
RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION OF MODERN KAZAKHSTANI WOMEN

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Abstract

This article considers the formation of religious identity of Kazakhstani women. Against the background of transformation of the entire social system, decrease in the role of basic traditional institutions, which ensure the socialization of the young generation, an increase in religiosity of the population and the predominance of religious rules and canons in the daily life of women has been observed. In academic circles, low interest in issues of women's religiousness, their social and political activity does not mean that the problems of this social group are insignificant. In light of this, the authors make one of the first attempts to study the social status of Kazakhstani women. In particular, they analyse the role of religion, religious canons, rituals and holidays in their lifestyle, career choices and family life. The article presents data from a sociological study organized by the authors.

Keywords: women, religion, sociological, study, Kazakhstan

1. Introduction

In the context of low social and political activity, the lack of normal secular opposition, and - on the other hand - the increase in poverty, unemployment, nepotism and corruption, there is an increase in the religiosity of Kazakhstan's population. According to Professor A. Izbaïrov, one of the factors "... of the growth of Muslim religiosity among the population is gaining independence and strengthening of national identity. In reality, the religious and national origins are rather closely interconnected, sometimes they even can be difficult to separate. In turn, the growth of national identity leads to an increase in confessional consciousness, which arouses interest in religious practice in a certain part of citizens." [A. Izbaïrov, *The Growth of Religiosity in Kazakhstan: Fashion or Radicalization?*, 2018, <https://ehonews.kz>, accessed 17.11.2018] The growth of religiosity in Kazakhstan automatically provides the prerequisites for

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the expansion of radical ideology. N. Yermekbayev believes that “Today in Kazakhstan about 10% of citizens consider themselves to be atheists or agnostics, 75% of citizens consider themselves believers, but do not observe all religious pillars, and only 16% of believers observe all pillars of religion. In this case, the growth of religiosity also provides various opportunities for spreading radical ideology”. [The growth of religiosity in Kazakhstan provides the prerequisites for the expansion of radical ideology - the head of the ministry of religious affairs, 2017, <https://time.kz>, accessed 17.11.2018] Against this background, the number of followers of Islamic radical organizations is increasing. This is largely due to the fact that the idea of an Islamic state, supposedly based on the justice of the Shari’a, the principles of social justice and opposition to the policies of the West, is becoming increasingly popular in the Muslim Ummah. It should also be noted that in Kazakhstan there is a rich ethnic and religious palette, which includes more than 130 ethnic groups and significant religious diversity [1].

According to P. Bourdieu, society through the institution of education imposes social capital, norms and values of society, the order of the state and the cultural imperatives of the majority. In his work ‘Reproduction: Elements of the Theory of the System of Education’ he expresses the view that there is symbolic violence in society, manifested in the form of a set of implicit ways of imposing senses and meanings that serve to legitimize and reproduce various forms of social dominance. Agents accept social domination relationships that determine their position in a particular field and, in a broader sense, their social position. Symbolic violence becomes a source of a subjectively perceived feeling of inferiority [2]. Over the past two decades, Kazakhstan has experienced disintegration of the traditional institutions of socialization dealing with the transfer of socially significant values and norms of behaviour to the younger generation. And today we can see a situation where the influence of the institutions of the family, school, education system, as well as the importance of work, public associations and movements and the state has fallen. In Kazakhstan, there are noticeable new trends indicating a change in the social role of religion, which is reflected in the rapid increase in the number of believers, the rise in the number of religious associations, both traditional and non-traditional, complication of the interfaith relations, people’s exposure to religious influence, indistinguishability between religious and ethnic identification [3]. Taking into account the fact that the society has historically and culturally been focused mainly on two traditional religions: Sunni Islam (Hanafi Madhab) and Orthodox Christianity, the most numerous religious associations are Muslim ones. They account for more than two thirds of the total number of believers in the country. This religion also has the largest number of places of worship (2405). The second place in terms of the number of followers in Kazakhstan is occupied by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which has 310 religious associations. The next religious direction for Kazakhstan is the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), which has 84 religious associations. A prominent place in the confessional space of Kazakhstan is occupied by Protestant religious associations, of which there are more than 600

in the country. In addition to the above, there are 6 Jewish communities, 2 religious associations of Buddhism, as well as a number of other denominations [4]. Apart from the cult practices, they are actively involved in charity, religious education and teaching, social service, carry out publishing and economic activities, establish and maintain international contacts and connections. With that, the emergence of centres of radical religious communities is observed, the development of non-traditional religious beliefs and pseudo-religious organizations have begun to take shape.

At the same time, the current situation testifies to the state balancing between the two world religions having lots of adherents – Islam and Christianity. It is noteworthy that the religious holidays of Kurban Ait (Eid al-Adha) and Orthodox Christmas, despite not being public holidays, are declared days off in the country.

Questions of the influence of religion on the formation of identity are considered not only by domestic researchers, but also by foreign scholars, which can be explained by the fact that in modern conditions, when civil and political identity is not formed, the religious factor is significant, and sometimes the most important one in shaping lifestyle [5], preserving health [6], choice of education, profession [7], sexual, reproductive and family behaviour [8]. The study of the ethnic and religious aspects of formation of identity of the population in different regions of Eurasia is one of the relevant areas of current studies [A. Masalimova, *Religiousness of Kazakhstani Youth: Problems of Identification and Socialization*, 2016, <http://elar.urfu.ru>, accessed 17.11.2018; A. Sultangaliyeva, *Religious Identity and National Integration in Kazakhstan*, 2014, <http://e-history.kz>, accessed 17.11.2018; 9-12]. Especially important is the study of the status of girls and women within religious groups and organizations.

As the theoretical and methodological basis of the study, the main principles of the feminist theory regarding gender aspects of structural and cultural violence were used. Feminist studies focus on the nature and psychology of violence, highlighting and analysing its types, such as structural violence (which is embodied in the institutions of repression) and cultural violence (relating to the spiritual sphere, information, religious preferences, social stereotypes and norms that encourage women's submission to tastes and needs of men). Thus, the anthropological data, religious and literary myths testify to the political tinge of patriarchal ideas about women. So, if we turn to the analysis of the socio-psychological aspects of religious beliefs, we can see that most of the world's religions are patriarchal or, using modern feminist terminology, 'chauvinistic', 'androcentric'. In them, the man established himself as a human norm, in relation to which the feminine becomes different and alien. At the same time, according to K. Millet, the patriarchy "had gone into partnership with God" [13].

The position of girls and women in modern Kazakhstan society, their real social statuses, rights and opportunities are determined not only by existing civil laws, but also by religious traditions and customs. It is in religion that the foundations of attitude towards women are laid, which are often traditionalist,

patriarchal, conservative in nature and based on prejudice and stereotypes. Currently, in the Republic of Kazakhstan, we can state the situation of religious renaissance. This means that the religious identity is being formed, the status of religion and believers in society has changed, a qualitatively new situation has been created regarding the model of government-religious relationship. At the same time, the adopted Law 'About Religious Activities and Religious Associations' recognizes that the Republic of Kazakhstan is a democratic, secular state that respects the right of every person to freedom of belief, guarantees equal rights of citizens regardless of their religion and recognizes the cultural and historical value of religions [*About Religious Activities and Religious Associations*, The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 October 2011, No. 483-IV].

The purpose of this work is to determine the role of religion in the life of modern Kazakhstani women. We offer for discussion the problems of religious identity of such a category as women who, within the framework of the established system of relationships, are outside the field of study and scientific analysis. Their values, lifestyle, social behaviour and identification have not been the object of research of Kazakhstani scientists. One of our assumptions is that, for example, when performing wedding and funeral rituals, the role of religious leaders is significant. They are the bearers of knowledge about religious rituals and procedures of performing them. It is believed that religious ministers have a certain amount of knowledge and practice, which allows finding happiness for the newly-weds/comfort both for the deceased and for their relatives. The study does not claim to be fundamental, but at the same time it gives a definite picture about religious relations in Kazakhstan.

2. Research methods

In 2017, the authors conducted a sociological study on the religious identity of modern women in Kazakhstan, within which an attempt was made to determine the role of religion in the lives of Kazakhstani women, their religious identity, the influence of religious canons and rituals on their image of women. The study was conducted using the quantitative and qualitative methods, the mass survey method and in-depth interviews among women attending religious institutions. The study involved about 1500 people. The data were processed using the SPSS program.

3. Research results

This study was aimed at determining how women and girls in Kazakhstan position themselves towards religion, how much identification with one religion or another is a significant identification factor, what influence religious institutions have and how they are perceived by women and girls.

The questionnaire consisted of several blocks and in this article we present only a few questions which are of great interest to us. The first block of the questionnaire contained questions regarding what religion means for our respondents. In social studies, one of the fundamental theories is M. Weber's theory of religion, who understood religion as "... the sum of subjective experiences, ideas and goals that form the spiritual state of the participants in social activities" [14]. And we have made attempts to define the role and significance of religion, and its internal content for our research participants. The question was semi-closed, where respondents could choose several answers or write their own answer. The distribution of answers to the question 'What does religion mean to you?', showed that the majority (67.9%) of the women and girls surveyed believe that religion is faith, 56.1% think that religion is a person's relationship with God and 30% of the women are convinced that religion is a person's spiritual quest. Among the women surveyed, the concept of religion is least of all associated with science – 4.3%, certain rules of behaviour – 8.8%, and with the moral and ethical attitudes of a person – 13.5%.

From this we can draw a conclusion that the women and girls of Kazakhstan we surveyed define religion for themselves in a simplified/delusional way, considering it as a way of moral and spiritual search for God, so religion for them is in no way connected with the rules of behaviour, the system of values and attitudes.

Answers to the question 'What is your attitude towards religion?' show us that 60.7% of Kazakhstani women and girls surveyed consider themselves to be active believers, i.e. those who regularly attend religious institutions and observe religious rules, 27.1% of the women indicated that they consider themselves to be believers, but practically do not participate in religious life, limiting themselves to holidays and some rites, 5.3% said they believe in God, but do not belong to any religious movement. Fewest women and girls surveyed by us indicated that they consider themselves unbelievers, atheists and opponents of religion – 0.3%, indifferent to religion – 1% of respondents, unbelievers, those who do not participate in religious life, but respect the religious feelings of other people – 1.3%.

The distribution of answers to this question shows that the main part of our women informants actively believed women/girls who identify themselves with their religious faith and regularly observe religious rites and traditions. Only a small number of survey participants are indifferent to religion or consider themselves unbelievers.

Russian girls/women of faith, as well as Kazakh girls/women of faith and representatives of other ethnic groups indicated that they regularly attend mosque or church and observe religious rites. Thus, we can see that the majority of the participants in our study are active believers.

Taking into account the region of residence, the informants' answers show that the majority of girls/women identify themselves as believers who regularly attend mosque or church, observe rites and taboos. Most of these girls/women participating in this study live in Shymkent, Uralsk and Pavlodar. Of the

participants in this study, the fewest active believing girls/women live in Astana and Karaganda. The majority of unbelievers, atheists and opponents of religion, from the participants in this study, live in Semey and Karaganda.

Answers to the question ‘What attracts you in religion in the first place?’ were distributed in such a way that the majority of women and girls surveyed by us – 59% – indicated that they are attracted by the possibility of spiritual perfection and achieving harmony, 35.8% mentioned sense of security and 31.4% – getting answers to the most difficult questions. The fewest respondents – 1.9% indicated that they came to faith because it is fashionable and 9.5% – because they are looking for social justice.

Summarizing the above-mentioned, we can say that Kazakhstani women/girls tend to romanticize coming to faith, believing that it will allow them to spiritually improve themselves and find harmony. A significant proportion of respondents are seeking protection and answers to complex questions from religion. The answers we received are similar to the results of the study by Kim Knott and Sajda Khokher, who also noticed that ethnic and religious canons to a certain extent help people with determining their place in society, profession, education [3].

Most of the surveyed Russian girls/women indicated that they were attracted to religion by the possibility of spiritual perfection and finding harmony, as well as Kazakh girls/women and other ethnicities. The least attractive was the fact that it has become fashionable to be a believer and that there are beautiful rites in religion.

Taking into account the region of residence, the informants’ answers show that the majority of girls/women are attracted by the possibility of spiritual improvement and finding harmony in religion. This is confirmed by the opinions of girls/women from Uralsk, Pavlodar and Shymkent. The fewest surveyed are attracted to religion by the fact that it has become fashionable to believe and that there are beautiful rites and traditions in religion. This is confirmed by the opinions of girls/women from Uralsk, Shymkent, Astana and Almaty.

Answers to the question ‘If you are a believer or just follow religious traditions, what religion do you belong to?’ demonstrate the distribution of women/girls by religion. So, the majority of our informants – 47% – consider themselves to belong to Islam (Hanafi Madhab Sunni), 19.7% – to Orthodoxy, 15.1% – to Protestantism. The smallest part of the respondents identifies themselves with atheism – 0.1%, agnosticism – 0.7% and Judaism – 1.5%.

It should be noted that the peculiarity of the perception of the religious status of Kazakhstanis is the correlation of religious faith and ethnicity, i.e. all Kazakhs are Muslims, all Russians are Orthodox, etc. Regarding those who are committed to non-traditional religious movements, such as Protestant – they are perceived as representatives of a certain ethnic group who, for whatever reason, are not members of their religious community, i.e. lost.

It should also be noted that women/girls have a special attitude to religious wedding rituals, since the wedding procedure itself symbolically marks the transition to adulthood, leaving the parental family, entering a new family

(husband's family) and preparing for motherhood. At the same time, it also brings social value, responsibility towards the new family, marital relations, reproductive behaviour and socialization of the younger generation. At the same time, religious wedding rituals themselves (for example, Orthodox Church wedding) are solemn, beautiful and symbolic.

Informants who indicated that funeral rituals were observed in their families without the participation of religious ministers, but with the observation of religious precepts made a minor part of 27.4%, while those who indicated that they did not observe religious funeral rituals without the participation of religious ministers made 36.1%. This distribution of answers shows that funerals are usually accompanied by religious ministers, since death, the transition of a person to another state is a mystical process that does not have an unequivocal interpretation, and it is believed that religious ministers have a certain amount of knowledge and practice, which allows to find comfort both for the deceased and for their relatives.

Responding to the question about the observance of religious wedding rituals in the family, the majority of Kazakh girls/women, as well as Russian girls/women and representatives of other ethnic groups, indicated that they always follow these rituals (Figure 1).

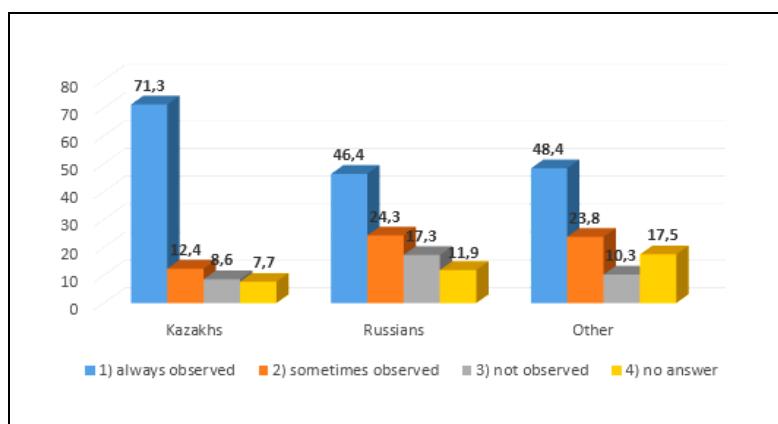


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question 'Are religious wedding rituals observed in your family?'.

Taking into account the region of residence, the informants' answers show that the majority of girls/women who always observe these rituals in their families and those who do not observe them live in Almaty and Pavlodar.

Our hypothesis about the importance of participation of religious figures in funeral rituals was also confirmed by the distribution of opinions on the question of whether religious figures participate in funeral rituals. As we can see, the majority of women/girls surveyed – 68.4% indicated that yes, they always participate and 16.1% indicated that they participate sometimes. Only 7.4% responded that no religious funeral rituals are observed in their family.

Answers to the question “What reasons led you to faith?” showed us that the main reasons that led women/girls to faith are as follows: 1. search for answers to difficult questions (justice, meaning of life, death, etc.) - 33.8%; 2. growing up in a religious family – 17.1%; 3. life difficulties (illness, job loss, loss of income, etc.) – 16.9%; 4. family traditions – 12.9%; 5. interest, curiosity – 5.2%; 6. desire to be a member of a group that shares common values, norms, traditions – 4.2%. It must be noted that for Kazakhstani women, non-religious socialization is normal and coming to religion is in a greater degree associated with the emergence of difficult life situations, the loss of loved ones and only then the religious behaviour of close social environment.

The distribution of answers to this question is consistent with the answers to the third question of our questionnaire, when 31.4% of women/girls indicated that religion attracts them with the possibility to receive answers to the most difficult questions. Thus, it can be stated that for our women informants faith and religion is an institution with the help of which they want to cope with life’s adversities and difficulties. It is a kind of a last stronghold, which will explain the causes of the imperfections of the world, injustice, the grief and misfortunes that a person faces throughout life.

Answers to the question ‘In your opinion, does the profession of a believing woman depend on her religious affiliation?’ show that the majority of respondents (46.1%) believe that a woman’s professional identity is in no way connected with her faith. 30.1% know that the profession of a woman is regulated by religious norms, 21.1% of women informants have no information on this issue (Figure 2). This distribution of opinions indicates low awareness of the surveyed women/girls regarding the religious precepts governing professional activities.

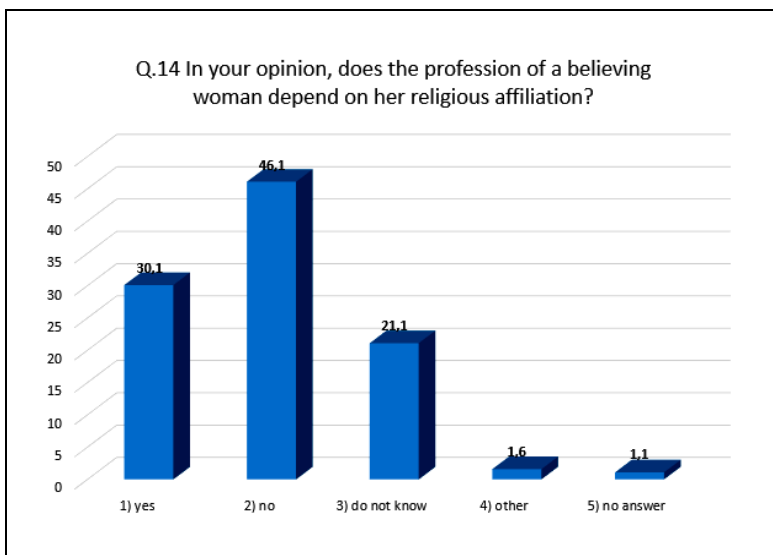


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents’ answers to the question ‘In your opinion, does the profession of a believing woman depend on her religious affiliation?’.

It should be noted that in Islam, the type of professional activity that is not contrary to its canons is allowed. A woman can work if she observes all the requirements set by religion. Permissibility or prohibition of a particular profession depends on how this work corresponds to religion. Taking up a profession that causes what is allowed from a religious point of view is permitted. And if a profession becomes the reason for doing what is forbidden by religion, then engagement in this activity is forbidden. For example, if a woman does her hair and puts on make-up not to attract other men's attention, but to look more attractive for her husband, then there is nothing reprehensible in this. Therefore, the money that a hairdresser earns by helping such women will be halal for her. If something is not haram itself, then the money earned from it is not haram as well. But if a woman who came to a beauty salon wants to get her hair or make-up done in order to stroll around and attract the attention of strangers, then she solely bears the responsibility for this, while the hairdresser bears no responsibility.

4. Discussion

The main part of the women informants taking part in the study were actively believing women/girls who identify themselves with their religious faith and regularly observe religious rites and traditions. The majority of our informants (47%) consider themselves to belong to Islam (Hanafi Madhab Sunni), 19.7% – to Orthodoxy, 15.1% – to Protestantism. The smallest part of the respondents identify themselves with atheism – 0.1%, agnosticism – 0.7% and Judaism – 1.5%. Only a small number of survey participants are indifferent to religion or consider themselves unbelievers.

The girls and women of Kazakhstan surveyed by us see religion as a way of moral and spiritual search for God and religion for them is in no way connected with the rules of behaviour, the system of values and attitudes. Summarizing the above-mentioned, we can say that Kazakhstani women/girls tend to romanticize coming to faith, believing that it will allow them to spiritually improve themselves and find harmony. A significant proportion of respondents are seeking protection and answers to complex questions from religion. The main reasons according to the women we interviewed that led them to faith are as follows:

- finding answers to challenging questions (regarding justice, meaning of life, death, etc.);
- growing up in a religious family; life difficulties (illness, job loss, loss of income, etc.);
- family traditions;
- interest, curiosity;
- desire to be a member of a group that shares common values, norms, traditions.

The same reasons were given by the informants during in-depth interviews. It can be stated that for the women informants faith and religion is an institution with the help of which they want to cope with life's adversities and difficulties. It is a kind of a last stronghold, which will explain the causes of the imperfections of the world, injustice, the grief and misfortunes that a person faces throughout life.

The main initiators of coming to faith are the people called 'significant others' – these are the closest and most significant people for a person, those to whose opinions he or she is receptive – parents, friends, relatives.

The main sources of information about faith are visits to religious institutions, social networks, communication with a spiritual advisor, television – 30.4%. The least important sources of information are radio and magazines. Due to the fact that the survey involved women and girls from different generations, both traditional (religious institutions, communication with a spiritual advisor) and modern (social networks and television) sources of information were mentioned.

The women/girls surveyed by us consider religious registration of marriage mandatory. Perhaps such a distribution of opinions speaks of honouring, respecting religious traditions and desire to observe them when entering into marriage. It should also be noted that women/girls have a special attitude to religious wedding rituals, since the wedding procedure itself symbolically marks the transition to adulthood, leaving the parental family, entering a new family (husband's family) and preparing for motherhood. Religious wedding rituals themselves (for example, Orthodox church wedding, nikah) are solemn, beautiful and symbolic.

Informants who indicated that funeral rituals were observed in their families without the participation of religious ministers, but with the observation of religious precepts made a minor part. This distribution of answers shows that funerals are usually accompanied by religious ministers, since death, the transition of a person to another state is a mystical process that does not have an unequivocal interpretation.

The informants believe that both men and women occupy the same position in their religion. Such a distribution of opinions indirectly shows us the situation when actively believing girls/women weakly reflect on gender rights, on their own status in religion, but intuitively feel the unequal position of men and women in religion. Thus, the respondents were convinced that women in their faith have the right to receive religious education and carry out religious services. Only the minority of the informants indicated that they have no such right. Of course, over the past decades many confessions have liberalized their attitude towards women and allowed them to receive religious education and participate in religious services, but such traditional confessions as Islam and Orthodoxy still categorically deny women the right to be engaged in religious activities. Apparently, our informants are poorly informed about the religious dogmas that regulate this kind of behaviour. Also, the majority of respondents believe that a woman's professional identity is in no way connected with her

faith. This distribution of opinions indicates low awareness of the surveyed women/girls regarding the religious precepts governing professional activities. The respondents are sure that the woman of their faith can be economically independent and not depend on the income of men. Thus, we again see the situation of incomplete awareness of actively believing women about the degree of their economic rights and freedoms.

The majority (70.5%) of the women/girls surveyed by us consider religious registration of marriage mandatory. At the same time, women/girls support civil marriage registration even more. This is probably due to a certain everyday pragmatism, when the status of a religious marriage is not recognized by the state and in the event of a family breakdown, serious problems may arise when dividing property, determining guardianship rights over children, etc.

Most informants (69.8%) do not approve divorces, 21.5% agree to divorce only in rare cases, and only a minority of women approve of divorce. This distribution of opinions was expected, since none of the traditional religions allow divorces and has an extremely negative attitude towards them. The presence of women/girls who approve of divorce is associated with the representatives of non-traditional denominations in our survey sample.

The questionnaire and interview form contained questions regarding the age of marriage. So, most of our informants consider it possible to enter into marriage at ages between 18 and 25. This distribution of opinions is typical for Kazakhstani women, as it is considered important to start a family and have a first child at ages between 18 and 25. The girls/women surveyed believe that religion affects the process of raising children. This distribution of opinions is expected, since religious initiation usually begins in early childhood and there are clear religious precepts for female/male children.

The majority of participants in our study indicated that the religious upbringing of children should begin before the age of six. Thus, we see that our informants advocate for the early religious upbringing of children. Women/girls, for the most part, believe that the religious education of children differs in its content for boys and girls. This distribution of opinions shows that women/girls are aware of gender differences in the religious education of children. The respondents interviewed by us are not aware of the specific features of the religious education of girls. The informants find it difficult to articulate the existing gender differences in the religious education of children, they are often implied, perceived as a matter of course and are difficult to describe and analyse. What they have in common is that they are aware of the differences in the religious education of children of different sexes, which may consist in the observance of religious canons and moral education.

Most part of the respondents indicated that their religion does not allow early marriages, that sexual relations before marriage are impossible in their faith, the women informants largely disagree with the situation of the marriage of a girl under the age of 16. Most of the actively believing girls/women intend to have more than three children. The women surveyed prefer to have both boys and girls. The part of the surveyed women who protect themselves from

unwanted pregnancy is equal to the part of them who do not. Probably, such a distribution of opinions is associated with the existence in the sample of our study of representatives of non-traditional religious denominations that do not regulate the reproductive rights of women. According to the articles of religion, the use of contraceptives is prohibited, but the answers of the girls/women in our study demonstrate that more than 36% of respondents use contraceptives. Most women indicated that they had a negative attitude towards abortions. The majority of the girls/women indicated that within the framework of their faith polygamy is unacceptable and the girls/women personally do not support polygamy. At the same time, the girls/women surveyed by us cannot formulate the reasons for the approval of polygamy, since they are ambivalent about this religious norm. On the one hand, religion justifies and allows it, on the other hand, it may be personally unacceptable for them. Also, the girls/women could not answer what kind of religious norms establish polygamy. This suggests that the level of religious literacy of actively believing girls/women is not high enough.

5. Conclusions

Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The aim of our study was not to analyse the religious situation in Kazakhstan. However, we asked this question both during a mass survey and an interview, as it is a significant factor in determining one's own religious identity and their tolerance towards members of other faiths. Most of the participants in our study described interfaith relations in Kazakhstan as positive. This opinion is confirmed by the readiness of the majority of the participants in the study to work in a team with representatives of a different faith, to study with classmates of a different faith, to live close to representatives of a different faith, to be friends with representatives of a different faith. These results are confirmed by studies of other scientists [A. Sultangaliyeva, *Religious Identity and National Integration in Kazakhstan*, 2014, <http://e-history.kz>, accessed 17.11.2018], who also claim that interfaith relations in Kazakhstan are peaceful. At the same time, informants were very clear about the matter of marriage with a representative of another faith. They do not even assume that such a choice of spouse is possible. This distribution of opinions is explained by the composition of the respondents (actively believing women/girls and mostly representatives of Islam), whose marital behaviour is strictly regulated by religious norms (for example, by the Shari'ah). Thus, it can be said that for the actively believing women and girls we surveyed, all kinds of social relations and connections with representatives of a different faith, except for marriage, are acceptable. Probably, more formal relationships established in a work team are considered more possible than personal, intimate relationships in a marriage.

Most women/girls believe that their religious beliefs and traditions are perceived neutrally or positively. It can be concluded that most of the believing girls and women feel comfortable and safe, have no fears and are not afraid of any discriminatory actions on the part of members of other ethnic groups.

A considerable part of the girls and women we surveyed have never experienced a hostile attitude for being representatives of a different faith. Of those girls and women who have experienced any form of negative attitude, the majority experienced scornful attitude, ridicule, avoiding communication, ignoring and boycotting, being gossiped about, slander and mudslinging.

Among the informants, neutral attitude towards those who externally demonstrate their religious affiliation dominates. It can be said that the majority of girls and women do not have negative attitudes towards people whose religious identity is demonstrated externally, with the help of religious clothing. As a rule, there are no representatives of other faiths in the families of women informants. Such a distribution of opinions indirectly indicates closeness and limitations in the choice of a different religious identity within the family. The girls/women said that they did not approve of the change of religion by their relatives, but at the same time, about the same number of the girls and women indicated that they do not criticise those who decided to change their faith, believing that everyone has a right to do so. Most informants thought about changing their faith or abandoning it at least once. Perhaps such a distribution of opinions indicates the existence of certain zones of tension, conflict among girls and women, while respecting religious precepts and norms.

The respondents believe that they have an average level of awareness of state policy in the field of religious rights and freedoms. Most of the informants believe that their faith does not affect their attitude to politics. Those who believe that this influence exists, regard it as minimal. The informants we interviewed most likely do not have a clear idea of the extent and quality of the influence of religion on politics. The respondents indicated that their religion, above all, does not accept extremist ideas, radical and Marxist ideas. Also, the girls/women stated that, for most of them, their faith allows them to participate in the activities of public associations and organizations.

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