

# Demographic disasters as a factor in the transformation of the peasant family in Russia in the first half of the 20th century

Lyudmila Mazur and Oleg Gorbachev  
Ural federal university  
Ekaterinburg, Russia



# The term 'demographic disaster'

- Coined by Alexander Chuprov in the early 1920s (demographic situation in Russia during WWI)
- Vladimir Isupov: sought to distinguish between 'demographic crisis' (endogenous factors) and 'demographic disaster' (exogenous factors)
- Sergey Maksudov:
  - a 10-20 million population decline;
  - a decline in the average life expectancy;
  - formation of a new trend in population replacement;
  - the irreversible character of the changes (the age-sex imbalance persists and increases).

# Two approaches

- *Narrow*: limits the range of reasons for population decline to the increased mortality rate;
- *Broad*: considers also other factors such as migration, declining birth rates and average life expectancy.

# Demographic disasters in 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia

1. 1914-21 (WWI and Civil War, 10-12 million lost)
2. 1930s (collectivization, mass famine, repressions, 10-11 million)
3. 1940s (WWII, 1946-47 famine, 26-29 million)
- 1960-70s (migration outflow, 40% decline of rural population)
4. 1990s? (migration, increased mortality rate, 14.4 million)

# Disaster features, after S. Maksudov

- **1st half of the 20th century:** more intense, but short-lived (4–5 years), with subsequent restoration / return to the previous model of demographic behavior;
- **2nd half of the 20th century:**
  - stretched over time,
  - more complex; affected all aspects of life of the population,
  - irreversible

= a new type of demographic disasters caused not by social cataclysms, but by endogenous causes, including state policy

# Peasant family:

- At the core of the family structure transformation in the Soviet society.
- Until the 1930s had managed to preserve its role by shaping the standards of demographic behaviour and family relationships among the vast majority of the population.
- The traditional peasant family should be considered as a heritage of the rural society, which relied on the concept of the family as a work unit.
- Complex structure.

# Budget surveys of peasant families in the Soviet Russia

- The available statistical data insufficient for reconstructing demographic processes and for studying transformations of the structure and functions of the 20th century family.
- Budget surveys cover a period from the 1920s to the 1980s.
- Budget statistics considers the family not just as a demographic unit but also as an economic unit.

# The budget survey program

- 325 households for 1929
- composition of the family (age, sex, and marital status of family members)
- retrospective analysis of family dynamics from 1913.



РОССИЯ

Свердловская  
область



# Distribution of peasant families in the Ural *oblast'* according to their size in 1913-1929

Average family size:  
 1913 – 6.10  
 1929 – 5.52

Number of household members	1913		1929	
	Number of households	%	Number of households	%
1	1	0.49	1	0.31
2	9	4.45	14	4.31
3	27	13.37	18	5.54
4	30	14.85	59	18.15
5	32	15.84	81	24.92
6	29	14.36	68	20.92
7	22	10.89	47	14.46
8	18	8.91	16	4.92
9	9	4.45	13	4.00
10	10	4.95	5	1.54
11	1	0.49	1	0.31
12	5	2.47	1	0.31
13	1	0.49	0	0.00
14	4	1.98	1	0.31
15	1	0.49	0	0.00
16	1	0.49	0	0.00
22	1	0.49	0	0.00
No data	1	0.49	0	0.00
<b>Total</b>	202	100.00	325	100.00

32,7%

28%

50%

65.2%

16,8%

6,5%

# Peasants' response for demographic disaster

	1916	1920	1923	1926
Number of households, thousand	1105	1088	1075	1224
On average, per household				
persons	5.11	5.82	4.88	4.7
horses	1.45	1.41	1.15	1.21
cows	1.70	1.48	1.18	1.46
sown area, tithe	4.21	3.55	2.69	4.00

# Key characteristics:

- 96.8 % of households were headed by men
- Acc. to budgets, only 6.47 % of households were single-parent, the rest were two-parent
- over 70 % of households had from 2 to 4 minor children while 7.4 % had 5 and more
- 22.46 % of households had no children or just one child

In the late 1920s the peasant family preserved its traditional characteristics and was less affected by modernization processes if compared to the urban family

## *Depeasantation* in the 1930s

- *Collectivization* policy
- *dekulakization* and breaking up of large peasant households;
- 1932 famine
- purges

### Effects:

- **external:** the shrinking size of the peasant population
- **internal:**
  - changes in life style and demographic behavior;
  - changing of social self-identification

# 1939 census

Average rural family size,  
Sverdlovsk region:

1929 – 5.52

1939 – 4.04

Singles – 2.4 %

2-4 family members – 64.3 %:

5-7 family members – 32 %

8 and more – 3.7 %

# 1930s, peasant household in the *kolkhoz* economics

- peasant households were associated with *kolkhoz* economics
- peasant household preserved its economic foundation, albeit in a limited way, until the 1960s were the basis for the formation of the family budget
- it also preserved its archaic characteristics such as the patriarchal nature of familial relationships, traditions of age and gender labour division, and women's subordination

The gap between social and demographic status of rural family:

though it preserved its *patriarchal* characteristics, its *demographic* characteristics were transformed

# 1941-50s

- Demographic consequences of the WWII
- Post-war Soviet agrarian anti-peasant policy, famine 1946-47
- Migration outflow

- Rise of the single-parent families
- Decline of birth rates

Average rural family size,  
Sverdlovsk region:

- 1939 – 4.04
- 1959 – 3.70

+

**Reducing the economic importance of peasant households since the late 1950s as a result of rising living standards**



**Accelerated irreversible process of the destruction of the traditional family**



# Conclusion.

## Stages of the evolution of the rural family

- **2nd half of the 19th century - 1929:** normal evolution of the Russian peasant family household
- **1930s** - the crisis of the peasant household: dramatic demographic changes with the reduction of the economic function, but the value of the small-sized private households as a means of survival is preserved). The crisis is overcome due to the continued expanded population replacement
- **1940-50s** - the deep irreversible crisis of a peasant family. Growing number of single-parent families. Narrowed population replacement.
- **1960-70s** – intensive migration outflow. The economic basis of the rural family changes; new sources of income. Completion of the demographic transition. Former peasant family transforms into the urban type family.

Thank you!

Lyudmila Mazur [Lmaz@mail.ru](mailto:Lmaz@mail.ru)

Oleg Gorbachev [og\\_06@mail.ru](mailto:og_06@mail.ru)

Ural Federal University  
Ekaterinburg, Russia

