

Spread of Western Marital Behavior in Georgia

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Introduction

The European type of marriage becomes more and more dominant all over the world; and Georgia is not an exception. This type of marriage is characterized by late marriages, decrease of the number of marriages, spread of cohabitation, low fertility, increase of extra marital births. Since the early 1990s all these features have caused the intensive transformation in the Georgian society. The similar family changes have been noticed also in other Post-Soviet countries, however, in different scales.

Marital behavior is formed alongside the process of socio-economic and cultural development of the society, is transferred from generation to generation, receives the face of traditions and becomes the cultural inheritance.

Substantial changes in nuptiality have been observed in Georgia over past 15 years. People are marrying later and less often. Legal Unions are increasingly giving way to non-registered unions. Marriage, which was until relatively recently, the only form of conjugal life, has lost ground to the new alternatives. So, contemporary marital behavior in Georgia acquired the signs which is characterized by the second demographic transition.

In Western and Northern Europe the new marriage patterns have started to emerge earlier, about four decades ago and have gained more rapidly. Soon it has spread in the South European countries and since the 1990s turned towards Eastern Europe and Georgia as well, but in Georgia family changes (and changes in marital behavior too) are different in scope and they have been occurring at different speed.

Rapid family changes have been caused by various reasons: unemployment, economic crisis, instability on the labor market (common for all the countries of market economy), emancipation, female employment, considerable drop of minimal income, disorganization of the state system for providing housing and so on. The intensive emigration processes, begun in 1990s also have contributed to the expansion of the western marital behavior. Certainly, among the above-mentioned reasons the economic factors play dominant role concerning this issue. Economic difficulties become kind of extra factors predetermining rapid family changes and a very steep and marked decline of fertility.

Methods

The research is mainly based on different quantitative and qualitative resources, including statistical yearbooks and surveys, the First National Population Census of Georgia 2002, and the information data provided by

Georgian and foreign experts and demo-sociological research held in January-February, 2006 by the authors of this paper.

Results

The transformation of Georgian society begun in 1990s has also caused the family transformation. Changes are noticeable in every sphere of the family life. Economic basis of the family , relation among the family members, the possibilities of their activities, the priorities of the life and matrimonial behavior are being changed. That's why demographic characteristics of family transformation have changed in Georgia. The number of marriages has decreased considerably, from 38,3 thousand (1989) to 12,7 thousand (2003) (Fig. 1). Noticeably, while in 1989 on 1000 person every 7,1 were getting married, in 2003 this indicator fell till 2, 9. (Fig. 2)

Figure 1.

DDynamics of marriage numbers in Georgia, 1989-2003

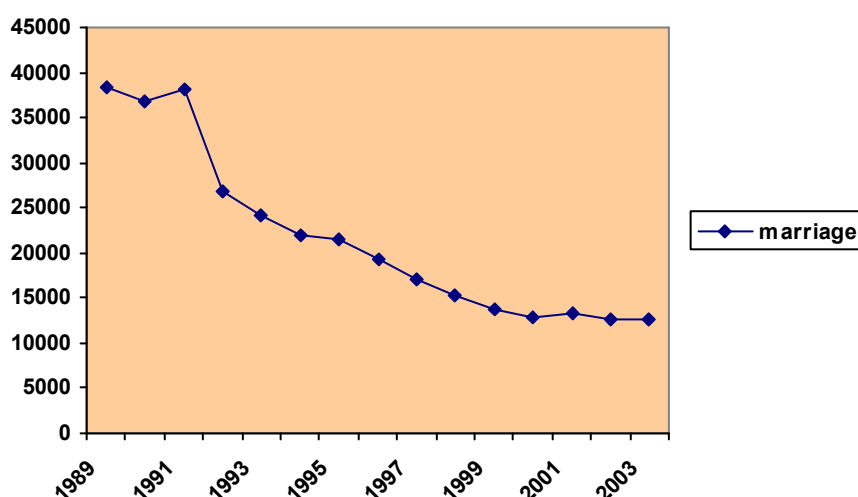
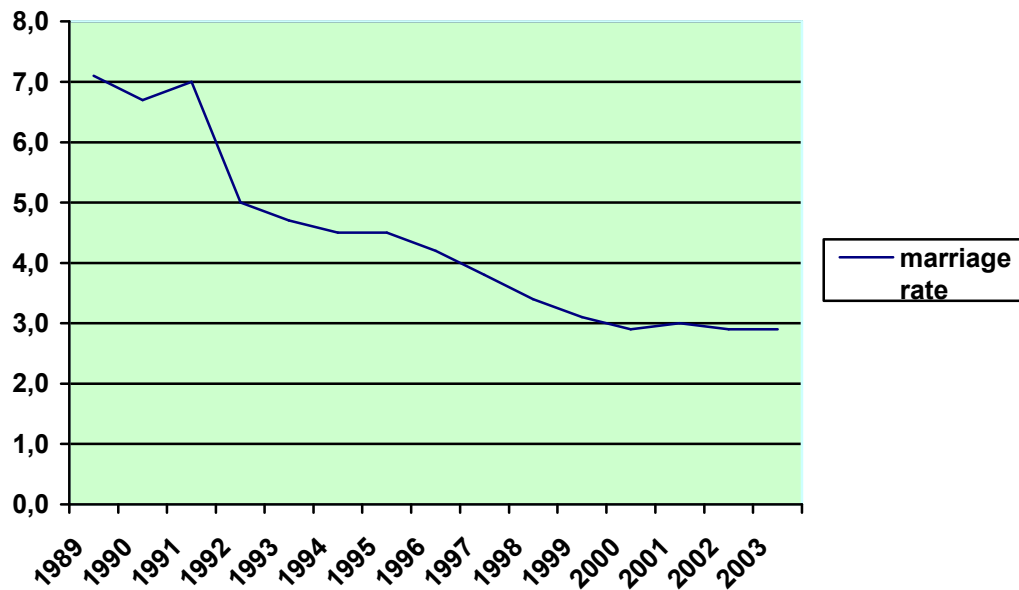


Figure 2.

Crude marriage rate in Georgia, 1989-2003 (%)



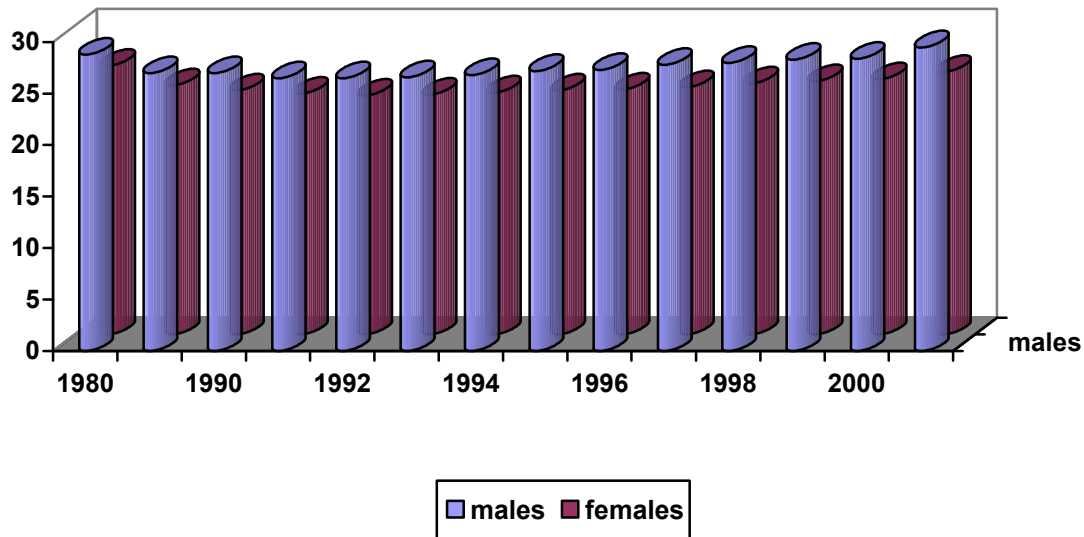
Not only the rate of marriage has reduced but marital structure of the population has changed greatly either. During the 20th century the proportion of married population was the highest only in 1989 and now its proportion is the lowest. According to the First National Population Census of Georgia 2002, the proportion of divorced people was the highest in 2002. The majority of divorced women are at the age of 20-29. It has a negative influence on fertility level, because divorced Georgian women remarry seldom in comparison with European women. The nuptiality decline among young women accelerates even further, and the additional marriages are insufficient to offset it. In 2002 because of divorces about 2620 children were not born. If we take into account existing fertility level, we'll see that demographic losses caused by divorces are considerable. The marriage structure of the population is disadvantageous because of high proportion of never married people. If we take into account the

deformation of marriage structure of the population the great proportion of women will still remain single and this proportion should continue to rise.

In Georgia the tendency of sharp decrease of birth rate coincided with the drop of economic living level, begun in 1990s. Since then informal relations have spread very fast and above mentioned intensive family transformation has begun, which has a great influence on marital behavior of the society. For instance, the mean age of first marriage is increasing constantly, by the year 2003 the mean age at first marriage for women was 25,5 instead of 23,7 (by the year 1990), and for men it was 29,5 instead of 27,0 (by the year 1990). This means that marriage “gets old”. This is one of the signs of the family transformation (Fig. 3). Laypersons believe that people in the South Caucasus, especially women marry at an early age, but statistics show the opposite situation. Precisely the South Caucasus and first of all Georgia is distinguished with late marriages. In Georgia the youth, especially young men after graduating from the university try to develop economic basis and then create the family. But today even the majority of women are not dependent on men. They also prefer receiving a high education, create hard economic basis and then have a family and children. And of course all these reasons cause delaying marriages. As for early marriages, they were common for Georgia before the 20th century. But even at that time less Georgian women got married at an early age in comparison with other nationalities living in Georgia.

Figure 3.

Mean age of first marriage in Georgia, 1980-2003



Both early and late marriages have negative aspects. Many researches showed that it is dangerous for the posterity both early and late marriages, also the first pregnancy and childbearing at an early age.

It is supposed increasing the mean age of the first marriage in the future. The results of the demo-sociological research have confirmed this statement. The majority of the students consider the best age of first marriage 25-30. The opinions of the interviewed people about the best age of the first marriage points to situation that in the future late marriages will be still typical for young people and by the years 2020-2025 the mean age at first marriage will reach the indicator presented in Northern and Western European countries nowadays.

The traditional Western model combines later marriage with high proportion who never marry, whereas the Eastern model is characterized by early marriage. It should be noted that late marriages have become common to Georgians not only at the present time, but for several decades already. Even in 1980-90s the mean age at first marriages for Georgian women significantly exceeded the same indicators of those in the Central and Eastern European countries. Even at that time, according to these indicators, Georgia was close to such countries, as Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, Norway, and Finland. Thus, by this indicator Georgia is close to Western model.

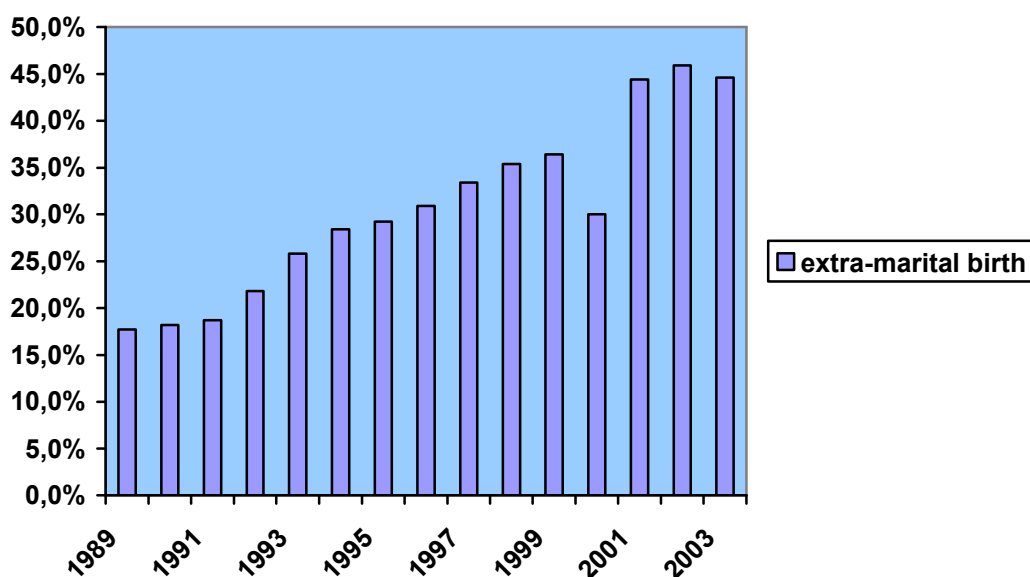
Another significant sign of the expansion of the European type of marriage and family transformation is the growth of cohabitation and extra marital births. The majority of the youth prefer informal relations. They enjoy to live in cohabitation without any registration. In Georgia decrease of number of officially registered marriages are compensated by non-registered relations. The evidence of such situation are extra-marital births. The number of children born without marriage has increased from 17,7 % (the year 1989) till 47, 7 % (the year 2004) (Fig. 4). In Georgia extra-marital births always existed, but it was sternly inadmissible by the society and its scales were not large. But at the end of the 20th century the attitude towards the extra-marital births became more liberal.

According to this indicator, Georgia surpasses its neighboring countries – Russia (29, 5 %), Ukraine (17, 3 %), Armenia (13, 2 %), Azerbaijan (7, 6 %)

(Fig. 5). It should be mentioned that in 2004 22735 (47,7 %) were born in non-registered marriage and 25929 (52,3 %) in registered marriages. Among the children born in non-registered marriages 39,9 % were children who are registered according to the declaration of both parents and 8 % according to the declaration of mother. This means that these mothers have to grow up their children alone.

Figure 4.

Extra-marital births in Georgia, 1989-2003



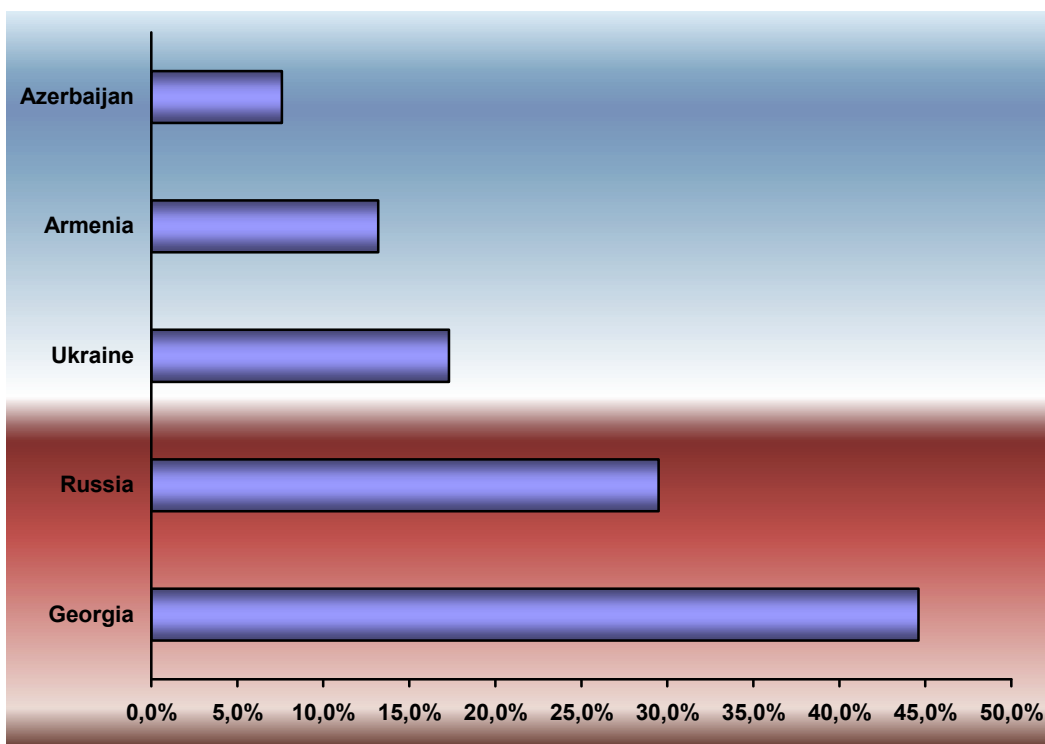
Before the 1980s the rate of extra-marital births was on a low level. Since then its increasing has begun. By the year 1985 among all live births this indicator has reached 10,5 % and by the year 1989-17,7 %. From the beginning 1990s has started its considerable increase – it has increased till 47,7 %.

We should pay attention to the rate of extra-marital births by age of mother. The share of children born by mothers at the age of 20 is very high. For example, in 2004 45,7 % of children were born in non-registered marriages by 20 years old mothers, in 1989 this indicator was 30,7 %.

Generally the majority of women in non-registered marriages have one child, that has a negative influence on fertility rate, because as a rule women in non-registered marriages have no desire to have more children.

Figure 5.

Extra-marital birth in Georgia and neighbor countries



At some point, the growth of extra-marital birth can be explained while taking into consideration that some marriages are registered in the confessional

way. Indeed, the majority of newly married couples do not address the judicial form – nowadays common way of marriage registration. Of course, this situation reduces artificially the number of registered marriages.

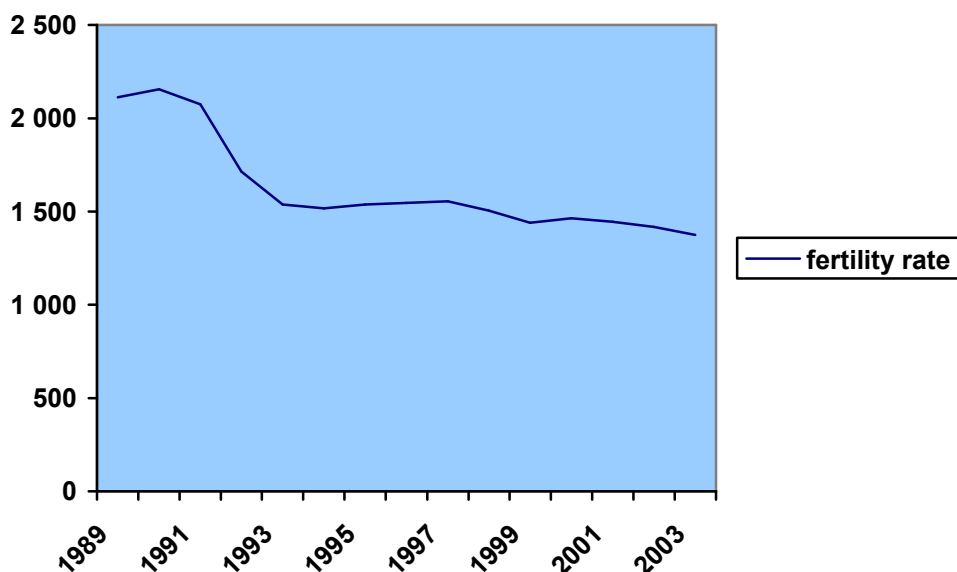
The increase of extra-marital births is also caused by the disposition of the youth about extra-marital births. Their attitude towards extra-marital births are very liberally. For showing their opinion and disposition regarding this matter we conducted the demo-sociological research in Tbilisi in 2006, 771 students were interviewed. The results of the research has shown that the young people have the tolerant relation towards the extra-marital births. The results of this research have a forecast meaning. If we take into account this, in the future the extra-marital births will still increase because of such disposition of the youth.

We must indicate that the fertility level would have been lower if the extra-marital birth had not increased so significantly. The number of births has reduced twice from 91,1 thousand (1989) to 46,2 thousand (2003). Total fertility rate has decreased from 2, 15 to 1, 37 (Fig. 6). Fertility rate will remain low in the future. The results of demo-sociological research have shown that if the reproductive behavior realizes according to the desirable number of children, young generation will provide reduced reproduction of population. In students' point of view, desirable mean number of children in the family is 2,3 child. According to the young men's opinion it is 2,4 child and the young girl's opinion – 2,2. Nowadays ideal and desirable mean number of children has

decreased. These indicators were higher four years ago. Thus, students' disposition about childbearing is disadvantageous in respect to ensure the population growth.

Figure 6.

Dynamics of Total Fertility Rate in Georgia, 1989-2003



It follows from analyzing the data of extra-marital births that since 1990s marriage forms have been changing in Georgia, especially in recent years and among young people. The majority of them prefer non-registered marriages. As we have already mentioned they prefer marriages in confessional way or simply cohabitation and of course their children are considered as children born in non-registered marriages because such marriages have not judicial rights.

The fact that in each subsequently younger generation opinions on extra-marital births and cohabitation have been liberalizing is indicate on a further propagation of the phenomena. It is very disturbing that about 44,7 % of the

young generation has neutral attitude towards increasing non-registered marriages and 35 % of them appreciate the increase of their number positively. Perhaps in the future their disposition will increase the number of non-registered marriages. In general it should be indicated that 70,8 % of the youth appreciate decreasing of number of marriages neutral and 27,6 % negatively, 1,6 % - positively. The most interesting is that much more young women appreciate the decrease of marriages neutral than the young men. i.e. the women who must provide the population growth in the future have indifferent relation towards the low level of marriage rate.

Thus, it seems that the great part of the young people can't realize the hard demographic situation of the country and hence it follows that they have the passive attitude towards the existing condition.

Marriages no longer considered the precondition for life as a couple or even starting a family: marriage has ceased to be a demographic phenomenon. Yet, it remains a major social phenomenon – legal unions has declined considerably but it remains quantitatively very important; many couples, whether or not already cohabiting and with or without children, still choose to get married. If this is sometimes for opportunist reasons, in many cases it reflects a genuine attachment to the institution of marriage, one which is reflected in the decision to have a religious ceremony after, or instead of the civil ceremony. Despite of its decline, marriage is more than ever a key indicator for understanding contemporary society.

As for factors preconditioning the alteration of the family, some of them are specific, the others – fundamental. Social losses when the changes caused by transferring to the market economy influence the part of population, belong to the specific factors. The intensive emigration processes have contributed to the expansion of western marital behavior. This condition has become one of the factors for family transformation in Georgia. The people, who are of age 16-49, not married or are divorced, present the main flow in intense emigration processes. It's obvious that the young people going abroad in order to improve living conditions, are unlikely to create families and rarely have children. Emigrants are considered to be extra source of European life-style and different forms of marriages widely spread in Western countries. This situation assists to spread western marital behavior in Georgia and the result of it is that the majority of the people adopt such behavior very fast.

Conclusion

The difficult economic situation begun in 1990s has caused a certain delay of marriages. The majority of the youth prefer informal relations, because they take less responsibility towards each other by this way. The main priority of young people is not the creation of the family, but the development of the economic basis. Marriage is postponed because of difficulty in acquiring a dwelling, inadequate income, situation of the youth on the labor market. So,

economic causes in postponement or renouncement of marriage are much more frequently considered as important in comparison with social, cultural or demographic causes.

The prevalence of cohabitation life-style has caused the transition to quite low fertility. The situation wouldn't become so crucial if the non-registered marriages were as productive as the traditional ones.

According to the mean age of first marriages Georgia is close to some European countries. (Portugal, Hungary, Estonia), while still behind Western and Northern European countries, but surpassing Central and Eastern European countries, especially Lithuania and Latvia.

In every 20-25 year Georgia somehow repeats the way of demographic development that Europe has already experienced many years ago. Taking into account this situation, we may assume that by the years 2020-2025 the mean age at first marriage will reach the indicator presented in Northern and Western countries nowadays.

All these changes – steady decline of the rate of marriage and fertility, spread of cohabitation, postponement of marriage and childbearing, increase of extra-marital births are significantly in Georgia, but they are weaker than in Western countries and have not yet appeared in full scope.

Thus, today there is a high spread of the European style of marriages taking place in Georgia. From the demographic point, this situation is not very welcome in Georgia, as it means abnormal relations as well as high level of

non-married people. Moreover, the cohabitation is one of the main reasons of the birth level decline.

It should be mentioned that the great part of the society reacts painfully regarding the decrease of number of marriages and births. They reject the phenomena of family transformation (senior people). In general, the attitude towards family transformation is different: on the one hand, the orientation towards traditional family still exists in Georgia, and on the other hand, families with modern European life-style are more and more prevalent.