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Adoption of nomadic childcare practices by urban Kazakh families: A sociological analysis

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Abstract

Relevance. Kazakhstan's modern social policy landscape has created challenges for urban families in managing childcare and household duties. This study examines the revival of nomadic cultural practices, specifically the employment of "female assistants", as a response to these challenges.

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to investigate the experiences of urban Kazakh middle-class couples who adopt or revive the practice of employing "female assistants" for childcare and household management, exploring the underlying reasons for this trend.

Methodology. The research utilizes data from 11 individual semi-structured interviews with female assistants, conducted between 2014 and 2017. A qualitative analysis approach was employed to examine the complexities of this social phenomenon.

Results. The study reveals a complex interplay of familial obligations, gender roles, and economic necessities in the employment of "female assistants". These arrangements often result in the exploitation of the assistants, who lose autonomy over their time and labour. The host families, while benefiting from the support, experience conflicting emotions about the fairness of the situation, often attempting to compensate through material means. Additionally, the study uncovers a significant invisibility of "female assistants" in symbolic representations and family hierarchies, contributing to the undervaluation of their work and social status.

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Conclusions. The research illuminates how urban Kazakh families navigate the challenges of contemporary social policies by reviving and adapting nomadic cultural practices. It underscores the complex power dynamics, emotional labour, and symbolic representations associated with the role of “female assistants” in modern Kazakh households, pointing to the need for further diversification of social policies regarding motherhood and childcare.

Keywords: social policy; neo-traditionalism; Kazakh families; “female assistants”.

Introduction

In most post-Soviet states, the reforms of the early 1990s were accompanied by a revival of traditionalist values and serious changes in the official ideology of the family and family policy. A significant decline in the birth rate forced the government to take a set of measures aimed at expanding benefits for working mothers and lengthening maternal leave. New benefits were aimed, in particular, at encouraging the family to have a third child; such a policy inevitably meant limiting women's workload in favour of family responsibilities. For the first time, experts publicly raised the issue of excessive overload of women combining the family role with the production one, and the need to give women freedom of choice between a professional career and family. One of the ways to ensure this freedom was seen as a transition from a dual-income family to a single-income family, i.e., raising a man's wage so that he could act as a “breadwinner”. These changes were not just a reaction to the official ideology of egalitarianism but a manifestation of the underlying tendencies of the “renaissance of patriarchy”, which was previously present at the level of mass consciousness. They reflected the crisis of the socialist “welfare state”, a veiled recognition of the social inefficiency of his family policy and the desire to return to the family its economic powers and responsibility for raising children [1].

Kazakhstan also was not an exception in this case. In a transforming Kazakhstani society, family policy can be characterized as traditional, pro-natalistic and family-friendly, which focuses on the normative model of the family (father, mother and children). The public, media, and academic discourses regularly reproduce the idea of the need to revive the institution of the family, as the stronghold of the nation, in which the woman fulfils the traditional roles of wife and mother, and the man is still entrusted with the function of economic responsibility for providing for the family. Kazakhstan's neo-traditionalism is becoming a state ideology in a transforming society. However, this ideology is poorly supported by current social policies. The state provides citizens with a set of the necessary minimum (maternity leave, job preservation, social benefits for child care, kindergartens), completely ignoring the diversified forms of modern families (single-parent, extended, large families, childless, urban, rural, etc.), motives for having children; the need for a variety of social services related to the care of children.

For example, a special state allowance is provided for large families in Kazakhstan with four or more cohabiting minor children. This includes children studying full-time in secondary, technical and vocational, post-secondary education institutions, and higher educational institutions. The allowance continues after they reach the age of majority until they graduate, but not beyond the age of twenty-three. The allowance was 10,345 tenge (27 dollars) in 2018 and increased to 10,405 tenge (28 dollars) in 2019. From January 1, 2019, the lump-sum benefit at birth to the

fourth child increased to 95.950 tenge (255 dollars), with the birth of fourth or more children, the number of payments is 159.075 tenge (423 dollars).

The monthly benefit for caring for a child upon reaching one year is for the first child – 14.544 tenge (38 dollars); for the second child – 17.196 tenge (45 dollars); for the third child – 19.822 tenge (52 dollars); for fourth or more children – 22.473 tenge (59 dollars). Nevertheless, at the same time, the parameters of the benefit are not differentiated depending on the number of children brought up in the family. Four or eight children in a family, it is appointed in the same amount. There are no nursery groups in state kindergartens and a child is admitted to kindergarten from only three years old, which does not allow mothers to go to work until the child is three years old. At the same time, the state childcare benefit is paid only for up to a year. The question arises: what does a woman with a child aged 1 year and 1 month do if she does not have a husband who undertakes to support her and her child, she lives without help from her parents or she does not have them, and she should provide for themselves and their child? E. Zdravomyslova [2] notes in her work that “...in the Russian gender order ... paid domestic labour is becoming more widespread ... the nanny market is diversified ... there is an increase in demand for these services”, then Kazakh families resort to traditional practices that originated and were justified during the existence of a nomadic society.

Here it is necessary to consider the specifics of social relations among Kazakh nomads because such a form of redistribution of child care described by us is available only with a certain configuration of kinship. The principles of kinship among Kazakh nomads are decisive in the formation of the social structure of a nomadic society. All the economic, social, and political needs of the society of nomadic herders are satisfied with the idea of the “kinship” of the individuals that make up the collective [3]. The primary elementary unit of the social structure of nomadic associations is “súek”, the institution of dominance of related, biologically related traits. It is difficult to explain “súek” by any Russian word capable of reflecting its internal content, although formally it means “bone”.

The terms “súek”, “súek bóly” – “bone”, and “bones cutting” – Kazakhs express the emergence of relations between the constituent units of nomadic associations. This kind of relationship is established through marriage. “Súek bóly” – “bones cutting” – this means: to connect in a marriage the “body” of a man, a member of one “rý”, with the “body” of a woman, a member of another “rý”. So, in public a kind of contract is concluded between these “rý”. “Kinship” does not end with the death of the directly married couples, but remains a constant relationship between the related “rý”. The Kazakhs are constantly saying: “*Kúey júz jyldyq, quda myń jyldyq*”, i.e. – “*Son-in-law – for a hundred years; in-laws, for a thousand years*” [3]. The relations arising in this case are of an allied,

contractual nature, imposing special obligations on the “spouses” of the parties, the fulfillment of which is within the jurisdiction of customary law (әдет). The relations entered into by various social units – “rý”, dictate to them the obligation to observe special norms of behaviour about each other.

Marriage between representatives of independent “family bloodlines” is an objectively necessary means of increasing productive forces. This is also indicated by the Kazakh proverb: *“Tósekte jas qosylsa, tóskeide mal qosylady”* i.e. *“If young people join in bed, then their livestock connects in the pasture.”* To justify such a production need, the idea arises of the “kinship” of these family farms. There is a “fusion” of non-native “bodies”, and “bones”. This constitutes the basis for the increasingly sophisticated social organism “rý”. Thus, the “Sútek” institution testifies to the existence of a specific way of creating units of kinship, with the subsequent expansion of the kinship system. Economic, social, military, and other interests linked nomadic herders into certain social associations. Modern Kazakhs have preserved not many traditions of a nomadic way of life, but adherence to kinship is crucial. Through the determination of belonging to the “rý” (clan), membership in one patriarchal branch is determined. All that is not included in the framework of a particular “rý” for the members of this “rý” are “jat”, “jek (e) – jat” – strangers, separate – strangers. Representatives of one of the “rý” carried, among other things, responsibilities for maintaining kinship relations, and caring for elderly relatives, children, and deceased parents.

In this article, we will try to describe the traditional practice of Kazakh families about the implementation of the childcare function, which differs from the standards established by the state. Through traditional values, we will understand the process of using norms and values from traditional culture and adapting them to modern conditions. This process is also called neo-traditionalism, because traditional practices adapt to modern conditions, not just reproduce. Approaches to the study of neo-traditionalism are ambiguous. So, researchers Y. Popkov and S. Madyukova [4] present it as a two-way process: on the one hand, the continuous reproduction of tradition, and on the other, its modification, and adaptation to modern conditions. As a result, it is not just following the “model” that is being carried out, but the tradition is developing through the incorporation of innovation. Another approach to considering neo-traditionalism as a process of using norms and values from traditional culture and adapting to modern conditions allows us to distinguish various forms of such adaptation [5].

We are interested in how a modern urban Kazakh family revives the traditions of a traditional nomadic society to take care of children. We will consider urban couples with children, representatives of the middle class. The fact is that as the research results [6] show, it is representatives of the urban middle class who are motivated to fulfil the gender contract “working mother” and “breadwinner”. “The gender contract is inextricably linked with social policy. Moreover, social policy defines a hegemonic gender contract” [2]. To date, in Kazakhstan, in our opinion, there are no clearly defined gender contracts. Rather, there is a certain mix that includes traditionalist, Soviet, and modernist practices. The choice

of these practices is determined by the individual biography of both the individual and the specific family.

Materials and Methods

As a theoretical basis, we use the approach of the Australian sociologist R. Connell [7], who applies the unifying paradigm in gender studies, using the concepts of “structure” and “practice”, borrowed from A. Giddens. The unifying paradigm in sociology arises as an attempt to overcome the opposition of the objective (social structure) and subjective (agent actions). In the Giddens theory of structure, structure and practice are linked as follows: human practice always assumes the existence of a social structure, in the sense that it invariably includes social rules or resources [8]. Giddens describes the structure as structuring qualities that allow, “linking” time and space in social systems, qualities that determine the existence of more or less the same social practices in time and space and which give them a “systematic” form [8].

Using a unifying paradigm, R. Connell [7] suggests describing the structure, finding out what it is in a given situation, and then exploring how the structure limits free practice. Practice in this sense is the transformation of a specific situation in a certain direction by or contrary to structure. He introduces the concept of “gender order”, understood as a combination of everyday practices and structural conditions that organize the interaction of genders at different levels of society [9]: institutional (social institutions that regulate gender behaviour), ideological (gender ideologies and discourses, gender norms of behaviour), symbolic (ideas about masculinity and femininity) [10]; every day (gender identities). Thus, using Connell's approach, we will analyse how objectively defined structures in the form of actions of state institutions and state social policy affect the daily practices of individuals in the field of family and marriage and how actors adapt to existing structures. We will analyse through four structural models: the structure of the profession, the structure of power, the structure of cathexis and the structure of symbolic representations.

The article describes and analyzes the tradition, which we conventionally designate as “female assistant”. We defined this practice precisely as “an assistance” for several reasons:

1. That is how we first heard about it from Kazakh women.
2. The concept of “assistance” in Russian means to contribute to someone or something; to facilitate, or simplify something (see. Great Dictionary), which is etymologically consistent with the description of this practice.
3. We searched for other designations (“students”, “a relative living in the house and doing homework and caring for children”, maids), but they were either not understood, or difficult to formulate, or did not reflect the practice itself.

The practice described by us involves the use of the labour of a young girl, a distant relative from an urban or rural area, who has experience in housekeeping and caring for children [11]. As a rule, her stay in her own family is problematic, as the family does not have finances for her education or marriage, but some relatives live in the city, are financially wealthy and who have children, elderly

relatives who need guardianship. As a “payment” for her work, the host family provides her with food, and clothing, sometimes paying for her studies at an educational institution or assisting in the issue of marriage.

The empirical base of the study was eleven individual semi-structured interviews with “female assistants” collected during 2014-2017. Interviews were conducted with girls living in the families of their relatives and taking care of the household and children of this family in the cities of Astana and Karaganda. The age of informants ranged from 17 to 25 years. The way to find informants is the snowball method. This method was chosen because the practice – of “female assistants” is poorly understood, and articulated by representatives of the Kazakh culture, it does not have a linguistic designation or name. Thus, no historical source describing the life of the Kazakhs [12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17] does not mention this tradition, but from conversations with Kazakh women, all agreed that they knew of the existence of such a practice. This made it necessary to explain in sufficient detail what we are investigating, and why it is of interest to us. Therefore, as a rule, our first informants gave contact to those girls, women who, like them, are involved in providing the care function. The interview was conducted in a calm, friendly atmosphere in the organization’s office.

Results and Discussion

In this article, as an example, we will consider the case of informant A., who, having enrolled in one of the universities in Karaganda, came to live with her paternal relatives – uncle and aunt in another city. The informant is 22 years old; she is from a provincial urban family. Her father is an employee of the system of secondary special education, her mother is a teacher at school, and she has a younger sister, a schoolgirl and a brother-schoolboy. The informant herself received a secondary special education and decided to continue her studies at the university in the correspondence department. Her uncle's family lives in a large industrial city in a private cottage. The family consists of three people: her aunt, who is a 50-year-old university teacher; her uncle, a 52-year-old employee in a leadership position in the educational system; and their 16-year-old son, who is a schoolboy.

Additionally, they have a 27-year-old daughter who is married with two children and lives separately. The interview itself consists of several thematic blocks. The first block of questions is devoted to a description of the reasons for the move and the rules that the informant will have to follow in the new family. The second block describes the family in which the informant is staying, who occupies what social status of the family members, and how relations are built between parents, children and the “assistant girl”. In the third block, the informant talks about the distribution of power between men and women in domestic work. In the fourth block, we talked about plans for the future [18].

As the reasons for moving to her relatives in another city, the informant indicated admission to the university for study. It was then that the question arose of where and with whom she would live. Note that the decision on where and with whom A. will live is made by her father and her uncle gives consent to her stay in his house and family. This situation demonstrates the patriarchal way of life in modern

Kazakh families, where men always make key decisions. “...*When it was necessary to decide where I would live [after entering a university in another city], my dad called his uncle and they arranged that I would come to them. Moreover, they have a big house, there are a lot of places, they work and I will come in handy for them [Laughs] (Inf., age 22)*”.

The informant means that she will “come in handy” to her uncle’s family as an assistant in housekeeping and to justify her stay in a strange house. As A. herself recalled, she did not want to live with relatives, she was ready to live either in a dormitory or in a rented apartment. However according to the traditional views of the Kazakhs, a young, unmarried girl should not be left to her own devices, and she cannot live in another city without supervision from older relatives. The presence of relatives living in the city at the location of the university automatically implies the presence of a young unmarried girl who came to study at the university and the fact that relatives will take her under their care. “*It was immediately decided that I would go to them [uncle] (Inf., age 22)*”.

To a block of questions about how A. was preparing for her departure, how she imagined her future life in the house with her aunt and uncle, she said: “*Mom warned me that it would be difficult... Mom herself once lived with relatives while studying... (Inf., age 22)*”.

As we see, the practice of “female assistant” is known to several generations of Kazakh women [19]. Moreover, all the girls we interviewed negatively assessed this experience of their life and said that they would never agree to this under any circumstances. But older women, in this case, mother A., do not inform their daughter about all the intricacies of occupying the status of “assistant”. “*And the aunt’s character is not so easy-going [Laughs] (...) Well, about the housework... I think somewhere to wash the dishes ... well, in general, what she asks on her initiative, where I see where my help is needed... (Inf., age 22)*”. As further interviews showed, the “female assistants” themselves did not expect that they would practically lose the right to manage their free time, as almost all housework and caring for children would become their daily responsibilities. Cleaning, cooking, preparing for family holidays, meeting guests, walking with children, entertaining children, seeing off to kindergarten or school, housework, they will all do this, following the instructions of older women.

Women themselves, who preserve and pass on to the next generation of women the values and norms of obedience, respect, veneration for elders, especially men, reproduce gender inequality in Kazakh families. Housework is gender-marked; it is imputed to the duties of women and only women. This work is not regarded as work; rather, it is regarded as characteristic of the “nature” of women. Women themselves give such an assessment of housework. Kazakh families support the exploitation of young girls by older women when girls are obliged to bear the burden of all household chores and work implicitly. “*Every day I start (...) I get up early, always at six (...) I cook breakfast, I already know, who eats what [Smiles] ... Then I wake up my brother, he does not get up for a long time, my aunt scolds me if he is late (...) Then we all go to work ... from work to the store that my aunt will say, I’ll buy something and I always try to [Buy] (...) House*

cleaning in the evening is necessary (...) The house is big, it's hard for her already [Aunt] (...) I'm cooking dinner (...). Then I call everyone to eat, I clean everything (...) By midnight I almost crawl to bed and sleep! (Inf., age 22)".

Early adolescent girls are attracted to helping their mothers with housework and in caring for younger children. By the age of 13-14, the girls, already possessing all the necessary skills for housekeeping and caring for children, became sufficient members of the female team of the family [16]. *"You can't disobey the aunt (...) You can't dispute with her! (...) I dare ask for somewhere [hanging out with my friends, eating out, cinema] she [aunt] immediately starts interrogating, where, why, with whom, why you didn't warn me, I was counting on you (...) Well, sometimes younger brother [aunt's son, schoolboy] supports me, tells her [aunt], that I have a right! (Inf., age 22)".* Daily, household relations in Kazakh families are strictly hierarchized, especially in relation to such criteria as gender and age.

This implies demonstrative and complete obedience of women to men and younger seniors. At the same time, gender hierarchy is more important than age hierarchy. *"The uncle is kind, calm, never interferes [in disputes or quarrels between family members] (...) Yes, and he is always busy, he has such a job (...) we don't annoy him [when he is at home] (Inf., age 22)".* Profession and income level usually determine the status of men in Kazakh families. The higher the professional status and income, the less the man or father is involved in the process of housekeeping and is fragmentarily involved in the care of children. All the burden falls on the woman, wife, and mother, who, at the same time, also works. Therefore, in the event of a stay in the house of a "female assistant", the most burdensome, routine and not prestigious types of domestic work are transferred to her.

The work of "female assistants" is also actively used in the process of caring for the younger members of the family – children. At the same time, it is considered extremely important to instil in young Kazakh girls the skills of caring for young children, as it is believed that this experience will be useful to them in the future when they become mothers. Kazakh girls get this experience at a fairly early age [20]. So, for example, the birth of the youngest child in the family automatically implies that the older girl will take on part of the responsibilities of caring for him. *"On weekends, we've got messy stuff! [Laughs] (...) Children come (uncle's granddaughters). They need attention, they need to cook something tasty there ... take them to the park or the playground and I need to catch everything ... then I rest at work [Laughs] (Inf., age 22)".*

In the course of the interview, it turned out that the "female assistants" were involved in caring for children not only of the family in which they live but also of close relatives of this family. This happens especially often when older relatives need to go on a visit. Note that going on a visit to the Kazakh culture is a very common practice and this happens almost every weekend. Thus, the "female assistants" themselves do not have the opportunity to relax, to choose what they will do on the weekend. *"This weekend they brought all the children (two uncle's granddaughters, two aunts' nephews) and I thought that I would go crazy! [Laughs] (...) They all simultaneously need something from me ... I try to somehow make them together to play ... they*

quarrel, toys are differed ... (...) I had to entertain them until night (until their parents returned from the guests) (Inf., age 22)". Such exploitation of the "female assistants" by themselves is perceived as something not fair, something that they are burdened with, but are forced to do because a refusal or a manifestation of a reluctance to do work will be perceived extremely negatively and will cause conflict and irritation from relatives. The only way to avoid fulfilling domestic duties is to leave home. But, doing it often is difficult, because it is either expensive, or makes you miss classes, or take time off at work.

The understanding that the exploitation of the "female assistant" is not fair, that too many responsibilities are entrusted to her, makes it necessary for relatives to somehow compensate for her care and work. Most often, material things or an opportunity to relax are used as compensation. *"They (aunt and her daughter) have so many things (...) So they will either give me a new bag completely, or they will bring some blouse (...) I don't always like it, but okay, at least something [Laughs] (...) Well, here I am dressed up and with the friends, I go to the cinema there or in a cafe (Inf., age 22)".* Such "double standards" about the "female assistant" cause her confused emotions, not understanding her attitude when she is exploited, on the one hand, and thanks and helps on the other. However, intuitively she understands that her situation is extremely unfair and she would not want a repetition of such an experience. *"The uncle is kind, fair, but aunt (...) no one can say anything against her (...) When she is not in the mood, she starts doing everything herself (at home) and then does not talk to anyone (...) the uncle then scolds us (informant and son) that we don't listen to her, don't help her (...) and then we walk around, fawn [Laughs] (Inf., age 22)".*

Staying in a family of relatives is accompanied not only by performing routine and not prestigious housework but also by psycho-emotional adaptation when it is necessary to build relationships with all family members. Older women in Kazakh families have symbolic power, which they use to psychological pressure on family members. This gives rise to the feeling that they are the ones who control the house and are the "head of the family". Nevertheless, financial issues, and key decisions are still made by men.

A stay in a family of relatives can last from a year to several years, but each of our informants said in an interview that they would like to live separately, independently, not with relatives. *"Yes, I would at least tomorrow! [leave] (...) I'm complaining to my mother, telling her how bad it is for me here [at my uncle's house] (...) I want to get another job so that my salary is normal (...) to leave, rent an apartment and live with girls [classmate friends] (Inf., age 22)".*

To do this, respondents use different strategies: they return home, move to a dormitory, look for work that will allow them to pay for a rented apartment, rent an apartment collectively, together with friends, and get married. In their assessments of the status of "female assistants", informants speak of it as something difficult, heavy, crushing, painful experience of their life, something that leaves unpleasant memories and does not cause a desire to repeat this experience.

After analysing, interpreting and describing the case of informant A., who acted as a “female assistant”, we came to the following conclusions. The system of gender inequality in Kazakhstan noticeably toughened with the advent of capitalist relations and the free market. The state failed to create a differentiated set of social services in the field of family policy. This situation forced individuals to find their own “recipes” for solving problems related to housekeeping, caring for children, and raising them. One of the ways of adaptation, the practice, recreated in Kazakh families from the traditions of a nomadic society, associated with close kinship relations, is to use the work of “female assistants”. The work of the “assistant girl” has become a way of adapting (of composition) actors to ineffective mechanisms for implementing the family policy proposed by the state (structure).

As the study showed, the gender order in Kazakh families is hierarchical, especially regarding such criteria as gender and age. Kazakh families support the exploitation of young girls by older women, when, by default, girls are obliged to bear the burden of all domestic work on an equal footing with adult women. The problem of the “curve” of women's power is not the topic of this article, but it is essential for understanding the position of the “assistant girl” in the Kazakh family.

The gender structure of labour in Kazakh families determines the status of men through their position, profession and income level. The higher the professional status and income, the less the man is involved in the process of housekeeping. All housework falls on a woman, wife, and mother. In the case of staying in the house of a “female assistant”, who is in the Kazakh family at the very bottom of the family hierarchy, all routine, burdensome, types of housework and care are transferred from the housewife to her. This situation confirms the fact of the existence of inequality in Kazakh families not only between men and women but also between women and women.

Conclusions

The hierarchy within the framework of relations determines the sphere of power, where the central axis is the connection of power with masculinity. So, “female assistants” get into a family with city relatives thanks to negotiations and the decisions of men. They lose the right to manage their free time because almost all housework and caring for children become their daily responsibilities. But any complaints from the “female assistants” about such injustice are considered ingratitude for the fact that the family of her relatives sheltered her and could lead to

serious disagreements and even a conflict between relatives.

The sphere of cathexis in “female assistants” is something not fair, something that they are burdened with, but are forced to do, because a refusal or a manifestation of a reluctance to perform this work will be perceived extremely negatively and will cause non-understanding, irritation from relatives. The understanding that the exploitation of the work of the “female assistant” is not fair, that too many responsibilities are entrusted to her, causes the need for relatives to somehow compensate for her work and care, and, as a rule, this is material compensation. Compensations are material things or the ability to relax. Such “double standards” about the “assistant girl” cause her confused emotions, and lack of understanding of the attitude of relatives from her, when, on the one hand, they exploit her, and on the other, they thank and help her.

But intuitively, they understand that their situation is extremely unfair and they would not want a repetition of such an experience. The sphere of symbolic representations is especially accurately reflected in the practice of “female assistants”, as it (practice) is not indicated in the language, in the sphere of symbolic communication. So, it is very difficult to understand who the “helper girl” is in the Kazakh family of the urban middle class, because its symbolic representation is absent, and its status in the language, and the family hierarchy is not indicated. Thus, the “female assistant” becomes as if not visible, does not exist, her contribution to the family is levelled down, and her work is not appreciated.

It should be kept in mind certain limitations of this study since only “female assistants” were chosen as the object of study, while a study of women using the work of “female assistants” will help to form a more holistic characterization of this practice. We suggest that the study may be the starting point for further study of this issue not only using sociological methods, but also ethnographic, anthropological, etc. A deep scientific reflection on how modern Kazakh families adapt to the conditions, goals and principles of Kazakhstan's social policy can contribute to understanding the need for diversification of social policy about mothers and children.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Переїняття кочових практик догляду за дітьми міськими казахськими сім'ями: Соціологічний аналіз

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Анотація

Актуальність. Сучасна соціальна політика Казахстану створила виклики для міських сімей у сфері догляду за дітьми та виконання домашніх обов'язків. Це дослідження розглядає відродження кочових культурних практик, зокрема наймання «жінок-помічниць», як відповідь на ці виклики.

Мета. Мета дослідження – вивчити досвід міських казахстанських пар середнього класу, які застосовують або відроджують практику найму «жінок-помічниць» для догляду за дітьми та ведення домашнього господарства, а також дослідити глибинні причини цієї тенденції.

Методологія. У дослідженні використано дані 11 індивідуальних напівструктурованих інтерв'ю з жінками-помічницями, проведених між 2014 та 2017 роками. Для вивчення складнощів цього соціального явища було застосовано підхід якісного аналізу.

Результати. Дослідження виявило складну взаємодію сімейних обов'язків, гендерних ролей та економічних потреб у працевлаштуванні «жінок-помічниць». Такі домовленості часто призводять до експлуатації помічниць, які втрачають автономію щодо свого часу та праці. Приймаючі сім'ї, отримуючи підтримку, відчувають суперечливі емоції щодо справедливості такої ситуації, часто намагаючись компенсувати її матеріальними засобами. Крім того, дослідження виявило значну невидимість «жінок-помічниць» у символічних репрезентаціях та сімейних ієрархіях, що сприяє недооцінці їхньої праці та соціального статусу.

Висновки. Дослідження висвітлює, як міські казахські сім'ї долають виклики сучасної соціальної політики, відроджуючи та адаптуючи кочові культурні практики. Воно підкреслює складну динаміку влади, емоційну працю і символічні репрезентації, пов'язані з роллю «жінок-помічниць» у сучасних казахських домогосподарствах, вказуючи на необхідність подальшої диверсифікації соціальної політики щодо материнства і догляду за дітьми.

Ключові слова: соціальна політика; неотрадиціоналізм; казахські сім'ї; «жінки-асистентки».