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## **Family Roles of Roma and Ways to Overcome its Socio-Cultural Isolation**

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### **Abstract**

The cultural factor has always played an important role in the lives of peoples. The ethnic specificity of life developed over the centuries has been embodied in customs, language, family traditions, consciousness, psychology, and character. Their formation and development have always been accompanied by a significant transformation of stereotypes in the minds of a particular society. Accompanying on the whole path of socio-cultural development, ethnic stereotypes are passed from generation to generation, becoming an element of ethnic consciousness in family relationships. Gender stereotypes are closely linked to gender roles. The formation and regulation of state policy on gender equality are carried out in accordance with the international obligations and legislation of each state. The differences in gender roles depend on the degree of masculinity or femininity of a culture. Each ethnic group has its own socio-cultural role adaptation to the family life. Different ethnic cultures have their own stereotypes about the family responsibilities of husband and wife, and marital relationships have national specifics. It is especially true of such a non-territorial nation, which is as widespread around the world as the Roma. The traditionalism and conservatism of their gender stereotypes hinder socialization and self-realization, especially for women who suffer from double discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and gender. Gender inequality and discrimination against Roma women remained an acute problem in various spheres of life and in the family in particular at the beginning of the third millennium. And since the Roma are a fairly closed ethnic group, the shifts in their consciousness of women's and men's roles and relationships are changing rather slowly. Consideration and comprehension of the essence of gender roles and stereotypes in relation to Roma woman, on the example of research by Ukrainian scholars, will allow to analyze the causes and consequences of gender issues of Roma, which also exist in other countries, and also, to offer the mechanisms for overcoming the negative phenomena and the ways of forming gender family relations of Roma, which are based on the idea of social equality and justice, stability of Roma woman self-realization, opportunities to live a full life based on their closed environment.

**Keywords:** Gender roles, gender identity, gender stereotypes, discrimination, masculinity, feminism, the Roma, Roma woman, family relations.

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## **Introduction**

The Roma have their own specific features. It is the world's largest ethnic group, distributed on all continents and in most countries of the world. The Roma are a stateless people. The representatives of these people enter the economic, social, cultural, and occasionally – the political life of the country in which they live. The system-forming mechanism of preserving their identity is mainly the internal factors, in particular conservative traditions, isolation from external interference, the system of taboos, family and community upbringing. The influence of state and socio-political structures in this process is of secondary, if not secondary importance (Krysachenko, 2015).

The Council of Europe estimates that the total number of Roma in the world is 18 million. According to experts (in the absence of official censuses), their number is much more. In the countries of the European Union, the Roma group includes more than 11 million people according to rough estimates. However, this community lives most densely in Central and Southeastern Europe. Thus, compared to other European countries, the large segments of representatives of this ethnic group are in Bulgaria – 10.33%, Macedonia – 9.59%, Slovakia – 9.17%, Romania – 8.32%, Serbia – 8.18 %, Hungary – 7.05%, Turkey – 3.83%, Albania – 3.18%, Montenegro – 2.95%, Moldova – 2.49%, Greece – 2.47%, the Czech Republic – 1.96 % (Lendiel, 2013).

According to unofficial estimates, the number of Roma in Ukraine ranges from 200,000 to 400,000, in contrast to the official census of 2001, according to which only 47,587 Roma lived in Ukraine. Historically, there have been several special Roma ethno dialect groups in Ukraine. Each of them has its own name, self-perception, differs in language, area of formation, activities, and beliefs. The largest Roma group in Ukraine is the Ukrainian Roma: Servs (left-bank Gypsies) and Vlachs (right-bank ones). Almost all Servs and Vlachs belong to the Christian Orthodox Church. The second largest group is the Crimean Roma (Moldavian gypsies, Chisinau people, Rüdari, Ursari; Lovari, Caldorari). They profess Islam. The smaller group represents Russian, Polish, German (Sinti), Latvian, northern Romanian, Chernobyl gypsies, and Luli (Central Asian gypsies). Among them are Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Christians (Zinevych, 2001). Living together at the same area, they do not always maintain neighborly relations.

Roma culture can be attributed to one of the most conservative – one that has rejected social innovations for centuries. The stereotypes of family relations among Roma negatively affect the process of social adaptation of Roma ethnic group and potentially contain a conflict with state systems and many social norms characteristic of the Ukrainian community. The gender roles of Roma women are interesting for our study. Despite the fact that the Roma have a purely patriarchal tradition, where the man is the head and the woman must obey him, the Roma woman must have masculine features in addition to feminine traits, because she must work and earn money and take care of the family's material well-being. The Roma are a fairly closed ethnic group and the shifts in their consciousness of female and male roles and relationships are changing rather slowly.

## **Discussion**

Among the studies of the Roma ethnic group, we note the works of such foreign and Ukrainian researchers as I.M. Botoş, R. Benninghaus, L. Cherenkova, E. Druts, J. Ficow, O. Gessler, L. Monogarova, V. Sanarova, S. Tokarev, V. Voskanian, V. Vladykina, T. Wentzel, which provide general characteristics of ethnic history, material and spiritual culture, life of the Roma. Despite considerable work, only in the late 1990s were some attempts made by Ukrainian researchers (O. Barannikov, O. Belikov, N. Belikova, V. Valiukhov, N. Zinevych, V. Zynych, etc.) to show their own vision of Roma history. There is a lack of thorough scientific research of the specifics of Roma family relations, and a lack of scientific works that study gender roles and stereotypes of the Roma ethnic group.

Today, the research on the problems of Roma communities does not pay much attention to women (with the exception of a few isolated projects to combat discrimination against women). It is generally believed that all Roma have the same problems. They are studied as a “homogeneous group” (regardless of their gender), which increases bias against “Roma” and does not take into account any gender needs, social and demographic diversity, etc.

Applying a gender approach will allow to reveal the peculiarities of Roma marital relations, explore the emotional, status functions of the family, and the personal rights of Roma women, her place in the structure of the modern family. This approach is based on gender socialization as a process of mastering the system of gender roles that meet the defined and inherent in this society rules and ideas about the behavior of males and females (Martseniuk, 2004).

The processes of gender-role socialization of men and women have many differences. Among the factors of gender-role socialization are such as: gender guidelines as a system of ideas about men and women; ethno-cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity; excellent means of upbringing the boys and the girls; specific types of work of each sex; differentiated male and female roles. In the process of socialization, there is a gradual assimilation of the individual gender stereotype. It acquires a personal meaning, embodying the gender program of all subsequent life, and becomes the conscious and subconscious motives for behavior. The detailed analysis of ethno-cultural mechanisms of constructing the women’s roles among the Roma shows the gradual assimilation of gender stereotypes and the mastery of appropriate patterns of behavior that affect all subsequent life.

The obtained results will allow implementing fully the current gender policy of the state on the way to building a democratic society. This will help to resolve the issues of regulation of interethnic relations between representatives of different ethnic communities in a multinational state. Roma are considered to be one of the most vulnerable categories of stigmatization (negative allocation of an individual (or social group) by society on a certain basis, accompanied by a set of stereotypical social reactions to the members of this social group). The conducted research allows us to state that Roma women in Ukraine are subject to double discrimination – on ethnic and gender grounds.

By ethnic discrimination, we understand the manifestations of Romaphobia as an acute form of social antipathy towards the Roma women. Romaphobia is manifested in intolerance, fear, aggression, condemnation of their lifestyle, social behavior, attempts to avoid the meetings, communication, physical and social contact, regardless of their age, social status, appearance, education, and occupation. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has adopted a recommendation calling for the first time for 47 member states to include Roma history in the school curriculum, which will help to raise awareness that they are an integral part of the national community. And it is an effective tool for combating hatred, discrimination, prejudice, and radicalization.

Gender discrimination means restricting the access of Roma women to socially significant resources, which prevents them from being economically independent of men, having the opportunity to choose a way of life, self-realization both in public (through education and labor market) and in the private sphere (through child-rearing).

## **Results**

The life of a Roma woman consists of several age stages, each of which determines her certain social status and influence in the family and community. Like every woman, a gypsy woman gradually acquires the basic social and age status of a child, adolescent, wife, and grandmother. In this way, she gradually passes from the object to the agent of socialization, from the object of ritual actions to their performer, from a person whose behavior is under constant social control to a person who has the authority of a moral censor of the behavior of others. Subject to the successful fulfillment of a number

of social roles inherent in each status (in particular, daughter, wife, mother, grandmother), a woman is recognized as a socially full-fledged person. The deviation from the established patterns causes certain social sanctions, where the gypsy court plays a significant role.

Gender socialization of Roma women, like girls of all other ethnic groups, begins at birth. At the first stage of socialization among children, there is no harassment in communication between boys and girls: they play together, roister. With the onset of puberty of girls, the childhood ends and a new period begins – girlhood. From this moment, the lives of adolescents are divided and run in parallel. First, at the subconscious level in everyday relationships with seniors, and later the basic stereotypes of the young Roma woman's self-consciousness are laid down through the purposeful role interactions – future social roles are programmed in the main spheres of her female self-realization (marital, maternal, and economic) (Afanasieva & Glebova, 2014).

The entry of a teenage girl into the Roma social environment is carried out through the assimilation of sexual roles and the culture of marital and family relationships. Due to this, the system of value-normative orientations of the Roma ethnos, which is inherited by the next generations, is realized and reproduced. Such conclusions can be reached by analyzing various documentary sources. For example, in the journalistic essay "Hey, Gypsy!" of V. Rodionov we find the following confirmation that a new stage in life begins with the growth of girls in gypsy families of Ukraine, Russia, America (Roma keep their own traditions regardless of where they live): "The girls live in a woman's world, the boys live in a man's one. For girls, such a transition is especially noticeable: yesterday there was almost complete will, and today there are a lot of restrictions that are manifested in clothing, appearance, behavior" (Rodionov, 2005).

These restrictions were related to the concept of "desecration", which occupies an important place in the worldview of the Gypsies, their ideology. Thanks to it, there was, fixed at the ontological level, a certain regulation of permitted and prohibited actions and deeds of women. Even during their girlhood, Roma women finally assimilate their inherent gender roles and prepare to embody them in later life. The analysis of ethnologists' observations suggests that the process of socialization of adolescent girls is associated with certain oppressions of personal freedom and an increase in personal responsibility for actions. Contrary to the legends about the romanticism of gypsy life, the personal life of girls is very virgin. Although the Roma girl was relatively free within her family and camp, even before marriage she went to work with her mother (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000). The mothers still bring and take girls from school. And it is the mother's responsibility to preserve her daughter's "virginity" and maiden's honor. If the girl is notorious, the family will be ashamed (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000).

There are many cases of non-completion of secondary education related to child marriage among the Roma population. In the Roma communities of Ukraine, such a phenomenon as early marriage is quite common. It is associated with the customary right to marry when young people fall in love, as sexual intercourse outside of marriage is not allowed. Therefore, the girls (as well as the boys) aged 12-13 are already forced to enter into a customary marriage, which the international community calls child (or early) marriage. The child (or early) marriage is a formal or informal union of two people when at least one of them has not yet reached the age of 18, because "...a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). If we take early motherhood as an indicator of child marriages, then the state statistics confirm this trend. According to birth statistics in 2011, 141 girls gave birth before the age of 15 (Martseniuk, 2016).

The materials of research sources allow to state that the teenage pregnancy becomes an irreversible obstacle on the way to realization of all rights of the Roma woman. Early pregnancy is a sign of poverty and the little girl's future is at risk. The lack of education and often impaired health dooms her to live in poverty and lawlessness. The Roma girl who turns into an "incubator" for giving birth to children leaves school and 90% will never return. The early marriages and pregnancies are becoming an obstacle not only for Roma girls. A certain proportion of boys, as future parents, also stop their education in order to work in low-paid jobs to provide for their future family (Myroniuk, 2015).

According to statistics, 73% of Roma boys and 75% of Roma girls attend primary school (ages 6-10), 65% of boys and only 59% of girls continue their education in high school (ages 11-15), 240 out of 300 women surveyed have incomplete secondary education and in 90 cases this was due to their early marriage (Gender-responsive evaluation of the implementation of the "Strategy for the Protection and Integration of the Roma National Minority into Ukrainian Society until 2020", 2019).

The parents prefer to provide education for boys, as girls are "preparing" for marriage. Even if the girls receive secondary education and do not marry early, their chances of choosing further education and career remain low due to the poverty of families who are unable to provide their daughters with university education.

The marital age is also greatly influenced by religious factors. For Roma who profess Islamic religion, early marriage is typical. "The early gypsy marriages are explained by the following considerations: the father preferred to arrange his daughter to be married so as not to worry about the family's reputation. The marriage among Roma was arranged not by the will of young people, but by the decision of their parents. Often the girl learned about the decision of her destiny last and she understood that it was only a simple formality when had been asked her consent" (Kryzhanivska, 1962).

Confirmation of this is the study of N.M. Mostovsky, who noted that: ...Many Gypsies got married quite early: the elders were afraid that the youth would "go wild and spoil". In addition, a younger girl is more accustomed to the man's family. The average age of newlyweds is 15-17 years, but it is not uncommon for even earlier marriages, sometimes in 11-12 years" (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000). There are also cases when children are married by parents (Islamic) almost from birth. Crimean Roma still pay a dowry for the bride. The size of the dowry depends on many components: the wealth of the groom's parents, the age and health of the bride, her dexterity. The same Roma who convert oppose early marriages today. When choosing a groom, the opinion of the parents is crucial. Although the girl has the right to refuse three times or to make a transparent allusion to the desired candidacy, the fourth time her opinion will no longer be taken into account (Rodionov, 2005). Many Roma families remove girls from school because of poverty so that the girls can work or care for younger family members while the parents are working (Decree of the President of Ukraine "On the Strategy for the Protection and Integration of the Roma National Minority into Ukrainian Society until 2020", 2013).

Marriage is an important stage in the life of a Roma woman. Because only a married woman (a young woman) could realize her gender mission and achieve recognition as a socially full-fledged person. Traditionally, motherhood itself determines the social status of a gypsy woman, and in her environment, she is not perceived as an established personality until she gives birth to a child. And today motherhood in most Roma women is compared to the social or professional achievement of a man, because only after the birth of the first child (especially if it is a boy) she became a full member of the family, and the more a woman realized herself as a mother, the more important her status becomes in Roma society (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000). That is why nomadic Gypsy families

used to be so large. The researchers consider that the causes of early marriages among Roma are in fairly common characteristics such as lack of sex education, knowledge of family planning, lack of access to contraception, low level of education, poverty, and poor living conditions, especially in compact Roma areas. It is the inviolability of the “tradition” of Roma communities that allows Roma girls to consider early marriage as a normal phenomenon. After all, in middle adolescence, it is almost impossible to perceive critically and oppose the “tradition of the genus”. There is a strict framework for such upbringing, sanctions for the slightest deviation from the established patterns of the tribal gypsy court (“kris”). It is reflected in Gypsy proverbs. The folk wisdom says: “E bori trubul te terdel kai koverchi”, which means – “The bride must always keep her feet on the ground”; “E zhiuvli kana nai mardi, nai lashchii”, translated as – “The unbeaten wife is bad” (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000).

One such manifestation of “traditional” discrimination against young women in Roma family is the requirement of complete obedience to the husband’s family. The father-in-law should not have seen the daughter-in-law asleep, she got up first and went to bed last. From the very morning, she had to keep a towel ready in order to pour water from a jug into the hands of her father-in-law and husband. The young wife was considered unclean; she had to comply with many prohibitions in communication with others. Until recently, she had no right to go in front of her husband and next to him, she could not shake his hand. In addition, bypassing the person sitting, the gypsy woman had to face him and apologize. On the part of a woman, it was considered rude to pass in front of a man, if you can go round his back, and stand with your back to the man, if he is sitting (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000). And nowadays many gypsy women follow this custom.

The specifics of gender stereotypes in Roma families can be learned from the recent total dominance of the division of labor. In a traditional gypsy family, a woman was responsible for most of the family’s worries and responsibilities, while a man could work nowhere. Until recently, it was common for the younger daughter-in-law to be overburdened with housework, and more prestigious earnings from the craft of divination have traditionally been the activity of more mature and “status” women in the family. The researchers also note the trends in the masculinization of Roma woman. Since the men’s earnings were mostly seasonal, a woman generated a stable income for the family. To do this, she spent a part of her life outside the camp, had to be brave, agile, had to stand up for herself (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000).

The next age in the life of a gypsy woman is old age. It should be noted that older women had a special place in the gender and age stratification of the family and community. Due to the partial reduction of physical capabilities, the range of their economic responsibilities is gradually narrowing (mainly, cooking and caring for grandchildren), but the influence in economic and family decisions is growing. The older a woman is, the more respectable she becomes. Men talked to the old gypsy woman, she could sit with them on holidays (which young women could not afford). Men did not do anything without consulting the oldest woman, her opinion was considered important for both the family and the camp as a whole. Only older women gained special authority in the family, received the status of a moral censor of the behavior of other members (Demeter, Bessonov, & Kutenkov, 2000).

The analysis of ethnographic essays, ethnographic and sociological research, journalistic publications, and media interviews in recent years show that many traditional rites, rules, genus laws in Roma ethnic groups are a part of the gender stereotype that has a huge impact on the further socialization of Roma woman. And today the image of the Roma woman is a complex combination of archaic ideas, based on the hierarchical opposition of masculinity and feminine. In terms of quality and structure, the Gypsy ethno-cultural stereotype of femininity is largely correlated with the patriarchal

canon and mental conservatism. The covert and overt discrimination against Roma women restricts their rights, degrades their identity, and makes women feel inferior.

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

Roma women, like all Roma communities, face alienation in all its aspects. They have limited opportunities to implement the basic right – to choose another future. This is especially true for more disadvantaged and traditional communities, where women do not have the right to choose their reproductive health and family planning. The girls drop out of school because of early marriages and have limited opportunities to fill education gaps later in life. This reduces any chances of getting out of poverty, getting a job and earning an income.

Therefore, it is necessary to help young Roma girls, for whom it is unusual to prioritize a career, to show the experience of successful women. The most important thing is to teach them how to change their lives, give them a chance and lend a helping hand. The main thing should be the desire of Roma women themselves to coexist normally with the society of the country where they live.

In order for children to receive an education, it is necessary that the parents also have an education, at least secondary. It is important to help some children up to a certain age, because everyone has different starting positions. The practice shows that those whose standard of living was better than their same age are more successful. There are serious threats to further reduce an access for Roma women and men to the free health care as a result of the reform of primary health care and the new approach to the remuneration of family doctors. Roma who do not have personal documents will not be entitled to receive their services. This issue has been outlined by other stakeholders. For example, the Ministry of Social Policy sent a letter to the Ministry of Health about the need to address this new problem.

It is clear that the desire for change must be on both sides. The society must realize that Roma are the same citizens as the members of other ethnic groups. And the state must make every effort to provide them with social guarantees, education that would take into account the peculiarities of Roma culture and history, and finally integrate Roma into professional activities in society.

The institute of Roma mediator has been established in Ukraine. Mediation is an activity for the benefit of the state and the Roma community at the same time. Such work helps the state to realize the duty of social security of its citizens, and to realize the right of the Roma community to a dignified life in their country. The work of mediators is extremely difficult, as they serve as a bridge between the Roma community and the state apparatus. However, it should be understood that it is the mediators who help the state, not the state helps them (Roma Mediation: Ukrainian Success Stories, 2019).

The launched and developed over the last 10 years by the Roma Women's Foundation "Chiricli" with the support of various donors, the Institute of Roma Mediators is already a well-functioning and well-established tool for approaching Roma communities. It helps to address the social assistance, housing, women's access to health care, schooling, conflicts and their prevention, and more. The Roma mediators were cited as an example of an effective practical approach by all institutions from different sectors at the local, regional, or central level.

Involving the Roma mediators is one of the best practices for working towards gender equality. There were 2/3 Roma women of the 54 mediators trained at the Roma Women's Foundation "Chiricli" under the Joint Program of the Council of Europe and the European Commission "ROMED" in 2015. In the external evaluation of ROMED, a network of mediators led by the Roma Women's Foundation "Chiricli", was a key participant in advocating at the national level the importance of involving European best practices of including the gender issue in Roma strategy. This report provides the

impressive data on the benefits of Roma mediators in the process of involving Roma women and girls in integration activities for enhanced access to the various services (Gender-responsive evaluation of the implementation of the “Strategy for the Protection and Integration of the Roma National Minority into Ukrainian Society until 2020”, 2019). According to the Chiricli report:

During the six months from October 2015 to March 2016, a network of 40 mediators provided services to 34,683 Roma, including 7,144 families, of which 11,125 were women, 7,890 were men and 15,668 were children. Every month, mediators provide services approximately to 200-300 Roma who are internally displaced persons. Among the most popular services: assistance in applying for identity documents and residence registration; appeal to the court; access to the local public financial assistance and services; information on social protection and fundamental rights; assistance with social housing and employment; educational support to improve the level of school education; access to diagnostics and hospitals (Ibid.).

The priority measures to overcome destructive gender stereotypes of family roles of modern Roma women and their further successful socialization in society should include the measures to support, protect, and promote gender equality in Roma communities and society as a whole. In particular, it is the elimination of the practice of early marriages, interaction with the local population, employment opportunities, access to education and medical services, relations with law enforcement officials, improvement of living conditions, systematic informational and educational work to prevent domestic violence and abuse in family.

The important role in this process is given to the media, which should disseminate information about the history and culture of Roma, about prominent figures of science and art, musicians, writers, the military, and doctors who had Gypsy roots. It is important to prevent any form of discrimination in the media for strict observance of human rights. The media should cover sensitive topics of Roma life correctly: nationality should not be emphasized in reports of crimes or offenses; not to use and learn to recognize hate speech, because the words of hatred can lead to aggressive actions in real life; not to use discriminatory generalizations that impose certain ideas about a person, event or phenomenon; avoid spreading any xenophobic expressions to whomever they belong. Such comments should not be used for sensationalism and more attention to the material; to present a broader context about the people or situations in the material, etc. (Memo for media representatives on coverage of national minorities topics in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine, 2020).

In order to realize the equal rights of women in different spheres of life, it is expedient to unite the efforts of state structures and public organizations, especially women’s. There is a need for an active explanatory work of Roma public organizations in Roma communities in the direction of increasing the participation of Roma in decision-making concerning their community, the formation of a tolerant attitude towards Roma in society, raising their legal awareness. It is advisable to introduce women’s groups to empower young Roma women who face numerous forms of discrimination. They should be provided with employment assistance, education, and qualification assistance in starting their own small business. This will help to prepare Roma girls for life and work, increase their self-esteem and status in the family and community.

Only daily awareness can lead to systemic changes in rethinking the cultural norms and gender values among the Roma community. In our opinion, only a long-term preventive and educational program will help Roma women to integrate fully into Ukrainian society.

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