

## The Underrepresentation of Women in Leadership Positions in Rural Russia\*

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**ABSTRACT** Numerous studies have documented the persistence of gender inequality in rural Russia, including the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. A survey ( $N = 169$ ) conducted in two rural Russian regions examined residents' explanations of gender inequality and their support for various remedies to ameliorate this situation. Both male and female respondents downplay outright discrimination in accounting for gender-based occupational inequalities. Instead, respondents are more likely to agree with explanations that are embedded in cultural notions of a traditional gender-based division of labor, in which the home responsibilities for women and a "natural" advantage of masculinity make it less likely that women become leaders. With respect to strategies for encouraging women to be leaders, both men and women support "more training" and "more husband help at home," with women being slightly more positive on the latter item.

### Introduction

Social scientists have devoted considerable attention to employment roles of rural men and women in different parts of the world. In developing countries, the role of women in smallholder microcredit organizations and microenterprises has been of special interest (Counts 2008; Midgley 2008). Research on rural women in developed countries has focused on the gendered division of labor in farming as well as in farm decision making. Traditionally, male labor in these countries is associated with cultivation and harvesting whereas women's work often comprises "helper" tasks, including taking care of children, keeping the account books, and providing medical insurance and additional income with off-farm work (e.g., Brandth 1995; Sachs 1996). More recently, however, some researchers have found evidence to suggest that

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gendered roles are more complex, depending on what a farm produces (Grigsby, Español, and O'Brien 2012; Machum 2006). There is also some evidence of movement from a traditional patriarchal toward more of a partnership model in some sectors of Western agriculture (Beach 2013).

The purpose of this article is to examine the cultural roots of gendered inequality in leadership positions in rural Russia. Researchers have demonstrated the presence of gendered inequality in economic power and income in rural Russia (Wegren, O'Brien, and Patsiorkovsky 2002; Wegren, Patsiorkovsky, and O'Brien 2010). As is the case in other rural environments, this inequality between men and women is produced by a complex set of factors, including important economic and political power relationships as well as culturally and socially transmitted attitudes about what is "men's work" and "women's work" and, most importantly, rationalizations of *why* women are more represented in some roles and not in others. Inglehart and Norris's (2003) cross-national comparison of gender inequality found that since the 1960s structural changes in a nation's economy, especially the shift from an agrarian one to industrial to postindustrial ones, as well as because of international and national legislative initiatives, have had a substantial effect on women's rights and opportunities around the globe. But at the same time, they observe that "cultural norms, values and beliefs also shape the transition to gender equality. These include how far economic growth serves women's needs and priorities and how far de jure rights, formal conventions, and legal treaties are implemented and translated into effective reforms" (2003:149).

The main focus of our inquiry is on identifying the specific attitudes of both men and women on what causes women to be underrepresented in leadership positions in contemporary rural Russia. Our central argument is that these attitudes reflect the reality that a complex set of factors, largely cultural in nature, but having roots in the institutions and social organization of the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, provides a critical foundation for maintaining this form of gender inequality and thus is an important starting point in addressing gender imbalance in the rural Russian workplace.

Cultural attitudes toward work roles are associated in complex ways with economic and political institutions. The cultural definitions of "appropriate" roles for men and women in the cloth-weaving crafts in preindustrial England, for example, were supported by a home-based gendered social organization of work that was subsequently challenged by the introduction of the factory system in the late eighteenth century, in which women and children were hired to work the mechanical looms. This, in turn, led men to form collective action organizations and social

movements to pass laws that would restrict women's and children's hours and thus redefine cultural definitions of the division of labor both inside and outside the home. These cultural definitions became justifications for keeping women at home, taking care of household tasks and children, but also for steering young women into types of education and training that reduced opportunities for them to gain skills that would be necessary to participate in, let alone lead, industrial organizations (Smelser 1959). In the second half of the twentieth century, technological and demographic changes affecting the social organization of the workplace and household played a role in the emergence of social movements to change the existing cultural norms of what was "appropriate" work for men and women (Inglehart and Norris 2003:36–48). These movements have produced some substantial changes in the ability of women in Western nations to occupy positions in the workplace that they were barred from even a few decades earlier. Yet as contemporary events illustrate, cultural attitudes formed in an earlier period can persist, even in the face of these other social organizational and institutional changes.<sup>1</sup>

A critical question, then, is to what extent do cultural attitudes toward a gendered division of labor persist even when economic institutions and social organizational arrangements that shaped those attitudes have undergone a significant change?

Examining the relationship between the contemporary gendered division of leadership in labor in rural Russia and the cultural legacy of the Soviet period can be helpful in providing some insight into this question. The formal institutions of the Soviet command economy proclaimed the full equality of men and women. In practice, however, the formal institutions and social organization of the Soviet economy, which in rural regions created the collective farm (the *kolkhoz*), as well as the informal institutions of the peasant household that were incorporated into the collective farm structure created a very different reality. This included steering women away from careers like agricultural economics that would provide a career path to leadership, assigning tasks on the collective farm by gender, and generating a "triple burden" in which women were expected to work outside the home, take care of the household garden plot, and be in charge of keeping up the home and taking care of the children (Denisova 2010:143–60).

<sup>1</sup> In the United States, for example, the organized resistance to the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which eventually was enacted in 2009, was generated by firms and lobbying groups whose economic interests were threatened, but the size and intensity of the opposition suggests that traditional cultural biases that supported discrimination toward women in the workplace played a role in this effort as well (Stolberg 2009).

The “shock therapy” reforms in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet system in the early 1990s introduced some important aspects of a liberal market economy, in the countryside as well as elsewhere in the country. A critical question is, to what extent has the introduction of these institutional and social organizational structural changes affected the pre-Soviet and Soviet era cultural supports for the traditional gendered division of labor that was biased against women becoming leaders? To answer this general question it is important to frame individual questions in terms of *specific* ways in which women were viewed as less capable than men as leaders in the earlier periods and the extent to which each of these attitudes remains today. This approach focuses on the *relative* strength of specific culturally based sources of resistance to women becoming leaders in rural Russia today. This, in turn, can provide insight into what kinds of strategies are most likely to change the current situation of gender inequality.

We test two sets of hypotheses about the specific sources of resistance to gender equality in leadership. First, we examine four hypotheses on how rural Russian men and women explain the reasons for gender inequality in leadership: (1) there is outright discrimination against women, (2) women lack the training required for leadership, (3) traditional gender-based division of labor means that women are best suited for household responsibilities, and (4) inherent differences “in nature” between men and women make men more suitable as leaders. Next we examine four hypotheses about attitudes toward several pathways by which more women might be able to occupy positions of leadership. These include: (1) providing more training for women in leadership, (2) having husbands assume more responsibility for household tasks, (3) increasing women’s access to physical capital, and (4) increasing participation of women in collective action organizations.

### **Historical Overview**

The historical situation of rural women in Russia is different than that in western European and North American nations. In the pre-Soviet era, peasant society assigned traditional gendered roles to men and women, which meant that women did all of the housework (Glickman 1992; Matossian 1968). When the Bolsheviks came to power, they wanted to “emancipate” women from traditional bourgeois roles by allowing them to work outside the home. Official ideology proclaimed gender equality, characterized by policies that tolerated “free love” and divorce on

demand from women. As one observer noted in the 1970s, however, the reality was that “Soviet women remain a distinctly second sex. If any large segment of the population has been exploited by the system, it is women” (Smith 1976:169).

In Soviet rural society, emancipation through labor meant that rural women faced the so-called triple burden (Denisova 2010:143–50). They were expected to have employment outside of the home; take primary responsibility for household jobs such as cleaning, child care, cooking meals, washing dishes, shopping, and so forth; and provide the majority of labor in the small household plots (on average, less than one-half of a hectare) (151–60).

During the Soviet period, a great deal of gendered income inequality stemmed from occupational segregation. Occupational segregation meant that rural women tended to be employed in mainly low-skilled, manual labor jobs on collective farms, while rural men were more likely to work in mechanized and highly skilled positions such as tractor and combine drivers. On Soviet-era state or collective farms, rural women typically occupied positions as milkmaids, manual crop workers, livestock caretakers, and other nonspecialized farm labor positions (Bridger 1992:271–80; Dodge and Feshbach 1992: 246–47).

Low numbers of women were trained in professions that prepared them for farm management or leadership positions. Farm managers were often recruited from the ranks of agricultural specialists, yet only 1 in 50 women were specialists (Bridger 1992:279). In addition, in the Soviet *nomenklatura* system, where positions of power and prestige were assigned from above, it was men who were most likely to be represented in the most influential positions in the party hierarchy. Bridger notes:

[There are a] dearth of women in management despite the fact that women are more highly trained than men. This has been found to stem on the one hand from a reluctance to promote women to posts of responsibility due to an under-estimation of their abilities and, on the other hand, from a tendency amongst women themselves to refuse these jobs due to family responsibilities. (1992:279)

Even as the educational level of the collective farm workforce rose sharply beginning in the second half of the 1960s, women, who had higher levels of education on average, did not move into management ranks (Hough 1971:117). It is no surprise, therefore, that on collective farms in the late Soviet period, women accounted for only 2.5 percent of

farm managers, 15 percent of chief specialists, and 29 percent of agronomists (Goskomstat 1987:304). On state farms, the situation was no better; women accounted for less than 2 percent of state farm managers, 12 percent of chief specialists, and 29 percent of agronomists (Goskomstat 1987:306).

At the same time, however, Soviet social policy did entail a number of advantages that were, compared to the West, ahead of their time. For example, Soviet-era women enjoyed an extended paid maternity leave; a guarantee of returning to one's previous job; stipends and subsidies for small children up to one year; and, after 1966, when rural men and women were brought into the state social security system, minimum wage levels and pensions.

The situation for post-Soviet women, not just rural women, presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, some authors have argued that women have been "losers" during market reform; that is, women were stripped of social protections offered by the Soviet state, experienced an erosion of familial support as social policies went unfunded or underfunded, and had their representation in national legislative bodies reduced. Moreover, women have experienced a disproportionate share of unemployment during the transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet economy, suffered a significant wage divergence from male incomes, experienced more sexual harassment, and faced more difficulties becoming upwardly mobile (Ashwin 2000, 2006; Saarinen, Ekonen, and Uspenskaia 2013; Sperling 1999). Research in the post-Soviet period has found that gender inequality persists (Ashwin 2000, 2006; Bridger 1996). During the critical 1990s, when the foundations of Russian capitalism were being built, women faced considerable challenges in adapting to market conditions, some brought on by choices women made and others due to structural reasons (Bridger, Kay, and Pinnick 1996).

Cross-national comparisons have shown considerable variation between the extent of gender inequality and the economic structure of a given society. Overall, gender inequality on a variety of dimensions decreases as we move from agrarian to industrial to postindustrial societies, although there is considerable variability within each category. The Scandinavian countries and Canada, for example, score higher on gender equality than the United States (Inglehart and Norris 2003:33, 39). Moreover, the trend toward convergence between the incomes of men and women in the United States, which was fairly strong in the 1980s and 1990s, has stalled in the first decades of the twenty-first century. U.S. census data show that American women earned 60.2 cents for every one dollar of men's wages in 1980, 71.6 cents per male dollar in 1990, 77 cents

per male dollar in 2011, and 76.5 cents per male dollar in 2012 (Cronin 2013).<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, there is empirical evidence that gender income inequality in rural Russia is more severe than in rural regions of Western nations. According to survey data, Russian rural women earn about 60 percent of men's wages on average, and women make less than men in every labor category of farm enterprises, including managers, specialists, and workers (Wegren et al. 2002, 2010).

At the same time, official data also reflect some improvement in the occupational status of rural women today compared to the Soviet period. The 2006 agricultural census, for example, indicates that women accounted for 9.5 percent of managers of large and medium-sized agricultural enterprises and 14 percent of managers of small agricultural enterprises. Furthermore, according to that census, women are head of 20 percent of private family farms and individual enterprises (Rosstat 2008:366–67). An important caveat here is that 20 percent is likely an overestimate, as many heads of private farms are women in name only. Moreover, a very large percentage of private farms either exist on paper only or are not engaged in agricultural production. In any event, despite some improvement, rural women, who constitute 52 percent of the rural population, are still underrepresented as managers of large, medium, and small agricultural enterprises and as heads of private family farms and individual enterprises.

It should be noted that there has been considerable improvement in the occupational status of rural women *below* the managerial level. In 2010, for example, women comprised 63 percent of top-level skilled specialists in biological and agricultural sciences, and in health care 49 percent of skilled workers, but only 31 percent of the unskilled workers in agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry (Rosstat 2011:81).

The improvement in the participation of women in positions below the management level is attributable to several factors. Clearly, greater opportunity and diversity of employment options exist today than in the Soviet period. *Nomenklatura* no longer decides who will experience upward mobility. There are opportunities to study abroad and to work domestically with foreign experts, enhancing the knowledge base of many persons, including women who would not have had these opportunities during the Soviet period. Access to foreign technology, information, and practices has improved. Below managerial ranks, there are

<sup>2</sup> The census data show that there is variability in the size of the gender wage gap between different age cohorts and skill levels (Cronin 2013).

critical shortages of skilled personnel on farm enterprises, and thus women have filled the ranks because men either cannot or will not. For example, in 2008 there was a shortage of 70,000 agricultural specialists, including agronomists, veterinarians, doctors, engineers, and livestock experts on farm enterprises (Skul'skaya and Shirokova 2009a:416, 2009b:509). Thus, to a certain extent the increase in women in skilled positions is due to acute shortages, and women fill the need just as they did during World War II when men were at the front (Denisova 2010:42).

When women do have managerial positions they tend to be on small and medium-sized farm enterprises. These types of farms produce less and have fewer employees, lower profitability, and smaller ruble turnover than larger, more profitable farm enterprises, where men still account for about 90 percent of the managers.

### **Hypotheses on Explanations of Gender Inequality in Rural Leadership Positions**

The hypotheses listed below focus on how rural Russians explain the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

#### **Outright Discrimination**

The first hypothesis is that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions will be seen as a direct result of the continuation of outright discrimination against women. As noted in our earlier discussion about the objective condition of gender inequality, it is not unreasonable to expect that individuals in rural areas would either personally experience or be aware of a friend, colleague, or family member experiencing such discrimination.

#### **Lack of Training**

A second hypothesis is that the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles will be seen as a result of a lack of training that prevents women from developing requisite managerial skills. Given the dearth of women in leadership positions during the Soviet era, it is not surprising that young women typically were steered away from university or agricultural institute specialties, like agricultural economics, that would train them for leadership positions. Instead women were more commonly found in specialties such as veterinarian medicine (Denisova

2010:41–45). The lack of training in the late Soviet period, in turn, might be expected to produce a lagged effect that would lessen women’s access to leadership positions today.

### **Traditional Gender-based Division of Labor and Household Responsibilities**

Another hypothesis is that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions will be seen as a result of having more household responsibilities. This view would mirror a reality that is found in developed countries, such as the United States, where women have greater household responsibilities than men (Offer and Schneider 2011). This pattern is likely to be even more pronounced in rural Russia based on what we know about the triple burden and the distribution of household chores (Bridger 1992:280–90). The farm manager position, for example, requires being on duty many hours per day and the work may be physically taxing. Thus, working 12 to 14 hours a day, often on call seven days a week, would pose severe challenges for a woman who had to assume all of the household and child-care responsibilities.

### **Men Are by Nature Better Leaders**

The final hypothesis is that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions will be based on the notion that there is something inherent in feminine versus masculine biological or psychological makeup that makes men better leaders. There is considerable empirical evidence that this attitude of “think manager—think male” is persistent across cultures even in developed nations where women have achieved a great deal of equality in other parts of the workplace (Eagly and Karau 2002; Schein 2001). Research suggests that this supposed “natural” advantage that men have as leaders is even more entrenched in rural Russia, which would mean that no matter how much training or other preparation women possess they would still be perceived as being less effective as leaders than men (Ashwin 2006:62–64). Moreover, other factors in the workplace in rural Russia reinforce this view. Being a farm manager not only requires training and skill in a variety of fields—agricultural science, finance, management, accounting, and planning, just to name a few—but in the post-Soviet period the position is elected by farm personnel, not assigned from above. In filling an elected position the manager must be respected and liked. One barrier here is that rural men may not like having a female manager and may resent being told what to do by a woman.

### **Postulated Remedies for Women's Underrepresentation in Leadership Positions**

In addition to specifying the attitudes that rural residents have toward the causes of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, we examine what rural Russians view as possible remedies for gender inequality.

#### **More Training**

One possible solution to the problem of gender inequality would be training in agribusiness or other specialties that would enhance a woman's opportunity to become a leader. As noted earlier, women were steered away from specialties that provided the background for managerial positions. In addition, we might expect that an obstacle to female participation would be available time, finding qualified trainers, sources of funding, and posttraining follow-up whereby direct linkages between training and upward mobility are established.

#### **Husbands Helping More at Home**

A second possible solution would be for husbands to assume more responsibility for household chores and care of children. This, of course, would require a fundamental shift in cultural traditions about what are "normal" roles for men and women in a rural household.

#### **Access to Physical Capital**

Another possible solution would be to provide women with more access to physical capital that would enhance their opportunities to assume leadership positions. This could include, for example, access to equipment and loans for either starting or expanding agricultural enterprises. This solution would not, of course, be relevant to the large enterprises, since these firms would have equipment and presumably, if they were viable, access to credit. Yet access to equipment and credit to purchase equipment would be very relevant to women who were seeking to initiate or increase the productivity of a family farm enterprise.

#### **Collective Action Organizations**

The final possible solution to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions would be to form some type of collective action organization, such as an agricultural cooperative. This course of action includes the example in Western countries of farmers forming

cooperatives to exert countervailing power against powerful buyers and suppliers in the agricultural sector (Schneiberg, King, and Smith 2008). There has been considerable interest in the potential for developing these larger scale cooperatives in developing countries (O'Brien, Banwart, and Cook 2013). Women's cooperatives have played a major role in the emergence of these organizational forms (International Year of Cooperatives Blog 2012). Moreover, a rise in the number of women's organizations throughout Russia in the post-Soviet period has been documented (see Sperling 1999).

### **Research Design**

To test the hypotheses described above, we conducted a survey in two rural regions located in southern Russia, Egorlyksky *raion* (county) in the south of Rostov *oblast* (province) and Kanevin *raion* in the northwest of Krasnodar *krai* (province). In both of the regions agricultural conditions are favorable and the private sector is more economically viable than in many other regions in the country. Because the demographic structure of rural Russian regions is heavily skewed toward an older population (Ioffe, Nefedova, and Zaslavsky 2006) we employed a nonrandom sampling procedure to provide an overrepresentation of younger economically active and more educated respondents. We sampled 89 respondents from Egorlyksky *raion* and 80 from Kanevin *raion*. Approximately half the respondents are employed in nonagricultural enterprises. Because the survey was nonrandom, we selected respondents from the list of permanent residents in each village (the book of household accounts) after consultation with the local administration. This list of residents includes data on the profession of the head of household and is kept by the village administration for all households within its jurisdiction. This list is updated annually and contains demographic and social characteristics of the households in the village. Once respondent households were chosen, a research team from the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (in Moscow) conducted face-to-face interviews in February and March 2013. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The response rate was 96 percent. Table 1 presents a profile of the respondents.

The survey captures a respondent base that is more economically active than a typical cross section of a Russian village. More than 83 percent of the respondents are employed full time, 8 percent are employed part time, and 9 percent are unemployed or not working. The cohort is well educated; 88 percent of respondents have a professional or

**Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile of Respondents.**

	Males ( <i>n</i> = 64)	Females ( <i>n</i> = 105)	Total Sample ( <i>N</i> = 169)
Mean age of respondent	43.7	44.7	44.3
Percentage of respondents employed full time	81%	85%	83%
Percentage with secondary professional or specialist education	44%	58%	53%
Percentage with higher education or above	34%	30.5%	35%
Mean number of household members	3.5	3.5	3.5
Total number of pensioners in sample	9	16	25

**Table 2. Employment Structure of Respondents by Gender.**

	Males ( <i>n</i> = 63)	Females ( <i>n</i> = 99)	Total ( <i>N</i> = 162)
Head of agricultural enterprise	7	3	10
Head of nonagricultural enterprise	5	2	7
Worker at nonagricultural enterprise	16	56	72
Individual entrepreneur	12	9	21
Head of family farm	0	2	2
Member of family farm	3	2	5
Operator of private plot	2	3	5
Worker at small agricultural enterprise (<10 workers)	6	2	8
Worker at medium-sized agricultural enterprise (11–100 workers)	9	5	14
Pensioner	3	7	10
On leave for child care	0	3	3
Homemaker	0	5	5

specialist, higher, or postgraduate education. There is only one single-person household in the sample, a status that is commonly associated with poverty and food insecurity.

Table 2 provides a profile of the primary occupational category with which each respondent identifies him- or herself.

### Findings

#### Rural Russians' Explanations of Gender Inequality in Leadership

Table 3 presents the findings with respect to the first hypothesis. That is, “whether or not respondents either have experienced themselves or have witnessed in others outright discrimination against women in agricultural enterprises.” The total sample means on these six items range from 1.88 to 2.75 on a five-point scale, indicating a low perception of outright discrimination by both men and women in the sample. The

**Table 3. How Often Did Respondent See or Face Discrimination against Women in Agricultural Enterprises in His or Her Region? Responses by Gender.**

	Men	Women	Total
Women paid less than men	2.19 ( <i>n</i> = 54)	2.28 ( <i>n</i> = 78)	2.24 ( <i>N</i> = 132)
Women thought to be worse workers	1.69 ( <i>n</i> = 54)	1.88 ( <i>n</i> = 76)	1.80 ( <i>N</i> = 130)
Harder for women in leadership position	2.72 ( <i>n</i> = 54)	2.77 ( <i>n</i> = 74)	2.75 ( <i>N</i> = 128)
Women do harder work than men	1.98 ( <i>n</i> = 54)	2.33 ( <i>n</i> = 75)	2.19 ( <i>N</i> = 129)
Women mostly hired part time	2.09 ( <i>n</i> = 54)	1.72 ( <i>n</i> = 75)	1.88 ( <i>N</i> = 129)
Women mostly hired temporary	2.17 ( <i>n</i> = 54)	1.99 ( <i>n</i> = 75)	2.06 ( <i>n</i> = 129)

Five-point scale: 1 = very seldom, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = very often.

highest mean score for the total sample is on the item “it is harder for women to occupy leading positions.” The only item that comes close to producing a statistically significant difference between men and women is “women are mostly hired for part time work,” where the mean for men is 2.09 and 1.72 for women ( $p < .10$ ).<sup>3</sup>

Table 4 shows the respondents’ attitudes toward the three other hypothesized explanations of why women are underrepresented in leadership positions in agricultural enterprises or family farms. Both male and female respondents did not see “lack of training or skills” (the second hypothesis) as a strong barrier to women being leaders in agricultural enterprises or family farms. The mean scores for the total sample on both of these items, 2.38 and 2.92, are below the midpoint on the five-point scale. There are no statistically significant differences between men and women in response to these questions.

The third explanation of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, “division of labor and household responsibilities,” receives the highest level of agreement in the total sample. “Unequal household duties” has the highest total sample mean of any perceived barrier to women as leaders in agricultural enterprises (3.22) and on family farms (3.10). There is no statistically significant difference between men and women on this item. There is, however, a statistically significant difference between men and women with the statement “women need to look after the house and children,” with respect to

<sup>3</sup> The significance levels of mean differences between men and women on this and subsequent items are calculated with ANOVA *F* tests.

**Table 4. Perceptions by Male and Female Respondents on Why Are There so Few Women in Positions of Leadership in Agricultural Enterprises and Peasant Farms and What Would Increase the Number of Women Leaders?**

	Men (n = 62)	Women (n = 94)	Total Sample (N = 156)
Why so few women leaders in agricultural enterprises?			
Lack of training or skills	2.65	2.20	2.38
Women don't want leadership positions	2.35	2.06	2.18
Men make better leaders <sup>a</sup>	2.61	2.08	2.29
Too hard for women <sup>b</sup>	3.10	2.42	2.68
Need to look after the house and children	3.21	2.78	2.95
Unequal household duties	3.05	3.33	3.22
Why few women leaders in family farms?			
Lack of training or skills	2.85	2.97	2.92
Women don't want leadership positions	2.65	2.56	2.60
Men make better leaders <sup>c</sup>	2.84	2.22	2.47
Too hard for women	3.34	2.91	3.08
Need to look after the house and children <sup>d</sup>	3.29	2.70	2.94
Unequal household duties	3.24	3.01	3.10
What would encourage women to be leaders?			
More training	3.47	3.43	3.44
More husband help at home <sup>e</sup>	3.12	3.82	3.54
Women's committees	1.90	2.30	2.14
Access to loans <sup>f</sup>	2.03	2.90	2.56
Access to agricultural equipment <sup>g</sup>	2.15	3.12	2.74
Development of local cooperatives <sup>h</sup>	2.22	2.87	2.61

Responses on a five-point scale: 1 = not important at all; 5 = a very important reason.

<sup>a</sup>  $F(1) = 10.718, p < .05$

<sup>b</sup>  $F(1) = 17.477, p < .05$

<sup>c</sup>  $F(1) = 14.144, p < .05$

<sup>d</sup>  $F(1) = 13.011, p < .05$

<sup>e</sup>  $F(1) = 17.721, p < .01$

<sup>f</sup>  $F(1) = 27.414, p < .01$

<sup>g</sup>  $F(1) = 34.084, p < .001$

<sup>h</sup>  $F(1) = 15.481, p < .05$

women being leaders in family farms (3.29 for men and 2.70 for women [ $p < .05$ ]), but not with respect to agricultural enterprises.

There is a clear gender difference in level of support of the fourth hypothesized explanation that “men are by nature better leaders.” Women are less likely than men to agree with this statement, although it is important to note that the level of agreement by men of this statement is below the midpoint with respect to both agricultural enterprises (2.61 for men and 2.08 for women [ $p < .05$ ]) and family farms (2.84 for men and 2.22 for women [ $p < .05$ ]). Women are less likely than men to agree with the notion that women are underrepresented in leadership in agricultural enterprises because “it is too hard for women,” but there are

no gender differences with regard to seeing this explanation as a cause of difficulties women face in becoming leaders of family farms. Finally, there is no gender difference in level of agreement with the statement “women don’t want to be in leadership positions.” Both men and women tend to disagree with this statement and the mean responses of both groups are below the midpoint on the five-point scale.

### **What Would Help Women Overcome Barriers to Becoming Leaders?**

Table 4 also shows respondents’ perceptions of the four possible remedies discussed earlier, more training, husbands’ helping more, greater access to physical capital, and collective action. The table shows both male and female respondents’ perceptions.

Although lack of training was not perceived as a significant barrier to women becoming leaders, the statement that “more training would help women become leaders” receives the second strongest level of agreement among the six items pertaining to amelioration of the dearth of female leadership (3.47 for men and 3.43 for women), and there is no statistically significant gender difference on this item. Not surprisingly, women are more likely than men to agree with the statement that “more help by husbands at home” would increase opportunities for women to become leaders but it is important to note that the level of agreement with this statement by men (3.12) is beyond the midpoint on the five-point scale. The questions pertaining to women’s access to physical capital—“access to loans” and “access to agricultural equipment”—produce significantly more positive responses among female than male respondents.<sup>4</sup>

Two items in the survey asked respondents to what extent they agreed that some form of collective action would ameliorate the gender gap in leadership in agricultural organizations. Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to agree that the “development of local cooperatives would encourage more women to become leaders,” but they do not express much support for “women’s committees.”

The idea of forming cooperatives to empower women has been well established in rural development programs in other countries (see, e.g., European Commission 2000). Moreover, a large number of women’s organizations did emerge in Russia in the early post-Soviet period

<sup>4</sup> A separate analysis, not shown here, found that there were no statistically significant differences in responses to the questions by women in the sample who were in different occupations. An explanation might be that women who are currently employees in either nonagricultural or agricultural enterprises (two-thirds of the female subsample) would at least like to have the opportunity to become engaged in entrepreneurial activities, which would require access to credit and equipment.

**Table 5. Factor Analysis of Responses to Questions about What Prevents Women from Becoming Leaders and How to Remedy the Situation.**

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Why few women leaders in agricultural enterprises?				
Training or skills	.123	.063	.004	<b>.745</b>
Women don't want leadership	-.141	.072	.078	.383
Men better leaders	.101	.152	<b>.700</b>	.126
Too hard for women	.005	.131	<b>.748</b>	.001
Look after house and children	-.001	<b>.701</b>	.273	.124
Unequal home duties	.148	<b>.801</b>	.007	-.069
Why few women head of family farms?				
Training or skills	.100	-.010	.001	<b>.811</b>
Women don't want leadership	-.035	.201	.227	<b>.605</b>
Men better leaders	.051	.087	<b>.814</b>	.182
Too hard for women	.041	.179	<b>.759</b>	.099
Look after house and children	-.007	<b>.785</b>	.312	.158
Unequal home duties	.039	<b>.825</b>	.198	.026
What would encourage women to be leaders?				
More training	.241	-.108	.140	<b>.721</b>
Husband help at home	.429	.443	-.101	.100
Women's committees	<b>.754</b>	.073	.066	-.023
Access to loans	<b>.847</b>	.034	.066	-.023
Access to agricultural equipment	<b>.841</b>	.095	.021	.087
Development of local cooperatives	<b>.735</b>	-.001	.091	.074

Responses on a five-point scale, from "not important at all" to "very important" reason. Men ( $n = 54$ ); women ( $n = 74$ ), total  $N = 128$ . Items in bold in each column indicate which items load on the factor listed at the top of the column.

Percentage of variance in responses accounted for by each factor: 1-24.301, 2-14.409, 3-11.745, 4-8.547.

Total explained variance in responses: 59.002 percent.

(Sperling 1999). Yet more recent empirical research on cooperatives in Russia offers a much more pessimistic outlook. Golovina and Nilsson (2009, 2011), for example, found in Kurgan province that the Soviet period has generated a historical path dependency in which top-down bureaucratic models tend to dominate and agricultural producers have a very low level of social capital trust with one another. In short, the extremely weak foundations of civil society, which were not well developed in the czarist period and were actively destroyed in the Soviet period, are a serious impediment to collective action solutions of any sort, including those of women in agriculture.

### Further Evidence of Distinctive Factors in Obstacles to Women as Leaders

Table 5 provides further evidence that there are somewhat distinct sources of resistance to women as rural leaders. The principal compo-

nents factor analysis (varimax rotation) empirically generates four distinct factors that account for 59 percent of the total variance in responses to the items shown in Table 4. Items that load on a given factor—that is, .500 or higher—signify that respondents who answered a certain way on that question gave a similar response to other statements that also loaded on that factor. The first factor, which accounts for 24 percent of the total explained variance, consists of four of the items pertaining to strategies for ameliorating gender-based inequality in leadership positions: “women’s committees,” “access to loans,” “access to agricultural equipment,” and “development of local cooperatives.”

The second factor accounts for 14 percent of the explained variance in responses and pertains to women’s responsibilities and the household division of labor. The two items “look after house and children” and “unequal household duties” have almost the same loadings with respect to barriers to women becoming leaders. The third factor assumes some sort of inherent characteristics of men and women that make the former better leaders than the latter; it accounts for 12 percent of the variance in responses. The two items “men make better leaders” and “leadership is too hard for women” load strongly with reference to both agricultural enterprises and private farms. Finally, the fourth factor, which accounts for 9 percent of the variance in responses, comprises primarily three items that refer to “training” plus the item “women don’t want leadership” with respect to being a head of a family farm.

### **Conclusion**

What is the significance of our findings for the larger issue of gender inequality in rural regions? At one level, the historical context of rural Russia is unique and like rural places in other parts of the world it has its own history or path within which contemporary events must be understood. This path dependency means that cultural traditions as well as historically specific political and economic institutions can stimulate or block change, including the status of women in the workforce. This is one of the most important insights of the new institutional economics (North 1990; Ostrom 1990) and the new institutional sociology (Brinton and Nee 1998) paradigms that focus on how relationships between formal (i.e., legal and economic institutions) and informal (i.e., cultural norms and social networks) institutional arrangements affect long-term social change. Even among nations with strong formal institutions supporting a market economy, such as the United States, western European countries, and Canada, differences in cultural traditions have generated substantial variation in the degree to which markets are regulated, social

support services are provided to citizens, and ameliorative measures are taken to lessen gender as well as income inequality (Inglehart and Norris 2003:149; Piketty 2014).

Similar differences can be found among post-Communist nations that transitioned from command economies to some form of a market economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although we can speak of Poland, Hungary, and Russia in terms of Communist and post-Communist periods, their respective experiences were quite different in terms of the extent of private ownership of agricultural land prior to collectivization, the degree to which the state permitted the development of private ownership and control as “compensatory mechanisms” during the Communist period, and the way in which land was distributed in the post-Communist period (Szelenyi and Kostello 1998; Turnock 1998).

At the same time, however, the post-Soviet rural environment in Russia and its relationship to the preceding Soviet environment offers us a unique opportunity to observe within a specific time frame how the interface between cultural traditions and major structural changes in a rural economy and its supporting political institutions affects gender inequality. There is considerable evidence that the introduction of a market economy has produced both economic gains and losses for Russian women, including those living in rural regions. As noted earlier, there have been important gains for women in skilled agricultural specialist positions and more representation in managerial positions (Rosstat 2011:366–67, 81). Yet, rural Russian women have experienced a disproportionate share of unemployment that resulted from the introduction of market shock therapy (Ashwin 2000, 2006; Saarinen et al. 2013; Sperling 1999) and recent survey data show that gender inequality in Russian rural regions remains greater than typically is found in rural regions in Western countries (Wegren et al. 2010).

Our survey findings are most useful in providing some insight into the cultural sources of resistance to further gains for women in the rural workplace, specifically in leadership positions. An important finding in this regard is that the lack of women in leadership positions in rural Russia cannot simply be attributed to overt discrimination. Both male and female respondents disagreed with statements suggesting that gender inequality in leadership was due to outright discrimination.

Instead, our study suggests that many barriers to leadership positions for women flow from deeply embedded cultural attitudes about gender and the division of labor. These attitudes about occupational segregation based on gender undoubtedly start first and foremost in the

household, with attitudes held by husbands and to some extent by wives as well. Yet these attitudes play a significant role in maintaining gender inequality in the workplace, especially in the post-Soviet environment where farm managers are elected and thus the attitudes of a larger cross section of the workforce can have a significant effect in reinforcing gender inequality.

The factor analysis (Table 5) shows that these culturally based attitudes can be empirically separated into different explanations of why women are less likely than men to become leaders either in agricultural enterprises or family farms. One factor pertains to an inherent natural difference between men and women with respect to leadership abilities—that is, “men make better leaders” and leadership is “too hard for women”—and another suggests that the major impediment to women assuming leadership roles outside the home is the gendered division of labor at home—that is, “looking after the house and children” and “unequal home duties.”

It is important to note that the two items suggesting that the gendered division of labor in the home is the primary obstacle to gender inequality in the workplace receive stronger support from men than does the item that “men make better leaders.” This means that the most effective means of reducing gender inequality in the rural workplace is likely to be to somehow reduce the tasks for women at home. Moreover, the survey provides evidence that altering the current gendered division of labor at home would receive some degree of support from men. Although, not surprisingly, women agreed more strongly that “more husband help at home” would encourage more women to accept leadership positions, the majority of men also agreed with this statement. In addition, men as well as women gave strong support to the notion that “more training” would encourage women to become leaders.

Empirical studies have shown that the successor to the peasant household in the early twentieth century that Chaianov (1966) studied can be quite entrepreneurial and thus in many ways supports cultural foundations of entrepreneurship that are found in Western rural regions (O’Brien and Patsiorkovsky 2006; Wegren 2005). The challenge, then, does not lie so much in a generalized attitude toward “modernization,” as might be the case in some other countries, but with the specific sources of resistance to women in leadership positions.

It is important to keep in mind that cultural attitudes currently supporting gender inequality in rural leadership are not immutable. Although it is easy to observe the extent to which formal institutional and organizational arrangements are *embedded* in informal institutional and organizational structures, there is evidence that this causal order can be

reversed. Formal institutional adjustments in the United States, such as the Land Grant University system, government support for agricultural cooperative development, and a multitude of social support programs, have strengthened skills, access to resources, and social capital networks of various disadvantaged groups. These institutional adjustments, in turn, have stimulated the growth of civil society and the cultural attitudes needed to support it (O'Brien 2012; Schneiberg et al. 2008; Skocpol 1996). Similarly, we might expect that cultural attitudes toward women in leadership positions in rural Russia would change if institutional adjustments were made to provide some relief to women from household tasks, such as workplace child care, and access to additional training in leadership skills and, in the case of family farms, programs to provide women with greater access to agricultural equipment.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that progress toward gender equality takes a long time and the challenges are formidable. Even in Western countries, where progress has been made, it has been uneven. In 2002, for example, the USDA census of agriculture reported that 11 percent of principal farm operators were women, increasing to 14 percent in 2007 (USDA 2009), but remaining at 14 percent in the 2012 census. Moreover, farms in which women are principal operators are much smaller; 9 percent with sales of \$50,000 or more, compared to 25 percent of all farms (USDA 2014).

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