

In Tajikistan, many girls are forbidden to continue their studies after high school graduation. It is believed that Tajik woman's destiny is to get married, raise children, to take care of her husband and his parents. Therefore, for many girls, a diploma of higher education becomes an obstacle to family life.

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Educated daughters-in-law are especially undervalued in rural Tajikistan. There, it is assumed that educated girls turn out obstinate wives. It has been this way at all times, and many Tajiks still believe it now.

33-years-old **Zulfia** (*not her real name*) lives in the Gazantarak village of Devashtich district in northern Sughd region. She is a lawyer by profession and now raises her son alone.

Despite the fact that she married for love, her family fell apart because her mother-in-law was reluctant to have an "educated daughter-in-law".

- On the third day after the wedding, the mother-in-law invited me outside. She was holding a long stick.

"I don't care if you are a lawyer or someone else. Starting from today, you will live according to the laws of my house. You will fulfill the norms I have set," the mother-in-law told me.

I did not understand the reasons for her antipathy to me then. Later she said that she wanted to marry off her son with a "homely, uneducated girl".



Devashtich district, northern Sughd region of Tajikistan. Photo: CABAR.asia

In many districts of the northern Sughd region, as well as throughout Tajikistan, it is customary to marry girls immediately after they reach the age of 18 or 19. Older ones are already considered as “non-prestigious” daughters-in-law. Therefore, very few girls want to continue their studies after high school graduation and enroll in a university. The probability for women with a diploma to start a family decreases many times among educated women.



Tavallo Safarova. Photo: CABAR.asia

Tavallo Safarova, 36, director of school No. 17 in the Vitkon village of Mastchoh district, says that they have very few girls who want to continue their studies after graduation. She herself was never married and she considers her desire to get a higher education and build a career to be the reasons for her loneliness. She even tries to spend the weekends at school now, because it becomes harder each time to listen to the parents' reproaches.

I built a career, but could not marry.

"I really wanted to be a teacher. When I returned to my village with a diploma, all my classmates already had two or three children. The men of our village do not care about your character or the worldview. The only thing that matters is the girl's youth. I built a career, but could not marry. And I think that I will not," Tavallo says with a sad smile. Although it is believed that this problem is typical only for rural regions, it is possible to meet women who could not marry because of the desire to continue their studies and build a career even in the central cities of Tajikistan.

Age of 34 years is considered a very late age in Khujand.

It takes at least six years to get a higher education. Getting married while studying is the most common way for urban girls. If they do not get married while studying, then the chances of arranging private life significantly reduce.



Zamira Sattorova. Photo from the personal archive

Zamira Sattorova is 34, she lives in Khujand, has a prestigious university job and a PhD degree. However, she rates her chances of building a happy family life very low. "Soon, people of the same age will begin to marry their daughters. Age of 34 years is considered very, very late age in Khujand. I don't know where my fate will take me," she says.

Deceived Teacher

In Tajik society, it is generally accepted that after becoming 25 years old, women must agree to any suggestions: be it the role of the second or third wife, marriage with a disabled man, etc.

Due to the age, such women have little choice. Neighbors' side-glances and family's reproaches do not make their lives better. Sometimes these girls become victims of deception.

So it happened with **Omina Rahmonova** (*not her real name*), a resident of the Devashtich district, who received two higher education degrees. However, the red diplomas did not save her from deception.

After graduation, Omina returned to her village with the intentions to benefit her fellow villagers. Nevertheless, they did not welcome her warmly.



Devashtich district, northern Sughd region of Tajikistan. Photo: CABAR.asia

The daily reproaches and reminders of relatives that she should have married long before, tired the woman. When the relatives showed her a photo of a young man from a neighboring village, she agreed to marry him.

- We did not meet and did not speak with my husband before the wedding. Even on my wedding day, when I left the house, I could not lift my head up and look at him. However, I imagined the photo that I was shown.

When domulla announced the nikah (marriage) and asked us to look at each other, I almost screamed in horror. A completely different man sat next to me!

He was hidden from me because he was mentally ill.

I did not know what to do, because the wedding was already underway. I just had to agree. I was depressed, I felt deceived.

Only later, I found out that they showed me a photo of my husband's brother. It soon became clear that he was hidden from me because he was mentally ill, a maniac and a drug addict.

I could not tolerate his abuse and left him.

Today, Omina conducts trainings for women: she talks about their rights, teaches not to tolerate violence and seek help from authorized organizations.

Uneducated Mother Is Uneducated Generation

Still, among the overwhelming majority of mothers-in-law, who do not want to have educated daughters-in-law, there are also those who are against the general trend, realizing that education contributes to a better life for young families.

Ulfatoy, 50, is a resident of the Ovchi-Kalacha village of Ghafurov district. She can sew, knit and cook very well, but she never fulfilled her dreams of higher education.

Ulfatoy got married during the third year of university studies. Soon she had children, and she never finished her studies.

- When my daughters grew up, my husband did not want them to continue their studies. The sons did not have any desire to get a higher education as well.

My grandchildren will have a successful future because an educated mother brings them up.

I was very worried about my children's future, because an uneducated mother is an uneducated generation. Therefore, I married off my son with a girl who studied at the university, and every day during five years, I sent her to go to study.

Only the road to and from the city takes two hours every day. Sometimes when their child was sick, my daughter-in-law wanted to stay with him. However, I forced her to go, and looked after the child myself.

There was not a day for her to miss a class. I do not regret it. I think my grandchildren will have a successful future because an educated mother brings them up.

Meanwhile, the lack of higher education among girls and women is a problem that worries the government of the country. The number of divorces among young families is growing

every year in Tajikistan, and often, young women by the age of 25 are left with three to five children to maintain, without a profession and means of living.

Over the past four years, the total number of divorces in northern Tajikistan was 15 193.

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Shamsinisso Madalieva, head of the Reconciliation Council of the Frunze mahalla in Histevarz jamoat of Ghafurov district, says that the tradition of girls' early marriage does not help strengthening the family.

- Experience shows that in most cases disagreements in a family arise from the brides' unpreparedness for family life. Therefore, we advise parents to marry girls after they reach the age of 20.

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Parents should prepare girls for family life. At the age of 18, they finish school, and then they must learn a lot, at least how to cook. For this, they need to get further education and profession.

A girl should be ready for marriage not only psychologically, but also physically. Men have different moments in life, and when it becomes difficult for him to provide for his family, a woman will be able to support him not only spiritually, but also financially.

The Committee on Women and Family Affairs of the Sughd region reported that the government is taking great care to increase the role of women in society. For this, quotas are constantly allocated for girls from rural areas to study at universities of the country, explanatory conversations are conducted and other work is done.

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