SOCIOCULTURAL CHANGES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of contemporary sociocultural changes on the transformation of the family institution and on the emergence of new forms of family conflict in Uzbekistan. The study is based on a theoretical analysis of Western sociological concepts of the family (A. Giddens, U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim, E. Illouz, L. Waite, A. Hochschild, S. Turkle) and on a secondary analysis of national and international statistical and analytical data. The results show that the gradual shift from a patriarchal to a more egalitarian family model, the rise of individualism, labor migration, digitalization, economic instability and the weakening of traditional mechanisms of social control jointly shape the conflict potential of the contemporary family. These processes are reflected in the growing number of divorces, particularly among young families, in the asymmetry of spousal expectations and in latent forms of intra-family tension. In the Uzbek context, global trends are superimposed on enduring cultural norms, which produces a specific configuration of family conflicts. The article concludes that a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to the prevention and resolution of family conflicts is required, including the institutional strengthening of mediation, family counseling and legal education.

Keywords: *family institution, sociocultural transformation, family conflict, gender roles, individualization, labor migration, digitalization, mediation, Uzbekistan.*

Introduction

Contemporary society is currently undergoing an intensive sociocultural transformation that affects all spheres of social life, including the institution of the family. This transformation is driven not only by global processes of urbanization, digitalization and migration, but also by profound shifts in value orientations, behavioral patterns and gender roles. As the basic social unit of society, the family is the most vulnerable to such changes and, consequently, reflects them in the structure of intra-family relations and in the forms of interaction among its members [1]. Changing social standards and cultural reference points are gradually calling into question the established mechanisms for distributing power, responsibility and emotional resources within marriage, and are creating new challenges for the social stability of the family and for the social support system.

Contemporary sociocultural transformations affecting the institution of the family are increasingly regarded in research as a key factor in the changing structure of intra-family interactions and the mechanisms through which conflicts arise. Unlike traditional societies, in which family roles, behavioral norms and hierarchies were rigidly fixed and reproduced from generation to generation, contemporary society is characterized by a high degree of normative uncertainty, which directly affects the stability of family relationships.

The aim of this article is to identify the main sociocultural factors transforming the family institution in contemporary Uzbek society and to analyze how these factors shape new forms of family conflict. To achieve this aim, the article (1) traces the key trends in the transformation of family roles, values and forms of social control; (2) interprets these trends through the lens of contemporary

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sociological theories of the family; and (3) outlines directions for the prevention and resolution of family conflicts.

Materials and Methods

The study is theoretical and analytical in nature. Its theoretical framework comprises contemporary Western sociological concepts of the family and intimacy: A. Giddens's theory of the transformation of intimacy and reflexive modernization, U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim's individualization thesis, E. Illouz's sociology of emotions, L. Waite's research on marital stability, A. Hochschild's concept of the "second shift" and S. Turkle's work on digital communication. These concepts are compared with research on the Uzbek family, including studies of the extended family and of the social consequences of labor migration.

The empirical basis of the study consists of secondary data: official statistics of the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, survey data of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and materials of the Ministry of Justice and of the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as reports of international organizations (IOM, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Pew Research Center). In particular, the OECD Family Database, which contains indicators on family structure, marriage and divorce rates, the labor-market position of families, public spending on family policy, parental leave, childcare services and other areas of family policy, served as an international reference point [2]. The study employs content analysis of scholarly literature, comparative analysis and secondary analysis of statistical data.

Results

One of the key trends of recent decades has been the gradual shift from the traditional patriarchal family model towards a more egalitarian and democratic one. The traditional family, characteristic of Eastern societies including Uzbekistan, was dominated by the notion of unequal roles for men and women, in which the man acted as the principal economic agent and the woman as the keeper of the hearth and of the family's moral foundations [3]. This model ensured the stability of family structures, yet at the same time it limited women's opportunities for self-realization and reproduced dependent patterns of behavior. However, the development of the education system, the expansion of women's employment, their active participation in social and political life and the growth of legal awareness have brought about substantial shifts in the distribution of household responsibilities and power within the family [4]. According to the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2023), the share of women in professional employment has increased by almost 30% over the past decade, while the level of female educational attainment has reached a historic high [5]. These processes contribute to the emergence of a new model of family interaction based on the principles of mutual respect, dialogue and a fair distribution of roles; at the same time, however, they become a source of role contradictions and latent forms of tension in family relationships.

Alongside technological change, value and normative shifts are also intensifying. The younger generation shows a tendency towards individualism, prioritizing personal self-realization, psychological comfort and emotional satisfaction. As access to education, information and economic opportunities has widened, the perception of marriage as an obligatory form of life arrangement is giving way to an understanding of marriage as a personal choice. According to the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, about 47% of the young people surveyed believe that preserving the family is not a priority if the relationship does not provide mutual respect and support [6]. These data confirm a general trend: a gradual departure from collectivist values in favor of individualist attitudes, which is naturally reflected in the rising number

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of divorces. According to official statistics, the divorce rate in the country has increased by more than 40% over the past ten years, and more than 60% of dissolved marriages involve couples who had been married for less than five years [5]. Consequently, conflicts between spouses are increasingly the result not so much of material hardship as of mismatched life priorities and expectations [7].

Migration processes are of particular importance in the structure of contemporary family relations. Labor migration, which has become a characteristic feature of the post-Soviet space, often leads to temporary or prolonged separation of spouses, weakening the emotional bonds between them. In Uzbekistan, according to the Ministry of Employment and Poverty Reduction of the Republic of Uzbekistan, about 2.3 million citizens work abroad, and in many cases these are men who leave their families for long periods [8]. Remote forms of interaction through messaging applications and video calls cannot fully compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication, which increases the risk of misunderstanding, alienation and mistrust. Women who remain at home often combine the roles of mother, educator and head of the household, which results in physical and emotional burnout.

Another important dimension of these transformations is the change in moral and ethical norms and in the forms of social control. Whereas the family was previously perceived as an unconditional value to be preserved at any cost, today there is a shift towards a more pragmatic attitude to marriage: if a relationship does not bring satisfaction, its dissolution is considered acceptable [9]. This is not always a negative phenomenon, since in some cases divorce becomes a form of psychological self-protection against violence. Nevertheless, the growing number of divorces, particularly among young families, indicates that society has not yet developed sustainable models of adaptation to the new sociocultural realities [10]. Traditional regulatory mechanisms, such as the involvement of senior relatives, mahalla councils or informal mediators, are gradually losing their influence, while new forms of dispute resolution, including mediation, family counseling and psychological assistance, are still emerging and require institutional strengthening [11]. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Mediation”, adopted in 2018, was an important step towards the development of out-of-court conflict resolution practices; however, according to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan, only 27% of citizens are aware that mediation exists, and actual requests for such assistance remain rare [12].

Thus, the analysis shows that the sociocultural changes of recent years exert a complex influence on family relations. Changes in gender roles and in the power structure within the family [13], the rise of individualism and the decline of collectivist values [7], the impact of the digital environment on communication and emotional intimacy [14], migration and economic factors that disrupt familiar forms of interaction [15], as well as the diminishing role of traditional institutions of social control and socialization [11], give rise to new forms of family conflict characterized by complexity, multilayeredness and psychological depth.

Discussion

Contemporary Western sociological research emphasizes that the key factor in the transformation of family relations is not so much a change in formal roles as a shift in value orientations within everyday interaction. Eva Illouz, in her work on the sociology of emotions, shows that the modern family increasingly functions as an “emotional project”, in which partners’ expectations centre on mutual recognition, emotional involvement and psychological comfort [16]. It is precisely this growth in emotional expectations that makes family relationships more vulnerable to conflict, since any failure to meet expectations is interpreted as a personal shortcoming of the partner or as a deficiency of the relationship as a whole.

As Anthony Giddens notes within the framework of the theory of “reflexive modernization”, the family in late modernity loses its status as an institution with predetermined behavioral scripts and becomes a space of continuous negotiation and renegotiation of agreements between partners

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[17]. This means that marital relationships no longer rest exclusively on traditional norms or social pressure but require ongoing communicative and emotional work. Under such conditions, conflict becomes not an anomaly but a structural element of family dynamics, reflecting the process by which partners adapt to changing social expectations, a point of considerable relevance to our society.

Analyzing the transformation of the family under conditions of individualization, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim stress that modern marriages are increasingly built on the expectation of emotional fulfilment, self-realization and personal happiness [18]. Yet it is precisely the growth of these expectations that makes family relationships more fragile: any discrepancy between expectations and reality may be perceived as a crisis that provokes conflict. In our society, marriage has historically been regarded primarily as a socially significant union aimed at procreation and the maintenance of family stability, while emotional aspects were of secondary importance. Contemporary sociocultural changes are eroding this model, generating tension between traditional conceptions and new individualist attitudes.

Complementing this approach, the sociologist Linda Waite, in her empirical studies of family stability, shows that sociocultural changes reinforce the asymmetry of expectations between spouses [19]. Women more often expect emotional partnership and equal participation in household responsibilities, whereas men may remain oriented towards more traditional models of role distribution. It is this mismatch of expectations that becomes a source of chronic conflicts, which do not always manifest themselves openly but accumulate in the form of emotional distancing and latent dissatisfaction.

The impact of urbanization and migration on family relations deserves particular attention. Research conducted by the International Organization for Migration shows that the prolonged labor migration of one spouse leads to a redistribution of roles within the family, growing emotional distance and an increased potential for conflict [20]. In the context of Uzbekistan, this is particularly evident, since economic responsibility traditionally rests with the man, and his physical absence forces women to assume the functions of decision-making, financial management and child-rearing. On the one hand, such changes strengthen women's position in the family; on the other, they may give rise to latent conflicts associated with the undermining of the customary hierarchy of power within the family.

Sociocultural transformations also affect intergenerational relations, which play a fundamentally important role in Uzbek society. Sh. Rakhimova's research shows that the extended family remains an active participant in the regulation of intra-family conflicts, especially during marital crises [21]. At the same time, the intervention of senior relatives may perform a dual function: on the one hand, it helps to reduce emotional tension and preserve the marriage; on the other, it limits the spouses' autonomy and hinders the development of private dialogue between them. Amid sociocultural change, this contradiction becomes a source of new forms of conflict, as young families face the need to balance traditional respect for elders with the pursuit of independence.

Gender change is another important sociocultural factor influencing the dynamics of family conflict. Arlie Hochschild's research demonstrates that even where men and women are formally equal in employment, an asymmetry persists in the distribution of domestic labor and emotional load [13]. In our society, where expectations regarding the female role remain largely traditional, this asymmetry may be amplified, particularly in families where women combine professional activity with full responsibility for the household. This creates the preconditions for the accumulation of latent dissatisfaction and emotional burnout, which subsequently manifest themselves in conflict situations.

Contemporary research also highlights the influence of digitalization on family relations. Sherry Turkle, in her work, shows that the extensive use of digital technologies changes the nature of interpersonal communication, reducing the depth of emotional contact and increasing the risk of misunderstanding [22]. In families, this manifests itself as "parallel existence", in which family

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members are physically together but remain emotionally isolated. For Uzbek society, which traditionally values face-to-face communication and time spent together, such changes may be perceived as a threat to family cohesion and become an additional source of conflict.

Economic factors also play a significant role in shaping the conflict potential of the family. According to World Bank studies, families experiencing economic instability exhibit higher levels of stress, which directly affects the quality of intra-family communication [23]. In Uzbek society, where providing for the family is traditionally regarded as the foundation of the male role, economic hardship may undermine men's sense of self-efficacy, provoking tension and conflict. Meanwhile, women, seeking to compensate for the shortage of resources, often intensify their own activity, which may be perceived as a violation of the traditional balance of roles.

Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of sociocultural trends shows that family conflicts in contemporary society are shaped by a combination of factors: individualization, migration, changing gender roles, digitalization and economic instability. In the context of Uzbekistan, these processes are superimposed on enduring cultural norms, producing a specific configuration of conflicts that calls for a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach to their regulation.

Understanding these processes is essential for developing effective approaches to the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the context of the sociocultural changes taking place in contemporary Uzbek society [24]. This underscores the need for a systematic approach to fostering a culture of peaceful dispute resolution, beginning with legal education and the training of specialists in social work.

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