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DIVORCE AND FAMILY RELATIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. *The COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding quarantine measures affected family relations. In some countries divorce rate has increased during the pandemic. In other states, statistical data did not show any changes or demonstrated decline in divorce rates, which would be affected by divorce application delay because of social mobility restrictions. The obtained results demonstrated that in Kazakhstan divorce rate declined and self-isolation improved family relations during pandemic.*

Keywords: divorce, pandemic; family relations

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine measures and self-isolation affected all spheres of human life including family dynamics such as family formation and dissolution.

The constant staying with family members, the need for spouses or one of them to work remotely, combining professional and domestic responsibilities would have some impact on family relations. In some countries, divorce rate has increased during the pandemic [1, 2, 3]. In other states, statistical data did not show any changes or demonstrated decline in divorce rates which would be affected by divorce application delay because of social mobility restrictions [4, 5].

The purpose of the study is to explore changes in divorce rate and family relations in Kazakhstan and its regions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature review

Studies about the pandemic's influence on social-economic and other spheres of life in Central Asia including Kazakhstan were published [6, 7, 8, 9]. However, not all of them issued divorce or family relations during the pandemic.

According to the United Nations (UN) report, in Kazakhstan, one of the hot-lines set up for victims of domestic violence reported a 50 % increase in calls in the first half of April alone as compared to February 2020. 50 % of girls are subjected to violent methods of discipline in the family, including 21 % subjected to physical punishment, while 45 % experienced psychological aggression and violence [10].

Results of a research based on the survey indicated that 12–13 % of respondents were worried about conflict cases in family relations, 1.8 % of cases led to divorce, 6 % – to alcoholism [11].

Materials and Methods

The main tools for collecting data are the method of statistical analysis of Crude Divorce Rate in the studied country and its regions for the period 2010–2020; secondary analysis of a survey which included persons aged 18+ ($n = 722$).

The survey was carried out in order to learn changes in social situation during the pandemic. It included a question “How isolation period affected your family relations?” which would indicate changes in family relations.

The sample is stratified by sex, age, place of residence, education level, and social position. According to gender indicators, 23 % were men, 77 % were women. 56.2 % were urban residents, 43.8 % were rural residents. The following groups were distinguished based on the education level: basic secondary – 7.8 %, general secondary – 10.2 %, secondary professional – 18.7 %, not complete higher – 6.5 %, higher – 56.8 %.

Study Results

In the years 2010–2019, the Crude Divorce Rate fluctuated between 2.6 and 3.2 per 1000 in Kazakhstan, in 2020 the rate notably declined (Fig. 1). In 2021, in urban areas, the value of rate did not change, while the rate declined from 1.8 to 1.7 per 1000 in rural areas.

It is important to observe that in Russia, the Crude Divorce Rate declined from 4.2 per 1000 in 2019 to 3.9 per 1000 in 2020. Uzbekistan, where divorce rate is one of the lowest, had the rate of 0.9 per 1000 in 2019 and 0.8 per 1000 in 2020.

Divorce rate in Kazakhstan is also characterised by regional differences. Historically, regions in northern, central, eastern parts of the country are mainly inhabited by European ethnic groups (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Germans, and others), southern and western parts – by Asian ethnic groups (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uighurs, and others).

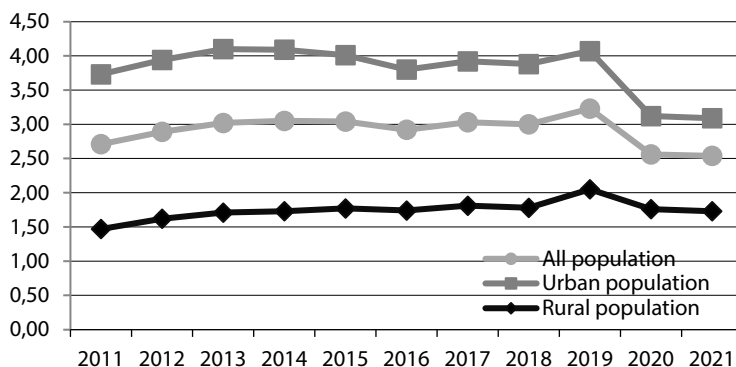


Fig. 1. Crude Divorce Rate, per 1000 (source. Bureau of National Statistics, Republic of Kazakhstan)

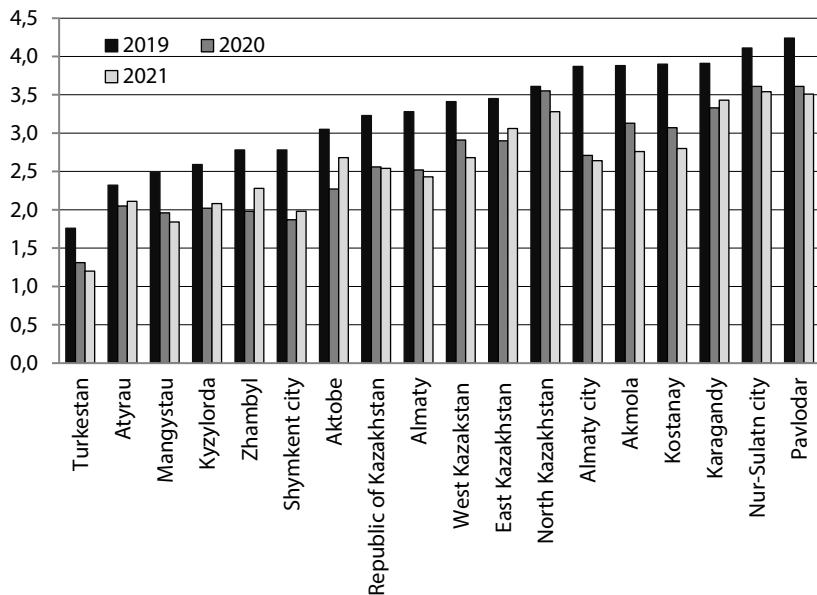


Fig. 2. Crude Divorce Rate, per 1000, regions (source. Bureau of National Statistics, Republic of Kazakhstan)

In 2019, the southern part regions such as Turkestan (1.8 per 1000), Kyzylorda (2.6 per 1000), Zhambyl (2.8 per 1000), Shymkent city (2.8 per 1000), and the western part regions Atyrau (2.3 per 1000), Mangystau (2.5 per 1000), Aktoke (3.1 per 1000) had divorce rate below the national level (3.2 per 1000) (Fig. 2).

The northern (North Kazakstan, Pavlodar, Kostanay), central (Akmola, Karagandy), eastern (East Kazakhstan) regions, municipal cities (Almaty city and Nur-Sultan city), and other southern (Almaty) and western (West Kazakhstan) regions demonstrated higher than national rate with the highest value in Pavlodar region (4.2 per 1000).

Cultural differences (according to their ethnic structure) and urbanisation level of regions would have some impact on regional differentiation of divorce rate.

Regions also had a decrease in divorce rate in 2020 in comparison with 2019. The decrease ranged from 0.1 in North Kazakhstan region to 1.2 in Almaty city. In 2021, not all regions had the reducing rate, in Aktoke, Zhambyl, Kyzylorda, Karagandy regions, and Shymkent city the value of divorce rate somehow increased.

We cannot surely suppose that divorce rate really decreased in the country, partially because of a divorce delay in the quarantine period. It is important to

Table 1

Marriage and divorce indicators					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of marriages	141 791	137 797	139 504	128 839	140 256
Number of divorces	54 626	54 797	59 796	48 002	48 239
Ratio, %	38,5	39,8	42,9	37,3	34,4

Table 2

Question: “How isolation period affected your family relations?”

	Sex	
	Men, in %	Women, in %
I got closer to my family and learned more about it	48.8	44.1
I argued with my family more than earlier	3.6	4.3
I met abuse and violence	1.2	0.5
I have divorced	0.6	0.7
Nothing changed	45.8	50.4

note that quarantine measures in 2020 had impact on marriage delay. Apart from marriage, in the year 2021, the number of divorces did not return to the pre-pandemic period, influencing the reduction of ratio value (Table 1).

According to the survey results, about half of interviewed men (48.8 %) and women (44.1 %) got closer to their family and learned more about family members (Table 2). Other half, 45.8 % of men and 50.4 % of women answered that nothing changed in their family relations during pandemic.

Conflicts in family relations were indicated by 4.8 % of men and 4.8 % of women. 0.6 % of interviewed men and 0.7 % of women divorced during pandemic.

47.6 % of respondents aged 18–30, 39.9 % aged 31–45, 51.2 % aged 45–60 and 33.3 % aged 61+ answered that they got closer to their family. Other part of respondents at observed ages indicated that nothing changed in their family relations. Just few respondents indicated the negative effect of isolation on family relations.

The results of the survey by other parameters also demonstrated that in most cases, isolation made family members closer to each other or changed nothing in family relations.

Conclusion

Analysis of statistical data demonstrated that in Kazakhstan and its regions divorce rate declined in 2020 when quarantine measures were relatively strict. In 2021, the rate slightly declined in rural areas and some of regions, other regions indicated an increase in the rate.

Negative changes in family relations surely took place in society. However, the survey results demonstrated that pandemic restrictions had mainly positive effect on family relations. Similar results were indicated in Kyrgyzstan,

according to UN research: 56.9 % of interviewed youth got closer to their family, 47 % answered that nothing had changed during the pandemic [12].

The divorce delay, in some cases an improvement of family relations would have positive impact on divorce rate dynamics in the country.

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