Chapter- III

Women at the Labour Market in Russia

since 1990

The economic reforms, which have accompanied Russia's emergence as an independent state has produced a massive, drop in living standards for many families in Russia. It was however generally recognised that in the chaotic period of change, which has been followed by the demise of the USSR, women have been the major losers.

The privatisation of production process and liberalisation of labour market along with realisation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP's) caused serious hurdles in women's employment in Russia. Since late 1990, Russia reduced its previous social programmes and adopted policies that would combine active labour with reproductive functions of women. It curtailed facilities like free educational and training programmes; state's childcare provision; benefits for children under 3 years; monthly subsidies for children under 16 years and day care centers, etc. The provisions that regulated the relationship between employers and women employees were violated everywhere in the labour market, especially, in private sectors where women were fired every now and then. Elderly women (over 40) especially had to face tremendous
complications in finding a new job or maintaining the existing one. Since 1991, women constituted 68 per cent out of the general decline of employed population.\(^1\) Above all, a labour flexibilisation strategy was launched by Russian entrepreneurs and this was used as mechanism for maximisation of profit, at the same time reducing the costs for maintenance of labour force. Women were compelled more frequently to accept part time jobs or short-term contracts jobs. The protection provided to the labourers by trade unions was very limited even in state sectors. As a result women neither got stable salaries nor made a good career, nor even reached respectful social status. Hence they formed the growing proportion among temporary and self-employed workers. They had to face isolation and marginalisation from the society.

Growth of the informal labour market duplicated these negative processes by degrading conditions of work and dismissal of control over production processes. As a result violations of rules and regulations by the employers became a common practice. In a sharp contrast to the treatment received by men, women were regularly subjected to different kinds of physical and moral violence besides economic and social violence. Most of the women could not protect themselves because of two basic reasons: 1) because of the fear of loosing the only source of

\(^{1}\) Survey Report of Women's labour Market Situation in Russian Provinces (Moscow: Center for Gender Studies, 1995).
earnings no matter how unreliable it was; and 2) In case of approaching
the court for justice the costs of hiring lawyers were so high and the
period of consideration was so long that there were little chance of the
problem getting solved. Social and economic rights of women met with
numerous legislative barriers. For example, the whole range of labour
code statues, which contained protection measures for women, were
practically discriminatory in nature. As women's competitiveness in the
labour market got undermined, feminisation of poverty grew
dramatically. The report on “macro-economic analysis or feminisation of
poverty in Russia”, prepared in 2000 for the World Bank, stressed that in
1997-1998 the number of women with substandard per capita income in
Russia approximated 28 million while in 1999, this number grew to 32
million.² The number of people actually laid off from work was, however,
far greater than mentioned in the data. The discrepancy had occurred
due to people not registering as unemployed and simply finding their
own means of survival. Greater significance, however, has been due to
the rising numbers of workers who were either on short-term or on
administrative leave. Periods of prolonged enforced idleness, during
which the employing enterprises paid little or did not pay any
compensation, continued to hold out the hope of a possible return to
work at a later date. With the lack of stability in the social and economic

² World Bank Report, 2000, p.179.
sphere, gender related asymmetry of the labour market was becoming more and more evident in the post-reform Russia.

The situation of women in the Russian labour market seemed to be made up of a combination of existing objective trends in the domains of employment, e.g. unemployment, labour mobility, occupational skills and experience, incomes and, to a greater degree, to more specific factors such as employment motivation, reproductive issues/behavior, social and psychological adaptation to new labour relations and finally gender stereotypes.

**Labour Market and Women's Employment**

The recent changes in the women's situation at the labour market occurred due to the generally hostile background of the economy in transition. This transition was characterised by drops in production yields, re-conversion process (transformation of the military industry to production of consumer goods) forced economic migration, lack of balance in assessment of labour of different complexity or quality, poor regulation of relations between work force and employers at private enterprises, etc.

One of the key problems of an economy in transition was the need for members of the work force to switch from old jobs to new ones. This
turned out to be one of the major market bottlenecks of the 1990’s. There was a trend to cut old jobs under the pretext of commissioning new ones, which appeared to be too scarce. The general drops in employment continued.³

Due to the financial inability to carry out employment policies, and consequently the ineffective ongoing programmes, some of the unemployed drifted from the category of officially registered to informal groups. A consequence of this trend was that, among the registered long-term unemployed, the number of those unemployed over eight months grew the most. The process of squeezing out people from the labour force and curtailment of employment programmes, aggravated the problems of those who encountered great problems finding a job independently and were forced to rely on the government for the intermediary support at the labour market. Women made up the majority among this category, thus shaping the image of official unemployment.⁴

Even though in Russia comparatively women had a higher educational level than men, the duration of unemployment and dynamics of inflows and outflows of the unemployed presented the special danger of pressing

women into marginal positions.\textsuperscript{5} From 1993-1995, the percentage of women unemployed for over four months, grew further and finally reached 16.4 per cent. In the category of those who were unemployed for over one year, the number increased from 9.3 per cent in 1993 to 15\% in 1995.\textsuperscript{6} In 1997, 31,000 women were registered at the employment centre including 28,000 with unemployed status, making 70\% of the total number of the unemployed. 31 per cent of these registered women had been seeking jobs for at least past 8 months. Although the level of women's unemployment was higher than that of men (3.4\% versus 1.3\% in 1997), women could get access to only one fourth of the vacant jobs and positions. The employment officers who reviewed the resumes preferred men who had a university diploma and were under 35 years of age.\textsuperscript{7} The principal reason given to deny employment to women was the age factor.

The above situation was typical of the military industries, as well as of textile and clothing industries and sectors, which were mostly female-dominated. These included administrations staff, healthcare, culture, education, trade and catering sectors. Actual and hidden unemployment found its reflection in the nation's daily life. All this resulted in a new

kind of labour mobility. This type of trend took shape as early as 1993 and became statistically significant. Over 50% public polls responders admitted a possibility of dismissal and about one-fourth of them volunteered to change jobs. The highest level of potential labour mobility was found among the private sector workers. Among the national economic sectors, the above mentioned female-dominated trade and services were leading, followed by social sectors of culture, education, science, crediting and finance. Some workers feared loosing their jobs because of close downs and were ready to leave even before it actually happened. These workers were chiefly women, both young and aged, who were the most vulnerable at the labour market and were the first to suffer from massive dismissals.

As already stated above that women surpassed man in education. Women’s employment however, had a pyramidal structure and a high level of education did not accompany by an equally high social status. The data, that covered the first half of the 1990’s situation, stated that the percentage of women managers (in leading positions) made up 7.8 per cent versus 10.0 per cent for men. According to the average data obtained, in industries with both a high degree of women segregation (as

in low paid budgetary sphere, education etc.) and a decreasing number of comparatively high paid sectors was found that among managers, women were four times lesser than men.\textsuperscript{10} In the past, however, there was a general rule that the women would be the managers of factories, where the majority of employees were women (in female-managed enterprises, the share of women-employees made an average of 82.4 per cent versus 46.1 per cent in male managed entities).\textsuperscript{11} The trend to decrease the ratio of women among managerial staff was based on the idea of the so called "glass ceiling" in women's professional careers. Self-limitation as a response to objective barriers impeded social and professional mobility and was also detrimental to other qualities of the female work force in the labour market. Nevertheless, despite a high level of women's professional skills, in Russia male and female labour were not equally remunerated. This was the result of a lower administrative status of women, sectoral difference in payment, and concentration of women in low remunerated industries. The economic restructuring widened the growing gap between wages of female non-manufacturing sectors and average economic indices. According to the statistics, in the mid-1990s, educators were 1.9 times behind industrial employees in terms of payments, while those in health care received 2.5 times lesser

\textsuperscript{10} "Research Data for Labour Market in Russia", Conducted by the Institute of Social Science, RAN, Moscow, 1995, pp.72-81.
\textsuperscript{11} "Women's Situation at the Reforming Economy, the Russian Experience", Research Data from the Institute of Social Science, RAN, Moscow, 1995, p. 77.
remuneration's as compared to those in the fuel industry. The ratio between wages of women and men made 2:3 for a longer period of time. In the new economic environment, the average wages of men were 1.5 to 1.6 times higher than those of women and their income in general was 1.5 – 2 times higher.

As for the entrepreneurship or individual mini-business, these were mainly male domains and the difference in income here was even more striking. Only 45 per cent of entrepreneurs were women as compared to 55 per cent men, while in the sphere of private mini-business, 40 per cent were women as against 55 per cent men. At the top rank level, the difference was very high with a mere 18 per cent women and 88% men. The inflow of women into business intensified in 1991-92. However, due to comparatively less public consciousness, double workload and the phenomenon of cultural bondage etc. generally hampered rapid development of female entrepreneurship. The nature of work motivation was also an important factor when women opted for business, like, for example getting an interesting job, aspiration for new experience and new contacts, to see concrete and tangible fruit for their work, to obtain

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inner comfort and self-esteem,\textsuperscript{15} etc. was not so intense among women. The importance of material motivation for women were not so pronounced as for men.

Between 1990 and 1992, Russian society underwent a drastic change in motivation for work. During this time, incomes of almost 95\% of the respondents started to lag behind price rises; 65\% of these was substantial\textsuperscript{16}. As a result the so-called instrumental motivation was formed, that is, to work just for income. An oversize proportion of those working only for money was traced in nearly all social and demographic sections of respondents. These trends continued together with many other objectives of the female labour market factors, i.e. unemployment, occupational segregation, unequal remuneration, hindrance of social and occupational mobility and abnormal social relations at the labour market, etc. Thus, a special term, “catastrophic adaptation” was introduced for describing the processes of adaptation to new realities and relations at the labour market. This meant that few employees who were dismissed due to an economic shortage or due to the extreme job deficit, as a result adapted themselves to the new labour relations even at the


cost of ruining their individual set of principles like neglecting law obedience, tax evasion, etc.\textsuperscript{17}

Multiple employments appeared to be an economic response of the threat to survival. This structure often contained irregular and informal employment. According to the survey data, in 1997, 15 per cent of respondents (selected through representative sampling) had a second employment. In 1998, the analogous sampling revealed that 42 per cent of families with low incomes, 37 per cent with medium incomes and 30 per cent with high earnings obtained informal extra earnings. In other words, about 35 to 40 per cent of the population was moonlighting.\textsuperscript{18} While employees had the higher degree of economic freedom, some negative consequences were also evident, like heavy load of work, lack of free time, lack of career development, etc.

It was hard to estimate women's contribution to alternative incomes, since this incomes came from rent of an apartment or a car. Women also earned additional money by working in their gardens during the


holidays. All this reduced the family's total dependency on their main breadwinner, and helped them to survive in the changed environment.

Besides economic adaptation, adaptation to new labour relations also showed a major challenge. The most important pre-conditions of the adaptation catastrophe were the lack of employment guarantees. High labour market intensity and dictatorship of the employer or the government, implied a rapid reduction of choices and switching from ideal working motivations to realistic ones. The analysis based on my oral interviews with women employees in a private concern, like Olga Ivanova and Ludmila Novikova, revealed that social institutions failed to protect and defend the interest of deprived hired labour forces at the labour market. The interviewers also revealed that the employers and employees had very little or no legal knowledge.\(^\text{19}\) The market interference into social and labour relations deformed the latter so much that they resembled semi-feudal relationship in combination with the market ones.

One of the contributing factors that aggravated discrimination against women was certain paternalistic principle embedded in the existing legal system, which reflected in labour legislation. For decades, the Soviet

\(^{19}\) Interview with Olga Ivanova & Ludmila Novikova (Employees of a Private firm in Moscow), on Oct.28\textsuperscript{th} Moscow, 2000.
employment policy rested upon various benefits, prohibitions and social regulations that stressed a special status of women. Article 162 of the Labour Code of the Russian federation even prohibited business trips, night shifts, extra working hours and work on holidays for women having children younger than 3 years of age.\textsuperscript{20} The legal norms, however, made them a very inconvenient and costly workforce for employers.

In this connections certain prohibitory rules were designed to protect women's health; for example, the legislation of women's labour in hazardous or dangerous environment, but, in reality, deprived women of the chance to implement their rights in the labour market.\textsuperscript{21} The term mother and child widely used in legislation also became an obstacle for rational placement of labour and human resources as it set up limitations on inter-family redistribution of functions.

The lack of employment guarantees for women after maternity leaves presented the biggest problem in the post-Soviet period. There were no legal tools, which offered an employee with family duties a flexible form of


employment.\textsuperscript{22} The methodology used to provide jobs in healthcare, education, culture, academic science has proven to be ineffective and often underestimated the complexity of these jobs, thus bringing in elements of discrimination with regards to compensation of women’s labour. The high skills of women found no recognition, especially in women-dominated sectors, because the existing tariff and qualification schemes did not take into account specific situation of working women.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, with reference to women’s employment the current legal regulations very often created a conflict and more often supported of contradictory concepts of egalitarianism and paternalism.

Table 8: Proportion of Population in Active Labour Ages, by Sex Among Economically Active Population (%)

\begin{tabular}{lcccccccc}
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Males : & 82,2 : & 79,6 : & 76,6 : & 74,6 : & 73,3 : & 70,0 : & 67,7 \\
Females: & 77,4 : & 74,4 : & 72,0 : & 70,2 : & 69,0 : & 65,7 : & 63,5 \\
\end{tabular}

Source: Labour and Employment in Russia, 1999, Goscomstat of Russia, Moscow, p.34.


Older Women – Prospects and Responses

In the present labour market for Russian women where employers were seeking women to fill vacancies, it was commonly stated that applicants should be aged below 30 or at the most 35 years. Since this was precisely the age over which most redundancies have occurred, the situation was extremely threatening for older women who were to lose their jobs. The willingness to employ a woman even up to the age of 40 was almost never expressed. The few job advertisements which specified women in the 30-50 age group made utterly depressing reading to former scientific and technical staff whose maturity and experience were scarcely required for selling cigarettes outside metro stations or other unskilled, casual labour of this type.

A whole range of private training courses has sprung into existence since 1992, which apparently provided women with the chance to find their niche in the new labour market.24 The courses on offer, however, reflected very closely the limited opportunities currently available for women. Courses like bookkeeping, typing and office skills, computing and foreign languages, prepared women primarily for subordinate clerical positions, keeping them permanently in low positions in hierarchy. Training in childcare, art and crafts, hairdressing, beauty consultancy or

even domestic service offered, at best an opportunity to move into low paid service sector employment or more probably, home-based casual work.

From the time of the beginning of the market reforms, women have been urged to take responsibility for their own survival by using domestic skills to make money. Women have been made redundant from the defense industries and research institutes, and have been encouraged to think in terms of setting up small business like tailoring, knitwear, embroidery, catering or a whole range of other domestic crafts. Given the lack of alternatives, many older women who lost their jobs were forced into attempting to make money either from existing hobbies or from newly acquired handwork skills.

The Union of Russian Women, for example, with its courses in hairdressing, dressmaking and in a range of traditional crafts talked about "survival" and expected these skills to be used as a means of economising, bartering or trading. However, only a tiny minority of their trainees has found formal employment as a result of retraining.

Courses in accountancy have been more popular with older unemployed

women having higher education. Among the courses for retraining that were regularly available, accountancy was virtually the only one, which appeared to offer some hope of remaining in professional employment. Accountants were much in demand in new commercial firms and so they hoped that in a highly skilled area such as this, the age barrier would operate far less rigidly. Unfortunately, it was over the question of their level of skill that women who have taken this route have also experienced difficulties. Most accountancy courses were short-term lasting just one or two months and could not provide even to the highly educated women with knowledge of the complexities involved in the job. Moreover, the alacrity with which state and voluntary and private organisations seized on the idea of accountancy training, as a cure for all ills, has led to a glut of ill-trained and inexperienced women facing vacancies that demanded a minimum of three years' experience, or a particular specialization. An unemployed ex-engineer, Enakhat Bagirovna, during a conversation with me said, "You know what it's like in this country, all the engineers have turned into accountants! We have all done one-month courses. We studied for fifteen years to become engineers and in a month we have turned into an accountants!" Where long-term courses have been


27 Interview with Enakhat Bagirovna, (An Ex-Engineer During the Soviet Period Presently Works in a Private Export Import Company in Moscow), on 2nd November 2000, Moscow.
offered and trainees carefully selected the problem of age discrimination has been overcome to some extent.

Nevertheless, this did not overcome the question of sex discrimination. Although women dominated the world of economics and finance under the Soviet system, with the opening up of the commercial financial sector in Russia, new job opportunities have become highly attractive to men. Where well paid work in accountancy and finance was on offer, women, even with appropriate skills and experience, found themselves in competition with men and had to face the same discriminatory attitudes as prevalent in other professional spheres.

Understandably, older women who have been displaced from what they believed were secure jobs, failed to see why they should be the ones to begin the experiment. As an academician Dr. Elina Mishelkina during the interview commented: “I’m 48, I can’t retrain. I don’t want to study any more. I’ve had study up to here (showing her neck). I’ve been in every higher education institution in Moscow, right upto Moscow State University!”

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28 Interview with Dr. Elina Mishelkina, (Academician During Soviet Times, Presently Works as a Part-Time Teacher in Two Institutes), taken on 4th November 2000, Moscow.
A comprehensive study on women and unemployment carried out in 1992 found that women were likely to be as negative about retraining as they were about accepting unskilled work. Perhaps more than anything else, women’s attitude towards retraining reflected the suddenness of change in contemplating the extraordinary state of the new labour market in Russia. Older women were in a state of shock and reluctant to accept the change.

When older women expressed their reactions to the change, which has so suddenly come upon them, their distress was visible. The level of stress they experienced in this situation was of course closely related to their domestic circumstances too. Apart from financial worry, the strain of redundancy might have been due to their profound sense of loss, especially for those women who had been highly committed to their work and have seen it as a vocation or career. In the present situation, they would have seen themselves as simply having spent time in a job, which did not really exists anymore or in which they felt powerless to make a genuine contribution further. Others however, described their love for their work, their high level of education and their years of experience and frequently became emotional while remembering the past. It was, therefore, not surprising that the combination of personal loss with

anxiety for their future security produced significant levels of stress in women who were either in their late thirties or early forties and yet saw no future whatsoever for themselves in the new labour market.

The stress of unemployment was recognised by those working in the Employment Service Centers. In one such Center in Dubna, on the northern side of Moscow, initiatives have been taken to provide employment, as well as psychological support to older women. However, such moves remained just drop in the ocean seeing the extent of the unemployment problem. What these initiatives could not do, however, was to bring these women’s job back. Many have undoubtedly lost their jobs forever and future prospects of formal employment looked very bleak indeed for some women who were over 40 years. In the absence of realistic benefit levels, they got into street trading, into casual part-time jobs as cleaners or child minders or dog-sitters, and plunged them to a level, which made them aware of their sudden invisibility. All these women were better than men: maybe not better scientists necessarily, but more intellectual on a different level. They were interested in art and music and literature, but under the changed circumstances they are now working as cleaners and traders. They have


32 Rimasheskaya Nataliya, “Gendernia Otnoshenia na Sovetskom i Postsovetskom Prostranstve Razbiti Rossii”, Zhenshina, Gender, Kultura, ISEPN, Moscow, 1999, p. 159.
the feeling that they don't exist any more that no one was interested in them any more.

As the market developed in Russia, the older women, far from making a new start, were being immediately written off and pushed into what was effectively a very premature retirement from formal employment. In a country obsessed with women's maternal roles, the position of babushka (Grandmother) for many elderly women, was the only vacancy on offer in the present situation.

**Younger Women – Opportunities and Obstacles**

As older women experienced great difficulty in coming to terms with the changes brought by the market reforms, it was expected that younger women would be more readily able to cope with the changed situations. Since the demise of the USSR, public opinion polls have almost inevitably found younger people welcoming the change and prepared to tackle the unfamiliar conditions. Younger women themselves were very conscious of the situation and could feel how much harder it was for their own mothers to adapt to changes.\(^3^3\)

Certainly, those I interviewed acknowledged very readily that it might be very hard for women of their mothers generation to accept the end of Soviet-style job security, and

that it was not at all surprising if the corollary was unemployment and increasing poverty.

For younger women, however, the loss of certain aspects of the former system might be seen as a positive development. The ending of automatic job assignment on graduation, for example, came as something of a relief for young women, who saw the potential to move into something more interesting in the new job market. It was, however, a very different story for those who were specialists in certain area, as now there were widespread redundancies on specialized jobs. Fresh graduate engineers and economists, for example, have found themselves in a position, which was little different from that faced by older women in these professions. However, finding employment was likely to mean a complete change of profile and while women under 30 had an advantage in the job market, this was not to say that the work on offer always appeared acceptable. In a country in which a degree has been a vocational qualification leading directly to a job in one's chosen sphere, a considerable adjustment was required even for fresh graduates to view it simply as an educational stepping stone to the jobs available.

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if the work on offer to women did not require high qualifications then obtaining a degree appeared to be a sheer waste of time.

As job market changed the entire system of higher education. The main courses on offer to younger women differed little from those provided for older women, and thereby lead only to casual employment. The group of young women who were the most affected in the present labour market situation were those with small children. Women in Russia commonly have children in their late teens and early twenties.\textsuperscript{36} The loss of childcare centres and the unwillingness of employers to employ women with small children have made it difficult for the young women to place themselves in an alternative formal employment once they are out of work. Job advertisement, generally specified that if women were required at all, they must be unmarried or without children.\textsuperscript{37} Courses in childcare with a view of employment as childminders or nannies were, therefore, seen as the most realistic option for women in this group, yet, such training scarcely offered a future of anything other than a low paid and insecure existence.


Younger women were also not seen as a homogeneous group. Those with young children were substantially disadvantaged even in situations, which generally favored younger women. The effects of growing up under the Soviet system came into play here very visibly. Women who were already in their mid-twenties have begun their post-school education even before any of the significant social and economic changes of the Gorbachev period took place. As a result, the notion of changing direction and finding an entirely new niche for themselves was alien to them. Women of younger age who were in insecure or poorly paid jobs, therefore, showed indecisiveness about moving into a new area of work, or even thinking of change as older women did.\textsuperscript{38} As two women in their mid-twenties, both extremely poorly paid librarians, Natasha Troinova and Katerina Shaumian put it during the conversation with me, “It’s now late for us to learn something else. What would we do?”\textsuperscript{39}

A higher education particularly in an area of specialisation like civil engineering was certainly not essential for many of the subordinate office jobs currently available to younger women. Young women when assessed as to what was available to them, saw the widespread disregard for their talents and skills as the most blatant form of discrimination.\textsuperscript{40} A young


\textsuperscript{39} Interview with Natasha Trinova and Katerina Shaumian (Works in INION Library, Moscow), on 8\textsuperscript{th} November, 2000, Moscow.

\textsuperscript{40} Ivanov Elenova, “Мы не можем ошибаться,” \textit{Vestnik}, no.4, 1995, p. 25.
woman, Tatiana Altinova, said in my interview conversation, expressing her anger towards the society, “Men have taken over all the best paid jobs and women get a pittance. The men have seized hold of everything, whilst the women are at their beck and call – "get the tea, get the coffee, etc".41

The perception that women were required only as decorative appendages to male professionals was based not only on personal experience but also on statements made in the popular press by successful entrepreneurs. The new breed of millionaire expressed the view that woman in business were more than glorified waitresses.42 It was made very plain to young women that the new commercial opportunities were not for them.

A glance down the situations vacant columns also made the position more clear. Job advertisements effectively stated that many employers, particularly in commercial firms, were not looking primarily for brains. For example, one job advertisement mentioned: “Secretaries required: attractive girls with office experience, aged 18-22, at least 168 cms tall.43

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41 Interview with Tatiana Altinova, (Active Worker in the Women’s Social Organisation “ANNA”) taken on 13th November 2000, Moscow.

42 Report from Trud, August 19, Moscow, 1994, p. 2.

43 Yakoleva, Y., Noviye Izvestia, Moscow, 10th March 1998, p.1.
In the Russian context, harassment is most frequently referred to by the Russian women as "sexual aggression" or "sex terror", which indicated directly to sex in exchange for employment, and continued to be a major taboo. Breaking the silence on this issue, in 1993 the newspaper Delovaia Zhenshchina published responses from readers. Attempts were subsequently made by journalists to set up a support group for women who had suffered sexual harassment. As one reader expressed, the situation has not been improved by the advent of the market reforms, and said: "Nothing has changed only added the fear of loosing the job. This particularly affects women who are the sole breadwinners for their families and it is these women who are transformed into office prostitutes. Those who refuse any proposition are simply chucked out."

Many of my interviewers suggested that there was a great deal of truth in this statement and that, for younger women seeking work, sexual harassment was a constant problem. A look into the situations vacant columns makes the importance of this issue quite apparent. Whilst the growing sexualisation of the workplace was suggested by the frequent emphasis on physical attributes rather than skills, no potential employer was likely to advertise the fact that sex was part of the job. It was rather, the occasional advert, which added, "no sexual services required". Which gave some indications on how widespread an assumption there was that women should provide whatever their boss demands.
Some of the women I interviewed, like Marina Nepochatova and Lena Sedolovskaiya (of the Miklouho-Maclay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology) described job interview questions with a sexual element and expressed concern that there was often a hidden agenda of sexual favours, even in the firms with big names,\textsuperscript{44} even though by its very nature, it was extremely difficult to assess the extent of the problem. Certainly, young women themselves perceived the problem as a significant one. During my interview with Irina Semashkova, a young Russia woman, (who works in a Moscow Sexual Assault Recovery Center, “SYOSTRI”) revealed that, “Sexual aggression is the main reason why Russian women cannot fulfil their potential. All my friends have met with this while trying to get jobs or once they are working. When a women has been in her job for say three months and she is just starting to settle in and feel good about herself, suddenly she starts getting all these propositions and she has to leave if she rejects such propositions.”\textsuperscript{45} Some courses provided for young women aspiring to enter the labour market have included the issue of sexual exploitation as a central subject in their programmes and young women are advised accordingly.

\textsuperscript{44} Interview of Marina Nepochatova and Lena Sedolovskaiya (of the Miklouho-Maclay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology), on 30\textsuperscript{th} Oct. 2000, Moscow.

\textsuperscript{45} Interview with Irina Semashkova, (Works in a Moscow Sexual Assault Recovery Center, “SYOSTRI”), on 3\textsuperscript{rd} November 2000, Moscow.
The key to this disturbing situation, of course, has been the catastrophic fall in living standards, which has accompanied the drop in employment. Veronica Schneider, who is in her mid-twenties and works in Hotel "Accademicheskaya", in Moscow, said during my interview conversation with her, “If you are looking for something yourself, you have to know the rules of the game and decide whether you want to play. There is an acknowledgement that once entered into such a situation, women may not necessarily be free to reject it.”

The introduction of an overtly sexual element into the new labour market undoubtedly had a bearing on women's direct involvement in the glamour and sex industry. If an emphasis on personal appearance has become a common element in mainstream employment, it was scarcely surprising that women who fitted the bill might seek to use their physical gifts more lucratively. When sex was expected from the humble office assistant, far better prizes appeared to be on the offer for the same sexual favours elsewhere. At a time when the gulf between rich and the poor was growing ever wider, when the good life available to the few was highly visible to all, and when women's employment prospects were so dire, young women were scarcely censured for selling their bodies as a smart move. This was moreover a logical outcome, which far from

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46 Interview with Veronica Schneider (Works in Hotel "Accademicheskaya" in Moscow), on 24th October 2000, Moscow.
reflecting a kind of youthful deviance, appeared to be very widely accepted in society at large and certainly in what has been termed as the pro-prostitution propaganda of the media. One survey reflected that 60 per cent of the Moscow girls leaving school thought of prostitution as the most attractive profession, as it provided with a very attractive picture of their assessment of the means of procuring job in the prevailing circumstances.

With the demise of USSR, the sex and glamour industry, which had been developing a pace under Perestroika was given an added fillip with the introduction of market reforms. The rapid development of glamour modeling, pornography and both overt and undercover prostitution developed fast. For the young women keen to enter this world of glamour opportunities boomed through the beauty contests. The reason behind this was the problems women faced in employment, with a high proportion of entrants with higher education employed in low paid public sector jobs.

However, in a country where the office junior found that her job contained a hidden agenda, it was scarcely surprising to discover that the same was true of activities with a primary emphasis on physical

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attributes such as beauty contest and modeling. It was revealed that entrants in certain beauty contests or at least those serious about winning a place and getting modeling contracts, were commonly prevailed upon to grant sexual favours to photographers and agents for getting serious treatment in the media. However, in August 1993, photographic and fashion models created a diversion in central Moscow by unfurling placards announcing, "models get paid, not laid", in an effort to challenge the 'sexual terror' which they saw as endemic in the industry. Their seriousness were gauged by the fact that they spent much of the winter attempting, though unsuccessfully, in the prevailing political climate, to form a model's trade union. That some modeling agencies were indeed, thinly disguised prostitution rackets, it was made clear by the reports in both the Russian and the foreign press about Russian women trapped in prostitution after accepting modeling contracts. The most highly publicised cases have inevitably involved traffic in women, controlled by Russian criminal groups across Europe. The involvement of police forces in many countries notably Germany, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Italy and ultimately America has helped rescue some of the women involved and return them to Russia. Surprisingly, such women have not, however, always been willing to go back even after one disastrous experience. The lure of foreign travel and the chance of earning real money abroad was enough to make some young women
prepared to take the chance more than once, even if it meant that their job would be of dancers or strippers. Occasionally, the aspiring models also got the work of topless hostesses.\textsuperscript{49}

The key issue for women who became involved in this work was whether they would be able to remain in control and ultimately to get out as easily as they got in. However, in a climate in which prostitution was normally described as the only way for women to make lot of money in the changed Russian society, many young women were undaunted by the possible consequences.\textsuperscript{50}

Considering prostitution merely as the largely indiscriminate provision of sexual services for payment, however, a popular alternative for them was to become involved in a much longer-term sexual relationship for the purpose of acquiring access to a lifestyle which their education and training could not hope to provide. When so many doors remained closed to women in Russia today, it was not surprising if those who were young and attractive saw the option of what might be termed undercover prostitution as a career move.\textsuperscript{51} Although women might well embark on a


relationship such as this through an acquaintance made in the normal way, the business element of the deal was underlined by many personal ads, in which men offered financial security in return of full time sexual relationship or a more casual affair in the case of those who were already married or those who simply wanted to brighten up their regular business trips.

Another options in this category were the advertisement placed by Westerners in the Russian press. For order of brides, a well-established feature of the traffic in women between South East Asia and the West has come to Russia as a growing indicator of the poverty. Russian women in search of security, specially those with young children for whom prospects were particularly bleak, were in demand as accommodating non-feminist wives for the predominantly aging, divorced Western men. Declaring their solvent financial status, men such as these sought attractive women ten, twenty, even forty years younger to them. In the West, men in their fifties and sixties with glamorous companions in their twenties usually in possession of a very fat wallet became indeed in vogue. The fact that Mr. X from an uninspiring provincial town from west, feels that he could aspire for a young, educated partner like these potential Russian brides, who were mostly highly qualified. And for many Russian women such a laison becomes a lucrative deal, as it provides them buying power with the Western currencies in Russia.
The only problem for young women was that a substantial element of risk was involved. Remaining in control was extremely difficult when it was the men in such relationships who controlled the purse strings. It was a situation, which was a wide open to abuse of all kinds. Nevertheless, it was clear that many young women were prepared to take a chance. When conventional employment prospects were so poor, ordinary jobs were by no means risk free, and the specter of years of poverty haunted millions, they feel that they have very little to loose. The phenomenon of undercover prostitution as described in various magazine on women's issue, was that within the months of the start of market reform process, thousands of girls were calmly and calculatedly selling themselves. The stupid ones did it just for money, while those with more brains and bigger plans did it for a prestigious job and a place to live.

This nature of women’s labour migration was regulated neither institutionally nor in juridical terms both inside the Russian Federation and outside the country. Russia became the donor country of migrants and women constituted more than half of them. In the UNDP report of 1999, it was stressed that half of decline in population growth in Russia was due to women’s migration abroad. However, state officials were not

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taking this into account when they expressed their concern about demographic issues. Women used intermediate services like marriage, modeling and tourist agencies for migration. Women were recruited by criminals who proposed them “safety work” in hotels or restaurants as dancers, baby-sitters or caretaker for elderly and disabled people, but in fact forced them to work as prostitutes and live in humiliating conditions. Thousand of young women voluntarily accepted diminishing labour conditions in foreign countries, because they did not have means for survival in Russia.

**Situation of Women in the Post-Soviet Society**

The Soviet legacy of protective policies towards women and the family produced a situation in which responsibility for the extensive range of child-care related benefits rested with the employing enterprises. At the same time, the prolonged media campaign sought to persuade women to place greater emphasis on home and children. For enterprises dealing with uncomfortable new economic realities, only resort was to label women as a potentially expensive and troublesome work force. Therefore, women have immediately been targeted for redundancy or for administrative leave. At the same time, many of the sectors in which

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women were heavily concentrated such as health and education, remained primarily publicly funded and saw a massive drop in the pay structure in the prevailing economic situation relative to other sectors.\textsuperscript{55} Taken together, all these factors have contributed to a steadily growing feminising of poverty in Russia.

The initial waves of redundancies primarily affected women in the Defense industries, research institutes and Ministries, and targeted first of all those approaching retirement age or had young children. Engineers and economists were, therefore, heavily represented amongst the first brand of enforced job-seekers in the transitional economy. With the passage of time their numbers have been swelled by new graduates, and those leaving the school, and more recently, skilled workers across the whole range of industries. The fundamental problem woman faced in seeking alternative employment was the mis-match between the skills and the jobs on offer.\textsuperscript{56} During the first three years of transition, the majority of unemployed women have had a higher or specialised secondary education. Meanwhile, most of the available vacancies have been for manual and less skilled work like sewing machinists,


secretaries, shop assistants, cleaners and other unskilled jobs in the service sector. However, the survey on unemployed women have found that women were reluctant to change profession or seek re-training even when job opportunities became so limited, since employers had a clear and well-documented preference for selecting men.

Attitudes such as these were not new. Discrimination in selection and promotion was rife in the former USSR too, and although briefly debated in the era of glasnost, it was never seriously tackled. Indeed, the economic and social policies of Perestroika itself, through the latter half of the 1980s effectively gave official sanction to a view of women as a subsidiary work force to be eased out of employment as necessary for the good of society. It was during this period that a reluctance to employ women became quite apparent. A survey conducted in 1990 covering enterprise managers, found that 79 per cent of them preferred to select a woman only if the job were not suitable for a man. The combination of market forces and a lack of legal safeguards since 1992, simply gave free rein to attitudes, which were already well established. Job advertisements commonly expressed gender preferences, and in the case of a pure majority of professional vacancies, especially those involving management skills, it was bluntly stated that male applicants only were

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57 Reports from “All-Russian Women’s Congress on Labour, Employment and Unemployment”, Moscow, Nov. 29, 1994.
required. Where vacancies were notified directly to employment centres, employers expected that their stated preference for male or female job applicants would be taken into consideration. Whatever the view of the centres on this issue might have been, particularly in the light of the fact that most of their clientele were women, they were evidently unable to check the prevailing trend in the current climate.\(^5\) Women, therefore, have been facing a dual disadvantage as the new labour market has developed: (1) unwanted skills; and (2) overt discrimination on the grounds of sex. Over and above this, for many of the new unemployed, another significant obstacle added was discrimination on the grounds of age.

**Demographic Status**

The population of Russia in 1997 totaled 147.1 million. Out of which 78.1 million were women. Birthrate dropped between 1991 and 1996 by 26.5 per cent. At the same time the share of women in their fertility age increased by 2.6 per cent (1991:36.0%, 1997:38.6%).\(^6\) As the population responded to the multitude of social and economic problems the worsening demographic reproduction process could be observed.

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\(^6\) Goscomstat, "Men and Women in Russia, Brief Statistical Data Collection" (Moscow: the Author), 1997, p.5.
Instability of economic and social conditions of life caused essential changes in the reproductive sphere. De-population became a permanent trend. In 1998, the deaths registered were 1.8 times more than births. Births co-efficient stayed at 124 births per 100 women of fertile ages. During the last ten years (since 1991) birth-rate reduced by 20 per cent. One quarter of young women did not want to have children at all, because they were not sure that they could provide acceptable standards of living for their children. In 2000, the state planned to spend 35.6 million rubles for the implementation of the programme "safety motherhood". However, this amount constituted only 2 per cent of the State expenditure.\(^{61}\)

According to data about 31 million women were employed at the labour market in 1995, which was 47 per cent of the total number employed. However, employable women (16 to 54 years of age) were around 40 million, though women from 30 to 49 years of age (86 per cent of the total) accounted for the highest level of employment. During 1992-1995 overall total number of employed women fell.\(^{62}\)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Age 30-40</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Age 30-49</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td></td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>47.2%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>62.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Goscomstat 1996 Statistical Year Book, Special Data on Women’s Situation in Russian Federation, Moscow.

The levels of education of working women were always higher than those of men. 52.3 per cent of all employees with higher education were women. They made up 57.5 per cent of those with a secondary vocational training. Only 14 per cent of employed women, compared to 20% of employed men did not have complete secondary education. 63 The statistics of the second quarter of 1997 showed the ratio of registered unemployed women as compared to the total amount of officially unemployed, however, has increased from 63 to 64 per cent. 64

The rate of unemployment among rural females in Russia exceeded that of the urban. Within the total number of registered jobless women in 1997, the rural, women has recorded an increased of 28.2 per cent. The

64 Goscomstat, Zenshchiny Rossii, (Statisticheskii Sbornik) (Moscow: the Author, Rossii), 1995, p. 77.
percentage of unemployed women in rural areas estimated by Goscomstat in the year 1998 was also high—Bouriatiya 78 per cent, Tatarstan, Adyghee 76 per cent, Bashkortostan 74 per cent, Karchaevo-Cherkessia 70 per cent, Kalmykia 67 per cent, Tyra 65 per cent, Lipetskoblast 74 per cent, Starvropol and Altai regions 73 per cent, in Primosky region, in Novosibirsk and in Omskoblasts 71%, in Kemerovo-oblast 70%. As of late 1997, the larger part of rural female unemployed comprised of women with children under the age less than 16 years, with disabled children (58.2 per cent in villages versus 49.9 per cent in town) and women having large families (18.9 per cent versus 3.1 per cent in villages and towns respectively). Besides the number of children, the major difference between rural and urban registered female unemployed was that of education. Female unemployment in rural areas were more in comparison with urban. Both rural and urban socio-economic programmes included financial support for women and children, but were given lower priority. The same was true for the general governmental socio-economic programmes too. They were elaborated without any account for the gender consequences.


Reduction in Social Welfare Benefits

Russian women have been left stunned by the rapid decline in availability of institutional childcare, inexpensive children summer camps and other benefits which have gradually melted away with the collapse of the Soviet social welfare system. By 1994, as more and more single parent families slipped below the poverty line, government officials began to refer to the feminisation of poverty.

In general the market-oriented reforms, which began in 1990, had a major impact on women's economic freedom and social status in the shape of reduction in social welfare programmes and female employment rates. This was also due to the foreign structural adjustment financing. When factories received Western loan money, they were required to start social services like medical facilities, daycare centers, etc. above the local city administration; this, however, was not done. Thus, the services ceased to exist, since the municipal budgets were also incapable of supporting them.68 The effect this was evident on women with children. The reforms deprived women of the guarantees available during the Soviet era, that were designed to facilitate combined facilities of

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childrearing with full-time labour outside the home, albeit in the interest of the state’s productive and reproductive goals.

The tremendous drop in the provision of public childcare, in particular, has affected women’s status adversely. During the past few years, factories have closed their childcare provisions at unprecedented rates. In 1993, 5000 childcare centers were closed, while others were privatised making them out of reach for many families. By mid-1994, despite laws contravening the conversion of childcare centers to commercial usage, the trend continued. Whereas, in 1988, 70 per cent of children had places in childcare centres, by 1994 it was down to 56 per cent, with 370,000 children on waiting lists. Other children, as Russian parliamentary deputy Ekaterina Lakhova stated, “are not even in line as the cost of putting a child in daycare significantly exceeds the minimum salary”. The effect of this combination has been that women have been pushed back homes. As stated by a representative of the Ivanovo Center of Social Support for Women and Families: “For women, in the near future, taking care of children is going to be a major problem, because they can’t count on the state sponsored children’s care centres, which are closing down. Now when in the west people are moving toward some expansion in this area, we are shutting them down, turning backward.

And also it will happen that we all loose our option to choose. Women will have to sit at home with the children.\textsuperscript{70} The closure of day care centres combined with female layoffs, created a situation where women were encouraged and even forced to abandon paid employment.

The trend of moving women out of the labour sphere got an official sanction as early as 1987 when Gorbachev, in his book \textit{Perestroika: New thinking for our country and the world}, sent a mixed message about women's proper role in society. On the one hand, Gorbachev called for concrete efforts to promote women to leadership positions in politics and economics. On the other, he wrote of the need to establish conditions that would facilitate returning Soviet women to their purely womanly mission,\textsuperscript{71} in other words, to the private sphere of household and family. Though women's groups protested against this trend but nothing much came out.

In 1993, academics also began to address the antidemocratic effects of the capitalist economic reforms on women's status. Pointing to the elimination of some social welfare guarantees by the new constitution, they argued that the government has abdicated its responsibility to help women who combined labour outside the home with their domestic

\textsuperscript{70} "Why Russia's Demographic Crisis is Deepening?" \textit{The Current Digest}, vol. 40, no. 41, 1993, pp. 21-24.

chores and motherhood duties. They reasoned that the goals of private entrepreneurship were in direct contradiction to those of working women. An entrepreneur had no intention to waste resources on social programmes designed to create conditions for women to combine their professional and public activities with their maternal and family duties such as childcare centers, pregnancy leaves and so on. This was aptly described by an academician, T.N. Sidorova, who said, "Motherhood is now considered as a woman's private affair".72 Thus the lack of childcare facilities excluded women increasingly from the labour force and public life for years at a stretch.

**Double Burden/Back Home**

For decades it was propagated that the "women's question" has been taken care of and increasing gender equality has been achieved with participation of women in social labour. The women's question resurfaced when debates started on issues related to women with the onset of glasnost and Perestroika. Gorbachev himself called for a re-examination of women's issues while addressing the special all-Union party conference in the summer of 1988. With endemic shortages of basic consumer goods, with an underdeveloped service sector, and with a lack of time-and labour-saving household devices, women were subjected to the "double burden" of work outside and looking after the household.

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along with child rearing. Poet Evgenii Evtushenko wrote, women have multiple jobs: at work place, in lines and with their children, home and kitchen.\textsuperscript{73} It was pointed out by commentators that the heavy burden placed on women barred them from taking a more active public role. As a result of this double burden, it was calculated, working women were spending between 40-42 hours a week at the workplace (including commuting time) and an additional forty hours a week doing household tasks such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, and laundry.\textsuperscript{74}

The policy-makers were responding to these issues by proposing an "either worker or mother/wife" option. Unlike earlier times when women were exhorted to be both worker and mother, the new ideology encouraged the women to opt for either one of the two - "wide roads" or "womanly missions". This fitted neatly into the \textit{glasnost} era milieu of "choice".

At the outset of \textit{Perestroika} an unofficial campaign was initiated to "facilitate women's return to their national predestination", a campaign which intensified as the transition towards market began, and which reinforced the boundaries of Russian women's limited socio-cultural status. The "return to the kitchen" campaign was promoted in the

\textsuperscript{73} Valery Sperling, \textit{Organising Women in Contemporary Russia} (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1999), p. 76.
\textsuperscript{74} Public Opinion Survey, from the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Studies, August 14-18, 1998.
mainstream press, accompanied by warnings about the dangers wrought by women's emancipation. Even Valery Rasputin, the well-known writer, affirmed that "emancipation is a moral mutation, the moral degradation of the weaker sex". It was increasingly emphasized that today's women suffered from over-emancipation and its costs.75

According to Marina Liborakina, an activist with several Moscow-based women's organisations, the "return to the kitchen" campaign took on a mass character in the media, advertisements, television shows and women's journals. A woman's desire to work was seen as an expression of egoism—not only does she want to work, she wants to steal this work away from her husband, her brother and her father. The preferred image for women was that of a happy wife and housekeeper. Some Russian policy-makers have argued that, tired of their double burden, women were grateful to leave the workforce, and added that, most of them were in difficult, non-prestigious and uninteresting paid labour, and therefore contented to don the aprons and slippers and becoming housewives at long last.

Others argued that this trend was for a short period of time, and that women have now changed their minds and actively wanted to work both to decrease their material dependence as well as to seek a source of

stimulation beyond domestic chores and children. Moreover, their socialisation included an assumption that women should all work outside the home. But even though most of these women were over thirty-five, with higher educational degrees and some history of labour force participation, they comprised a social group whom most firms and enterprises were reluctant to hire.

Political scientist Svetlana Aivazova argued that after years of invasive state interference, the private sphere was being resurrected in Russia, along with the myth of a "natural destiny" for both sexes, aimed at limiting women to the private sphere. However surveys conducted in late 1992 showed that only 18 per cent of women with young children chose to be full-time housewives as opposed to 32 per cent in 1991.76 In other words, despite the increase in the "return to the home" rhetoric, the numbers of women not wanting to work outside the home has been dropping.

**Discrimination of Women at the Labour Market as State Policy**

Women's economic status in Russia has been affected by many discriminatory tendencies, including those, which were implicitly and

explicitly sanctioned by the state. Indeed, economic discrimination against women in Russia was hardly new. For decades, women were tracked into branches of industry, featuring low pay and low prestige. However, in August 1994, the wages in industrial branches with predominantly male labour forces ranged from 190 per cent (electrical energy production) to 361 per cent (gas) of the average Russian salary, while those in women’s branches ranged from 49 per cent to 127 per cent (food industry) of the average.77 Despite having an overall higher level of education than men, working women were always clustered in lower skill categories. Women rarely reached the level of managers or industrial executives.

Like most other countries, Russia too has not been able to avoid a gender-based earnings gap. According to a Public opinion foundation poll conducted in March 1996, discrimination against women was visible indirectly through major differences in wages. In their poll of 8,869 employed people in urban areas with higher or secondary education, women made up 87 per cent of the group whose monthly income were under 100,000 rubles ($21). While before Perestroika women’s average

77 Goscomstat, Kontseptsia Zhenskoi Zaniatosti, Appendix 3 (Moscow: Institut Economicy, RAN), 1994.
pay was 70 per cent of men's, by 1994 it had come down to a mere 40 per cent of men's wages.\textsuperscript{78}

In addition to governmental negligence in enforcing anti-discrimination law, the Russian government has inherited from the Soviet system a governmental policy of direct economic discrimination, whereby 460 of 6000 professions listed on government books were simply closed for women. Further evidence of the Russian State's economic discrimination against women was seen in the fact that state enterprises reacted to the onset of economic crisis and unemployment by dismissing women. According to a Human Rights Watch report, from 1995, according to the of recorded cases where government enterprises conducted mass dismissals, they fired significantly more women than men. The explanation for women's dismissal was that the Soviet occupational stratification that placed women disproportionately in "super-fluous jobs" disappeared as the economy restructured.\textsuperscript{79}

\textit{De-Feminisation of the Labour Force}

Sex-role stereotyping has found greater sustainability in the post-Soviet

\textsuperscript{78} Khotkina Zoia, (ed.), \textit{Seksualnye Domogatel' stva na Rabote} (Moscow: Zenskiikonsortsium and MCGS, 1996), p.15.

period. There was a surge of overt messages and discourses about the proper roles expressed by public officials in daily interactions and in the mainstream media, which began to influence social attitudes towards women and their roles in Russia, which were frequently essentialist in nature and often openly sexist. In 1993, the then labour minister, Gennadii Melikian, was quoted as saying; "There is no point in creating jobs for women". This was despite the fact that under post-Soviet economic condition, most families required two salaries in order to survive. The idea of separate spheres and roles for women and men was also reinforced by representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was argued that accepting women into 'priesthood' was against the norm that prescribed separate spheres for sexes, based on their "essential nature".

A hegemonic discourse thus reinforced traditional sex roles, stressing women's primary role as reproducers of the nation. Complimentary to the idea that women's sphere should not extend beyond the home, was an upsurge of the commercialization and objectification of women's bodies. The most visible means of objectification was printed pornography. Perekhody (underground street crossings) were dubbed as porno-khody. The transformation of women's bodies into consumer goods extended to

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television and printed advertisements. This twin process of increasing defeminisation of the labour force and sexual objectification of women became a concern in post-Soviet Russia. The labour market also reflected societal attitudes towards women's roles and employment opportunities. While women's roles in the private sector, especially in the business world were being restricted, there were open advertisements for either sex work or jobs in which women should be willing to cope with sexual demands of their bosses or clients.\(^\text{81}\)

Simultaneously a view of market as a benign phenomenon, which would ensure future prosperity, was being presented. Repeated assertions were being made that "the market has no sex" and it was the strongest who wins regardless of gender in conditions of competition. This, however, has not been the case, especially where women were concerned. Women suffered the most as a group in the transition period. The Russian women, who were once the highest labour force participant worldwide (over 90 per cent), became one of the least employable in the recent period. Society in Russia has been rocked by violence that ranged from ethnic conflicts to astronomical increases in crime rates, including rape and domestic violence.

The 'Female Face' of Unemployment

By 1993, popular magazines like the Rabotnitsa declared that unemployment had a "female face". As of January 1994, Federal employment service figures showed that 68 per cent of the registered unemployed were women. Also, women found themselves disproportionately unemployed among the educated strata, making up 78.2 per cent of the unemployed with a higher education in 1993. This was in contrast to the Soviet times, when women had an unusually high labour force participation rate (around 90 per cent). This trend of pushing women out of the labour market was particularly hard for single mothers, who headed 13 per cent of Russian families and in 1995, about 55 per cent of Russian single mothers were below the poverty line.82 Women over thirty-five with young children were increasingly hard pressed to find work.

Once made redundant, women experience greater difficulty than men in finding a new job. In 1993, the average length of redundancy was four months for men while it was five months for women. Although it was becoming increasingly difficult for women school-leaver's and graduates to find work, the majority of unemployed women were over thirty years.

Some of these women were of pre-retirement age and have retired early, either on voluntary or on a compulsory basis. Nevertheless, the largest group among the urban unemployed appeared to be that of the middle-aged mothers with fifteen-twenty years work experience who had usually worked in one place of work where they had remained since graduating with either secondary, secondary technical or higher education. 83

There were two fundamental reasons for the disproportionately high number of women being unemployed. First, there was a well-entrenched system of vertical and horizontal occupational segregation by sex. For decades, even during the Soviet-period, women have been working in branches featuring low pay and low prestige. Nearly 80 per cent of the working women have been employed in "female" sectors and jobs, where over 70 per cent of the personnel were women. Female occupations have mostly been in the fields of medicines, education, science, planning and accounts in the non-manual sphere, and trade, catering services, communication, textiles and clothing in the manual sphere. Russian women predominated in several of the industrial branches, which were the hardest hit by the changes in the economic system and by the collapse of the USSR. These included light industry, especially textiles, etc. The relative rates of pay in these occupations were low.84

concentration in low-level jobs and low-status professions has left them vulnerable in view of the change in course of the country's economy. Presently, being employed mostly employees in the public sector, which on its part is facing degeneration and underfeeding, they are poorly paid and that too after extensive delays.

Another reason for increasing female unemployment was the privatisation process. Profitability motivated the employers not to hire women, since they simultaneously held the responsibility for taking care of family, including sick children and aged parents. Also, women were the main beneficiaries of the parental leave policies and the sole recipient of other associated privileges that the Soviet government granted specifically to women workers with children. 85 A commonly held assumption among employers was that women constituted the less desirable and unproductive workforce, since their family responsibilities encroach upon their work time. 86 Deprived of state subsidies under the new market-driven conditions, enterprise directors saw no benefits in hiring or retaining women as part of their labour force, since they assumed that women, having children would continue to take advantage

of their legal rights to work lesser hours. Consequently, more and more women having families slipped below the poverty line. Hence, poverty had visibly become feminised.

Table 10: Average Yearly Number of Men and Women Employed in the Economy (Thousands of Population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>37211</td>
<td>38114</td>
<td>34761</td>
<td>31680</td>
<td>34639</td>
<td>31311</td>
<td>33936</td>
<td>30703</td>
<td>33377</td>
<td>30265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labour and Employment in Russia. Goscomstat of Russia, Moscow, 1999, p.62.

Equal Rights and Opportunities

The protective legislation in the labour code, including ban on women's employment in hundreds of occupations and a series of other limitations related to pregnancy and maternity have prevented women from enjoying "equal rights and opportunities". These provisions were taken very seriously by those aiming to justify women's exclusion from the workforce, both in terms of improving production (without having the problems of women taking time off to have babies, or to look after sick children or due to their own ill health) and of benefiting the society as a whole, by increasing women's involvement in family life. They also pointed out that millions of women continued to be employed in
occupations labeled as "hazardous", and in heavy industry. Many high-paying jobs were found on the list of restricted occupations. Some of these restrictions appeared illogical like for example women were not allowed to drive buses although they were permitted to work as tram drivers, they were not allowed to be pilots but an opportunity to work as flight attendants, was always open to them.

Protective legislations of 1993, according to feminist economist Zoia Khotkina, did not provide women with equal opportunities. She labeled them "social invalids", who might be forced into specialised workplaces or "female ghettos" rather than integrated into the main workforce. According to the women activists groups, the withdrawal of the "protective legislation's" would amount to elimination of women's privileges; and in the absence of these priviledges women would have more difficult time winning promotions, while the unemployed would have an increasingly hard time getting hired.

Women's movement groups in Russia that were currently calling for "equal rights and opportunities" (which included dismantling of "protective legislation" for women) clashed with the popular desire in today's Russia to "restore the social safety net". The political bloc,

"Women of Russia", whose election platform in 1993 had called for such a restoration, ultimately adopted the feminist position of ending protective legislation and hence was not re-elected in 1995. With multiple burdens that have further encroached upon women's time and mind, there have been concerns regarding women's interests to partake in political activity and administration especially under circumstances that sought to exclude women from labour force and public life.

### Table 11: Sex Distribution of Employees by Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1990**</th>
<th>1995*</th>
<th>1997**</th>
<th>1998***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>52 48</td>
<td>60 40</td>
<td>61 39</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 Workers</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>73 27</td>
<td>77 23</td>
<td>76 24</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Workers</td>
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**Conclusion**

The above mentioned facts and trends related to women in the Russian labour market testify to the prevalent gender asymmetry. Macroeconomic factors (decline in volume production, default crisis, reconversion processes) which went hand in hand with the rise of real unemployment, occupational segregation and payment distortions, have pushed women out of the labour market. Neither the legislation relevant to women’s employment issues nor the new industrial relations and old stereotypes have contributed to women’s market competitiveness. Women, indeed, have had one advantage that of higher educational standards. But, only a very few categories of entrepreneurs have implemented it to their advantage.
The discrimination on the basis of sex, which was in fact never, really totally absent in Soviet Russia, has become increasingly overt with the advent of glasnost. Women had to live with newly overt sexism, pornographic images of women, a patriarchal nationalist upsurge that espoused the return of women to the home and a renewed stress on women's "natural predestination".

The new preoccupation with glamour and sexuality has replaced the Soviet legacy of glorifying "heroine mothers" and its "women workers". A new meaning of female emancipation has been emerging. An entirely new iconography of women has been produced. The woman worker was being replaced by the glamour model motivating women not to produce but to consume. However, with the new consumerism and glamour, the situation soon began to take a different turn. What once have approved, as an 'artistic expression' has now become an erotic and sexually explicit imagery of women that is either total or near pornography.

Russian women today, are caught in the vicious cycle of inadequate employment opportunities and difficult economic conditions. At the same time, those in employment found it enormously difficult to look after their homes and children, with no social infrastructure and child-care facilities. The existence of minimal state protection for motherhood made women less competitive in the labour market.
Faced with the growing threat of unemployment, fear for redundancy, etc. have urged the need to reassess their abilities, develop self-penetration skills, set up their own ventures, etc. Russian women have been urged to appreciate that time has changed and that it was no good expecting the state to solve all their problems. New attitudes and new skills need to be developed especially for job search and selection procedures, in order to withstand competition in the new labour market. The crude and blatant discrimination which the Russian women face in the new labour market is not a factor which could be easily overcome.

One of the few positive observations made about this state of affairs was that, if nothing else, the gloves were off and women could see exactly what they were up against. The social attitudes which underpinned the present discriminatory climate towards them were actually established well before the period of market reform began. Policies, which promoted an image of women as mothers and house-makers, and which gradually crept into employment sector too, actually had their roots in the Soviet legacy itself in the Stalinist family legislation and in Brezhnevite's pronationalism. Finally, under Gorbachev, this view of women arguably attained its apogee, persuading women themselves that they could choose to spend more time with their children and still have safeguarded employment rights even as the edifice of the planned economy was being
dismantled. At least in the present state, the realities of Soviet-type discrimination were seen for what they were. The failure to promote women, to award them equal pay, to tackle sexual harassment at work place and the male chauvinism in society at large, have, indeed, reflected in the current shocking dismissal of women as bimbos and babushkas. Now with increased family poverty, the continued political rhetoric about the protection of mother-hood sounds too hollow, and it can no longer be used as smokescreen, or as an excuse for women's inequality at work. Perhaps, there still are some grounds for optimism that women might be able to combat the social attitudes and stereotypes, which have produced the present catastrophic situation.

This type of situation is typical of sectors which are mostly female dominated like textile and clothing industries, administration staff, healthcare, culture, education, trade and catering sectors and also in the female dominated sectors like science, crediting and finance. Thus, both the young and the aged Russian women were vulnerable in the changed labour market and were the first to suffer from the massive dismissals.

Women have also been particularly hard hit by the privatization regime. They received lesser salaries than men. The average time they remained unemployed was also higher. There was also a tendency for women to be pushed into poor enterprises, offering low level of social benefits. With
the withdrawal of Soviet type state facilities like child care and crèche facilities, women were increasingly compelled to give up their jobs. In fact, research projects that analyzed the state of women after reforms revealed that since socio-cultural barriers against women were intensifying, social tension amongst them has also grown higher than men.

Women in Russia have adopted several methods to resist the feminisation of poverty and the decline in their social status. A large number of women have entered the market indulging in small time trading by buying and selling almost any object from household goods, to import and export of commodities. Women have also entered new service sectors. However, an overall lack of skills, new forms of commercialization, and growth of sex industry have worked against the interests of women at the labour market.

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