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Taganrog Post-USSR: Patriarchy, Poverty, Perspectives

7.1 Introduction

Earlier chapters have shown some of the many reasons why one should not idealise life in the USSR or regret the demise of the Soviet order. The old days were bad, but, nevertheless, conditions of life have deteriorated drastically for many Russians. In the wake of ‘market reform’, poverty, social tension, stress and insecurity have taken a tragic toll in terms of well being, health and life expectancy. The labour market is only a part of this scenario, but an essential one on which the majority depend for their livelihood and for important elements of their identity, their status and self-esteem and for social relations well beyond those in the workplace itself.

Russian workers have experienced drastic changes. Instead of job security, they face fear of unemployment. Instead of not being able to find goods, people are unable to afford them. Instead of an all-dominant state sector, in 1998, 43 per cent of the employed population worked in the private sector and an additional 18 per cent in enterprises with mixed ownership (Rossiiskii … 1999, p. 109). Yet, the privatised enterprises most often retain both their old management and much of their old working practices. Firms are supposedly subject to ‘the discipline of the market’, yet they evade paying what they owe each other, their workers and the tax authorities for years on end. GNP has slumped, yet open unemployment is not higher than in Western Europe. Employers default on wage payments, yet hire new staff. Millions of employees do not get paid, yet do not quit their jobs. Wages do not cover the cost of bare essentials, yet people survive.\(^1\) Although the old system collapsed in disgrace, those who ruled under it (and their offspring) are still likely to be powerful and affluent, while those most nostalgic for the old order tend to be such as it disadvantaged.

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\(^1\) K. Katz, *Gender, Work and Wages in the Soviet Union* © Katarina Katz 2001
The present chapter will limit itself to certain aspects of the gender dimension of employment in Russia. There is, by now, quite an extensive literature in the field, but a shortage of solid empirical analysis, particularly quantitative. Since empirical knowledge beyond impressions, individual cases and anecdotes is a precondition for taking theoretical analysis further, what follows will focus on the empirical and quantitative.

Women in the former Soviet Union encountered the turmoil of post-Soviet economic reform from a relative position of disadvantage, of segregation and discrimination. This chapter will outline the differential impact of post-reform changes on women and men in Taganrog, and in Russia, as concerns labour force participation, unemployment and earnings. A statistical analysis, similar to that of the preceding chapters will be performed on household survey data collected in Taganrog in 1993/94 and comparison made with those of 1989. In addition, official statistics will be used to measure the local situation against the national, and to follow trends up to 1997–98. Analysis of wages will be mainly based on the Taganrog data. The study of changes in employment and unemployment will have heavier emphasis on the national statistics, since the number of observations of unemployed and of employed in smaller sectors are not large enough in the sample.

The study is limited to paid work even though this is unsatisfactory, particularly for a gender analysis. Contrary to what was expected before the transition, it is not likely that housework has been reduced. The need to search for the cheapest goods and to forgo services that have become unaffordable (such as laundries) and the increased need for subsistence gardening, take up time that earlier was spent in queues. (Eremitcheva, 1995, is one of the few sources to discuss this issue, but does not have representative or quantitative data.) According to official statistics the volume of consumer services in 1996 was less than a quarter of the 1990 level (Rossiiskii. . . 1999, p. 457). The statistics no doubt exaggerate the size of the drop since some service production has transferred to the ‘shadow’, grey or black economy, but it would be surprising if none of the decline was real. Since no fully-fledged time-use studies are made in Russia today, we will not go deeper into the issue of housework here.

A summary of the findings and a discussion of the conclusions that can be drawn from them is deferred to chapter 8.

7.2 Women in post-reform Russia

7.2.1 ‘Backlash’

One very visible phenomenon starting in the glasnost’ years and continuing in post-Soviet Russia was – to use a perhaps inappropriately