

Russian Brides and the Econometrics of Love

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June 09, 2015



There is an old saying "Like must marry like or there'll be no happiness." Nevertheless, many people in Russia ignore this wisdom, especially women who look for love abroad. The "Russian bride" phenomenon didn't appear by chance but because of a basic rule of economics — demand creates supply.

For Men

Being a middle-aged, middle-income man from the United States, Canada, Europe, or even from somewhere near Europe can be enough to pass for a decent groom for a young Russian woman.

If the groom is not sure whether it's a good idea to marry a Russian woman, and not a woman from his own country, he resorts to a simple cost-benefit analysis.

Family values is one advantage of marrying a Russian woman. Any man who wants his better

half to dote on him and look after the housework and their children, and not be an independent feminist type will be happy with a Russian wife.

With a Russian woman, at least, according to the dominating stereotype, a man is assured of a good wife.

Some men may be a bit embarrassed about a potential age gap between them and their spouse in their own countries. In Russia, this is not a problem. A wife who is 25 years your junior does not lead to any kind of social stigma.

Though the Russian brides market offers a good cultural mix, there will be no drastic differences between the man's life views and hers, and there's a chance she'll even speak English.

For Women

Women, naturally, seek comfort and safety.

Sometimes a Russian woman has a foreign man fall in love with her and he then takes her to a cozy little farm in a Utah Mormon settlement to become his fifth wife. She'll get a sewing machine as a birthday present while she is waiting for her work permit, which happened to one of my acquaintances who married an American and went with him to the United States.

Or, she may be flown away to foggy Albion by a fine English gentleman whose paranoid thrift and aloofness she expected to change but gave up in despair after 15 years of marriage. This happened to another acquaintance of mine.

So where do Russian women get the idea that life in a foreign country is much better and easier than in Russia?

The answer is simple: We all remember the economic and social hardships of the 1990s when we understood that food and clothes were in abundance in the West, where a woman could buy shoes and a handbag in the same color and style as her suit or dress.

It was a powerful lesson. Though times have changed and now Russia is a consumer's paradise, this tendency is still alive, albeit in a weaker form. The thing is that the Russian brides market is huge and is constantly replenished by newcomers from poorer Russian provinces.

The fact is that both sides make economic calculations. Men do that literally, women do that in a more abstract way — in the form of a consumer dream.

Effect on the National Economy

Last year, 1,247 marriages between Russian women and foreign men were registered in Moscow alone. Turkish men are in first place — 221 marriages, Germany takes second — 161, bronze medal for Israel — 152, and the U.S. at 97 trails slightly behind Britain at 113.

On the whole, the statistics say that there has been an increase in weddings between Russian women and foreign men during the last few years, both in the capital and in the provinces.

It means that in all probability, many of those women leave Russia with their new husbands, draining the Russian workforce.

The most serious negative effect for the economy is that not only are these women leaving, but also their potential children.

This outflow of potential mothers and children leads to the further deterioration of Russia's demographic situation which is already in a precarious state.

However, the cultural exchange resulting from such marriages is good for international relations, which in turn benefits the economy.

Of course, it would be better if Russia immediately conducted economic reforms and made the country attractive not only for investors, but also for brides from developed countries.

In this case the flows of brides would balance each other. It would help the economy, demography and cultural integration in Russia.

When a woman in love plans to marry her overseas prince, she should think carefully.

She should think about possible difficulties in adapting to her new surroundings and should carefully compare the economic benefits of her decision with the strength of her feelings, and she must not rely on a chance that she will reform her chosen man, molding him into someone more preferable.

Choose the one you wouldn't like to change, because as Margaret Mitchell once said: "No wife has ever changed a husband one whit, and don't you be forgetting that."

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Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/09/russian-brides-and-the-econometrics-of-love-a47260>