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Women and Men in Taganrog and in the USSR  

4.1 The data

4.1.1 Why Taganrog was chosen

This study is based on a survey carried out in the southern Russian city of Taganrog. Taganrog is a port on the Azov Sea, which is linked to the Black Sea by a narrow strait. It is in the Rostov region (oblast’) and thus not far from the Ukrainian border. Soviet Taganrog was an industrial city, dominated by a few large industries linked to the so-called ‘military industrial complex’. In 1989 it had a population of approximately 300,000. The region is among the richer agricultural districts of the USSR, and this was reflected in better availability and quality of foodstuffs than in most of Russia.

This city, which was founded by Peter the Great, has a predominantly Russian population, as well as Greek, Armenian, Ukrainian and Jewish minorities, and a strong Cossack tradition. Taganrog is known historically as the place where Tsar Alexander I died, an event that triggered the Decembrist uprising in 1825. It is known in literature as the birthplace of Anton Chekhov and in sociology as, probably, the best researched town in the USSR.

In the 1960s Taganrog was chosen by a team of Soviet researchers as a ‘typical Soviet middle-sized town’ (see Rimashevskaya, 1992). A number of surveys covering different fields were carried out in 1967–68.1 Similar projects were undertaken in 1977–78 and 1988–89 (Taganrog I, II and III).2 The most comprehensive accounts are Onikov (1977), Rimashevskaya (1988a), Rimashevskaya and Onikov (1990) and Rimashevskaya and Patsiorkovskii (1992a). The data used in the following are from one survey included in Taganrog III called ‘Way of Life’ (Obraz zhizni), which focused particularly on gender issues.3 The interviews were carried out February–April 1989.
What generalisations is it legitimate to make from this sample? It is always hazardous to generalise about the Soviet Union. The USSR was the size of a continent in itself and even within Russia there were large differences, between regions, between urban and rural life and between province and metropolis. The degree of centralisation, on the other hand, helps to make inferences from a local sample more general. Excluding the additions for work in the far north, wage scales and wage regulations were the same in the whole Union.

Compared to Russia as a whole, Taganrog had an unusually large heavy industry sector. The level of education was somewhat higher than at the national level. Keeping these characteristics in mind, I consider it legitimate to make inferences from Taganrog to the urban population of the European regions of the USSR.

The highest average wages in the USSR were found in the three Baltic republics, and the lowest in Moldavia, Azerbaidzhan and Central Asia (excluding Kazachstan). The Russian average was 7 per cent above the Soviet average in 1987. According to Taganrog I and II, the average wage in Taganrog was higher than in the USSR, because of the well-paying military industries. By 1989, this was no longer the case, since the arms industry had gone into decline.

In the following section the sampling is briefly described. More information is available in Katz (1994), Prokofeva (1992) and Rimashevskaya (1988a, pp. 111–16). The rest of this chapter contains descriptive accounts of topics that are relevant for the employment and wages of women. The accounts will present information on the USSR generally and from the sample. In section 4.2 the demographic composition of the sample is summarised. Section 4.3 begins with a short history of education in Russia and a description of the system of education in the later Soviet period, with section 4.3.3 focusing on the gender aspects of this institutional set-up. Section 4.3.4 summarises statistics on the education of the Soviet population and the sample in 1989. In section 4.4 possible determinants of and some earlier research on female labour force participation rates in the USSR are discussed. Section 4.5 is also devoted to labour supply, but to hours of work of the employed, legal and institutional aspects and basic data from the sample. The subject of section 4.6 is the jobs men and women have. Different aspects of occupational segregation in the USSR are discussed. Section 4.7 introduces the other side of the gender division of labour – in bringing up children and housework. In section 4.8, descriptive data on earnings of respondents and in the country are presented, to prepare for the econometric analysis in chapter 5.