

Gender and Work in Transition – the Emerging Russian Labour Market.

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Introduction

This paper takes as given that employment - or the lack of it - is one of the main determinants as well as an outcome of the prevailing gender order and of gendered identities. It starts from the conviction that although quantitative studies in social sciences are always subject to imprecision of measurement and their truths are partial, they are, nevertheless, a necessary complement and corrective to qualitative studies which may be based on few and selective observation. They are also more transparent as to how conclusions are drawn.

The Russian labour market is a topic where experts differ not only in predictions – which time and time again have turned out to be wrong – but also in fundamental perception of reality. (See Clarke, 1998.) In part this is due to the complexity and contradictions that exist, in part to preconceived notions of “how markets work”, or of “women as victims”, that are not confronted with empirical evidence.

General economic theories are always vulnerable to concrete and particular institutional, social and historical settings. They be particularly so in the context of the former Soviet Union where the imprint of the past weighs heavily on the present. It is not possible to understand the Russian labour market without a good understanding of employment and labour relations in the USSR and this requires an understanding of the Soviet gender order.

The aim of the paper is to present some of the quantitative evidence of how gender differences in work and pay in Russia have developed over the last 12 years and introduce some problems of definitions and of the methods of collecting and organising data. It will not explicitly discuss the meaning of work and of the social relations around the work place for Russian women, of their views of themselves as workers. Instead it will cover some of the empirical groundwork, which should be a necessary precondition of an informed discussion. Even this is a tall task in the space available. The first two sections outline those traits of the Soviet economic and gender systems most relevant for the topic of the paper. The remaining five follow the structure of Katz (2001), chapter 7, but are considerably abridged. Some updating of figures and literature has been made, but readers wanting more complete arguments, details or references are referred to the original.

Employment in the Soviet Union

Certain characteristics of the Soviet system are essential for understanding the problems of employment in transition.¹ The Soviet economic system was characterised by endemic and chronic shortages of goods, consumer goods as well as inputs to production. First, it was always difficult for Soviet enterprises and institutions to recruit the workers they needed. In particular, there was a great shortage of manual workers for unskilled jobs. The reasons are complex and would require a paper of their own. They were partly a result of inefficiencies in production -

¹ For more extensive treatments, see Katz (2001), Marnie (1992), Oxenstierna (1990) and Arnot (1988).

the sluggishness of technical renovation, labour hoarding due to the unpredictability of planners' demands as well as of supplies necessary to fulfil them, a tug-of-war between management and workers about intensity and pace of work. Partly, they were the result of a mismatch between demand and supply of labour with different forms of training and education. Whatever the reason², unemployment in the European USSR was a low level of frictional unemployment. At the same time, overstaffing and low productivity of work acted as a heavy clamp on economic growth and living standards.

The tendency towards labour hoarding was encouraged by the fact that firms were relatively insensitive to labour costs. The most important restrictions on hirings were imposed by central planners, not by the profitability of the enterprise.

Second, the Soviet system was what could be called "a priority driven system"³ – scarce resources were directed towards certain kinds of economic activity and the others "had to make do with what was left". Priorities were not subject to popular or democratic control.

Third, both in relation to the authorities, in employment and promotion and in everyday life informal networks and "contacts" were paramount. Enterprises and institutions could provide employees with a number of amenities, goods and social services, which were either more expensive, of poorer quality or simply not available, otherwise.

Fourth, surplus demand for labour provided most categories of workers with good opportunities to choose their jobs and to "vote with their feet" if they found conditions of work worse than in alternative employment.⁴ The authorities were unable to restrict labour mobility to the levels they wanted.

Gender, work and wages in the USSR

Fifth, but not least, the Soviet economy depended on a highly unequal gender order to such an extent that this requires a section of its own.

Formally, Soviet women enjoyed equal rights with men, as concerns wages and employment. Nevertheless, after decades of such "equal rights", women in the USSR were believed to earn approximately one third less than men. We can, however, only "believe" since official statistics on the gender wage gap were published only once in the history of the USSR, in 1989, and then only in the form of tables of distribution in wage brackets of men and women (Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, 1989).

Labour force participation among Soviet women was high, by international standards. But standard clichés like "90 % of women of working age are working or studying" obscured the facts that, first, "working age" was five years shorter for women, and, second, women on average worked fewer hours and, third, "employed" is not the same as "at work" - women on maternity leave are included among the employed. In 1982 the right to maternity leave had been extended from one year to 18 months. 18

² See the references cited in footnote 1, as well as Granick (1987) and Hanson (1986), for different views.

³ See Oxenstierna (1990.)

⁴ Katz (2001), Marnie (1992)

weeks of the leave were fully paid. Caregivers also had the right to leave to care for a sick child. These rights, valuable as they were, however, also led to women workers being regarded by employers as less reliable and less committed to their careers than men. The same can be said for "protective legislation" which limited the tasks and work conditions that women could be assigned.

Women in the USSR spent more time in paid work than women in Western countries, but without a corresponding reduction of housework. Among those employed in industry, women spent nearly twenty-nine hours per week on housework and men eleven hours (Narodnoe Khoziaistvo, 1989). This drain on time and energy could not but affect careers. The officially sanctioned gender roles were contradictory: Women should both work outside the home and bear the main responsibility for housework and child-care. Women should earn, but the husband retained the role of main "provider" (*kormilets*). Women should be strong, but they must not dominate their husbands.

The length of schooling differed very little between women and men in the employed population. There were, however, great differences between what women and men studied, and between the jobs they had. The level of sectoral segregation was high – about a quarter of employees in construction were women and a third in metallurgy, but 80% in health care, 75 % in schools and over 70% in light industry. Priority sectors (like heavy industry, mining, energy) tended to be male dominated. Regression analysis of aggregate branch data from 1988-89 indicates that there was a strong negative correlation between the average wage in each branch and the proportion of women among its work force, even when the level of education of employees was controlled for. (See Katz, 2001, chapter 5.)

Within sectors, women were over-represented on the lower occupational and skill-levels and under-represented on the higher. In particular, relatively few women were promoted to positions of authority over the work of others, such as managers or foremen. (McAuley, 1981, Katz, 2001.)

Backlash and exclusion from the labour market?

Russia in the early 1990s displayed blatant signs of an ideological and cultural "backlash" in all spheres (Buckley, 1992, 1997, Fong, 1994, Posadskaya, 1994). As mentioned above, in the Soviet period, attitudes to the gender division of labour and to women's career commitments had been ambiguous and contradictory. But after the breakdown of the USSR, influential voices, politicians, journalists, "experts", and well-known personalities in the media openly expressed discriminatory opinions that had earlier been held in private. Soviet women were said to have been "over-emancipated", deprived of their "femininity" and torn away from home and hearth. The real frustration of woman at the "double burden" of paid and unpaid work was recognised, but only few and isolated voices proposed more equal roles in parenting and housework.

In the *perestroika* period, enterprises were encouraged to reduce employment. According to case studies and anecdotal evidence, the major part of redundancies was among clerical staff, predominantly female. Pressure to reduce public spending meant reduced budgets for female dominated health-care and education. Lower real wages meant lower demand for domestically produced consumer goods - another female

dominated sector of employment. Substitution of household production for previously purchased or free services and goods would also tend to increase the burden of housework.

With a market economy employers are more sensitive to costs connected with maternity leave, absence for family reasons, protective legislation for women and special rights for mothers.

At the same time, policy measures were taken that would tend to reduce female labour supply at child-rearing age, a time of life which is also crucial for gaining a foot-hold on the labour market and starting a career track. The right to maternity leave was extended to three years. This was, of course, not compulsory, and the low benefits would make it impossible for many women to use the full length of the leave, but social and employer pressure might make them extend it beyond what they would have wanted, particularly since child-care fees were increased and wages fell.⁵

The conclusion drawn by a number of both Russian and Western writers was that gender inequality would increase, indeed already had increased, compared to the relative disadvantage at which women found themselves in the Soviet period. Einhorn (1993) expressed a standard view in what became a standard reference in the field when she said that paid work as the norm for women would become “anachronistic”. According to Posadskaya (1996, p. 16) the “prognosis of great losses which women would have to carry in the sphere of employment in the reform period, have come true”. Unemployment was said to “have a female face” (Khotkina, 1994, Bridger, 1996).

Not all considered it an evil, however, since “... quite a few more women wish to return to the kitchen in order to be relieved of doing road work, construction jobs or factory work” (Lissyutkina, 1993, p. 276). Kalabakhina (1995) agrees as far as women manual workers are concerned, while deploring that highly educated and committed female professionals loose their jobs. With real wages halved, one-earner families are not an option for most Russians, however. Beyond the economic need to work, Ashwin & Bowers (1997) find in interviews with female manual workers that work and work mates are an absolutely essential part of their life. While their sample is small and not probabilistic, the authors mentioned above do not cite any quantitative evidence at all.

There were, however, also factors that would work to the relative disadvantage of men. The worst of the economic crisis hit some of the male-dominated former priority branches like military production and coal mining. A shift from heavy industry to consumer services, which had been undersized and underpaid in the USSR (such as trade, catering or laundries) would improve employment prospects for women. Such branches were considered “female” and more women had experience and skills in these fields.

Juggling jobs and housework had developed women’s efficiency and management skills. Russian women are less likely to be absent or inefficient because of drinking

⁵ Formally, the right to leave to care for a child under three years old can be taken up also by fathers or other relatives. No official statistics on male take-up rates exist but I would be surprised if they are more than very marginal.

than men and have the double-edged "competitive advantage" of being attractive workers because they accept lower wages than men (Ashwin and Bowers, 1997, Bruno, 1997)

Data sources

Considering the scope of the research issues, the availability of data is poor. In particular, there are no comparable pre- and post- transition data sources generally available to the research community. In this section, I briefly introduce some main sources for Russian labour market data.⁶ For reasons of space, I omit enterprise surveys.

Labour market statistics published by the official statistical agency, Goskomstat, stem mainly from two sources, from reports submitted by enterprises, and from the Labour Force Surveys (LFS). Because of the poor reporting from small enterprises and from the self-employed, Goskomstat uses LFS-results to correct the enterprise data. Even so, the discrepancies between the sources have been large. Further, there have been substantial revisions of already published LFS data, mainly to correct for bias in sampling and response.

Wage statistics are based on enterprise reports and do not include "unofficial" earnings or take into account multiple job holding or wage-arrears. Both survey and enterprise data are subject to omission and bias due to unwillingness or inability to report earnings accurately.

The most widely used household survey data is the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) with nine waves carried out since 1992 (with one change of panel). The first panel included 6 500 households, the second 4 700. It is a good quality source of information, but has limited labour market data.⁷

The All-Russian Centre for Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) carries out bi-monthly surveys since 1991. With a sample each time of 1500-3500, VTsIOM has created a huge database. It does not, however, go quite back to pre-transition USSR, the labour market related questions are few and the details of the sampling frame and weighting are obscure.

The Centre for Comparative Labour Studies, University of Warwick and the Institute for Comparative Labour Relations Research (ISITO), Moscow have carried out household surveys in four Russian cities with retrospective data on employment histories going back to 1987.⁸

The city Taganrog in South Russia became the site of a set of socio-economic surveys in 1967-68. The research was repeated in the late 1970s and 1980s. A smaller survey was made in 1993 and three surveys (focussing on household consumption, health and employment, respectively) were carried out 1997-2000. Although local, the Taganrog

⁶ For well-informed and more detailed surveys and discussion of data sources, see Klugman and Braithwaite (1997) and Clarke (1998, 1999).

⁷ See <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/rlms/>

⁸ For information see Clarke (1999) and <http://www.csv.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/complabstuds/russia/russint.htm>

data are unique in providing comparable information from Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.⁹

Was there a mass exit of women from paid work?

The answer to this question is "yes" – female labour force participation and employment have fallen by millions. So have those of men. The gender difference in numbers is sufficiently small that years of comparison, statistical sources, editions (revisions) of the statistics, exact age range and definition of "employment" can be decisive for whether a gender difference is found. Early labour statistics (Trud..., 1996) indicated that the number of women in the labour force had decreased by nearly 3 million and that of men hardly at all – and in another table that both male and female participation rates had declined by about 6 percentage points. Later revisions have made Goskomstat's publications less contradictory. (All figures in the following are from, Trud..., 2001, unless otherwise indicated.)

The following will discuss, briefly, the extent of labour force participation, employment and unemployment of men and women in Russia. Figure 1 provides a chart of the some concepts of labour economics and statistics, which are helpful in structuring this information.

Labour force participants, or the economically active population, are those willing and able to work. If women voluntarily quit their jobs to become housewives this would be recorded as a fall in labour force participation. In the age range 15-72 years, male LFP fell 10.0 percentage points 1992-98 and increased by 3.3 percentage points to 2000. For women the fall 1992-98 was 8.5 percentage points and the recovery after 1998 was 4 percentage points.¹⁰

This story, of a declining gender difference in participation rates from 14 percentage points in 1992 to 12 percentage points in 2000, is not false but incomplete. In the child-rearing age group 20-39, female LFP has decreased more, whereas more male pensioners have left the labour force.

The economically active population include both those employed and the unemployed. In this section, I will focus on employment, partly because, as will be seen in next, the line between non-participation and unemployment can be drawn in different ways. According to the LFS there was a decline in employment rates 1992-2000 (in age 15-72) of 9.9 percentage points for men, of 6.7 for women. This story is also incomplete:

1. Figure 2 indicates the changes in employment rates 1992-2000 for men and women in different cohorts. As can be seen, male employment has decreased more in the 55-72 age group¹¹ but female employment has decreased more in the 25-29, 30-34 and 35-39 cohorts. This was even more pronounced before 1999.

2. The above is already an indication of a weakening of the labour market position of mothers. If we add to this that about 700 000 women are on maternity leave (LFS May, 2000), the difference in at work rates between men and women in the age group

⁹ For more detail, see Katz (2001, 2002)

¹⁰ According to the LFS.

¹¹ The male/female difference in age 55-59 remains over 30 percentage points.

20-39 years would be about a dozen percentage points. Absence from work in this age interval is likely to affect women's jobs and wages also later in life, and, if it is seen as "normal", it can influence young women's choices of education and jobs as well as employer expectations and behaviour.

3. As mentioned, there had been considerable staff reductions before the LFS started in 1992. The number of employed women according to the 1992 LFS data is 3.3 million below the 1989 census figure, while for men the difference is 2.6 million. This comparison is flawed – the census and LFS concepts of employment differ – but I do not see why there should be a substantial "gender difference in the difference".

4. The enterprise-based statistics indicate that from 1990 to 2000 the number of employed women has decreased by 7 million, the number of employed men by only half as many. Absolute numbers disregard demographic changes and there are problems with the enterprise statistics, but those for 2000 have adjusted so as to be not far from the LFS totals and in 1990 the problems associated with small enterprises, informal employment and second jobs were smaller.

Comparable, but local, data for 1989, 1993 and 2000 are available in the Taganrog surveys. Employment rates differ by about 3 percentage points between men and women between age 20 and pension age in Taganrog in both 1989 and 2000. In other words, they have fallen by about equally much. Pension age range is, however, 55 years for women and 60 for men. The proportion of women on maternity leave has fallen. This is because of the drop in birth rates and despite falling at-work rates of mothers. (See Table 1.) The Taganrog survey 2000 indicates that, with a rough estimate, a fifth of mothers who had been on maternity leave in the last 4 years would have preferred to return to work earlier than they did.

The androgynous face of unemployment

When the newly established Federal Employment Service began to publish the numbers of unemployed at its offices, about two thirds of them were women. Total registered unemployment was only about 1 % in 1992. The first Labour Force Survey showed that unemployment, according to the standard, international (ILO) definition, was 5 % among both women and men. Subsequently male unemployment has been about a half of a percentage point higher than the female. For both men and women, the higher the level of education, the lower the risk of unemployment. The widespread claim that "the typical unemployed" is a woman with university or specialised secondary education (Vlasova et. al., 1994, Khotkina, 1994, Kalabakhina, 1995) was erroneous.¹²

This unemployment story is incomplete too. The ILO definition requires that an unemployed person should not have worked at all the previous 7 days and should have actively searched for work within the last four weeks. People looking for a full time, regular job and finding only casual jobs part of the time are not counted as "unemployed" (only "underemployed"). Yet, their situation is certainly a part of the social and economic problem of unemployment.

¹² Rzhantsyna (1993, p. 16) and Bodrova (1994, p. 41), however, rightly emphasised the risks of the unemployment of the least qualified manual workers.

It may be the case, however, that men suffer greater risk of experiencing unemployment, but that women are in a more difficult position when they do become unemployed. Among the unemployed, women have on average been unemployed one month longer than the men (See also Foley, 1997a and Grogan & van den Berg, 2000.). In the Taganrog survey 2000, there is information about all job separations of respondents from 1996 to the time of the interview. Of all separations where the respondent either started a job directly, or searched for a job,¹³ 48% of the men and 37 % of the women had found a new job within four weeks. 41 % of the men remained without work more than two months, 53 % of the women.¹⁴

It may, therefore, be a realistic assessment of possibilities that makes women less likely to quit voluntarily than men. (See, e. g., Monosouva, 1996). Among all separations, the overwhelming majority are, officially, “voluntary quits” (Gimpelson & Lippoldt, 1999), but firms have incentives for, and means to, force workers to leave but sign a document that they quit “voluntarily”. In the Taganrog survey, more detailed questions about reasons for job separations were asked and they were coded as “firings” or “quits” accordingly. Nearly 3/5 of the separations involving women were involuntary, but less than 2/5 of those of men. More men were made redundant due to enterprise closure, more women due to reductions in staff.

Widening the concept of unemployment, labour economics and sociology recognise the “discouraged“, who are ready and willing to work but have given up searching. There are also different forms of “hidden unemployment” – people who would be able to work under certain conditions (such as availability of child care); people who are temporarily redundant with little or no compensation; people who are forced to work shorter workweeks; and people who work but are not paid. Research on these questions suffers from limited data and has not focussed on gender, beyond a dummy variable in regressions (if that). Lehmann et. al. (1999) find women less likely to have suffered wage arrears in 1996, Koumakhov and Najman (2001) find that they are more likely to be exposed to short time and to involuntary, unpaid leave. If the women in Taganrog who say they would have worked if childcare had been available, had been employed, the female employment rate in age 20-39 would have been two percentage points higher.

Keeping their jobs at any price?

Have women managed to remained employed, despite, discrimination, by accepting pay and conditions that men do not accept? Is there a growing gender gap in wages and conditions? Or have women been more flexible and better able to adapt?

In terms of mortality, crime and alcoholism, women have coped better than men with the strains of transition. It is too simple to identify women as “the losers”. But although most men have lost too, there are certainly fewer women among “the winners” (by economic criteria). They are underrepresented among self-employed and entrepreneurs and among managerial staff. It is a common assumption in the

¹³ Note that the observations are not independent since the same respondent may have had more than one separation.

¹⁴ Those counted here as “searching for a job” said that they wanted to work, were ready to take up a job and did something to find one (be it only asking around if their friends knew of anything). Of the men, 4 out of 5 described themselves as “unemployed” (nearly all the others as “pensioners”), but only half of the women. A quarter are “pensioners”, a quarter “housewives”.

literature that women's commercial activities are smaller and less "ugly *biznis*" than men's and also that this is the general opinion among the public, but none of these studies presents a sampling frame that makes it at all possible to judge the representativity of their informants.¹⁵

Second jobs, on average, pay better than primary jobs. Women are less likely to have second jobs and when they do, the gender pay differential is much larger than in primary jobs (Foley, 1997b). Glinskaya and Mroz (2000) compare gender ratios of hourly wages for each year from 1992 to 1995. The most striking result is that the ten or twenty percent of men with highest wages have increased their relative advantage noticeably, both relative to lower-paid men and to all women, including those in the corresponding percentiles.

Whether the gender wage gap as a whole has increased or decreased compared with the Soviet period is impossible to say since no national data from the USSR are available. Brainerd (2000) finds a large increase from 1991 to 1994, but her estimates for 1991 are anomalously high, compared with all other studies. In the Taganrog surveys of 1989, 1993 and 2000 we find an increase of a 5-6 percentage points in terms of monthly earnings. According to preliminary results from the 2000 survey, the female/male ratio in total monthly earnings was 59%. Glinskaya & Mroz (2000), Ogloblin (1999), Sheidvasser & Benitez-Silva(1999) and Newell & Reilly (2000) all use RLMS data. Ogloblin finds a ratio for monthly earnings in primary place of work 1994-96 of 67% for those who were not owed back wages. Correcting for hours of work increases the ratio to 72%. Newell & Reilly estimate a ratio for hourly wages of 78% in both 1992 and 1996. Sheidvasser & Benítez-Silva find a female/male ratio for monthly wages of 63% in 1996-98.

Gender segregation remains high. Table 2 shows percentage women in sectors 1990-2000. These numbers are based on enterprise reports and do not distinguish between primary and second jobs. Therefore the LFS figures for primary jobs in 2000 are also included. The most pronounced change is that the proportion of women in industry has fallen. In 10 years, employment in industry has decreased from 30 to 23 % of the total and, apparently, women have born the greatest share of the reduction. In relative terms, female dominated garment and textiles have fared worst, but in absolute terms their loss of 1.4 million jobs dwindles besides the 5 million lost in engineering and machine building. The proportion of women, but not the numbers, has decreased in two traditionally female dominated and low paid sectors that have become very much more lucrative: Trade and finance, banking and insurance. Female predominance in education and health care remains, while average wages in these sectors have fallen relative to the national average.

In lieu of conclusions

During the early years of economic transformation in Russia, dramatic increases in inequality and in abject poverty were obvious. Yet, within the dominant discourse, concern over this was expressed as concern for "weak" or "disadvantaged" groups that might be excluded from a generally beneficial process, not as criticism of social inequality per se. That many Russian women experienced job losses, insecurity and

¹⁵ (See inter alias, Bruno, 1997, Roshin & Roshina, 1994, Babaeva & Chirikova, 1995, Marchenko & Tetrenko, 1994).

poverty was too easily interpreted as an increase specifically in gender inequality, a “patriarchal renaissance”.

The objective of this paper has been to show something of the complexity of labour market outcomes for men and women and some of the pitfalls of making such simple characterisations. There has been a massive decrease in female employment. On the other hand, this is also true of the male. On the third hand, the changes in age specific employment rates indicate a gender difference, which may have serious consequences for women in the future. On the fourth, men are somewhat more likely to be unemployed. On the fifth, women are somewhat more likely to be long term unemployed. And so on. A gender analysis must be interlinked an analysis of social class differentiation, and conversely. The question “does gender discrimination exist?” (which it undoubtedly does) is not the same as the question whether it has increased or decreased since the Soviet period. The question “have women’s employment and real earnings declined?” is not the same as the question whether they have declined more than those of men.

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Figure 7.1 Sketch of labour market positions



Figure 2. Fall in male and female employment rates, in percentage points.



Source: Calculated from Trud..., 2001.

**Table 1 Occupation of mothers according to age of youngest child percent)
Taganrog 1989, 1993/94, 2000* (Percent.)**

	< 1 year			1-2 years			3-6 years		
	1989	1993	2000	1989	1993	2000	1989	1993	2000
Work	0	7	15	65	20	31	93	80	64
Study	0	10	15	4	1	2	1	0	2
Unemploy ed	0	2	0	0	0	7	0	4	10
Home	100	80	69	26	77	60	4	14	24
Other	0	0	0	5	2	0	2	3	0
Number	41	41	13	76	97	42	164	250	88

Table 2 Percent women in sectors 1980-2000. Of annual average number employed.*

	1980	1990	1995	1998	2000	LFS 2000
ALL	51	51	48	48	48	48
INDUSTRY	49	48	40	38	38	38
AGRIC	41	39	34	32	35	41
FORESTRY	20	18	20	21	21	18
CONSTRUCT	29	27	23	24	24	23
TRANSP	25	25	26	26	26	23
COMMUNIC	71	71	67	60	61	58
TRADE	80	80	64	62	62	65
SERVICES	54	52	44	46	47	51
HEALTHCARE	85	83	82	81	81	81
EDUCATION	78	79	81	80	80	79
CULTURE	69	71	69	68	69	70
SCIENCE	52	52	51	50	50	49
FINANCE	87	90	75	71	71	67
ADMIN	69	67	60	48	45	34
OTHER	53	34	31	25	26	

* Trud i zaniatost', 2001. Numbers, except for the last column, are based on reports from medium and large enterprises and for last two years adjusted to include imputed values for small enterprises. LFS figures refer to primary job.