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# **Gender Norms in the Former Socialist States: An approach using micro data in a case of Russia**

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# Gender Norms in the Former Socialist States: An approach using micro data in a case of Russia\*

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## 1. Introduction

Analysis based on household survey data (micro data) collected from individual samples such as individual households and individual persons is the mainstream in empirical research on individual decision-making processes. Since it makes it possible to identify individual properties such as not only age and gender but also level of education, employment status, health status, household budget, and individual income level, it enables a wide range of analysis not possible using summarized macro data.

Relatively early examples of Japanese studies utilizing household-budget survey data in economic analysis of Russia and other former socialist states include Hiwatari (2008). The author too has authored papers employing household survey data from countries including Russia and Tajikistan (Kumo, 2010, 2012; Karabchuk *et al.*, 2017). However, it must be said that studies in Japan using micro data in social-scientific analysis of these regions remain limited.

The most widely used and best-known household survey of Russia, the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS)<sup>1</sup>, can be used free of charge after completing the necessary procedures. In the case of Tajikistan as well, a central Asian state not studied as frequently as Russia, the household survey data of Tajikistan Living Standards Surveys (TLSS)<sup>2</sup> may be used freely. Even so, it is rare for household surveys to include questions about values, and for this reason these data differ in nature from micro data that may be used in the domain of sociology, which concerns such subject matter. Accordingly, this paper is intended to contribute to future studies by looking at data that can be used in comparative analysis between Russia and other former socialist states and other countries on the subject of gender.

Those investigating Russian social dynamics must have heard of the institutions of VTsIOM

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rlms-hse.cpc.unc.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/73>

and the Levada Center. These are public-opinion surveying institutions located in Russia and independent of the government. However, their surveys are limited to the nation of Russia alone and tend to ask questions concerning recent issues. Their data on issues such as changes in rates of support for the government and public satisfaction cannot be used in multinational analysis. It also should be pointed out that the possibilities of using their data in analysis are very small since they collect almost no information on the properties of respondents. Here we will use the International Social Survey Program (ISSP)<sup>3</sup> as a survey that compensates for these points and collects data repeatedly.

The ISSP can be considered useful regarding points such as the following. First, while the survey began in 1985, Russia has participated continuously since 1991, making it possible to trace changes since prior to the nation's systemic transformation. Second, while the theme differs each time the survey is conducted, it already has surveyed subjects multiple times on identical themes such as social inequality, religion, the roles of government, and family and gender roles, making it possible to observe long-term changes in such specific aspects. Furthermore, its subjects include not only Russia but multiple other states that underwent systemic transformations, OECD member states, and developing countries that are relatively large in terms of population and economies, facilitating international comparison.<sup>4</sup> Another distinguishing feature of this survey is the presence of survey rounds focused on studying the status of gender. The ISSP will be considered in detail below.

## **2. ISSP: The survey and available data**

### **2.1. Overview of the ISSP**

The ISSP is a survey on major themes in sociological research, which began in 1984 as a survey of a relatively narrow range of four countries. Through international cooperation, it has been conducted continually each year as a repeated cross-sectional survey. Intended to collect micro data, its data are easily accessible from an archive site that contains a wide range of data, GESIS<sup>5</sup>.

Its basic survey method involves surveying individuals using questions translated into each country's language, as a project intended to enable mutual sharing of data. The theme of the survey varies from year to year. The number of participating countries also varies from year to year. For example, while 41 countries participated in 2012, 30 participated in the 2017 survey.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://w.issp.org/menu-top/home/>

<sup>4</sup> While these second and third points also apply to the well-known World Values Survey, the ISSP focuses each year on a clearly identified theme and includes numerous questions on each theme. Since the WVS uses largely the same questions every five years, the scope of the content of its questions inevitably will be limited.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gesis.org/home>

The theme of the 1988, 1994, 2002, and 2012 surveys was "Family and Changing Gender Roles." These were intended to investigate matters such as changes in values and receptivity regarding topics such as the state of relations within the family, male and female roles, work, and income in each country. However, since Russia has participated in the ISSP since 1990, the data available for use on this theme for that country are limited to those from the 1994, 2002, and 2012 surveys. Plans call for the 2022 survey once again to concern the issue of "Family and Changing Gender Roles." The data available for use as of September 2021 are those through the 2018 round of the survey (on themes unrelated to gender). Since it takes some time to prepare micro data, the data from the 2022 round of the survey on gender will not be available for use until several years later.

A look at the 1994, 2002, and 2012 rounds of the survey on family and gender conducted since Russia began to participate shows that the number of countries surveyed grew from 23 countries in 1994 to 34 in 2002 and 41 in the 2012 survey.<sup>6</sup> The sample size per country ranged from around 1000 to more than 2000, and the total sample size was 33,590 in 1994, 46,638 in 2002, and 61,754 in the 2012 survey. In principle, sampling was conducted through the method of stratified two-step random sampling, and survey subjects were men and women aged 18 and older. Data were collected through means including email, ordinary mail, and in-person surveying. The content of the questionnaires grew to some degree each time the survey was conducted. The 2002 questionnaire had more detailed questions than did the 1994 questionnaire, and the 2012 questionnaire had even more detailed questions than the 2002 one did. However, it must be noted that such growth is not always a good thing, since it means an increase in the number of items for which comparison among rounds is not possible. The survey makes it possible to ascertain the division of labor between partners in the household through questions on subjects such as the burdens of household work and childcare and hours worked in the home.

## **2.2. ISSP data**

Here we will identify a number of items from the ISSP 2012 round and consider the usable data. Subjects of questions related to the properties of individuals and their families included respondent age and gender, partner age and gender, family membership structure, level of education and hours worked per week of respondent and partner, and number of children in the household. These data enable cross tabulation across individual and partner properties and family properties. Questions directly related to the subject of "Family and Changing Gender Roles" include those on division of

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<sup>6</sup> Countries (regions) subject to the 1994 survey were Australia, Germany (the former West Germany), and the United States. In 2002 Brazil, Chile, the Flanders region (Belgium), Portugal, Taiwan, and the Republic of Cyprus were added. In 2012, Argentina, Australia, and India were added, while Northern Ireland and Cyprus were removed.

roles with the partner in the household, process of making decisions on child reading, thinking on who should take maternity leave and childcare leave and on bearing of related costs, and general thinking on child rearing and marriage. A small number of examples of these questions is introduced below.

Question R2 on the original survey concerns the social and family division of roles between men and women.

Question R2 (question number from the 2012 round, which was unchanged from the 1994 and 2002 rounds): "To what extent do you agree or disagree: a: Both the man and woman should contribute to the household income; b. A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family."<sup>7</sup>

Answers (for each of the items a and b): "Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree or disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree; Can't choose"

Questions R16, R17, and R19 ask about the division of roles with the partner regarding work inside the home. These questions are shown below.

Question R16a (question number from the 2012 round; was number R9a in the 2002 round; question R16a and R17a were not included in the 1994 round): "On average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities?"

Question R17a (question number from the 2012 round; was number R9b in the 2002 round): "On average, how many hours a week does (your partner) spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities?"

(Answers to both questions were in numbers of hours)

Question R19 (question number from the 2012 round; corresponds to questions R8a-f in the 2002 round and question 18 in the 1994 round): "In your household who does the following things? a. Does the laundry; b. Makes small repairs around the house; c. Cares for sick family members; d. Shops for groceries; e. Does the household cleaning; f. Prepares the meals."

Answers (for each item a-f): "Always you, usually you, about equal or both together, usually your [spouse/partner], always your [spouse/partner], or by a third person."

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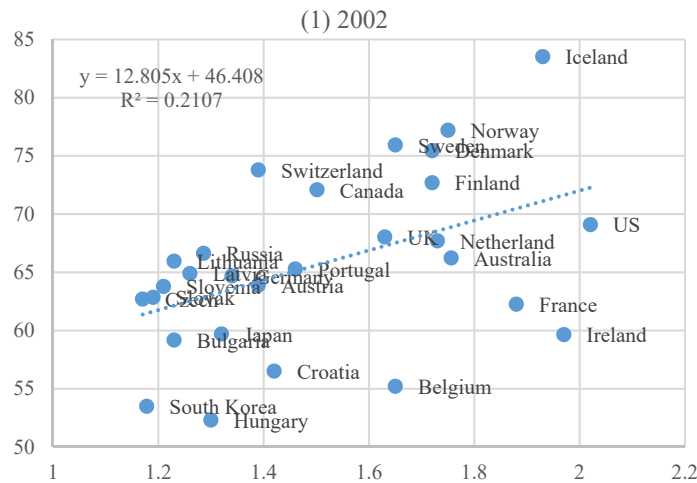
<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the 2002 round included "Nc: Men ought to do a larger share of household work than they do now; Nd: Men ought to do a larger share of childcare than they do now." However, these questions were not asked in the 2012 round.

Answers to these questions on matters such as norm consciousness and the state of division of labor within the household can be used to identify tendencies across the basic information of subject's age, level of education, and household information, and the same information for the subject's partner. While such analysis will be subject to limitations, or even completely impossible, when relying on macro data, with micro data it is possible to ascertain differences in answers related to individual properties.

### 3. Gender as seen in the ISSP

The issue of low fertility can be said already to be recognized widely as a subject closely related to gender. Research on low fertility in developed countries in recent years has fully highlighted the perspectives of gender and work-life balance. As a simple depiction of the meaning of these perspectives, Fig. 1 shows the distributions of the labor participation rate of women and the total fertility rate in OECD member states and former socialist-economy state subject to the ISSP survey in the years 2002 and 2012 subject to this paper.<sup>8</sup>

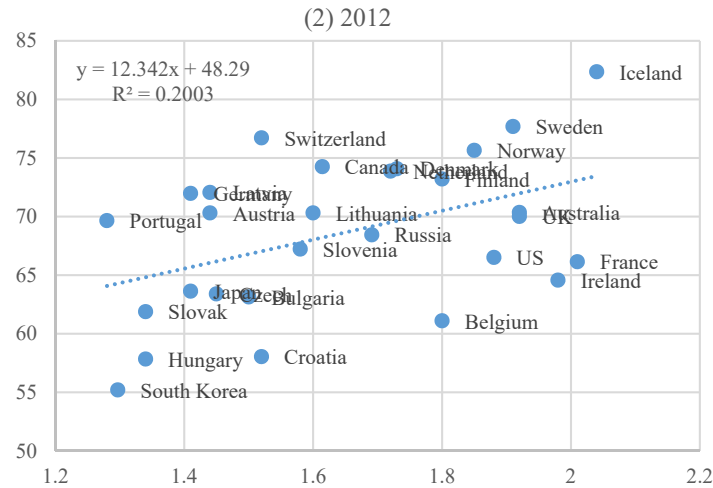
Fig. 1. Distribution of the labor participation rate of women (vertical axis) and the total fertility rate (horizontal axis).



(Source: Prepared by the author based on World Bank, *World Development Indicators*)

<sup>8</sup> For both fertility rate and employment rate, outliers more than two standard deviations from the average (Chile, Mexico, Israel, Turkey) were excluded.

Fig. 1. Distribution of the labor participation rate of women (vertical axis) and the total fertility rate (horizontal axis). (cont.)



(Source: Prepared by the author based on World Bank, *World Development Indicators*)

Since a rise in the labor participation rate of women both increases the opportunity cost of childbirth for women and makes it more difficult to adjust the distribution of labor in household work and childcare, it is thought that it would be considered in most cases to lead to a drop in the fertility rate. But Fig. 1 shows a counterintuitive tendency toward an increase—albeit a gentle one—in the fertility rate as the labor participation rate of women rises.

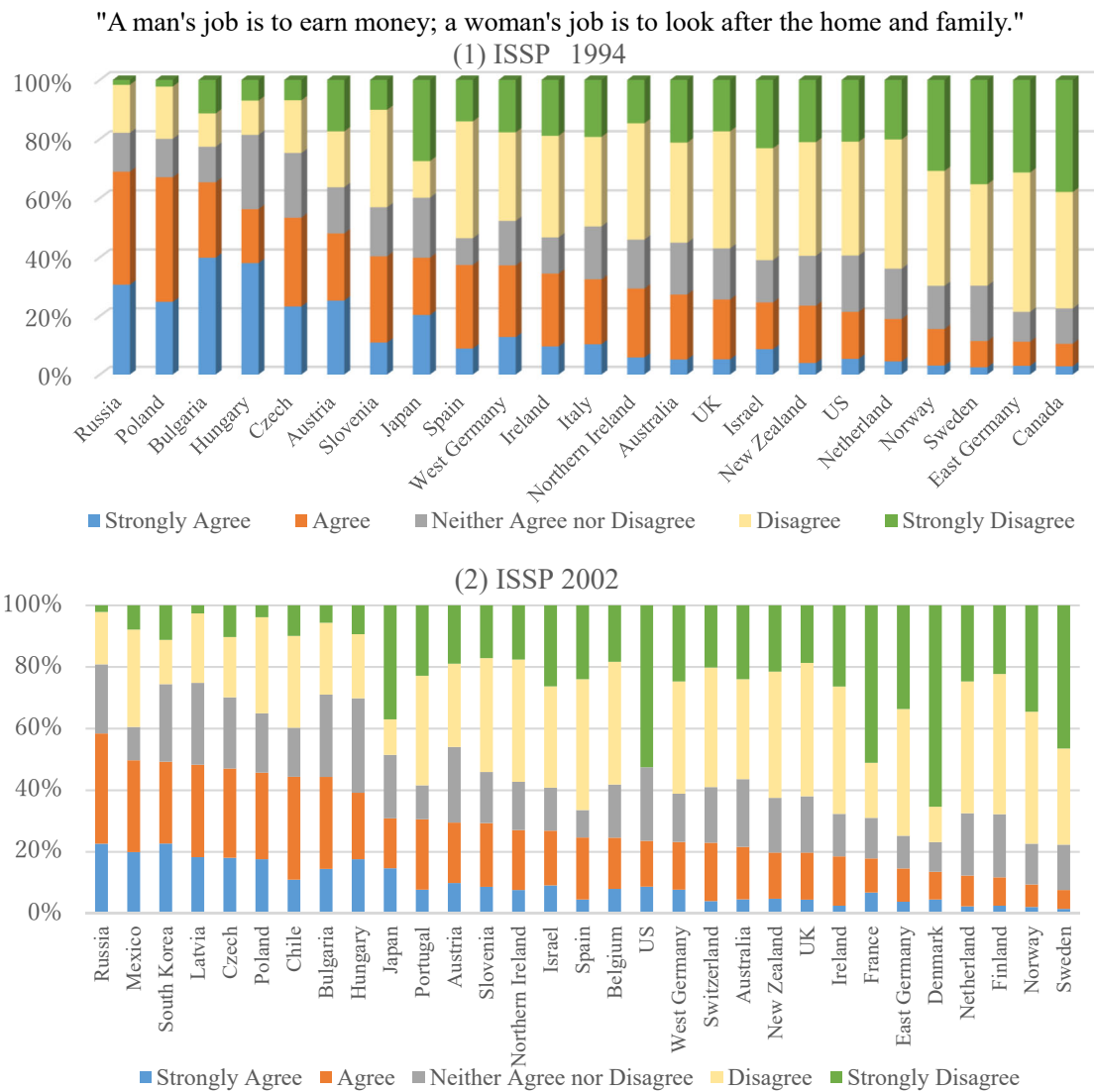
The countries in the bottom left quadrant of Fig. 1—that is, those in which both the labor participation rate of women and the fertility rate are low—are, if not including former socialist states, countries in which traditional norms are considered to be strong: Japan, South Korea, and Portugal. Countries in the upper right quadrant—those where both the female labor participation rate of and the fertility rate are high—include many that are known for their high levels of social welfare, such as Norway, Finland, and Sweden. This leads to the issue of how this tendency should be interpreted and how the former socialist states should be positioned within these findings.

The latter countries can be considered to be ones in which cooperation in household work and childcare—i.e., division of labor in the household—is advanced. In addition to aspects of their social systems such as socialization of childcare, abundant subsidies for raising children, and establishment or enforcement of systems for men to take childcare leave, these countries can be considered to differ clearly from the former countries in terms of consciousness at an individual level as well. That is, the latter countries stand out in terms of progress on division of labor in the household. Aspects such as these can be identified through the ISSP. Below, we will look at questions closely related to gender norms.

### 3.1. International comparison of consciousness of gender norms

Consciousness of norms related to division of responsibilities by gender has a decisive impact on realization of the work-life balance noted above. The ISSP asks directly, "To what extent do you agree or disagree: A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family." Actual data are available for all OECD member states and former socialist states subject to the survey. Countries in which high percentages of respondents reported that they either "Strongly agree" or "Agree" with this view are plotted along the horizontal axis, from left to right by higher to lower percentages.

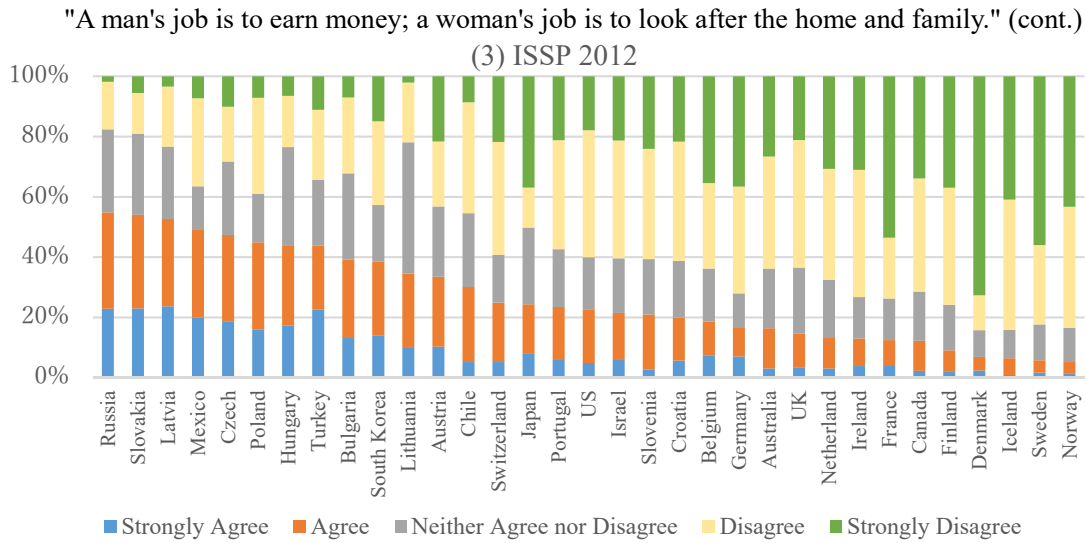
Fig. 2. Agreement or disagreement with the statement,



(Source: Prepared by the author based on ISSP questionnaires)



Fig. 2. Agreement or disagreement with the statement,



(Source: Prepared by the author based on ISSP questionnaires)

Here we seem to get a glimpse of the strength of traditional norm consciousness in the OECD member states of Japan, Austria, and South Korea. But here the position of former socialist states, the main subjects of this paper, should be emphasized. In this figure, former socialist states are positioned in the group on the left side of the horizontal axis: those accepting of traditional norms on division of labor by gender. The ratio of male to female respondents either is adjusted to roughly equal ratios or, in the overwhelming majority of countries, the ratio of women is higher. Thus, this result is not due to a bias toward men in the makeup of respondents by gender. While the former socialist states of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Latvia were among the countries most accepting of traditional norms on division of labor by gender in each round, what stands out most of all is the fact that Russia remained the country most accepting of traditional norms on division of labor by gender in all rounds.

There may be understanding to see these findings as indicative of problems in the validity of the methodology itself, such as the fact that answers were collected to questionnaires containing identical questions translated from English into multiple languages. But it must be said that when an extremely clear trend is apparent it would be pointless to try to blame it on a linguistic issue. In addition, when there is a clear trend in figures collected from a large sample it would be hard to say that it would be logical to deny it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, doubt may arise as to whether respondents understood if the question was asking about their own views or common views of society. The view also is conceivable that if there was infinite variety among subjects concerning such judgments then the responses could not be relied on. But such views are not persuasive when summation of large-scale data shows clear trends.

If doubts such as the above were to arise when considering individual countries, then they could be resolved through collection of data from multiple countries similar in nature. What happens when the answers are totaled through categorization of these countries by aspects such as social security policies and family policies, based on previous studies?

### 3.2. Differences in receptivity to gender norms by country group

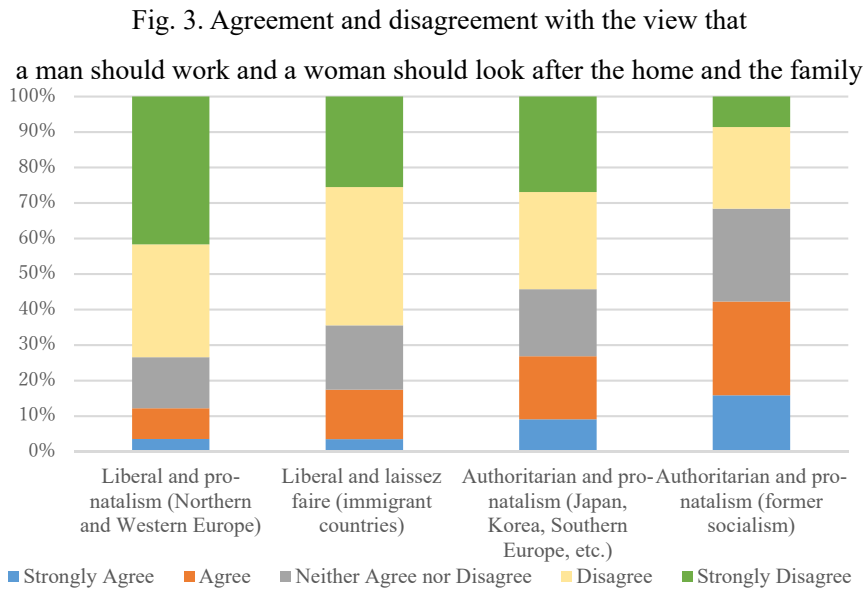
Employing the welfare state category, as identified in Esping-Andersen (1990), OECD member states can be grouped into the categories of (1) social democratic regimes, centered on Scandinavia, with strong respect for freedom along with universal social security and a major role for government, (2) conservative regimes such as Germany, Spain, Japan, and South Korea in which government cooperates with the private sector while traditional authority and the unofficial sector also play major roles, and (3) liberal capitalist regimes such as the United States and Canada, which emphasize liberalism and have highly developed private-sector markets. Similarly, Pfenning and Bahle (2001) proposed the categories of (a) liberal states, in which government in principle does not get involved in family relations, (b) countries that stress blood ties, in which support is provided basically by relatives, (c) countries focused on children, which stress enhancement of childhood education, (d) vulnerable countries, which effectively lack any family policy, and (e) strong countries that proactively support a balance between women's participation in the workforce and childcare. While seeing the former socialist states that are its focus as one type, this paper will summarize results for the categories shown in Table 1, with reference to the perspectives of previous studies such as those referred to above.

Table 1. Country types based on values and family policy

Typology	1994	2002	2012
Authoritarian and pro-natalism (former socialism)	Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, East Germany	Russia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia, East Germany	Russia, Slovakia, Latvia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovenia, Croatia
Authoritarian and pro-natalism (Japan, Korea, Southern Europe, etc.)	Austria, Japan, Spain, West Germany, Italy	Korea, Japan, Portugal, Austria, Spain, Germany West	Korea, Austria, Japan, Portugal, Germany
Liberal and pro-natalism (Northern and Western Europe)	Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	Belgium, Switzerland, France, Denmark, Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Ireland	Belgium, Switzerland, UK, Netherlands, Ireland, France, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway
Liberal and laissez faire (immigrant countries)	Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada	USA, Australia, New Zealand	USA, Australia, Canada

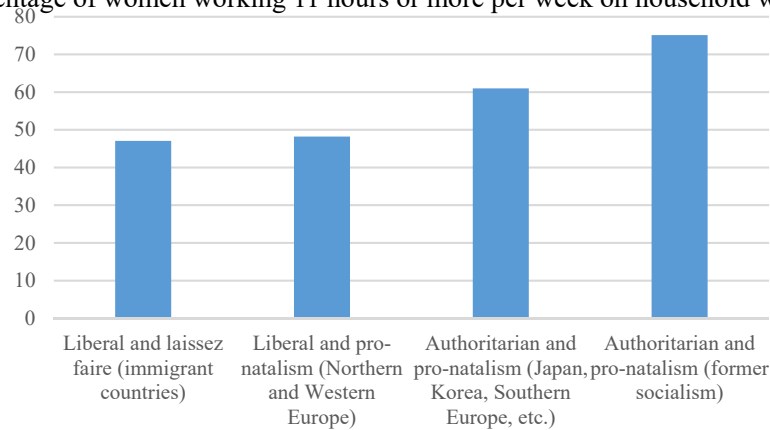
(Source: Author, prepared from Pfenning and Bahle, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990)

Figure 3 shows the sum totals of answers by country type regarding the above consciousness of norms on division of responsibilities based on the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family, as percentages. It shows clearly that in former socialist states, compared to other country types, higher percentages agree and lower percentages disagree with traditional norms. While Fig. 3 concerned only 2012 data, the data from the 2002 and 1994 rounds of the survey showed the same trends. For these 2012 data, we conducted one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) concerning the percentages. This confirmed a statistically significant difference between the former socialist countries that encourage childbirth and other country groups, in both the percentages agreeing and strongly agreeing and disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with the above view. Testing of the differences among all percentages using the Tukey method showed that these were statistically significant at the 5% or 1% level.



Next, we will look at the distribution of the percentage of women working 11 hours or more per week on household work. Again using the country types referred to above, 2012 results are summarized in Fig. 4. Here once again, the household work burden on women can be said to be pronounced in former socialist states, and as in the case of Fig 3 these findings are similar to those from the 2002 survey round. Comparison with the 1994 round is not possible since that round did not include a question on hours of household work. In this way, it would seem hard to deny that attitudes strongly tolerant of traditional gender norms on division of labor and continuity of existing structures involving division of labor in the household can be observed widely among former socialist states as a whole.

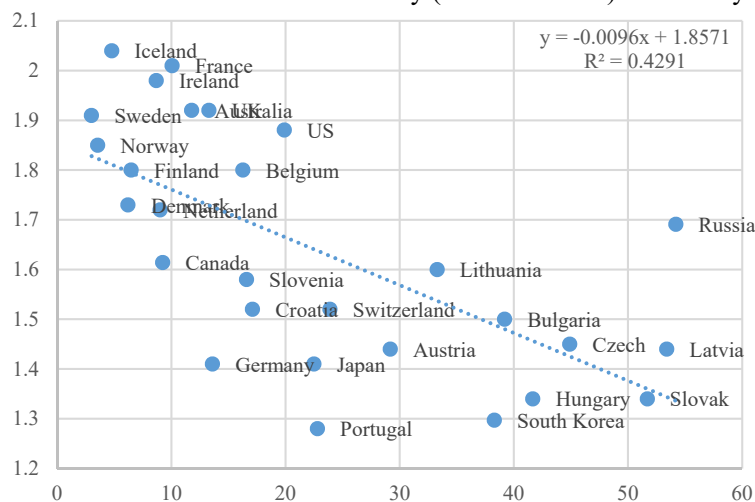
Fig. 4. Percentage of women working 11 hours or more per week on household work (%).



(Source: Prepared by the author based on ISSP questionnaires)

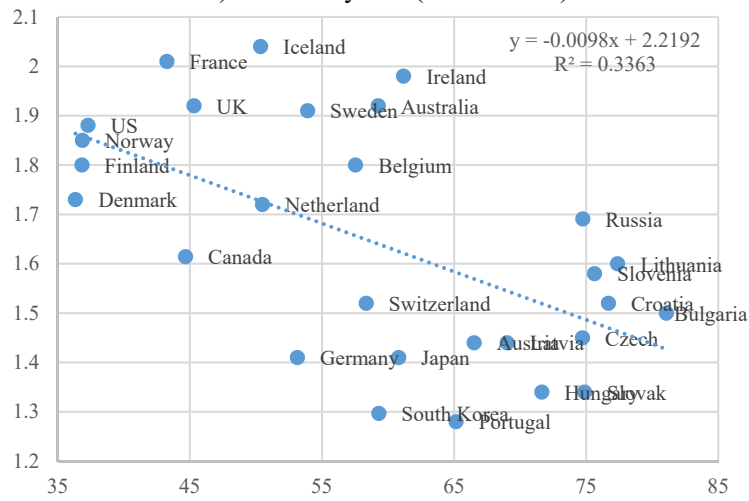
The possibility also can be pointed out that these facts could be related to the extremely low fertility apparent in these countries. Figures 5 and 6 plot distributions showing correlations between agreement and disagreement with the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family and the percentage of women working 11 hours or more per week on household work, respectively, and total fertility rate in each country. They show a much clearer relationship than that seen in Fig. 1 above between the female labor participation rate and the fertility rate. These show a relationship in which countries that do not accept traditional norms on male-female division of labor and those in which women's household work burden is low overall have higher fertility.

Fig. 5. Percentages agreeing or strongly agreeing with the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family (horizontal axis) vs. fertility rate (vertical axis).



(Source: Prepared by the author from ISSP 2012 forms and World Bank, *World Development Indicators*)

Fig. 6. Percentage of women working 11 hours or more per week on household work (horizontal axis) vs. fertility rate (vertical axis).



(Source: Prepared by the author from ISSP 2012 forms and World Bank, *World Development Indicators*)

#### 4. Consciousness of gender norms in Russia

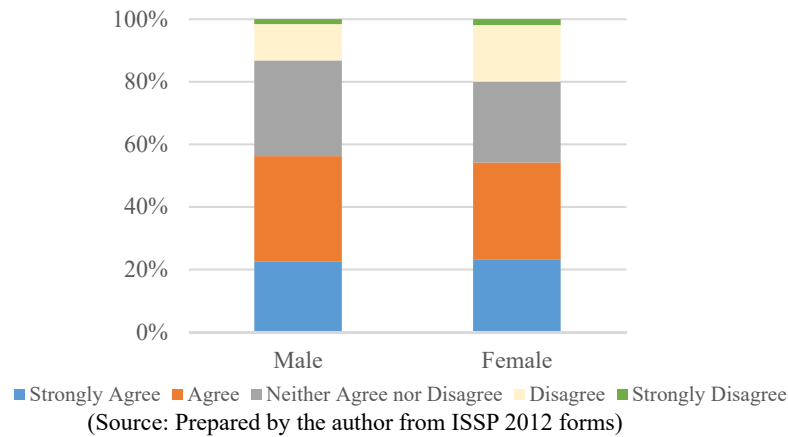
As noted above, the ISSP samples are adjusted for gender, so that they can be considered representative samples free from bias in answers due to gender imbalances. The findings can be generalized, and here we will attempt to observe what kinds of correlations can be identified between individual properties and gender norms. It can be expected that if individual properties such as income level and educational level vary, and a clear correlation can be detected between such factors and consciousness of gender norms, then it may be possible to identify prospects for realization of gender equality in the future. Of particular interest is whether answers differ by factors such as age (cohort), educational level, family income level, and whether or not women work. Consideration of these matters requires study across individual properties and answers, and micro data enables such cross tabulation across multiple variables.

Here we will consider Russia, in which retention of consciousness of gender norms appeared to be the strongest among the countries considered in the preceding section. However, since ISSP data consist of repeated cross sections and the sample size per individual country is limited,<sup>10</sup> we will present a number of examples only, instead of considering cause-effect analysis. While the illustrations in the preceding section concerned total answers from both men and women, here we will focus on the kinds of results derived when considering men's and women's answers separately.

<sup>10</sup> In the case of Russia during the 2012 round, the numbers were just 547 men and 978 women.

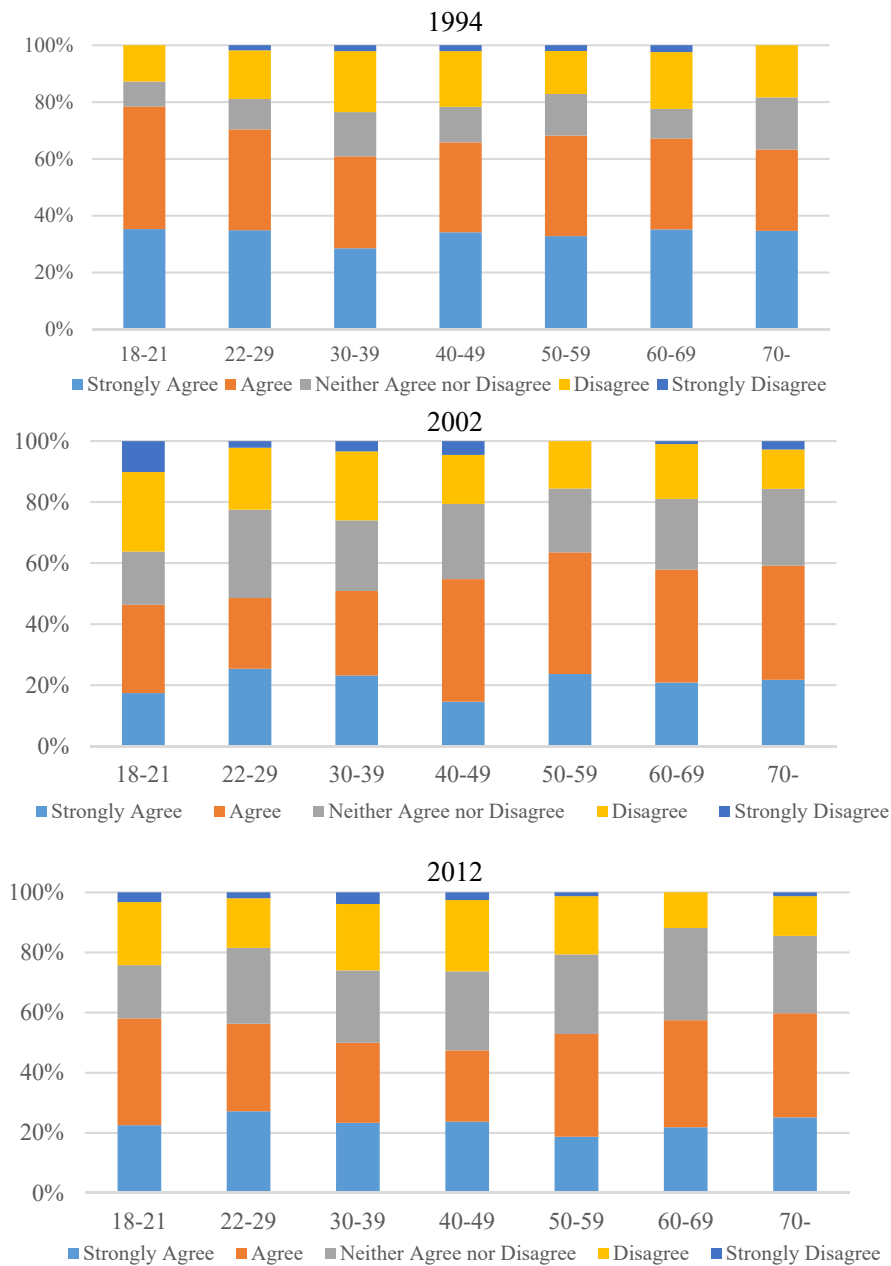
First of all, Fig. 7 shows totals by gender regarding the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family. As would be expected, higher percentages of women were opposed to traditional norms on division of labor by gender. Testing of the difference in percentages between these two groups also showed a statistically significant difference. However, even a look at women respondents alone shows that a total of more than 54% answered that they either strongly agreed or agreed with this view—a result that does not differ much from that of male respondents (56%). Of course, this difference of two percentage points is not statistically significant at all. Accordingly, it can be pointed out that the difference by gender on this point of acceptance of traditional norms is limited in Russia.

Fig. 7. Percentages agreeing with the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family in the ISSP 2012 round.



Next, we will look at how responses differ by individual properties among Russian women only. Figure 8 shows total responses of women by age range in the 1994, 2002, and 2012 survey rounds. But it is hard to identify from these findings the result that would be expected intuitively, that women would tend to be more likely to agree with gender norms as their ages rose and less likely to agree at younger ages. In the 1994 and 2012 rounds, across all age ranges total percentages strongly disagreeing or disagreeing accounted for less than 30% of all responses. While in 2002 only there appeared to be a trend toward disagreement with traditional norms at younger ages, that trend could not be said to be pronounced. However, a partial trend was apparent toward lower percentages agreeing and higher percentages disagreeing with the above view among young female respondents (2002) or those in their working years (ages 30–49) (1994, 2012). Still, due to the limited sample size and limitations on available data noted above, it would be difficult to examine a cause-effect relationship in this observed phenomenon, and it will not be considered further below.

Fig. 8. Agreement or disagreement with the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family, by age of women.



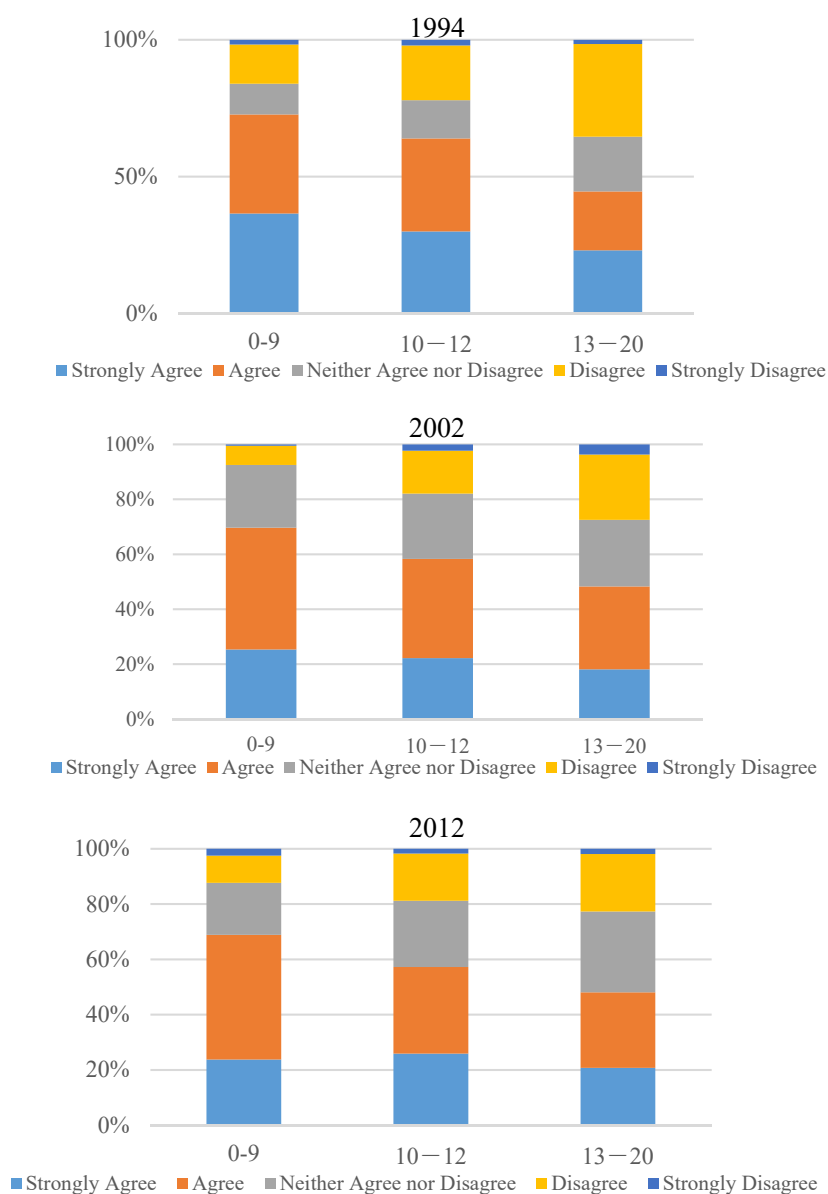
(Source: Prepared by the author from ISSP forms)

Of course, ISSP data can be used in cross tabulation employing various other individual properties and family properties as well. On the subject of educational level, ISSP data include descriptions of years of public education completed. Figure 9 shows the results of totaling once again the percentages agreeing or disagreeing with the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family by grouping respondents into the three main categories of primary,

secondary, and tertiary education, based on the Russian education system.

Unlike in the case of age groups, these data clearly suggest that consciousness of norms on division of labor by gender weakens as educational level rises. It is recognized widely that women's rights expand at higher educational levels (Todd and Courbage, 2007), and this finding agrees with the situation in Tajikistan identified in Igarashi and Kumo (2021).

Fig. 9. Agreement or disagreement with the view that a man should work and a woman should look after the home and the family, by educational level (years) of women.



(Source: Prepared by the author from ISSP forms)



Here, however, we will focus on whether any changes are apparent over time. Actually, no trend can be observed over the years from 1994 to 2002 and 2012 toward a decrease in percentages agreeing or strongly agreeing with the above view, or toward an increase in percentages disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with it. It even appears that percentages disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the above view tended to be lower among those who had experienced higher education (13–20 years of public education). It is surmised that this could be due to the rapid increase in subjects with higher education experience. While the total number of respondents in this category was just 133 individuals in 1994 (10.5% of the total sample of 1272 women), in 2012 it had increased to 485 individuals (49.6% of the total sample of 978 women), a clear indication of wider participation in higher education. These results could be due to the fact that people from groups with stronger norm consciousness have been added to this category. It would not be appropriate to compare results from the group between different points in time if there has been a pronounced increase in heterogeneity within it.

However, since such an aspect can be identified from the data it would appear that there is a possibility that the likelihood that penetration of education in Russia would promote gender equality could be limited. In fact, over the period of around 20 years for which data are available, the percentage of respondents who reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with traditional gender norms on division of labor never once exceeded the 20% level (Fig. 1). Russia was the only country among the former socialist states and OECD member states subject to the ISSP survey for which this could be said.<sup>11</sup>

Why is the traditional consciousness of gender norms so much stronger in former socialist states—particularly Russia—than in other developed countries? Did the socialist ideology and workforce participation of women in society fail to contribute to easing such norms? Are these results due to differences in average educational level, or can they be explained by income level? It is hoped that international comparison on topics such as these will be conducted in the future based on micro data.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has taken an overview of the ISSP, a sociological survey that can be used in international comparison conducted for a sample of nations that includes Russia and the former Soviet Union and other former socialist states, as well as considering a small element of the availability of

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<sup>11</sup> While the same was true of Slovakia in 2012, the country was not subject to the 1994 and 2002 rounds.

data related to ascertaining the status of gender in those countries. While use of panel data and multivariate analysis controlling for various factors would be essential to analysis of cause-effect relationships, it should be emphasized that today, nearly 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, sufficient data are available for use that can be controlled for distinguishing features at the individual level. It is unlikely that the importance of such data could be overemphasized at a time at which it is argued that differences in gender status lead to differences in fertility rate (Higuchi, Fukawa, 2011).

Another aspect that should be stressed regarding analysis using large-scale data, of which this paper has provided merely a glimpse, is the fact that the resulting conclusions are highly generalizable. It can be expected that information on a delicate subject such as gender status could be obtained from surveys that stress in-person interviews, as seen in this paper. In particular, the ISSP survey, which includes rounds in which the status of gender itself is the main topic, could be much more usable than other surveys since it makes it possible to observe changes over the years. It also is likely to be highly useful in multinational comparison.

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