The local *hokimiyat* provides for two staff positions for the *mahalla* committee: an elected chairman and a secretary. Expert Social Research Center, *Consultations with the Poor* (May 1999, p. 7).

<sup>52</sup> See p. 74 of footnote 13.

<sup>53</sup> Personal report from Ms. Dildora Tadjibaeva, Business Women’s Association Republican Office. See, also, footnote 11.

expressed for the future of the women's movement in Uzbekistan if young women's access to education and career opportunities were curtailed by a growing traditionalism.

In addition to the resurgence of early marriages for young women, there is anecdotal evidence of the emergence of other marriage traditions as a result of economic difficulties. Poor families with many children are particularly likely to look for ways of offsetting the costs of many children. Reports of polygamy—while strictly prohibited by the Family Code of Uzbekistan—seem to reflect both increasing poverty and economic polarization, as well as some restoration of Islamic norms that has accompanied a more assertive Uzbek nationalism. The emergence of a new class of rich men (known colloquially as the “new Uzbek”) has increased the number of “second families” sanctioned by an Islamic ceremony (*nikokh*). There have been reports of publications endorsing polygamy as a form of social protection of women in times of difficult economic circumstances.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, women contracted to polygamous marriages or married by means of religious ceremonies (*nikokh*) and their children have no legal grounds to alimony or a share of property. According to reports, the expense of weddings, and in particular, the recently inflated bride price (*qalym*) has also led to a revival of abducting brides in Karakalpakstan. While this is sometimes orchestrated with the consent of the young women, at times it occurs against their will. Under such circumstances the young women involved are forced out of shame to marry their abductor.<sup>55</sup>

On a more positive note, a shift in the importance of women's economic activities, such as an increased reliance on the sale of produce grown on the family's private plot, can lead to changes in intra-family relations. When a woman has control over a certain type of income-creating activity within the sphere of home and plot production, her economic independence grows. This happens, for instance, when she is involved in the production and sale of garments, or in “shuttle” shopping. The situation is different if the woman is only involved in one stage of a specific aspect of home or private plot production. If she, for instance, tends the cattle, but her husband is in charge of selling it, then her separation from the trade and financial aspect gives greater authority to her husband who handled the sale. This latter version of woman's participation in home and plot production is more widespread than the former, and this is why overall women's situation has worsened with regard to economic rights and interests.

From the point of view of the family, the current economic situation places enormous strains on family relations. One consequence of this stress is an increase in domestic violence. It is however very difficult to measure this increase. Trying to gauge to what extent physical and psychological abuse of women is increasing or just becoming more spoken about is in this case difficult. However, some women's NGOs have reported a link between economic hardship and increasing violence.

According to the records of one crisis center in Samarkand, the greatest number of calls by women to the center's telephone advice service deal with family conflict. Issues of husbands working long hours and conflicts over financial issues are among the more common calls. In addition, increasing family conflict was seen to result from the number of women assuming the nontraditional role of main or even sole provider of the family. The work of anthropologist Kristina Vestbo suggests that when men are no longer able to provide sufficiently for their

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<sup>54</sup> See p. 24 of footnote 6.

<sup>55</sup> See p. 9 of footnote 11.

families due to a sudden and significant decrease in salary or to unemployment, this may lead to male drinking, domestic violence and conflicts over household finances.<sup>56</sup> In the past few years, shelters for women and children who are victims of family violence have been established. Furthermore, the number of women suffering burns and death through burns has also increased.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, many women's NGOs include training on women's legal literacy as part of their educational programs. The hope here is that women who know their rights will be less tolerant of such abuse, and perhaps even break the family silence that usually surrounds this topic and report such cases to the local authorities.

Of course, the success of such reasoning depends on the willingness of state authorities to act in support of women's health and safety. While physical violence against women is a criminal offense as in many other countries, in Uzbekistan violence against women in the home is often sanctioned by society and families or at least seen as a private matter.<sup>58</sup> To this extent, state patriarchy and not merely patriarchy in the family needs to be addressed through training programs directed at civil servants as well as general public awareness and educational campaigns.

### **Economic Status of Female Labor**

Women's economic status has been affected by the shrinking economy and financial squeeze faced by state and nonstate enterprises experienced during the post-Soviet period. Enterprises are no longer subsidized or integrated within the all-Soviet economy. The cut in state subsidies has placed great difficulty on enterprises in terms of maintaining output and covering production costs. In response, enterprises have either closed or carry a large number of "hidden unemployed" (i.e., employed workers on unpaid leave). Another common tactic has been the withholding of wages, sometimes for up to a year. Wage arrears encourage women to go on unpaid leave, rather than work for nothing. Where possible, working women look for other types of employment. However, here women find themselves up against employers' preference particularly in the private sector—for male workers who are more mobile and can dispose of their time more freely than women. The current labor legislation grants working women a number of benefits that make employers reluctant to employ them except for certain "female" type jobs. It is not surprising then that although women comprise 42 percent of the labor force, they account for 63 percent of the registered unemployed.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of the above changes, there are two worrisome trends regarding women's economic and employment status in Uzbekistan. Firstly, the transition to a market economy has rendered women less competitive in the employment market, particularly in the private sector. Secondly, there is mounting concern that poverty is undergoing a process of feminization.

There has been little change in the number and percentage of men and women who are considered part of the economically active population in recent years. However, the labor force

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<sup>56</sup> Kristina Vestbo, "At Home We Are Uzbek," Master's Thesis, University of Oslo, 1998, cited by Expert Social Research Center, *Consultations with the Poor* (1999, p. 21).

<sup>57</sup> See pp. 26-28 of footnote 13.

<sup>58</sup> "A widespread practice among Uzbeks, wherein parents advise their sons before their impending wedding that in order to 'keep the peace' in the household, they should beat their newly-wed wives when they get out of hand, suggests that domestic violence is not only tolerated within Uzbek society, but is also sanctioned." (p. 28 of footnote 13)

<sup>59</sup> See p. 51 of footnote 13.

participation rate has dropped since independence from 80 percent in 1993 to 73 percent in 1997. In addition, the share of women in the labor force declined during the mid-1990s but has improved slightly since then (see Table 6). Labor force participation is lowest in rural and other disadvantaged areas, indicating a direct link between low economic growth and rising unemployment.<sup>60</sup> Overall, the number of employed persons—men and women—testifies to the high level of economic activity of the population. In 1998, 73.5 percent of the working age population were engaged in economic activity. 72 percent of working-age women and 75.1 percent of working-age men. The majority of employment is still found in the rural areas with 39 percent of employment in agriculture in 1998 (with men accounting for 60.3 percent and women for 39.7 of the total agriculture and forestry workforce).<sup>61</sup>

**Table 6: Share of Women in Labor Force**

(%)

	1989	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Share of women	46.5	46.5	43.3	43.4	42.7	43.7	44.0	44.1

Source: UNDP, *Human Development Report* (Uzbekistan 1999); Narodnoye Khozaystvo SSSR (National Economy of the USSR), Moscow 1989.

More than half of female workers are concentrated in the “feminized,” so-called non-productive sectors of education, health care, insurance and culture. Women account for 75 percent of workers in health care, 44 percent in insurance, 61.5 percent in education and 53 percent in culture and the arts.<sup>62</sup> Men on the other hand are concentrated in “construction” (90 percent), “transport and communications” (84 percent) and “authorities” (76 percent). These are also industries most at risk from unhealthy and unsafe work environments.<sup>63</sup> Table 7 provides a breakdown of the distribution of the female labor force by sectors of the economy.

There are also a few trends in the sectoral distribution of women that need to be investigated to ensure that women are not being relegated to less competitive sectors. For example, whereas the share of women involved in construction and transport has remained stable between 1993 and 1998, women’s share in “industry,” “communications,” “trade and catering, material and technical supply and sales, procurements” has declined. In addition, economic growth areas are in the services sector and informal sector. Informal sector enterprises have less protection and assistance than the formal sector, and their workers are similarly unprotected and insecure.

The concentration of women in education and public health has implications for women’s level of salary and future employment prospects. On the whole, such jobs are found in the public sector, which has been most vulnerable to erosion of real wages (see Table 7).

<sup>60</sup> See p. 5 of footnote 11.

<sup>61</sup> See p. 74 of footnote 21.

<sup>62</sup> See footnote 18.

<sup>63</sup> See p. 75 of footnote 21.

**Table 7: Distribution of Female Labor Force by Sector, 1998**

Sector	%
Education	34
Public Health	19
Industry	14
Agriculture	11
Trade, catering, supply, sales, procurements	6
Transport and communication	3
Construction	3
Culture and arts	2
Others	8
Total	100

Source: Women of Uzbekistan 1999: Statistical Collection (1999, p. 80).

During the Soviet period, wages in the education and health sectors were maintained close to the national average wage. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the relative level of wages in these sectors began to fall. In 1997 the average national monthly wage was 3,681 sum. However, in the sectors with considerable female employment the average monthly wage was lower than the average national level (see Table 8). For example, in the health care and social security branch, the average monthly wage was 61 percent of the national average (in some cases even 58.4 percent). In education the average wage was 67 percent of the national average and 43.1 percent in preschool educational facilities. Monthly average wages in agriculture, where female employment is also high, was 52 percent of the national average and 41 percent for those involved in crop growing. Overall, at the present, women are paid on average 30 percent less than men.<sup>64</sup>

To an extent this wage differential is a consequence of skill differentiation within sectors. For example, in mechanical engineering, metal-working and instrument-making industries, men are mainly engaged in the more highly-skilled labor related to the operation of machines and mechanisms (machine operators, adjusters, repairmen, etc.). Women employed in these industries are mainly qualified operators on assembly lines or nonqualified staff involved in cleaning, labeling, packaging, etc. The same situation applies in agriculture where men are employed as highly qualified machine operators, while women remain unqualified, seasonal laborers. However, this is not the full story. In particular, many highly skilled and professional women have to struggle on below average wages because they work in the public sector (see the discussion below on the “new poor”).

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<sup>64</sup> See footnote 18.

**Table 8. Wages within Various Branches of the Economy \***

	1991	1992	1993		1994		1995		1996		1997		1998	
	Ruble	Ruble	Sum-coupon	US\$	Sum	US\$	Sum	US\$	Sum	US\$	Sum	US\$	Sum	US\$
Average wage	346	2,541	30,220	27.5	280	16.8	1,059	38.7	2,137	51.6	3,697	55.7	5,432	57.34

**Wages in the branches of employment with a predominance of women**

Public health & social security	305	1,827	10,578	9.6	147	8.8	684	25.0	1,430	34.5	2,244	33.8	3,283	34.66
Education	321	2,146	7,278	6.6	172	10.3	683	24.9	1,593	38.5	2,458	37.0	3,711	39.17

- Sources: (1) Annual reports, Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics. Table 2C, "Statistics and wage budgets for blue and white collar workers."  
 (2) Expert Social Research Center, weekly monitoring of currency rates.  
 (3) Calculations for 1997-1998 were based on Wages and Foreign Exchange Market, *Country Economic Review* No. 4, August 1999.

\* Data concerning wages is not calculated by gender. All calculations are performed in US dollars according to the official average annual rate of the sum with regard to the US dollar. Data concerning hard currency rates are absent before 1993. Recalculation of wages at black market exchange rates will decrease in 1.5-1.8 ones.

\*\* Data before 1992 is calculated in USSR rubles, for 1993 in sum-coupons, and from 1994 onwards in sum.

A number of factors need to be considered in relation to women's economic status in Uzbekistan, including access to employment, nondiscriminatory labor practices and the availability of child-care facilities. In general, there has been a weakening of the measures established during the Soviet era designed to provide women with greater access to these factors. Although poverty was high for many rural workers in the Soviet era, there were a number of features such as heavily subsidized child-care centers, and health and education services, which kept the cost of living low. This situation has changed over the past decade, with a decline in the level of government subsidized services (due to subsidies from the state budget and richer trade unions).

The well-developed system of preschool establishments during the Soviet era represented a considerable support to women who wanted to work or study. Inexpensive and accessible kindergartens and nurseries were a decisive factor enabling women to find time for work and study. In the transition period, subsidies from the state budget for preschool institutions have been cut back, resulting in a decline in this sector. In addition, few private sector businesses subsidized child-care and other services extended to workers in state-owned enterprises during the Soviet era. Consequently, the number of children attending nurseries dropped from 1,166,300 in 1993 to 758,100 in 1996 (or roughly by a quarter in three years). Over the same period the number of nurseries fell from 9,273 to 8,139.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> "Women and Children," Ministry of Macroeconomics and Statistics, 1996, cited in footnote 6.

### **Women as less competitive**

Soviet style “protective” policies toward women—including generous maternity leave, subsidized nurseries and other provisions directed at female employees—allowed more women to work within the context of a Soviet-style command economy. However, such policies, still actively pursued by today’s trade unions in Uzbekistan, tend to have the opposite effect in a market economy as they increase the cost of female labor. While maternity leave in principle protects women, in practice it discourages the hiring of women because many of the costs have to be carried by the employer.

There are several justifications given to explain this stance. Firstly, employers give the “objective” reason that women are more expensive to the employer given the range of “privileges” such as maternity leave, shortened office day, paid vacation to attend to sick children, etc., guaranteed under the Labor Code. This calculation appears especially strong in the private sector. Public sector trade unions are on the whole still committed to a Soviet-style “protection” of female workers’ labor rights and “privileges.” Regardless of employers’ preferences, female workers will themselves withdraw from work if they cannot find adequate child care arrangements. Secondly, according to current legislation and prohibitions in the Labor Code, women are excluded from 460 categories of work on the basis of health and safety.

In addition, in the context of a tight job market and fierce competition for jobs, there has been a re-emergence of ideologies that defend men’s right to work over women’s right, on the basis of gender ideologies that see men as the main provider in the family. This situation is made worse by demographic trends and the excess of labor supply brought on by the young population structure. The working age rural population alone grows by an estimated 200,000 people each year.<sup>66</sup> Given the growing competition in the labor markets, women—particularly those pregnant or with small children—are the most vulnerable section of the working population.

Job redundancies also appear more likely in the future. One of the foreseeable consequences of further transition to a market economy will be the downsizing of enterprises across Uzbekistan. As the current trends suggest, women will be hardest hit by these redundancies. The Government has been slow in carrying out such reforms because of a concern over job loss. However, the consequence of this decision has been a decline in labor productivity and a fall in the living standards of the population.<sup>67</sup>

### **Feminization of poverty**

Employment is a critical factor in women’s economic status. Important measures here are women’s greater share of the total number of registered unemployed persons and women’s higher share of voluntary unemployed persons. In 1999, women accounted for a higher proportion of officially unemployed persons, that is, 63 percent. Seventy percent of unemployed women are unskilled and have restricted mobility because of children. This is also reflected in the age of the

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<sup>66</sup> See p. 50 of footnote 13.

<sup>67</sup> See p. 51 of footnote 13.

majority of unemployed women, that is, between the ages of 20 and 30, when most women have a young family.<sup>68</sup>

Official unemployment rates do not bear much relation to actual unemployment and underemployment. While the official rate unemployment for 1999 was 0.5 percent, estimates put the real level of unemployment at 5-15 percent and underemployment at 10-25 percent.<sup>69</sup> Women also make up the majority of hidden unemployment. Estimates of hidden unemployment or underemployment in agriculture are as high as 33 percent of all workers. As a rule, women on maternity leave account for the largest proportion of hidden unemployed. The Government is not unaware of the problem, however. The reluctance to downsize or rationalize employment levels at government enterprises can be seen as motivated by a sense of social protection and recognition of the problems of unemployment. Furthermore, to relieve pressure from the labor market the Government has extended maternity leave from two to three years and is introducing 12 years compulsory education. While the problem of unemployment needs to be tackled, extending maternity leave may further discourage the hiring of women and disadvantage women as a share of total unemployed vis-à-vis men.

Furthermore, in Uzbekistan, employment brings other benefits such as a social insurance scheme only available to employed people. This scheme covers eventualities such as sickness, old age, disability and loss of provider. Currently, there already exists a disparity in the average pension given to men and women because women in general have shorter working lives due to time taken off for childbirth and earlier retirement ages. This is compounded by the fact that women on average earn only 80 percent of the average male wage.<sup>70</sup> These factors are reflected in an average lower base pension for women (calculated as 55 percent of the average monthly wage in relation to length of working life). Women's falling labor force participation will have consequences down the track on the amount of benefits paid to women.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that housewives are not entitled to a decent pension also has a negative impact on women's position. Women who have never been officially employed at any enterprise or organization (or have only a very short work record) are entitled to only a very small old age pension when they reach retirement age. In this respect, many rural and urban women who have not been employed outside the home are in a similar position. Although pension levels for those who have been employed in the official economy are not high, they still represent one of the main reasons for people to seek employment: pensions are still popularly perceived as a source of stable income, however minimum, in old age.

An excess of labor is particularly pronounced in rural areas where the labor market is characterized by seasonal unemployment and underemployment. Seasonal unemployment was

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<sup>68</sup> See p. 13 of footnote 21.

<sup>69</sup> See. p. 2 of footnote 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Human Development Report* (1999), cited in p. 5 of footnote 4.

<sup>71</sup> Another issue that needs to be considered in the context of structural adjustment and market-economy reforms is the disadvantage for female workers if some protective measures for women included in this scheme were removed. Currently, there are limited measures in place to take into account women's withdrawal from the labor market for family reasons. For example, increments are added to women's basic pension on the basis of time spent caring for children under 3 years of age or to cover time out of the workforce due to husband's posting. A move towards an accumulative pension fund that removed such conditions would only sharpen existing disparities.

estimated at around 30 percent in 1995.<sup>72</sup> An additional problem relates to the wage arrears for agricultural workers on cooperative farms (*shirkats*).<sup>73</sup> Participants in one study said that in the Soviet era the middle class encompassed the majority of the population, and covered the intelligentsia, *kolkhoz* or collective farmers and industrial workers. Nowadays, participants argued that while members of the intelligentsia remain middle class, collective farmers find themselves in the category of the poor. For this reason, the term *kolkhoz* worker has come to signify the poorest category of the population.<sup>74</sup> In this study, public servants and pensioners in rural areas who receive regular salaries are considered lucky by their rural neighbors. A great deal of focus and high hopes have been pinned on the creation of private farms (*dehqan*), family plots and other private income-generating activities in rural areas. Private farms have not provided the rural income and employment opportunities initially thought due to unresolved issues relating to privatization and land distribution.

Women, however, have been quick to take advantage of other opportunities such as food processing and sale of agricultural products from their family plots. Seasonal agricultural work is then combined with other economic activities such as dairy food production, sale of vegetables and fruit, breeding and sale of poultry, and handicraft production. Private plots in rural areas are for this reason increasingly important both as a source of income and to meet family consumption needs, and have become a major occupation for women. In 1998, sales of farm products accounted for 27.2 percent of aggregate family income in rural areas and private land plots provided 19.3 percent of family food consumption.<sup>75</sup> This is an increase on the 1990 estimate that the share of family income derived from such activities represented up to 21 percent of total household income.<sup>76</sup>

This increase is due to three factors. Firstly, the amount of land officially available for use as private plots has more than doubled since 1990. Secondly, the liberalization of the regulations regarding small-scale trade means that agricultural workers are free to sell their products. Thirdly, the systematic failure of both government and collective rural enterprises to pay wages on a regular basis together with the lack of employment opportunities in the formal sector have made private plots not only a source of income for the family, but also a mechanism for absorbing surplus female labor.

While women's activities are crucial here they—like housekeeping tasks—are unremunerated and unrecognized as work. This can affect the intra-family distribution of money and resources, and increases the risk of economic inequality between men and women. Women moreover often carry out a whole series of tasks at home, such as making clothes, baking bread,

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<sup>72</sup> See p. 19 of footnote 6.

<sup>73</sup> During the Soviet era, the dominant form of agricultural management were *kolkhozes* (collective farms) and *sovkhoses* (state-owned farms). Since that time, a number of *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses* have been transformed into *shirkats* (cooperative farms). In addition, a number of other forms of farm management have emerged including independent peasant or *dehqan* farms. Despite the growing diversity of agricultural producers, *kolkhozes* are still the dominant forms, accounting for 55 percent of all irrigated land in 1998. See Alisher Ilkhamov (1998) for a discussion of farm restructuring in Uzbekistan.

<sup>74</sup> See p. 13 of footnote 11.

<sup>75</sup> See. p. 19 of footnote 6.

<sup>76</sup> Deniz Candiyoti. "Women and Social Policy" in *Social Policy and Economic Transformation in Uzbekistan*. Edited by Keith Griffin. Tashkent, UNDP (1990, p. 133); cited in footnote 13.

herding cattle, etc., i.e., tasks that have a commodity or value equivalent, and represent concrete money savings on the purchase of clothes, bread and other food products. This also has implications for women's long-term security and access to social insurance available to employed persons only. The other concern of note is the expanding scope of unremunerated work performed by women and children.

The search for work or better-paid work by men is also leading to more female-headed households. Related to this, more men are migrating from rural to urban areas in search of work. Such migration is often illegal in that these men are not registered to live in the urban areas and there are reports of considerable harassment by police. Women also look for work in urban areas; however, these women tend to be drawn from surrounding areas, enabling them to commute on a day-to-day basis. Uzbekistan has recently signed a labor agreement with the Republic of Korea and other countries. Already Uzbekistan men, predominantly from rural areas, are working in the Republic of Korea, thus signaling Uzbekistan's increasing participation in international labor flows. Currently, men make up the majority of migrant workers. This leaves increasing numbers of women forced to cope as heads of households.

Any discussion of the feminization of poverty in Uzbekistan must take into account the fact that in Uzbekistan's increasingly stratified society new categories of poor (and rich) are emerging. One of the newer categories of poor covers professionals and members of the intelligentsia, who were formerly middle class by virtue of education and professional work history. The real decline in the value of wages paid to professional and skilled women, particularly in the public sector where women are over-represented, has led to the growth of what could be termed the "new poor". There are numerous stories of highly trained professionals seeking badly paid and nonprestigious work to improve their families' material well-being. Stories of professional women seeking employment as domestic workers are common. Similar stories are told of professional men, who now seek work as drivers or day laborers for the same reason. For women, however, such work often carries additional personal safety risks and is not accompanied by any reduction in their duties at home.

Some of these women have retrained to improve their level of income, often becoming very entrepreneurial and successful. Nevertheless retraining is not always the best solution. In particular, there are implications not only on gender relations but also on the skills base of Uzbekistan's labor force if the skills of professional women are inefficiently used either by women withdrawing from the workforce or seeking unskilled but better paid work.

## **Health and Nutrition**

Transition to a market economy and the economic hardships suffered in Uzbekistan over the last 10 years have had a number of negative consequences on women's health and well-being. This is despite the fact that there are some positive developments in this area. For example, the crude death level continues to fall and life expectancy is fairly stable at around 68 years for men and 73 years for women (although higher in urban areas than in rural areas). Infant and maternal mortality and morbidity rates have also fallen. Between 1993 and 1998, the infant mortality rate fell from 70.8 to 43.4 per thousand, with boys accounting for a higher proportion of deaths. There has also been a decrease in the uneven distribution of infant mortality rates. For example, in 1993, the infant mortality rate in Karakalpakstan was 44.8 per thousand compared with the Republic of Uzbekistan average of 32 per thousand. By 1998 the respective figures were 24.9 and 21.9.

Indicators of maternal mortality also decreased over the same period with the mortality rate falling from 24.1 per thousand in 1993 to 9.6 in 1998.<sup>77</sup>

Despite these positive developments, there remain serious health problems related to women's poor nutrition, unhealthy environment and frequent births. Poverty and the decline in health services accompanying the transition to a market economy exacerbate all of these problems. The health system in Uzbekistan is currently under heavy financial strain. While the Government has tried to retain the share of government expenditure on health since independence, health's share of government expenditure has declined. Health spending as a share of national income fell by about one fifth between 1992 and 1996, that is, from 4.6 percent of GDP to 3.7 percent. The effect of this decrease together with inflation means that the level of per capita real health expenditure has fallen to 55 percent of the 1990 level. Increasingly, people have to pay for health services with mothers often in a position of having to choose whether to prioritize their own health or other needs when making decisions about family expenditure. For example, payment is now required for dentistry, dental prosthetics, and preventive medicine; and clinic treatments and diagnostics have become fully or partially use pay. Furthermore, the real cost of health care has risen due to the increase in informal fees charged by medical practitioners, nurses and for medication, all of which are ostensibly free. According to one study in Ak-Altyn region, each household that sought medical assistance in 1997 spent 12,000 sum—or one fifth of their annual income on health costs.<sup>78</sup>

For these reasons, there has been an increase in what could be called diseases of the poor. For example, in some disease categories affecting women, there has been little difference over the period 1995-1998. The 1998 figures for the diagnosis of breast, uterine and ovarian cancer have changed little from those of 1995. However, this is not the case with social diseases such as active tuberculosis and syphilis.<sup>79</sup> Infectious disease is the primary cause of infant mortality, with 80 percent of infants dying from acute respiratory infections.<sup>80</sup> Infectious morbidity remains one of the major epidemiological concerns of Uzbekistan. Infectious diseases accounted for 4.7 percent of the death rate in 1995, with viral hepatitis affecting 8-12 percent of the population. Recently, there has been a growth in such diseases as hepatitis and diphtheria.

In addition, one of the major health problems facing women in Uzbekistan is anemia, which nearly 60 percent of women suffer to some extent.<sup>81</sup> In some areas, such as Karakalpakstan, 98 percent of women suffered from anemia in 1998.<sup>82</sup> Anemia is a condition closely linked to frequent births, inadequate nutrition and poor water quality. Although anemia was present during the Soviet era, the incidence of anemia has become worse. Poverty is of course a factor here, particularly in rural areas where ironically there are greater problems of poor diet and restricted caloric intake. For example, consumption of meat is 2.5 times higher in

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<sup>77</sup> See pp. 34-35 of footnote 21.

<sup>78</sup> An ADB project, cited in footnote 13.

<sup>79</sup> See p. 46 of footnote 21.

<sup>80</sup> Tharald Hetland and Jane Haycock, "Investment for Health," in *The Social Policy and Economic Transformation in Uzbekistan*, edited by Keith Griffin, Tashkent, UNDP, 1995; cited in p. 3 of footnote 13.

<sup>81</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>82</sup> Materials from an international seminar on "Understanding Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Demographic Behaviour and Implications for Formulation and Execution of Population Policies and Programs," Tashkent, October 1999.

Tashkent city than in rural Surkhandarya. The consumption of dairy products is similarly higher in urban areas, and in this case 1.6 times higher in Tashkent city than in Surkhandarya.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the avoidance of costly medical services has led to greater neglect of illness by women, particularly in the poorer classes.<sup>84</sup>

Frequency of childbirth is another factor in the incidence of anemia. On average, women in Uzbekistan have their first child at 21 years of age and continue to have a child—on average—every 2.5 years. Despite some reduction in family size, the average family size was 5.5 children in 1999 (that is, 6.1 children in rural areas and 4.6 children in urban areas). Women also prefer to breast feed, with the average length of breastfeeding at 17 months. Such factors alone would not necessarily negatively effect women’s health. However, in a situation of poverty, inadequate health resources, poor nutrition and water quality, even a low birth rate will have implications on women’s health.

In this context, women’s sexual and reproductive health is also at risk. Of concern here is the use of abortion as a form of contraception. While women’s use of contraception has increased, there is much room to expand this use. Use of contraception per 100 women of fertile age was 38.2 in 1995 and 59.5 in 1998, with IUDs being the most widely used form of contraception. Unfortunately, too, there is little use of condoms. Women associate these with adultery and hence are vulnerable to the transmission of STDs and HIV/AIDS. The area of sexual and reproductive health is also shrouded in ignorance and shame. Most adults think that sex education should be conducted in the home, but then feel acute embarrassment discussing such issues with their children. This, and the lack of formal sex education at school or public health clinics, lead to a lack of knowledge of such issues.

Unhealthy environments and unsafe water supplies have also contributed to women’s poor health (particularly anemia), reproductive complications, and infant and child mortality. Infectious diseases cause major epidemics in Uzbekistan with the most common—intestinal diseases and viral hepatitis—caused by the poor condition of water supply, lack of hot water and sewerage facilities. About 40 percent of the rural population is equipped with centralized water supply amenities, and only 2 percent have access to centralized sewerage facilities. Thus over half of the population draw water from open and unsanitary water reservoirs, which can be affected by chemical pollutants and cholera agents.

Furthermore, parts of Uzbekistan face serious environmental pollution, which most often affect women and children first. Such pollution poses special risks for pregnant women. For example, areas such as the Aral Sea region, Fergana valley, Bukhara province and Tashkent province’s industrial zone have unsafe levels of air and water pollution. Drinking water and food contain unsafe levels of chemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.<sup>85</sup> The Nukus-based NGO, Perzant (meaning “infant” in Karakalpak) reports that the mortality rate of women and children in the Karakalpakstan region is one of the highest in the CARs.<sup>86</sup> A 1995 analysis of drinking water in Karakalpakstan found high salinity and chemical levels (the residues of mineral fertilizers, pesticides, phenols and oil products). Furthermore, toxic elements were found in

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<sup>83</sup> See footnote 16.

<sup>84</sup> See p. 31 of footnote 13. The following paragraphs draw heavily from pp. 29-42 of footnote 13.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 3 of footnote 13.

<sup>86</sup> See p. 198 of footnote 32.

potable water throughout Karakalpakstan and in 64 percent of food samples taken from the region. This helps to explain the increased cancer rates in the region (which increased from 163 to 183 cases per thousand between 1985 and 1992).<sup>87</sup>

There is another issue that needs to be considered here, and that is the amount of time women can spend in leisure and free time. Estimates of the time spent on work in the home by men and women from a survey of households in the Ak-Altyn region of Syrdarya conducted in Spring 1998 are given in Table 9.<sup>88</sup> It is worth pointing out that the total time expenditure indicated may be much less in reality, as some of the tasks are carried out simultaneously (such as child care and cooking). Yet the data indicate that the total time spent by women on work at home exceeds any time spent in productive activities (estimated at eight hours), and hardly gives them time for rest and personal hygiene.

**Table 9: Breakdown of Average Time Costs on Housekeeping by Women and Men in Ak-Altyn Region of Syrdarya Oblast**

Type of Activity	Hours per Day	
	Men	Women
Repair and making of household equipment	1.0	
Care of livestock	3.5	
Storage of fodder for livestock	1.0	
Storage of fuel	1.0	
Maintenance and repair of house and additional premises	2.0	
Purchase of food and goods	1.5	
Care of children		6.0
Storage of domestic stock		3.0
Potable water delivery		1.0
Cooking and washing up		3.0
Cleaning in the house and yard		2.0
Washing and ironing clothes		1.5
Sewing and repair of clothes		1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>17.5</b>

\* Seasonal arrangement.

\*\* Water is taken from the outside water pump, for which people usually queue.

Unfortunately there is a lack of data in this area, particularly in relation to the health, psychological and physical affects of women's increased workloads. It would also be useful to see how increased workloads reduce women's potential to pursue education. This may in fact be a significant issue for daughters if they are being asked to assume more responsibility for housework. While we have some statistics on how women spend their free time when they have it, we need more time research into how women spend their time and how much of this (if any) is spent on free time.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Oral Ataniyazova, "Economic Factors and Reproductive Function in the Extreme Situation of Southern Aral," *Compendium of Research Program Reports of the International Maternity and Childhood Health Care Foundation*, Moscow, 1995, pp. 225-231. Cited in p. 41 of footnote 13.

<sup>88</sup> A 1998 ADB project that surveyed 600 households using random sampling methods.

<sup>89</sup> See pp. 82 and 84 of footnote 21.

## **Education and Training**

Due to a system of compulsory education, there is no significant difference between girls and boy's educational attendance and attainment at primary and secondary education levels. Furthermore, the incidence of poverty does not appear to affect attendance at these levels either. There is near universal literacy in Uzbekistan and no major differences between the sexes. Where poverty and gender do result in unequal opportunity for men and women is in higher education. Women's participation rate is falling here, particularly at the more prestigious institutions. For example, women's enrollment at the Tashkent Institute of Finance declined from 65 percent in 1991 to 25 percent in 1997. In 1993, 18 percent fewer girls graduated from vocational schools than did boys, and 22 percent fewer from undergraduate and graduate programs in institutes of higher learning.<sup>90</sup>

Such a decline is directly related to the costs of economic transition. As with health, the transition to a market economy has been accompanied by cuts to education. While there have been some positive educational reforms during this period such as the universal 12-year education system, the general decrease in government funding and the gradual increase in the number of students who must pay private fees for education have made higher education unaffordable to many. This has resulted in an overall decline in the number of students enrolled in institutes of higher learning: in 1991, there were 337,400 registered students, but by 1998, there were only 158,206. In a context where education is increasingly expensive (including usually some sort of bribe to even secure a placement at university), and where the association between education and employment is weakening (due to the poor salaries and conditions offered in many professions), there seems to be a shift away from investing in young women's higher education.

Apart from the increasing educational costs, other factors restricting young women's access to higher education include the resurgence of traditional attitudes about women and a lower age limit for marriage within the Family Code (where there is potential conflict between 12-year compulsory education and a lowered age of marriage at 17, and in some cases, 16).

Another concern in the area of education is the high degree of specialization of female students in higher education and specialized state education. Women continue to account for 90 percent of students in public health despite the deteriorating employment and salary conditions. Furthermore, the unavailability of institutes of higher learning in rural areas has implications for young women. For example, the only institution of higher learning in Kokand is the Pedagogical Institute. This means that if young women are to continue their education closer to home, they can only study to become teachers. This is of even greater concern given the rather bleak employment situation of teachers currently in Uzbekistan.

There is also evidence that women's enrollment in some subjects that are better matched with existing employment demand is declining as increasing numbers of men pursue these subjects. One report suggests that women's enrollment in economics, management and planning was down to 35 percent in 1999, although these subjects were considered women's subjects at the beginning of this decade. Despite the fact that accounting and economics were earlier considered

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<sup>90</sup> See p. 62 of footnote 13.

female subjects, in 1997 only 40 percent of the economics students at Tashkent University were women.<sup>91</sup>

Training and education are critical if women are to maintain and regain lost employment status. However, women need to be encouraged out of their “traditional” subject areas in order to remain competitive in the workforce. Furthermore, greater emphasis should be placed on women’s continuing education. As a first step, further research is required in the following areas to determine what are the critical factors behind the decision to support/prevent daughters from higher education. In addition, as part of the current implementation of a new national education program, efforts must be directed at

- (i) Combating stereotyped ways of thinking about women’s and men’s education, professions and specialization;
- (ii) Developing education programs that are strongly linked with existing demand of the labor market, and then encouraging women into these new professional areas; and
- (iii) Developing a system of flexible, affordable vocational education programs for rural and poor women incorporating business, technical, and other functional training.

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<sup>91</sup> See p. 62 of footnote 13.