



Marriage and its dynamics in central Asia (19th-20th century)

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OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 24 December 2024

ACCEPTED 26 January 2025

PUBLISHED 28 February 2025

VOLUME Vol.07 Issue 02 2025

CITATION

Zebuniso Amanullaevna Saidova. (2025). Marriage and its dynamics in central Asia (19th-20th century). The American Journal of Social Science and Education Innovations, 7(02), 125–128.

<https://doi.org/10.37547/tajssei/Volume07Issue02-13>

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Abstract: This article examines the historical and socio-economic factors shaping marriage age and birth rates in Uzbekistan from the 19th to 20th century. It explores early marriage traditions, the impact of 20th-century reforms, and shifting trends due to urbanization and economic changes. Special focus is given to the post-1991 period, where economic transitions, education, and contraception contributed to declining birth rates. The study highlights how cultural norms, policies, and economic conditions have influenced demographic trends over time.

Keywords: Marriage age, demographic trends, birth rate, urbanization, economic transition, reproductive behavior.

Introduction:

- 1. Marriage Age in Central Asia Before the 20th Century**
- 2. The Influence of Social and Political Life on the Marriage Age in the Early 20th Century**
- 3. The Impact of Marriage on Birth Rates**

1. Marriage Age in Central Asia Before the 20th Century

Marriage, divorce, birth, and mortality are the key demographic processes. While marriage and birth rates positively affect the gender and age structure of the population, divorce and mortality affect them negatively. Marriage is one of the factors directly influencing the age composition of a population. It is a socio-demographic process influenced by social, economic, and demographic factors. Marriage statistics in Uzbekistan have been recorded since the late 19th century. According to scientific sources, in ancient times, women in Uzbekistan married at a very young age

(14–16 years).

In ancient Central Asia, early marriages among girls were common. For instance, nearly 49% of girls aged 15-16 and 75% of girls aged 17-19 were married. Cases of early marriages have also been noted in various studies conducted in Uzbekistan. The marriage age was determined by Sharia law, according to which a girl

reached adulthood at 9 years old, while a boy reached adulthood at 12 years old.

2. The Influence of Social and Political Life on the Marriage Age in the Early 20th Century

At the beginning of the 20th century, changes in the social and political life of the republic led to an increase in the marriage age for girls.

Table 1

Distribution of Women Married in Uzbekistan by Age Group (1940-1994) (in percentages) *

Age Group	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1991	2000
Total Married Women	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Under 18	0.1	0.1	0.1	4.0	5.4	7.6	8.6	12.5
18-19	45.6	23.5	17.1	34.4	--	32.0	34.1	35.8
20-24	24.8	34.3	33.6	39.2	--	46.0	44.5	39.9
25-29	14.0	15.0	15.0	7.5	7.7	8.0	7.3	6.2
30 years and older	15.5	27.1	34.2	14.9	6.2	6.4	5.5	5.6

* M.R. Burieva, Ўзбекистонда оила демографияси. (Family Demography in Uzbekistan), Tashkent, 1997.

The absolute number of marriages in Uzbekistan steadily increased in both urban and rural areas. However, this process did not always occur at the same rate. For example, between 1940 and 1960, the absolute number of marriages increased 2.3 times. The highest marriage rate occurred between 1950-1960 when, on average, 5,011 people or over 5,000 families married each year. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of marriages in the republic slightly decreased compared to 1960. Children born in the 1940s and 1945-1950 would have reached adulthood and marriage age in the 1970s. However, due to the war, the birth rate in Uzbekistan significantly declined, leading to a lower number of marriages in the 1970s. In contrast, in urban areas, marriage rates increased. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of marriages rose from 37,000 to 40,300. This was mainly due to the establishment of many new cities, the overall increase in the urban population, and the migration of young people from rural areas to cities for work and education.

Between 1970 and 1991, the number of marriages in the republic increased 2.5 times. This was largely due to the growing proportion of young people reaching marriage age.

Since 1991, there has been a new trend of declining marriage rates in the republic. This decline is linked both to the decreasing proportion of young people of marriageable age and to socio-economic problems during this period.

3. The Impact of Marriage on Birth Rates

According to scientific sources, the total birth rate in Uzbekistan was 45-50 children per 1,000 people.

This high birth rate was due to various socio-economic factors, including labor relations, low urbanization levels, the role of women in society, traditions supporting large families, Islamic beliefs, and high mortality rates, especially among women and children.

Since 1991, Uzbekistan has undergone economic changes, particularly the introduction of market relations across all sectors. Birth rates in the republic began to gradually decline from the mid-20th century. The reasons for this decline include changes in labor relations, increased participation of women in social production, higher levels of education and awareness, advancements in medicine, widespread availability of contraception and knowledge about it, and urbanization.

The introduction of new economic conditions in

Uzbekistan since 1991, particularly the transition to a market economy, has significantly altered the country's socio-economic environment. Changes in economic relations in the country and among the population have had a significant impact on the widespread use of medical contraceptives and awareness about them, particularly regarding reproductive health (attitudes toward the number of

children in a family). In Uzbekistan, the birth rate of fifth, sixth, seventh, and subsequent children sharply declined.

Since 1991, socio-economic transformations in the country have contributed to declining birth rates in both urban and rural regions.

Table 2

Dynamics of Birth Rate in Urban and Rural Areas of Uzbekistan*

Year	Total Birth Rate		Special Birth Rate	
	Urban Population	Rural Population	Urban Population	Rural Population
1991	26.7	39.8	107.66	178.18
1992	25.7	38.0	103.17	169.64
1993	23.9	36.1	95.30	161.38
1994	23.2	33.3	91.54	145.59
1995	23.8	33.5	92.85	144.24
1996	22.2	30.5	86.02	129.65
1997	20.8	28.4	79.70	118.98
1998	19.0	25.5	72.20	105.22
1999	18.5	24.7	69.28	100.07
2000	17.7	23.5	65.67	93.60
2001	17.1	22.4	62.77	87.77
2002	17.4	23.1	63.13	88.62
2003	16.5	21.7	59.35	81.96

* Demographic Yearbook, M.1990, p. 310; Demographic Yearbook of Uzbekistan, 2003, Tashkent-2004, pp. 127, 149.

According to sources, before the 1990s, Uzbekistan was among the countries with high birth rates. Between 1985 and 1989, the total fertility rate in Uzbekistan was 4.70. By 2003, this figure had dropped to 2.36. It should be noted that the decline in birth rates accelerated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Women born between 1900 and 1929 had an average of 9-10 children, whereas those born between 1930 and 1939 had 6-7 children. Among rural women born between 1940 and 1949, 38.2% had 7-10 children, while for those born between 1940 and 1944, the figure was 28.6%. Most women born between 1950 and 1960 had 4-5 children. Uzbek women born between 1970 and 1984 now consider 2-3 children per family to be acceptable.

Overall, between 1991 and 2003, there was a sharp decline in birth rates in both urban and rural areas of Uzbekistan. The previous disparity between urban and

rural birth rates has significantly narrowed due to the rapid decline in birth rates among rural populations. According to demographic criteria, the birth rate in all rural areas of Uzbekistan can be classified as moderate (2.1-4.0).

Several factors contributed to the sharp decline in birth rates in Uzbekistan between 1991 and 1999, including economic difficulties associated with the transition to a market economy, employment challenges, and the widespread availability of medical contraceptives. Under the influence of these factors, the reproductive behavior (attitude toward childbirth) of the population changed drastically. Each family regulated the number of children based on its economic capacity, and this trend could be observed across all regions of Uzbekistan.

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