

The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational & Social Sciences (EPESS), 2024

Volume 39, Pages 171-178

**IconSE 2024: International Conference on Science and Education**

## **How Do Kazakhstani Tajik Women Form and Reproduce Ethnic Identity When Raising Children?**

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**Abstract:** Comprehension of the role of women of ethnic communities in shaping the life orientation, identity and everyday life of the younger generation is of great practical importance for the socio-cultural development of Kazakhstan. Women of ethnic groups play an important role in preserving the cultural heritage and identity of their people. The purpose of this article is to analyze the research of the question “How Do Kazakh Tajik Women Form And Reproduce Ethnic Identity When Raising Children?” The author considers the processes of formation and reproduction of ethnic identity as a directed process in the daily life of Tajik women in the upbringing of children. Tajik women play a key role in passing on the traditions, language, and culture of their people to their children. They are the first teachers of children and form their ideas about the world, values and norms of behavior. The article presents the results of a field study of two qualitative methods: narrative in-depth interview and observation. The object of the study were women of the Tajik community of the Turkestan region and the city of Shymkent, who have experience raising children over the age of 18.

**Keywords:** Ethnic identity, Raising children, Woman and culture

### **Introduction**

In modern society, women play a significant role in all spheres of activity, from politics and business to family and education. They face various challenges related to the changing economic situation, the changing role and status of women in society, as well as crisis situations such as economic crises, conflicts and wars. Women of ethnic groups play an important role in preserving the cultural heritage and identity of their people. In this article, we will describe the women of the Tajik community in the southern regions of Kazakhstan.

The group of issues that this article was aimed at investigating includes insufficient attention to women representing ethnic communities as an object of special research. The literature does not reflect the peculiarities of their lifestyle, social status and position in society, as well as their role in shaping the life orientations of young people. In addition, empirical data are insufficient to analyze their contribution to reproduction and identity formation. Observations show that Tajik women often interact with society through men who perform external communication functions, while women provide internal connections and relationships within the family circle.

The purpose of this article is to study and find answers to the following questions: how do kazakhstani tajik women form and reproduce ethnic identity when raising children? The author examines the processes of formation and reproduction of ethnic identity as a directed process in the daily life of Tajik women in the upbringing of children and tries to conduct an analysis taking into account family status, education, employment and social environment. The main variable of the comparative analysis is the type of settlement, that is, its monoethnicity and polyethnicity.

### **Literature Review**

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Understanding the role of women of ethnic communities in shaping the life orientation, identity and everyday life of the younger generation is of great practical importance for the socio-cultural development of Kazakhstan. Women play a key role in passing on the traditions, language, and culture of their people to their children. They are the first teachers of children and form their ideas about the world, values and norms of behavior. Identity is one of the most common terms in the social sciences and humanities. It reflects a person's personality, self-awareness, sense of belonging to a particular group or community, as well as socio-cultural and historical aspects of his life. At the same time, this concept often faces problems related to its definition, variability and multiplicity of interpretations. This made it possible to emphasize the importance of identification in the social self-determination of the individual and to understand the external social reality to a certain extent as a result of internal social construction. In methodological terms, this led to the priority of the subject-activity approach over the structural-functional one (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2013).

Scientists use identity to denote a common identification with a collective or social category, as is done in the theory of social identity or in modern works on social movements, thereby creating a common culture among participants. Finally, some use the term to refer to the parts of the self that consist of the meanings that people attach to the multiple roles that they usually play in highly differentiated modern societies (Sheldon & Peter, 2000).

American psychologist and psychoanalyst Eric Ericson gave a global spread to the term "identity", and also introduced this concept into scientific discourse. The researcher identified identity as the internal "continuity of an individual's self-experience", "lasting inner equality with oneself", the most important characteristic of personality integrity, the integration of a person's experiences of his identity with himself and with social groups. The American scientist put forward three important aspects of identity: a sense of identity, the process of identity formation and identity as a result (Ericson, 1960).

Thus, according to E. Ericson, identity is a complex, multilevel structure, the most important condition for the effective functioning of a personality and an indicator of psychosocial stability (Ericson, 1996). In general, according to E. Ericson, this is a feeling of belonging to a certain social group, expressed through social roles and ego states.

If we consider each type of identity, then by ethnic identity we mean the awareness and experience of belonging to an ethnic community or group. Its most important elements are symbolic representations of the territory ("native land"), language ("native speech"), religion ("correct", "true"), ethnohistory, cultural traditions, as well as an ethnonym (self-designation). Ethnic identity is distinguished by ethnocentrism, as well as characteristic patterns of group and individual behavior (Kochetkov, 2012).

Ethnic identity is conceptualized as an expression of relations between two or more groups that are considered to be carriers of a "cultural peculiarity". Hutnik and Street show that people in an ethnic community can imitate the ethnic groups to which they belong in order to determine their ethnic identity (Hutnik & Street, 2010).

Considering the works studying Kazakhstan, of which there are not many in the country, Tutumlu and Imyarova (2021) present ethnic identity as a concept based on the principles and cultural characteristics of an ethnic group, in this case the Kazakh people. It implies the recognition and preservation of ethnic values and traditions, as well as attachment to a particular ethnicity. The authors write that modern Kazakhstani identity is a post-Soviet new type of supranational identity based on the principles of a more advanced person who transcends ethnic norms and evolves into a new type of person - a Kazakhstani. The modern Kazakhstani identity was modeled on Kazakh values and language, which were supposed to unite all ethnic groups into a new higher form of national identity (Tutumlu & Imyarova, 2021).

Kolbachaeva (2019) identifies the main aspects that influence the formation of ethnic identity in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The author emphasizes the importance of regional, confessional and national factors. The influence of regional aspects can be manifested in the differences in culture, traditions and lifestyle in different parts of the country. Confessional factors encompass religious beliefs and practices that can contribute to the formation of identity based on religious affiliation. National aspects, in turn, are related to the historical, linguistic and cultural characteristics of national groups. Kolbachaeva argues that one of the key factors contributing to the effectiveness of Kazakh statehood at the present stage, along with socio-economic conditions, can be the factor of national identity (Kolbachaeva, 2019). Next, let us consider the main roles played by women in ethnocultural processes. First of all, they form ethnic identity, reproducing ethnic and cultural boundaries between "their own" and "strangers". The next function is that a woman "designates ethnic features in the form of a symbol of

national unity, i.e. her image becomes an important ideologeme designed to consolidate the members of the group” (Sikevich, 1995).

## **Method**

The article presents the results of the research conducted under the grant project “Women of ethnic communities as channels of reproduction and formation of civic and ethnic identity (on the example of Turkestan region and Shymkent city)”, funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

This project applies a qualitative method of sociological analysis. One of the key criteria for this approach is that it is appropriate when there is a limited amount of previous work on the topic at hand. This method is exploratory in nature, which makes it useful when the author is unsure of which variables should be considered in the context of the issue at hand. In addition, the qualitative approach is particularly relevant for understanding new and unexplored issues that cannot be adequately explained by existing group and sample-specific theories (Morse, 1991). Another reason for using qualitative methods is the limited capacity for analysis within the general population of the sample (Baltaci, 2019). This is particularly important in situations where small groups are the object of study and it is not possible to extract detailed information on their sex and age characteristics and place of residence from the general population, which makes qualitative methods preferable.

Two methods of qualitative approach were used in this project: narrative in-depth interview and included observation. The narrative in-depth interviews carried out within the framework of this project were conducted by researchers on the basis of a pre-developed guide, or manual. In general, the role of an informant in a narrative interview is to support the interlocutor within the framework of the topic under discussion, actively listening and asking relevant questions at the appropriate moment. Therefore, the guide included only the basic questions. In addition to questions related to the socio-demographic status of women, place of work, number of children and family members, questions about values, role responsibilities, relationships with society, daily life and attitude to socio-cultural ties were added to the manual.

The in-depth interview script with the inclusion of the main questions was developed spontaneously during the conversation. However, during the interviews with women, special attention was paid to aspects related to the main components reflecting citizenship and ethnicity. Narrative interviews with each informant were conducted for an average of 1-1.5 hours. All ethical norms were observed during the interviews, i.e. the informants were familiarized with the guarantees of anonymity, voluntary participation and the possibility to stop the interview at any time. Also, the interview was conducted one-on-one in a quiet and comfortable environment for the informant.

Any sociological data can be analyzed only after it has been recorded. Therefore, all interviews were recorded on a dictaphone after the permission of the survey participants and then transcribed. The object of the study was defined as women of the Tajik community of Turkestan oblast and Shymkent city who have experience in raising children over 18 years old.

In this study, along with the main method, the method of included observation was used. During the observation, the researchers' attention was focused on the informants' external attributes. Public places (stores, restaurants, schools, streets, markets, etc.) were chosen as control areas. During the observation, diaries and cameras also recorded any visual aspects of the social world that required analysis, such as women's clothing, their actions in certain situations, their style of communication with each other and with other ethnic groups, and visual representations of behavior patterns.

Our research took into account the peculiarities of settlement of ethnic groups. Thus, Al-Farabi village of Zhetysai region, where Kazakhs and Tajiks live together, was selected as a polyethnic settlement; Firdausi village of Maktaaral region was studied as a monoethnic settlement where only Tajiks live (Kim et al., 2024).

## **Sample Population of the Research**

The sample of in-depth interview included women over 18 years old from villages of Turkestan province, namely 8 Tajik women from Al-Farabi village and 8 Tajik women from Ferdowsi village. The main criterion for

selection was the presence of motherhood experience. Socio-demographic characteristics of informants reflected the data of women from socially different groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of the research participants

#	Location of the interview	Age	Occupation
1	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	31	self-employed
2	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	30	cleaner
3	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	49	housewife
4	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	59	pensioner
5	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	29	teacher
6	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	44	cleaner
7	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	41	teacher
8	Turkestan oblast, Al-Farabi village, Zhetysai region, polyethnic settlement	44	cleaner
9	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	45	housewife
10	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	39	self-employed
11	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	62	pensioner
12	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	35	housewife
13	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	31	housewife
14	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	38	housewife
15	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	38	saleswoman
16	Turkestan oblast, Firdousi village, Maktaaral region, monoethnic settlement	38	housewife

## Results and Discussion

### Age of the informants

The age of the interviewed informants starts from 29 years to 62 years. The average age is 41 years. At this age, half of Tajik women are already in the status of grandmothers and have a lot of experience in managing family life and bringing up children.

### Number of Children

According to the results of narrative in-depth interview, half of the informants have 4 or more children. 7 out of 16 Tajik informants (44%) have 6 children. We can see that Tajik families in Kazakhstan often have many children, and it should be noted that large families are not characteristic of certain ethnogroups, but of many women in the southern regions, regardless of ethnotraditions.

Tajik women who participated in the interviews said that they were employed in teaching, trade, medicine, there are also representatives of the service sector, and 6 out of 16 informants were housewives. This is explained by the fact that the Tajik community is traditional and patriarchal. The main role of a Tajik woman is to organize the household, bring up the younger generation, respect and create conditions for elders and spouse. In the family/household, men do not help much in “women’s” affairs, and women have to manage to do everything

themselves. This characterizes a pronounced traditional approach in the upbringing of Tajik girls, i.e. preparation for their future role as daughters-in-law, wife and mother.

### **Education in Household Management Skills and Moral Values**

The distribution of household chores in Tajik families plays an important role in the upbringing of children, instilling in them responsibility and diligence. Tajik women traditionally adhere to a clear distribution of gender roles, which is reflected in the upbringing of children and the distribution of household chores. From an early age, girls learn to manage the household and help around the house, while boys, according to traditional attitudes, are not involved in household chores. This division of roles begins in childhood and lays the foundation for children's future perception of their responsibilities in the family and society. Girls help with household chores from an early age, but their responsibilities depend on the age and maturity level of the child. For example, one of the informants emphasized that it is too early for her daughter to prepare food and she is not allowed to go near the gas stove. This attitude reflects a desire to keep children safe, but at the same time it reinforces stereotypes about women's role in the household.

According to traditional attitudes, boys are not involved in household chores, reflecting fixed gender roles. From an early age, they are accustomed to a different social function focused on external tasks, while women's roles remain concentrated within the household. This approach demonstrates the persistent gender division of labor in Tajik families, which, despite possible changes in society, continues to be a stable element of the social structure.

It is important to note that, regardless of gender, children are actively involved in various aspects of household activities, especially in rural areas. They often assist in farming, caring for domestic animals and other daily tasks. In such settings, boys show responsibility even though their participation in traditional household duties is limited. Thus, teaching children to work becomes part of the educational process aimed at developing their autonomy and responsibility.

Religious education also occupies an important place in family life. In Tajik families, children are exposed to religious practices from an early age, which contributes to the formation of moral foundations and spiritual identity. Children participate in religious practices, such as performing daily prayers, which contributes to the formation of moral foundations in the younger members of the family.

*My daughters pray namaz, they are believers. My son is still young, he hasn't learned yet*  
*Tajik woman, 44 years old, cleaner*

### **Preservation and Transmission of Ethnic History**

Ethnic identity is an important aspect of self-consciousness and cultural belonging, formed through the process of socialization and transmission of cultural norms and traditions within the family and society. In multi-ethnic communities such as Kazakhstan's, where Tajik families coexist with other ethnic groups, this process becomes particularly complex and multi-layered. Language environment, family customs, history of their ethnicity, religious traditions and social norms - all these factors influence the formation of identity, especially in childhood. Women play an important role in this by preserving and transmitting cultural values to their children through language, upbringing and participation in cultural and religious practices.

Traditional practices and customs occupy a significant place in the upbringing of children of Tajik families. Some Tajik women noted the celebration of the custom of "shildekhana" (a holiday in honor of the birth of a child), which is preserved in both Tajik and Kazakh cultures. This custom becomes a point of contact between ethnic groups, emphasizing intercultural exchange. However, Tajik women note that living in the Kazakh community affects their knowledge of Tajik traditions.

*The ritual after the birth of a child we also have. Since I lived there closely with my Kazakh brothers, I do not know much about Tajik customs as a Tajik woman.*  
*Tajik woman, 31 years old, self-employed*

It should be noted that this statement reflects the partial loss of ethnic knowledge due to living in a multi-ethnic environment. Thus, ethnic identity is formed in the context of adaptation, where some Tajik traditions are preserved, but Kazakh cultural elements are also integrated. The transmission of ethnic traditions to children is mainly through participation in cultural events and family festivals. Children learn from family interactions and traditional festivals, but they do so more informally by observing their parents.

There is also an element of uneven distribution of knowledge of traditions within Tajik families, and even among Tajik women themselves there is not a full understanding of all customs. Tajik women have a partial knowledge of cultural heritage, which can limit the process of passing it on to the next generation. At the same time, they consciously choose to have their children assimilated into Kazakh culture. This choice demonstrates the priority of maintaining integration into the Kazakh community over ethnic isolation.

Cooking also occupies an important place in the transmission of traditions. The description of the dish “kurutob” shows an element of preserving ethnic identity through food. In view of this, it is possible to note culinary traditions that are passed on to children, thus maintaining their ethnic identity through food habits.

### **Language Proficiency**

Language proficiency plays a key role in the formation of ethnic identity, where women are the main transmitters of cultural values and traditions. In Tajik families, women are actively involved in the upbringing of children, influencing their linguistic and cultural environment. It is through language, which is used in the family and in everyday life, that the process of transmission of ethnic identity based on centuries-old traditions takes place. The language proficiency of the informants and their children varies according to the family and educational context. Many children speak several languages: Tajik, Kazakh, Uzbek, Russian and English.

#### *Kazakh Language*

Kazakh is the main language of schooling, and many children speak and write Kazakh fluently. Some parents are also fluent in Kazakh, particularly fathers, and use it as the primary language in social and educational settings.

*I speak Kazakh and Tajik, of course. All schools are in Kazakh).  
Tajik woman, 31 years old, self-employed*

Women emphasize the importance of the Kazakh language for children, linking it to the education system and social environment. This confirms that children's ethnic identity is formed in the context of constant interaction with Kazakh culture, while Tajik identity is partially weakened.

#### *Tajik Language*

Informants and their families are generally fluent in Tajik, and it is used in everyday communication at home. However, some informants note that children sometimes forget Tajik, as their environment is predominantly Kazakh and Russian. This process indicates a gradual weakening of the ethnic identity associated with the Tajik language. Women realize that Kazakh and Russian dominate the daily life of children, which makes it difficult to preserve Tajik language and culture.

### **Knowing the History of Ethnicity**

Understanding the history of their ethnicity helps children to realize their roots, their connection to their ancestors and their sense of belonging to a cultural community. In Tajik families, mothers often tell their children about their family's origins, ancestral migration, traditions and customs. It is important for many Tajik mothers to pass on to their children knowledge about the cultural and historical roots of their nation. Some women mention that their children know their family history through their grandfather's stories. Family histories serve as an important element in maintaining a connection to the historical homeland and identity. However, there are those who do not pay special attention to the history of the Tajik people. For example, some mothers'



responses show that their children are not very familiar with Tajik history, as they focus more on life in Kazakhstan and its history.

Some mothers consider it important to study Tajik literature and language. They note the importance of knowing works such as Avesta and getting to know historical figures such as Ismail Samani. In this context, knowledge of literary works and language helps children to better understand their cultural identity and form pride in their origins.

Knowledge of the history of one's ethnic group contributes to the preservation of the ethnic identity of children of Tajik families, strengthening their connection with cultural roots. At the same time, the lack of attention to this knowledge may weaken ethnic self-identification in the context of integration into Kazakh society.

## **Conclusion**

According to the results of the study, it was revealed that the process of identity formation in children by women differs in monoethnic and multiethnic settlements. In monoethnic villages, traditions and customs are transmitted more steadily due to the limited influence of other cultures. At the same time, Tajiks of multiethnic settlements face great challenges in preserving their ethnic identity, as their traditions may mix with the customs of other ethnic groups.

In monoethnic settlements, Tajik women play a key role in the formation of identity through the upbringing of children in accordance with traditional gender roles and religious norms. In multiethnic communities, the influence of other cultures leads to a mixed approach, where Tajik mothers can adapt elements of Kazakh culture, but try to preserve the basic traditions of their ethnic community.

In monoethnic areas, the upbringing of girls and boys is based on clear traditional roles, where girls are restricted in movement and attention is focused on household duties, while boys are given more freedom and opportunities for an active life. Girls are being prepared for family life, and boys are being developed as breadwinners. In multiethnic areas, these differences are also present, but the influence of different cultures can somewhat soften the norms for girls, allowing them to receive more opportunities for education and self-expression.

In Tajik families of monoethnic settlements, Tajik remains the main means of communication, although children also learn Kazakh and Russian. In multiethnic settlements, Kazakh and Russian languages often dominate, which leads to the gradual loss of the Tajik language and, as a result, the weakening of ethnic identity.

In both types of settlements, most children are not familiar with the history of their ethnic group. At the same time, in some families there is an older generation who transmits this knowledge orally. However, under the influence of the educational system and other factors, children know more about the history of Kazakhstan as a whole than about the history of their ethnic group.

Thus, ethnic identity is formed through traditions, language and cultural practices, stories of Tajiks transmitted by women in families. In a multiethnic society, Tajik women play a key role in the upbringing of children, helping them to realize their belonging to an ethnic group. At the same time, identity adapts to new conditions, reflecting changes in culture and social environment, which contributes to both the preservation and transformation of ethnic traditions.

## **Scientific Ethics Declaration**

The author declares that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS Journal belongs to the author.

## **Acknowledgements or Notes**

\* This article was presented as an oral presentation at the International Conference on Science and Education ([www.iconse.net](http://www.iconse.net)) held in Antalya/Turkey on November 13-16, 2024

\* AP14870213 «Women of ethnic communities as channels of reproduction and formation of civic and ethnic identity (using the example of Turkestan region and Shymkent city)» is being implemented within the framework of the funding grant project of the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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### To cite this article:

Otar, E. (2024). How do Kazakhstani Tajik women form and reproduce ethnic identity when raising children?. *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational and Social Sciences (EPESS)*, 39, 171-178.