



**Institutional space of  
a family in the south  
of Russia: Specificity of  
traditions and innovations**



**INSTITUTIONAL SPACE OF A FAMILY IN THE SOUTH OF RUSSIA:  
SPECIFICITY OF TRADITIONS AND INNOVATIONS**

**ESPACIO INSTITUCIONAL DE UNA FAMILIA EN EL SUR DE RUSIA:  
ESPECIFICIDAD DE TRADICIONES E INNOVACIONES**

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**Abstract**

The article provides a sociological analysis of traditional and innovative elements in the family sphere of the modern institutional space of the South Russian society. According to the results of our study, it was concluded that there is a negative attitude towards the institution of polygamy in the public consciousness of respondents. Moreover, there can be noted significant differences by gender: men, compared to women, are more positive about the institution of polygamy, despite the presence of negative assessments of this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** institutional space, South Russian family, traditional family, egalitarian family model, family culture, family divorces, polygamy, South of Russia.

El artículo proporciona un análisis sociológico de elementos tradicionales e innovadores en el ámbito familiar del espacio institucional moderno de la sociedad del sur de Rusia. Según los resultados de nuestro estudio, se concluyó que existe una actitud negativa hacia la institución de la poligamia en la conciencia pública de los encuestados. Además, se pueden observar diferencias significativas por género: los hombres, en comparación con las mujeres, son más positivos acerca de la institución de la poligamia, a pesar de la presencia de evaluaciones negativas de este fenómeno.

Palabras clave: espacio institucional, familia del sur de Rusia, familia tradicional, modelo familiar igualitario, cultura familiar, divorcios familiares, poligamia, sur de Rusia.



## **Introduction.**

Family and marriage are fundamental institutions for ensuring the social health of the population, which, in turn, affects the most important social, economic and political aspects of the life of society as a whole [Gafiatulina, 2015; Bortsov, Dyuzhikov, et al., 2016]. The institutional space of a modern South Russian family is characterized by its heterogeneity, a variety of family relationships and practices, styles of marital and parental behavior, a combination of traditional and innovative family norms, and a high level of risk of disintegration of family unions [Gryshai, et al., 2018; Volkova, 2019]. This, though to a lesser extent than in other regions of Russia, is also characteristic of modern Dagestan family, which is influenced by external (globalization) and internal (economic, spiritual, social) factors destabilizing the realm of family relationships and increase their level of conflict [Shakbanova, et al., 2018; Zagirova, 2017].

B.M. Alimova notes that the norms of behavior and value orientations established in modern society negatively affect the lifestyle of not only young people, but also many already adult married people. Family as a traditionally respected social institution in the South of Russia is gradually losing its value, traditions of life and culture, adherence to the norms of customary law that determine stereotypes of behavior in various areas of family life [Alimova BM, 2015: 124]. These phenomena are of a universal nature, since the transformation of family values and relationships, including among young people, is the result of the influence of global tendencies of egalitarianization, individualization of human relations actively spreading under the influence of globalization [Vereshchagina A.V., Gafiatulina N.Kh., Zagirova E.M., 2015: 159; Rokotyanskaya, 2014; Gluzman, et al., 2018].

On the other hand, according to the evidence of domestic researchers, there is a restoration of the traditions of polygamy that have become obsolete during the Soviet period, and in modern reality this takes on a slightly different character and psychological response among women - the wives of those men who, "referring to Islam, have a second and sometimes a third wife", without caring about the psychological state of the first wife, as well as children from their first marriage [Alimova BM, 2008: 76; Serdyuchenko, 2017].

This behavior of men is often the cause of divorce in modern society. This happens, as we see it, because in the course of social evolution and transformation of gender and family relations, a woman herself, her position and role in the social and family life have changed. Therefore, a return to the traditions of polygamy, which have long lost their significance and sociocultural foundations, is quite naturally perceived critically by the female half of South Russian society [Ponomarev, et al., 2019]. Unwillingness to archaism family sphere, especially without consent from the woman (men going to polygamy, as a rule, do not coordinate their actions with the first wives and, especially with children), that is why there are destructive consequences of polygamy for the first family.

Historically, polygamy as a social phenomenon is justified in a number of indicators, and the need for it arose in special conditions, when as a result of a bloody war, a sharp imbalance in the quantitative ratio of men and women did not allow many women to realize their family and reproductive needs. In addition, serious requirements were always made on polygamy, which generally mean that a man if he chooses this type of marriage should be



able to provide all wives and their children with both material means and love [Shakhbanova, 2012].

Polygamy, not perceived as the traditional norm of family life at the present stage and not due to special reasons that took place in the past, becomes a source of destabilization of family relations. In other words, not all family traditions, rooted in customary law and once supporting the stability of the family-marriage institution, are positive in the context of modern reality, which has changed significantly during the Soviet and post-Soviet period [Berezhnaya, et al., 2018; Kovaleva, et al., 2019].

If polygamy as a once-prevailing family tradition returns to the institutional space of the South Russian family, causing devastating consequences, then interethnic families, which were quite widespread in the Soviet period, gradually disappear from the family sphere of modern South Russian society, taking into account changes in value orientations [Motsovkina, 2019]. For example, let us turn to Dagestan, one of the North Caucasian republics. Despite the fact that traditional ideas about family and marriage among the peoples of Dagestan oriented both in the past and present on endogamous family strategies, the destruction of the established tradition of interethnic marriage in Soviet society, albeit not as widespread as in other regions of the former USSR, has rather negative consequences for the sphere of interethnic interaction [Shakhbanova, Kasyanov et al., 2019; Serdyuchenko, 2018].

Modern society rapidly loses the culture of interethnic communication [Shakhbanova M.M., Gafiatulina, et al., 2018] and one of the reasons for this negative trend scientists call a sharp decrease in the number of ethnically mixed marriages and the steady nature of this trend [Young family in the Rostov region (according to a sociological study)., 2011]. High culture of interethnic communication is the most important condition for the stability and positivity of interethnic relations, and its destruction in the post-Soviet period should be associated with the growth of interethnic tension and ethnic conflicts [Vaskov, et al., 2018].

Thus, it is difficult to assess unambiguously the loss of this family tradition, barely formed in the Soviet period, as one to which, while maintaining a low level of exogamy in the family sphere, there was a positive attitude. Taking into account the reasons for the rejection of interethnic marriages at the present stage, related to the desire for ethnic consolidation and ethno cultural self-preservation, one cannot but take into account the losses that Dagestan society suffered as a result of the deinstitutionalization of the interethnic family [Tambiyants, et al., 2017].

Therefore, in modern society, the ideal of the family is a mono-ethnic and mono-confessional family [Vereshchagina A.V., 2003], but even today it experiences difficulties that undermine the family foundations. It is important to analyze the ongoing transformations in the family and marriage sphere [Chikaeva, Belikova, et al., 2019] using the example of the multinational and multiconfessional composition of the South of Russia such as the Republic of Dagestan [Shakhbanova, Kolesnikova, 2019].

### **Materials and methods.**

The theoretical and methodological base of the research consists of the conceptual provisions of sociological theory, revealing the following basic concepts: “family”, “institutional space of the family”, “traditional family”, “egalitarian model of the family”,



“family culture”, “family divorce”, “polygamy”. The article uses an institutional approach aimed at studying the family as an actor in the sociocultural context of the South of Russia.

The applied part of the study is the results of a sociological survey conducted in 2018 in southern Russia and in Dagestan on the study of a traditional family, as well as identifying factors of its destruction and development trends.

What are the causes of conflicts and divorces in South-Russian family, particularly in Dagestan family? Do they have specific foundations or are they universal? How destructive for the stability of the Dagestan family are the innovative elements of family relations penetrating the institutional space of the family in Dagestan?

To answer these questions, we turn to empirical sociological data obtained in a number of studies during a survey of residents of Dagestan as a prominent representative of the institutional space of the family of the South of Russia.

### **Research results and their discussion.**

The intention to create a family is determined by a wide range of life spheres that are most important for young people in the South of Russia, in which the state of health, material well-being, friendship and family occupy the dominant positions. Focusing on creating a family, people strive to achieve love and spiritual comfort, which, along with material, spiritual values occupy a leading position in the consciousness of these groups [Shakbanova, 2018; Shakhbanova, Zagutin, 2018; Ponomarev, 2019].

In the most general semantic understanding, a family as a value in the life of young people can be judged by the place it takes among other values important for a young person, such as work (study), health, friendship, leisure, politics and religion. Over time (from generation to generation), the structure of life values of young people in the South of Russia is transforming, but the family still occupies one of the leading positions in it and is included in the group of values associated with vital needs, which, first of all, include health and material well-being. This trend is generally similar to the value hierarchy of the Russian population in other regions, where health and material well-being are also at the forefront. So, the wealth factor, according to TS Morozova, was indicated by more than 96% of all respondents [Morozova, 2008].

This is evidenced by the analytical data of the study of family values for a young family in the Rostov region. Based on these data, it should be noted that for young people the foundation of family-marriage relations is love. However, this does not take into account factors of common values of life and personal interests, which potentially, due to immersion in everyday problems, can lead to deformation of family relations up to the collapse of the family. In addition, a significant part of the respondents shares the view that the modern institution of family is subject to a crisis state, which is one of the reasons for the unwillingness of Rostov youth to create new families. Thus, according to Rostov sociologists, about 48% of youth indicate that a high level of divorce in Russia speaks in favor of the crisis of the family institution; 42% of young respondents point to economic factors - decline in family life [Young Family, 2011].

### **Public opinion on polygamy.**



In the post-Soviet period, there was a transformation not only of the socio-economic and political foundations of Russian society associated with traumatic reforms for social well-being and social health of the population [Chikaeva K.S., Scherbakova, et al., 2018], but also in the family and marriage sphere. In the indicated period, the institution of polygamy was widespread in the Islamic republics. The nature of this phenomenon goes back to the distant historical past and was considered a relic along with other phenomena that existed in the family and marriage sphere of the peoples of the southern Russian regions [Serdyuchenko, 2017]. The revival of this phenomenon in post-Soviet Dagestan is diversely estimated by different socio-demographic groups. At first, only a rather wealthy and independent person could have a “second wife” later it became possible to observe the conclusion of such a marriage by people who are far from being wealthy.

In the mass consciousness of peoples, a transformation of the earlier understanding of the traditional family takes place; therefore, this aspect was also given attention in our study. In answers to the question “How do you feel about polygamy?”, the results of the study show prevalence of negative attitudes with the motivation “this can destroy the family, because not every woman agrees with her husband’s desire to have “a second wife”, it is 49.3% of all respondents; on the second place is the judgment "negatively, under polygamy they try to cover up immorality" (26.0%). On the third place is a positive attitude towards polygamy in case “a man does not leave the "first family" and provides it financially” (18.2%); further, every sixth respondent considers polygamy “a relic of the past”. However, about 14.1% of respondents positively assess polygamy with the motivation “we have fewer men than women, and every woman deserves happiness”.

The spread of this phenomenon in the modern information society naturally contributed to the emergence of an information resource, which, according to its founders, was created to help young people find a marriage partner, which was highlighted in our study.

According to the results of our research, in the mass consciousness of the Dagestan peoples prevails the negative attitude towards the site “I am looking for “a second wife” (42.1%) with the motivation “this will lead to the destruction of the first family”. Respondents, regardless of the type of religiosity, demonstrate a negative attitude to the emergence of the above site: 32.6% of “convinced believers”, 40.9% of “hesitant”, 43.6% of “believers”, 45.8% of “unbelievers” and 66.3% of “convinced unbelievers”; with a wide margin, the second ranking place is taken by the position “negatively, this will lead to an increase in divorces and an increase in the number of single-parent families” (33.5%); by the type of religiosity, this opinion is held by every third respondent in the subgroup of “convinced believers”, “believers”, “hesitant”, “unbelievers”, their share among “convinced unbelievers” is noticeably lower (every sixth respondent). On the third place is the answer “this will lead to the destruction of the foundations of a traditional family” (29.3%). This opinion is shared with regard to religiosity by every second person among “convinced unbelievers”, one third of “hesitant” and “unbelievers”, every fourth respondent in the subgroup of “convinced believers” and “believers”. The fourth ranking place is occupied by the judgment “negatively, a man will not be able to fully pay attention to the upbringing of children in both families” (28.1% of all respondents), in subgroups one second part of “convinced unbelievers”, every third among “believers”, each fourth among “convinced believers” and “unbelievers,” one in five among “hesitant”. At the same time, in the



attitudes of the respondents there is also a positive attitude to the site "I am looking for "a second wife", demonstrated by every seventh respondent, because "this will allow people, without violating religious commandments, have marital relations and maintain morality in society"; with regard to religiosity, this position is shared by every second respondent among "convinced unbelievers", every fourth respondent from the subgroup of "convinced believers", every eighth respondent among "believers", "unbelievers" and "hesitant".

Further, 8.3% of "convinced unbelievers", 10.4% of "believers", 11.7% of "hesitant", 16.5% of "convinced believers" and 16.7% of "unbelievers" see the possibilities of this site in creating a "happy family"; at the same time, the position "negatively, it contradicts state laws" is shared by 5.0% of "convinced believers", 8.7% of "believers", 11.7% of "hesitant", 12.5 % of "unbelievers" and 16.7% of "convinced unbelievers". Thus, the results indicate a negative attitude towards the appearance of the site "I am looking for "a second wife", although there are noticeable differences in the type of religious self-identification of respondents. In other words, the presence of a tolerant attitude to polygamy in the Islamic dogma, in the opinion of the authors, determines a tolerant attitude to this phenomenon.

Further, in our study, "control questions" were asked in order to establish the marital behavior of the respondents. Thus, in answers to the question "Would you agree to become "a second wife?", 51.4% of women adhere to the position "no, you must not interfere in another family and destroy it" and, by type of religiosity, their share is greater in the subgroup of "believers" (39, 9%), "hesitant" (36.9%), "unbelievers" (37.5%), "convinced believers" (28.1%) and noticeably less among "convinced unbelievers" (16.7%); at the same time, 23.6% of the women surveyed consider such an act to be "immoral", according to the type of religiosity, one in four respondents among "convinced unbelievers", every sixth among "believers", "hesitant" and "unbelievers"; further 8.0% are ready for such a marital union "if they love a person" and there are relatively more of them among "convinced believers" (8.8%) and "believers" (5.8%) compared to other subgroups, while other subgroups did not mark it at all; further 7.6% of the women surveyed are ready to become a "second" wife in order to have a child".

To the question "Would you like to have "a second wife?", 29.1% of men answered, "Yes, if there are no children in the first marriage, but I do not want to part with my wife", ethnically their number is noticeably higher among the Avars (12.9%), Kumyks (17.8%), Chechens (31.0%), and by type of religiosity among "convinced believers" (10.4%) and "hesitant" (13.6%). At the same time, the opposite position "no, I would not want to destroy my family" is supported by the same number of men surveyed, by nationality, compared with other subgroups, there are more of them among Dargins (10.7%) and Lezgins (18.3 %). Wherein, the type of religiosity, as our study shows, has a definite influence on the assessment of this phenomenon: every third respondent among "convinced unbelievers" and every sixth respondent among "unbelievers" adhere to this position, and the proportion of those in the remaining subgroups is noticeably less: 10.8% of "convinced believers" and 9.7% of "hesitant". At the same time, 13.9% of the men surveyed admit the possibility of having a "second wife" because "our religion allows a man to have 4 wives" the leader here is the subgroup of "convinced believers" (10.8%), in other subgroups their share is statistically small; further 11.5% of the respondents consider polygamy "immoral" the leaders here are "unbelievers" (12.5%), "convinced unbelievers" (16.7%) and 6.0% of



respondents whose “financial situation does not allow having "a second wife". Thus, we can state the opposite behavior and attitude towards polygamy by gender: most of the women surveyed do not accept the institution of a “second wife”, while the men interviewed are more likely to have a “second family” having different motivations.

If we turn to a survey conducted among the students of the South of Russia (on the example of the Republic of Dagestan) in 2012 [Vereshchagina A.V., Shakhbanova M.M., 2013: 61], during which they tried to identify the attitude of young respondents to family and family values, it was found that the main reason for divorces in modern Russian society, according to Dagestan youth, is lack of understanding between spouses (75%). Among other reasons, they noted those associated with a lack of knowledge about family lifestyle, responsibility in the family, family roles, material problems, no children in the family [Motovkina, Vishnevsky, 2018]. A relatively small number of respondents indicated a decline in morale as the cause of divorces in the families of southern Russia — about 20%; an even smaller number of respondents associated this phenomenon with the lack of education in the family, at school, and insufficient social support of the family from the state, and, as a result, trauma to various segments of the population [Gafiatulina, Rachipa, et al., 2018; Motsovkina, 2015].

A significant proportion of divorces in Russia, regardless of the region, are among young families [Young family in the Rostov region (based on a sociological study), 2011], which explains the importance of studying the opinions and positions on the reasons of divorces specifically among the young generation, for whom, by the way, the value of the family continues to remain at the highest level, including among Dagestan youth [Vereshchagina A.V., Shakhbanova M.M., 2013: 63].

Nevertheless, the reproductive attitudes of Dagestan youth no longer reflect the focus on a large number of children in the family, with all that, in comparison with the all-Russian data, the South-Russian youth demonstrates higher rates: in most cases, as a study conducted among students of the south of Russia in 2013 showed, the respondents planned to have from 2 to 4 children (with the majority of young people focused on a three-child family). For Dagestan, which has always been famous for its large families, the presented indicators, as the authors of this study write, are not high [Vereshchagina A.V., Shakhbanova M.M., Shikhaliyeva D.S., 2014: 59].

Accordingly, the emerging tendency towards a decrease in the birth rate in Dagestan in the post-Soviet period, despite the high rates by this demographic criterion among other regions of Russia, can take on a stable character [Gafiatulina, Vorobyev, et al., 2018]. In these conditions, the attitude to polygamy as a way to increase the reproductive potential of the region and its successful implementation can change in society.

On the issue of the influence of innovative and traditional elements of the family culture of the Dagestan peoples on the stability of family relations, measured, first of all, by the level of divorces, based on official statistics analyzed by B.M. Alimova, the followings can be said. Lower rates of divorce are recorded in rural areas than in urban areas. This is due to the much greater sustainability of family traditions in the rural regions of the republic and the high level of significance of social control of the family sphere by the rural society and kindred circles [Alimova BM, 2015: 124].

## **Conclusion**





Thus, the study shows that public opinion, as a force regulating family relations, has largely retained its position in rural areas, and therefore orientation to divorce as a way out of family conflicts is much less typical of rural families. In traditional family culture, divorce is not part of the system of positively perceived values, which in the regions of its sustainable reproduction is expressed in the dominance of family behavior, maximally focused on preserving marriage and family, overcoming conflicts.

In addition, based on the results of our analysis, we would like to draw attention to the following important aspects. The new norms and values of family relations penetrating the institutional space of the modern ethnic family of the South of Russia [Shavshin, Karapetyan, 2018], can also be ambiguously assessed, as are the trends of archaization, bringing back to life some of the long-forgotten family traditions, which include not only polygamy, described by us above, but also early marriages. A vivid attempt is also being made to restore a rather shaky structure of role interactions in the family based on patriarchal principles. The egalitarianization of family relations, albeit slowly, makes its way, mainly in the urban environment. The carriers of egalitarian family culture or rather its elements are mainly young families, whose higher level of instability can slow down the institutionalization of the model of egalitarian family that has already been established in many regions of Russia and the modern world. However, the process of family evolution is dynamic and, as it seems to us, the reconstruction of the traditional institution of the family in an archaic format that does not correspond to the dynamics of gender relations no longer threatens the institutional space of the family in the South of Russia.

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