

Marriage Timing, Ethnicity and Religion in Kazakhstan  
Elwood Carlson  
Heather Garris  
Florida State University

Extended Abstract

Previous research has tested the minority group status hypothesis regarding specific stages of the family-building process for countries in the Middle East and Central Asia (Agadjanian 1999, Gore & Carlson 2008). The hypothesis in its most general form posits an interaction effect between ethnicity on the one hand and education or other measures of socioeconomic status on the other, with respect to the timing and intensity of each stage of the reproductive cycle--first marriage, first birth interval, second birth interval and so on, and ultimately, completed family size.

This interaction between ethnicity and education can appear in one or both of two partial forms. First, disadvantaged minority groups within a society may exhibit earlier marriage, shorter birth intervals, and subsequent higher levels of fertility than the majority population. This higher fertility at the "bottom" of the society has been interpreted variously as the result of blocked alternate opportunities, or as persistence of a separate minority group subculture emphasizing pronatalist norms. Second, elites among such minority groups may exhibit later marriage, longer birth intervals, and subsequently lower levels of fertility than the majority population. This has been interpreted as status anxiety of these minority elites in the face of potential discrimination from the majority.

The minority group status hypothesis was first developed with respect to race/ethnic identity within the United States (Goldscheider & Uhlenberg 1969, Ritchey 1975, Bean & Marcum 1978, Day 1984), but has subsequently been applied to a wide range of ethnic minorities within national populations in many parts of the world (Kennedy 1973, Thapa 1989). With respect to Central Asia, Agadjanian (1999) has explored this hypothesis in Kazakhstan and concluded that patterns of childbearing there do not fit the hypothesis well. On the other hand, Gore and Carlson (2008) have recently demonstrated that the hypothesis describes marriage patterns of ethnic Kurds compared to the majority population in nearby Turkey extremely well, with both forms of the effect clearly identifiable.

This paper uses evidence from the 1995 and 1999 Kazakh Demographic and Health Surveys to examine the timing of marriage for two distinctive groups within the population of Kazakhstan. We follow Agadjanian (2008) in combining ethnic Russians with other European groups (Germans, Ukrainians, etc) and comparing them to the ethnic Kazakh population in the country, and also in excluding small ethnic splinter groups from other Central Asian countries (Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, etc) from the analysis. We concentrate on marriage timing in order to most closely replicate the work of Gore and Carlson (2008) for Turkey, and also because Agadjanian (2008) has demonstrated that virtually all births in Kazakhstan for these samples of women occurred within (and shortly after) marriage. Since marriage thus constitutes a reliable marker for the timing of the first step along the path of reproduction, it makes sense to begin analysis at that point. Agadjanian (1999) has treated this issue of marriage timing in Kazakhstan in a previous article, but that analysis completed some years ago did not involve event history analysis, and also did

not specifically examine the hypothesized interaction effect between education and ethnicity.

Kazakhstan uniquely raises an unusual theoretical issue about the minority group status hypothesis, because it is not immediately obvious which of the ethnic populations in the country should be regarded as the “disadvantaged minority” in terms of expected consequences for timing of reproductive behavior. Some evidence shows that the ethnic Russian (and more generally, the European) segment of the population historically appropriated a disproportionate share of the higher-status occupations after immigrating into Kazakhstan in response to Russian/Soviet resettlement initiatives (Davis & Sabol 1998). However, other research has demonstrated a concentration of ethnic Kazakhs in higher education and some other fields (Agadjanian 2008). Similarly, the numerical balance of these groups in the population has shifted in recent decades, and has always been near parity in terms of dominance by sheer numbers. For these reasons we do not assume at the outset which group should be regarded as the “minority” group for evaluating the hypothesis, but rather examine the empirical results for clues on this question.

Agadjanian has proposed (and utilized in several studies) a useful division of the ethnic Kazakh population into two groups described as more or less “russified” based on selection of interview language by these respondents at the time of each survey--those who chose to be interviewed in Russian are compared to those who chose the Kazakh language for the survey interviews. These groups allow further tests of the minority group status hypothesis, specifically for the most disadvantaged members of the population, in terms of evaluating the alternative hypotheses of blocked opportunities versus persistence of proutist subcultures as explanations for higher fertility. Although the correspondence between ethnic and religious self-identification is extremely strong in these surveys (nearly all Russians identify themselves as Orthodox and nearly all Kazakhs identify themselves as Moslem, regardless of language or other differences) the correspondence is not perfect and we also examine religious identity as an alternative way of operationalizing ethnicity in examining the minority group status hypothesis.

Agadjanian, Victor. 1999. Post-Soviet demographic paradoxes: ethnic differences in marriage and fertility in Kazakhstan. *Sociological Forum* 14:425-46.

Agadjanian, Victor, P. Dommaraju & J. Glick. 2008. Reproduction in upheaval: ethnic-specific fertility responses to societal turbulence in Kazakhstan. *Population Studies* 62:211-33.

Bean, Frank & John Marcum. 1978. Differential fertility and the minority group status hypothesis: an assessment and review. pp 189-212 in F. Bean & W. P. Frisbie (eds). *The Demography and Racial and Ethnic Groups*. New York: Academic Press.

Davis, Sue & Steven Sabol. 1998. The importance of being ethnic: minorities in post-Soviet states--the case of Russians in Kazakhstan. *Nationalities Papers* 26:472-91.

Day, Lincoln H. 1984. “Minority-group Status and Fertility: A More Detailed Test of the Hypothesis.” *Sociological Quarterly* 25: 456-72.

Dommeraju, Premchand & Victor Agadjanian. 2008. Nuptiality in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia. *Asian Population Studies* 4:195-213.

Goldscheider, C. and P. Uhlenberg. 1969. “Minority Group Status and Fertility.” *American Journal of Sociology* 74:361-72.

- Gore, DeAnna & Elwood Carlson. 2008. Ethnicity, education, and the non-proportional hazard of first marriage in Turkey. (Paper presented at the European Population Conference, Barcelona).
- Kennedy, Robert. 1973. Minority group status and fertility: the Irish. *American Sociological Review* 38:85-96.
- Ritchey, N. 1975. "The Effect of Minority Group Status on Fertility: A Re-examination of Concepts." *Population Studies* 29:249-57.
- Thapa, S. 1989. "The Ethnic Factor in the Timing of Family Formation in Nepal." *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* 4(1): 3-34.