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Tajik Women Struggle to Regain Lost Rights

VIDEO

Women

These are hard times for women in Tajikistan, a former communist Central Asian Republic. The Soviet system created social safety nets that benefited most of the country's female population. After the demise of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan's independence, social support structures collapsed. (19)

AUDIO

Women at work

Tajikistan continues to be the poorest of the former Soviet Republics. Unemployment is rampant and most of the country's 7 million inhabitants live below the poverty line. Close to one million persons, the vast majority men, have gone abroad to find work. Increasingly women have had to take the role of their family's main provider and bread-winner. Through the disbursement of micro-loans, UN Agencies are encouraging women to become entrepreneurs. (30.5)

Shopkeeper

4 Years ago, Madina Youssof Zoda tried to borrow money from banks in order to start a business, with no luck. She then approached UNIFEM, the UN Development Fund for Women,

and obtained a loan of 500 US dollars, through a local voluntary organization. Madina now owns a store front at a market and her business is growing fast...(21)

Madina Youssof Zoda,
Entrepreneur, on camera, in
Russian

"I was bored at home. I wanted to be surrounded by people, to be able to support my family and to be independent, to have my own money." (10)

Classroom

A priority of the Soviet period was education for boys and girls. Within 70 years, literacy grew from just over one to 93 percent countrywide. Recently the number of girls attending school in Tajikistan has steadily decreased as a consequence of civil war, poverty, and a return to pre-Soviet values, causing the gender divide in education to widen. This is particularly acute at university level. Young women make up just over quarter of the country's undergraduate population. Girls from remote parts of the country have even less chance enrolling in higher education. (41)

Learning Center

That's why the UN Development Programme and the Tajikistan Government are supporting the Learning Center in Dushanbe, the country's capital city. A refurbished hostel, the Center provides free-of-charge accommodation to 150 young women attending university. They come from distant communities and expectations are that some will become the country's leaders in the future. (25.5)

New Maternity

Maternity Hospital number 1, the country's most advanced. 5000 babies are born here every year. It's a modern and well cared hospital. It is also the exception to the rule in Tajikistan. (14)

Old Hospital

Most health facilities here look like this. These machines date back to the Soviet era and have not been replaced since. The budget for purchasing new equipment for this district hospital is 3.300 US dollars a year.... (17)

Mothers and babies at district hospital

There has been a dramatic decline in women's health. For mothers in particular the situation could not be further from the reality they lived just 15 years ago. During Soviet rule, motherhood was associated with awards and honours. The more children women bore and raised, the more the state contributed towards their family's finances. No longer... (24)

Aminov Khusein intro

Aminov Khusein, responsible for maternal and children health policy, says that from the 192 US dollars the country once spent on health care for each Tajik citizen, it now spends 4 dollars per person... (15)

Aminov Khusein, Head of Maternal and Children's Health, Tajikistan Ministry of Health

"These days with the limited resources of the Tajik State, we no longer can afford to check the health of every single woman here." (8)

Women

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment is widespread. Most of it goes unreported. Domestic

violence, poverty, unemployment and undiagnosed mental health conditions are leading women to adopt a radical solution to deal with their problems: kill themselves. Suicide is specifically forbidden by Islamic law, and many suicide attempts are masked as accidents, in order to reduce the potential for social stigma.

(29)

Burnt woman in hospital

Officially, 63 women were admitted last year at Dushanbe's Central Hospital, attempting to kill themselves by fire. But reliable data is hard to come by. A UN publication states that throughout the country, 30 women a month are hospitalized with severe burns linked to the practice of self-immolation. No suicide prevention programs exist in rural areas and very few exist in urban areas.

(30.5)

Olimova Sarvinoz

23 year-old Olimova Sarvinoz attempted suicide one year ago by setting herself on fire. She had an ongoing dispute with her older brother and tried to kill herself as a way to draw attention on her suffering. She now deeply regrets it. (18)

Olimova Sarvinoz, Suicide attempt survivor, on camera, in Tajik

"I would like to be the same woman I was before getting burnt. But I know that it won't be easy. Now I just sit here and do nothing". (8)

Women

Modern women here are influenced both by their recent Soviet experience, with its strong emphasis on gender equality, and traditional Tajik

values where women played a central role in the private sphere of the family. Striking a balance between these two strands is key for the women of Tajikistan to regain some of their rights that have been taken away from them. (22)

UN logo 20"

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