

## WOMEN IN THE ETHNIC COMMUNITIES OF KAZAKHSTAN AS A CHANNEL FOR THE PRODUCTION AND FORMATION OF CIVIC AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: ON THE EXAMPLE OF TAJIK WOMEN IN THE TURKESTAN REGION

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### ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of a field study conducted among women of the Tajik ethnic group of the Turkestan region based on the project «Women of ethnic communities of Kazakhstan as a channel for reproduction and formation of civic and ethnic identity (using the example of the Turkestan region and the city of Shymkent)».

The research methodology was based on a qualitative approach. Considering that women of the Tajik ethnic group of Kazakhstan had not previously been studied within the framework of identity, methods of narrative interview and observation were used to analyze their identity and daily life.

The article not only presents the identity of Tajik women and the channels of its transmission in their interpretation, but also presents the concepts of «identity», «civic identity», «ethnic identity», the rules of the narrative interview method, its disadvantages. The advantages and difficulties faced by the researchers during the field period of the study were described. In general, the article can be considered a guide for specialists in the field of social sciences on the use of qualitative research methods, including the use of narrative interviews in the study of ethnic groups, especially when studying identity issues in small groups. In addition, the article is important for specialists working in the interethnic field, engaged in research in this field, especially for specialists considering the problem of identity, for young scientists and students studying in the field of social sciences

**Key words:** Ethnic Groups, Tajik Ethnicity, Women, Identity, Methodology, Qualitative Research Approach.

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**Қазақстан этникалық қауымдастықтарындағы әйелдер азаматтық және этникалық бірегейлікті өндіру және қалыптастыру каналы ретінде: Түркістан облысындағы тәжік әйелдері мысалында**

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада «Қазақстан этникалық қауымдастықтарындағы әйелдер азаматтық және этникалық бірегейлікті өндіру және қалыптастыру каналы ретінде (Түркістан облысы және Шымкент қаласы мысалында)» жобасы негізінде Түркістан облысындағы тәжік этносының әйелдері арасында жүргізілген далалық зерттеудің нәтижелері ұсынылды.

Зерттеудің әдіснамасы әлеуметтанудағы сапалы зерттеу тәсіліне негізделді. Қазақстандағы тәжік әйелдері осыған дейін этникалық топтың мүшесі ретінде бірегейлік шеңберінде зерттелмегені ескеріле отырып, олардың бірегейлігін және күнделікті өмірін талдауда нарративті сұқбат пен бақылау әдістері қолданылды.

Мақалада тәжік әйелдерінің бірегейлігі және оны трансляциялау жолдары олардың интерпретациялауында ұсынылып қана қоймай, «бірегейлік», «азаматтық бірегейлік», «этникалық бірегейлік» ұғымдарының тұжырымдамасы берілді, нарративті сұқбат әдісін жүргізу ережелері, оның кемшіліктері мен артықшылықтары, далалық кезеңде зерттеушілердің кезіккен қиындықтары сипатталды.

Жалпы, мақала әлеуметтік ғылымдар саласындағы мамандар үшін сапалық зерттеу әдістерін, оның ішінде өте сирек қолданылатын нарративті сұқбатты этникалық топтарды зерттеуде, әсіресе бірегейлік мәселесін шағын топтарда зерттеу барысында қолдану бойынша бір нұсқаулық болып есептеле алады. Сонымен қатар, мақала этносаралық салада қызмет атқаратын, осы саланы зерттеумен айналысатын мамандар үшін, әсіресе бірегейлік мәселесін қарастырып жүрген мамандар үшін, әлеуметтік ғылымдар саласында білім алатын жас ғалымдар, студенттер үшін маңызды болып табылады.

**Түйін сөздер:** этникалық топтар, тәжік этносы, әйелдер, бірегейлік, методология, сапалы зерттеу тәсілі.

### **Женщины в этнических сообществах Казахстана как канал воспроизводства и формирования гражданской и этнической идентичности: на примере таджикских женщин Туркестанской области**

**Аннотация.** В статье представлены результаты полевого исследования, проведенного среди женщин таджикского этноса Туркестанской области на основе проекта «Женщины этнических сообществ Казахстана как канал воспроизводства и формирования гражданской и этнической идентичности (на примере Туркестанская область и город Шымкент)».

Методология исследования была основана на качественном подходе. Учитывая, что женщины таджикского этноса Казахстана ранее не изучались в рамках идентичности, для анализа их идентичности и повседневной жизни использовались методы нарративного интервью и наблюдения.

В статье не только представлена идентичность таджикских женщин и каналы ее передачи в их интерпретации, но также представлены понятия «идентичность», «гражданская идентичность», «этническая идентичность», правила проведения метода нарративного интервью, его недостатки. Были описаны преимущества и трудности, с которыми столкнулись исследователи в полевой период исследования.

В целом, статья будет полезной для специалистов в области социальных наук руководством по использованию методов качественного исследования, в том числе по применению нарративного интервью при изучении этнических групп, особенно при изучении вопросов идентичности в небольших группах. Кроме того, статья важна для специалистов, работающих в межэтнической сфере, занимающихся исследованиями в этой области, особенно для специалистов, рассматривающих проблему идентичности, для молодых ученых и студентов, обучающихся в области социальных наук.

**Ключевые слова:** этнические группы, таджикский этнос, женщины, идентичность, методология, качественный подход исследования.

### **Introduction**

Society is an integrated system where elements are closely related and influence each other. In the same way, the formation of personal identity is invariably shaped by the influence of societal members and structures.

The formation of personal identity is significantly influenced by the perceptions of others, their lifestyles, patterns of experience, methods of self-development, decision-making experiences, and individual journeys in understanding life [1].

Representatives of symbolic interactionism (Mead J., Cooley K.) observed that children begin to form their worldview within the primary group, typically their

immediate family. This perspective resonates with E. Erikson's psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes that a child's early social experiences within the family shape their initial sense of group identity [2].

The project "Women of ethnic communities as channels of reproduction and formation of civic and ethnic identity (using the example of the Turkestan region and the city of Shymkent)" was developed based on observational research conducted at the Institute of Applied Ethnopolitical Research [<https://iaer.kz/>] between 2020 to 2022. The research findings highlighted distinct role and gender-specific practices in childrearing among the majority of Kazakhstani ethnic groups. Specifically, the

division of labor within these groups significantly influences their roles within the family structure. For instance, men are predominantly engaged in agriculture and logistics, while women are active in teaching, medicine, or domestic affairs. Consequently, women often assume primary responsibility for household management due to men's extended absence from home. Based on the findings of the secondary analysis, the primary focus of this research project centered on elucidating the role of women in childrearing, their contribution to civic and ethnic identity formation within their ethnic communities, as well as exploring the role, position, status, and identity of women within these ethnic groups.

The article presents the results of a field study conducted among women of the Tajik ethnic group of the Turkestan region in March-April 2023. It analyzes the identity of women of the Tajik ethnic group, focusing on their perceptions of daily life, societal roles and positions, their contributions to child-rearing, and the methods through which they transmit identity during the upbringing of children.

### **Methodology**

This research is based on a qualitative approach. Qualitative approach is used if there is little research work on the issue under consideration. It is exploratory in nature, so it is useful when the researcher does not know what variables to consider in relation to the problem being studied. Also, the qualitative approach is important when researching issues that are new, have never been studied, and cannot be applied to clear theories about specific groups and samples [3]. At the same time, another reason for using qualitative research is that there is a limitation of the possibility of research within the framework of its general set [4]. That is, when the object of research consists of subgroups and it is impossible to extract detailed information about their gender, age and place of residence from the general population, it is decided to use a qualitative approach.

Taking into account the fact that the subject of the proposed research has not been fully and systematically reviewed in Kazakhstan, as well as the compact loca-

tion of the research objects and their small volume, it was decided to use the qualitative research method in this field study. In addition, the fact that the problem of women in Kazakh ethnic groups has not been studied as a separate group and their place and role in the formation of identity has not been considered at all was the main reason for undertaking this research project.

This project uses a qualitative method of narrative research and participant observation. The word «narrative» can be understood as a report/story from the beginning to the end about the experience of the informant and a conclusion drawn from it [5].

Narrative interviews are characterized by unstructured, in-depth tools with deep features arising from the respondent's life stories and cross-analysis of the situational context. This type of interview aims to encourage the interviewer to tell about important events in the informant's life and social context. In this method, based on the idea of reconstructing social events based on the perspective of informants, the influence of the interviewer on the conversation is minimal [6].

Women of Tajik ethnic group in Turkestan region with experience in raising children over 18 years of age were identified as the object of the research.

A key principle that distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative research is that it is not based on a specific sample. In a qualitative approach, the researcher is concerned with the completeness of the information rather than the retention of a specific, predetermined sample. In this study, priority was given not to sampling, but to full collection of information. That is, the researcher decided to stop the research only when all the information was gathered, the same answers were given to the questions, and new ideas and thoughts began to be repeated.

More than 30 respondents participated in this study. In the course of the research, attention was paid to socio-demographic characteristics, education levels, and social categories of interviewees in order to ensure the comprehensiveness of public opinion, as well as to listen to the opinions of all categories of the population.

Additionally, the study focused on the settlement patterns of ethnic groups. Thus, the village of Al-Farabi, in which Kazakhs and Tajiks live together, was chosen as a multi-ethnic settlement; the village of Firdausi was chosen as a mono-ethnic settlement, where exclusively Tajiks live.

Piotr Sztompka in his work «Visual Sociology» notes that visual symbols describe social life and the reality of the society, therefore any visual information is important for the analysis of social phenomena [7]. Therefore, in this study, the main method - narrative interview, along with participant observation method was used. During the observation, the attention of the researchers was directed to the external attributes of the informants. Public places (shops, restaurants, schools, streets, markets, etc.) were selected as control areas. During observation, diaries and cameras also recorded any visual aspects of the social world that needed to be analyzed, such as women's clothing, their actions in any situation, the style of communication with each other and with other ethnic groups, and the visual representation of behavior patterns.

### **Main part**

There are differences in the interpretation of the main concepts of the domestic sociological tradition, such as «nation» and «ethnos» and the works derived from them [8, 9]. Debates about the relationship between the terms «ethnicity» and «nationality», «ethnic identity», «national identity» and «citizen identity» are still ongoing. The categories «ethnicity» and «nationality» are often used interchangeably, that is, they are considered synonymous.

In fact, it is important to understand the complexity and multiplicity of the term «identity» in modern society. Identity reflects a person's consciousness, feeling as a member of a certain group, as well as socio-cultural and historical aspects of their life. The term «identity» is one of the most widely used terms in the social arts and humanities. It increased the importance of the concept of identity in the social self-determination of a person and made it possible to understand the external social reality as a result of the internal social structure. On the meth-

odological basis, it led to the priority of the subjective-actional convenience instead of the structural-functional convenience.

According to Erikson, the formation of identity is one of the main tasks in personality formation and development. The formation of identity is explained not only as a person's spatial identity, but also as a group identity. The process of formation of identity is based on individual and socio-cultural basis. From the point of view of psychology, the formation of identity is the simultaneous implementation of reflection and control processes, which occur at all psychological levels. During the process, the individual evaluates himself according to the evaluation of others. Thus, for Erikson, identity is a complex, multi-level structure, the main condition for the effective functioning of a person and an indicator of psychological stability [10].

The works of a certain number of authors also consider one of the types of identity - ethnic identity. As for *ethnic identity*, through this type of identity an individual forms a sense of belonging to an ethnic community or group. Its important elements are territory («native land»), language («mother tongue»), religion («correct», «true»), ethnohistory, cultural traditions, as well as symbolic representations of ethnonym. Ethnic identity is distinguished by ethnocentrism, as well as manifestations characteristic of group and individual behavior [11, 12].

Ethnic identity has been comprehensively studied in social science by anthropologist T. Eriksen [13], sociologists D. Mason [14] and J. Rex [15] and social psychologists Phinney [16], M. Verkuyten [17]. Most of the researchers agree that ethnic identity is not a biological phenomenon, but a specially constructed one [18]. Ethnic identity is conceptualized as an expression of the relationship between two or more groups, which are considered to be carriers of «cultural differences». N. Hutnik and R. Street show that people in an ethnic community may imitate the ethnic groups they belong to in order to define their ethnic identity [19].

As for *civic identity*, it was considered as self-identification of a person as a citizen of the state, understanding of the image of the state, the «We» country, coopera-

tion, unity, sense of responsibility when it comes to national issues [20]. According to L.M.Drobizheva, the unity that distinguishes civic identity from other forms of identity is its nature of action [21]. Action-based identity is not only loyalty to the state or its norms, but also unity with the country's citizens, its desire to participate in making political decisions, to take responsibility for the country's problems.

The sense of citizenship is taken as the main measure of civic identity, that is, it means a sense of solidarity that eliminates individual differences. It can also be used as a resource for the development of a mono-ethnic society, because division and «tribalization» are not only based on ethnic characteristics (ethnic and religious divisions are evident), but also social, value, ideological, property-based, etc. types [22].

*The results of the study.* Tajiks are a Central Asian people who inhabited the Kazakh lands during the times of Tsarist Russia. According to the All-Russian Population Census, in 1897, 987 representatives of the Tajik ethnic group lived in Kazakhstan. Like the Kazakhs, they adhere to the Sunni branch of the Islamic religion and live in a geographical environment with similar natural conditions [23]. In the twentieth century (1930-1966), Tajiks settled in the regions of the South Kazakhstan region: Zhetysai, Saryagash, Maktaaral, Shardara. Since 1934, Tajiks from the Republic of Uzbekistan began to come to the Maktaaral region. In 1930-1940, settlers from Gorny Maschto came to the "New Path" farm in the village of Firdousi. In 1955, after Bostandyk was transferred to the territory of Uzbekistan, settlers immediately began to move to the Saryagash region. In the 30s of the 20th century, Tajiks from the villages of Porasht, Arsaf, Hayat, Ukhm, Mocharm, Sintab, Sob and Echi of the Forish region began to move to the village of Maktaaral. The main reason for the resettlement of the people, on the one hand, is the low standard of living, lack of irrigated land, disagreement between family ties, and on the other hand, the lack of labor in the recently built Maktaaral state farm [24].

In 1924-1925, residents of the Forish region leased new lands of Maktaaral and worked seasonally. In the 1940s, the

number of migrants grew to 3,000 families. In 1930-1940, Tajiks from the Gorno-Machinsky region of Tajikistan moved to the village of Rokhi Nav, which was later renamed into the village of Ferdowsi. On November 27, 1956, in order to irrigate the Dilvarzinsky massif, by order of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Tajikistan, the residents of the Machinsky region were resettled to this land. And some of them, in search of their relatives, came to the Zhetysai region of the South Kazakhstan region.

The resettlement of Tajiks to Kazakhstan continued until the 60s. A few years later, a small group returned to Tajikistan; for others, Kazakhstan became their home. The village of Firdausi is called "little Tajikistan" in Kazakhstan.

There are currently 50,121 Tajiks living in Kazakhstan, which makes 0.27% of the total population of the republic. In the Turkestan region their number is 37,640 people. Most of them inhabit the Maktaaral (15,228 people), Zhetysai (12,410 people) and Saryagash (9,491 people) regions [25]. The bulk of Tajiks live separately in the village of Bostandyk, Saryagash region, in the village of Firdousi, Maktaaral region, as well as in the village of Al-Farabi, Zhetysai region.

*Social portrait of Tajik women.* Based on the narrative interview results, half of the informants, irrespective of their residency, have five or more children. Tajiks in Kazakhstan are known for having many children, highlighting that large families are not unique to specific ethnic groups but are common across various ethnicities in the southern regions.

Most Tajik women have secondary education; higher education is noted only in a small number of informants. This reflects the typical life trajectory of all Tajik women, who share similar experiences, that is, they raise girls from childhood for a future family, teach them everyday life, how to run a household, be a mother, without much consideration for their education beyond high school graduation. This explains the fact that even if Tajiks send their daughters to study, then only in fields deemed beneficial for their future roles as wives and mothers, such as teaching and healthcare professions. In a traditionally structured patriarchal family/household, men help little in "women's" affairs, and women have to do everything themselves. This char-

acterizes the pronounced traditional approach to raising Tajik girls.

The issue of higher education for women in the Tajik ethnic group of the Turkestan region deserves particular consideration. It is especially worth noting the mono-ethnic settlement, in which receiving religious education in a madrasah is considered preferable to obtaining higher education. There were cases in which families, especially elders, were against educating women. At the same time, despite all the prohibitions, violating their internal orders and traditions, there are Tajik women who plan to educate their children.

In a multi-ethnic settlement, women are encouraged to receive higher education. However, obtaining a higher education does not guarantee them employment, since the main problem in the village is unemployment. If we take into account the fact that unmarried young Tajik girls do not receive support from family and society when moving to other regions of Kazakhstan or nearby settlements of the region for employment, then it is foreseeable that their future will predominantly revolve around starting a family and managing household.

Another important factor influencing the lifestyle of Tajik women is the religion of Islam. According to the results of observations, the most devout Tajiks live in the village of Firdousi. These villagers base their daily lives on Islamic law and rely on Sharia law when making decisions. Residents of the village of Al-Farabi do not perform basic religious rituals, sometimes they perform some rituals, they perceive religion as culture. Tajiks annually celebrate holidays such as Nauryz (the first day of spring) and Eid al-Fitr (the end of Ramadan).

*Role in raising children.* For a Tajik woman, the most valuable thing in their life, and the goal of life in itself, is their children. In a Tajik family, family functions are strictly distributed. Basically, the woman is involved in everyday life, raising children, and the father is the unquestioned authority, the breadwinner of the family. It turns out that a woman fulfills the primary needs of children: feeding, bathing, taking them to activities clubs, buying them clothes, preparing for school. At the same time, women tend to underestimate their large role in education. However, if even a little,

there are families where the father tries to find time for the children, spend time with them, particularly since many Tajik women lack adequate education, resulting in fathers often assisting with homework. But mostly the mother or children help each other, the older children help the younger ones. If a dispute arises between spouses, women said that the spouse is not happy with the mother protecting the children, taking their side, and hiding mistakes.

It is worth noting that the permanent authority in upbringing remains with the father. The foundations of the traditional type of family have been preserved, where women "raise" children, frightening their father, "If you don't listen, I'll tell your father!" This is also the reason why children go to their mother for advice; not everyone dares to turn to their father.

*Identity.* The daily life of Tajik women is also monotonous. They generally begin to get involved in household chores in the morning, take care of children, and only in spring and summer do they have the opportunity to earn money in the fields. It is worth noting that the main income for women consists of TSA (Targeted Social Assistance) received from the state.

When asked how culturally active they are, Tajik women answered that they do not go out to cultural events much, but they do not miss events related to children, such as competitions and concerts where they participate. They are not keen on reading books, do not follow the news happening in Kazakhstan and the world, they are more interested in the news of their village, which can certainly affect them, and other socio-political, socio-cultural issues of their region or country are not a subject of interest for them.

Both settlements exhibit characteristics of collective consciousness and collective behavior, so in them women are more subordinate to the authoritarian opinion of men and live according to the rules established by the older generation. For most women, the laws of their village, their community, are more influential than the state ones. This could be attributed to their lack of familiarity with these them.

When analyzing Tajiks from the point of view of identity, it is worth taking into account their regional characteristics. For

example, among the Tajiks from the village of Al-Farabi self-awareness is dominated by local ethnic identity, while among Tajiks from the village of Ferdowsi – ethnic with a pronounced religious component.

The main components of ethnic identity among Tajiks are the Tajik language, the history of the people, identification with their ethnic group, and a sense of pride in their people, which has deep historical roots from Persian culture.

It is worth noting that women do not invest purposeful effort in the reproduction and formation of any type of identity in children. They do not talk with their children on topics related to such important areas of society as history, culture, law, etc., therefore they do not play a special role in the formation of legal and civic literacy of children. However, they do their part to develop children's religious knowledge and love for their ethnicity by teaching them their mother tongue, religious knowledge and preservation of traditions. Another issue is that Tajik women stated that although this is not achieved by disseminating certain knowledge in shaping the identity of the future generation, they shape it through their experiences and their own examples.

Many Tajik families are extended, which means that several generations live under one roof. Elders ensure that family and cultural traditions are observed. Moreover in this society there are public institutions like the Council of Elders and the Council of Mothers, which take part of the responsibility for raising the generation. In such a society, it is logical that women have to share their functions of raising children not only with the elders of their family, but also with public institutions.

### **Conclusion**

As history shows, the existence and stable development of a multi-ethnic state like Kazakhstan was impossible without the formation of a unified civil nation and the corresponding national consciousness. The formation of national identity today is based on the recognition of the need for citizenship.

During the XXXII session of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev noted that a new national identity has been formed in Ka-

zakhstan during the years of independence. According to him, the blue passport and the blue flag are real symbols of our identity [26]. The President considers our society to be a union of free and responsible citizens united by common ideals and values. This is another bright manifestation of our national identity. According to the President, today all citizens can feel themselves as members of one big and united Kazakh family and nation. In addition, Kassym-Jomart Tokaev noted the important role of preserving national identity, and in this regard, it is necessary to carefully consider issues of ethnopolitics.

Since woman is the main actor of socialization in the family, the role of women in the formation of social identity is important. Recently, the conflicts and intolerance observed in the youth environment raise the question of the role of women in the formation of the civic identity of the new generation of Kazakhstanis and how this process is combined with the formation of ethnic identity. The events of January 2022 raised the issue of education of tolerance and citizenship in new situations. The role and potential of women in this socially important process is important, because nowadays social media and the environment are powerful actors in influencing children and young people.

Due to the fact that women in ethnic groups of Kazakhstan have not been studied before, the study of women is relevant and necessary today. For the science of Kazakhstan, the features of women's lifestyle, their status and position in society, and their role in shaping the life orientations of young people are still unknown. Also, there are no empirical data worthy of analysis about their role in the construction and formation of identity. Observations show that women in ethnic communities «communicate» with society through men, that is, men carry out external communication, and women make internal connections and relationships.

The results of the study show that Tajik women's roles in the family continue to be overshadowed by men, who shape their views and life positions. Based on the research data, women can be represented as a channel that transmits established traditions and norms in society to new generations. Since they have not received mass

higher education and have not established close sociocultural relations with the external environment, they tend uphold and perpetuate existing societal identities.

The results of the study among women of the Tajik ethnic group of the Turkestan region show that in order to form and strengthen civic identity in a given society, it is necessary, first of all, to strengthen the position and role of women in it, to update their current social portrait. To do this, it is important, primarily, to direct the activities of public institutions of a given society to motivate young women to obtain higher education and modernize the consciousness and views of women in accordance with the requirements of modern times.

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