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Conjugality in the Olonets province in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some inferences drawn from information taken from the registers of births, deaths and marriages

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The region

In the nineteenth century, the Olonets province was one of the northern provinces of Russia covering approximately 130 thousand sq. km not counting rivers and lakes.[1] At that time it was the fourth largest province in European Russia after the provinces of Archangel, Vologda and Perm. The Olonets province was located in the north of the Russian empire between 60°21' and 65°16' N and 29°42' and 41°57' E. Its latitude corresponds with that of Norway and Sweden. The Olonets province adjoined the provinces of Archangel, Vologda, Novgorod and St Petersburg and the Great Principality of Finland.

Southern areas of this province had formed part of the Old Russian State since as early as the ninth to eleventh centuries. The town of Olonets, one of the colonization outposts on the northern boundary of the state, was first mentioned in the year 1137. The Olonets territories were owned by Great Novgorod until the 1570s. The interests of the Novgorod Republic, and later those of the Moscow state, had clashed in the province with those of Sweden. These territories passed from hand to hand until early in the eighteenth century when, as one of the consequences of Peter the Great having won the Northern War, they were made part of the Russian empire. It was Peter I who began to construct the northern Russian shipbuilding yards, ironworks and mines. The comparatively short period of industrial development in this province was a result of his innovations. The economy of the Olonets province was later greatly influenced by the new Russian capital of St Petersburg.

The administrative and territorial status of the area was changed more than once until the early nineteenth century, when Emperor Alexander I ordered

[1] Register of the Olonets province for 1913 (Petrozavodsk 1913) 2.

the restoration of the rights of the Olonets province. It then had 7 *uezds* (districts) and the city of Petrozavodsk was declared its capital.

The population of the province was about 207,000 according to the governor.[2] Just before the First World War this had risen to about 450,000.[3] However, despite the significant growth in population, the Olonets province had the lowest but one population density in European Russia for the whole of the nineteenth century with 2 to 3 people per sq. km. The population density in the Tambov and Yaroslavl provinces, which are also included in this study, was ten times greater. The majority of the population of the province were Russians, around 70%, but in some *uezds*, for instance in Olonets and Petrozavodsk *uezds*, there were many Karelians, Finns and Vepsians and about 1% other nationalities.

About 98% of the inhabitants of the province were Orthodox Christians. By the end of the nineteenth century 297 church parishes and 15 monasteries, nunneries and *pustyns* (Orthodox monasteries with particularly rigid rules) had been founded on the territory of the province. The northern Russian territories have always been a refuge for dissenters (*raskolniks*).

The territory was predominantly hilly and overgrown with forests. Soils were rather poor for growing crops. Some grain was grown but the harvest was not sufficient to feed the population except in the Kargopol *uezd*, which was the only district in the province to produce enough grain to feed its inhabitants throughout the year until the next harvest. Approximately 1/7 of the area of the province was covered by rivers, lakes and small islands. Travel and transport was generally by water with only two main roads being fit for traffic. One of these went to Petrozavodsk and the other from Lodeinoye Pole to Petrozavodsk. The railway from Vologda to Archangel was not constructed until late in the nineteenth century.

The climate was generally cold and humid with very cold winters which lasted six and a half months. December was the time for hard frosts, and blizzards alternating with periods of thaw were quite common. In winter inhabitants of the province could often admire the Northern lights. Spring came in April but often the snow did not melt until the middle of May. Frosts occurring as late as June or July were a danger to crops. The warmest time was between mid June and July. Autumn lasted for at least two months and was accompanied by frequent fog, drizzle, wind and snow.[4]

As has been mentioned above, farming in this province was not well developed but abundant forests and rich sources of minerals afforded good prospects for the development of some branches of the economy, for instance,

[2] RGIA. F. 1281 Op. 4. D.90: Reports of the Olonets governor for the years 1804–1810: 30.
[3] RGIA. F. 1284 Op. 194. D.12: Reports of the Olonets governor for 1913: 2.
[4] K. Petrov, Brief description of the Olonets province (Petrozavodsk 1881) 10.

forestry and mining. In the late nineteenth century there were about 400 industrial enterprises in the province employing approximately 3,000 workers. Most of these were government owned and founded as long ago as the eighteenth century, such as the Alexandrovsky steel works in Petrozavodsk and ironworks in Petrozavodsk and Povenets *uezds*. The province exported wood, furs, fish and building materials (granite, marble, limestone).

Early in the twentieth century about 12,000 people worked in cottage industries.[5] Many people left their homes and went to work elsewhere, most often to St Petersburg, and some were employed in servicing the system of canals (*Mariinskaya* system).

There were 7 *uezd* towns and about 5,000 settlements or villages in the province. Villages were predominantly very small, no greater than 10 homesteads.[6] The urban population amounted to about 7% of the total population with the largest town being Petrozavodsk which had a population of 14,860 in 1912. Some of the *uezd* towns were very small with populations of 1,000–2,000 (Povenets, Pudozh, Kargopol).

In the late 1890s there were 30 doctors, 9 hospitals and 4 emergency clinics in the area.[7] Education in the province was given in two secondary schools, two seminaries and 566 primary schools, including parish church schools, with a total of 20,446 pupils.[8]

The Olonets province was a backward, sparsely populated, outlying territory of the empire, with a low level of social and economic development and on the edge of the political and cultural life of the nation. Very few significant events occurred in the province during the nineteenth century, with the exception of the liberal reforms of 1860–70 which brought considerable changes to the social status of peasants, the conditions of military service, the local self-management system and legal procedures.

The demography (marriage)

Documents recording the population statistics (registers of births, deaths and marriages, church registers and others) kept in the National Archives of the Republic of Karelia (NARK), the State Archives of the Vologda region, the Central State Historic Archives of St Petersburg and the State Archives of the Archangel region have been used for this study.

The study of factors affecting demography in the Olonets province carried out within the framework of this project commenced far later than similar

[5] Proceedings of local committees concerning the needs of the agricultural industry in the Olonets province (St Petersburg 1903) 106.
[6] Military statistical survey of the St Peterburg military district. Drawn up at the headquarters of Guard troops and St Petersburg military district (St Petersburg 1884) 84.
[7] RGIA. F. 1263. Op. 2. D. 5392. St. 743: 258v–259.
[8] RGIA. F. 1263. Op. 2. D. 5392. St. 743: 262.

studies undertaken by other participants in the project. Therefore, comparable results and calculated values of factors similar to those already published in the collection of papers *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional demographic development in a comparative perspective 1880-1917* are only just available. The cohort method, the procedure which is clearest and gives the best results when investigating natural population movements, was originally chosen as the method for studying demographic processes in the province. Birth cohorts were formed and analysed for the year 1810 and 20-year periods from then on.

Unfortunately, cohort analysis is a very labour-intensive and costly research strategy and it is impossible to apply this to the entire collection of documents. It is quite evident that when forming birth cohorts, researchers take an artificial sample from the entire set of data. It is also possible that searching the cohorts for information about marriages might bring no satisfactory results. It is difficult for Russian historians to know to what extent the information kept in the Netherlands is correct and comprehensive, but experience with Russian documents has shown that it is possible that a large amount of data could be missing.

The work of Dutch historians[9] showed that in four cohorts for the city of Groningen the number of men who were married in the same town was 28 to 30 in each cohort, whereas the corresponding number of women was 36 to 43, and in the rural areas, where 5 – 6 settlements were considered with a total population included in the cohorts of about 600 – 700 people in each cohort, the number of men who were married in the same rural area was 91 – 167, whereas the corresponding number of women was 143 – 209.

In carrying out cohort analysis, not only is an artificial sample taken but account must be taken of the fact that natural sampling has also taken place since only a certain amount of the data has been preserved. Therefore, indicators obtained by cohort analysis can better be termed estimates of indicators for the entire universal set and it is necessary to calculate the sampling error inherent in the method and determine confidence intervals, as is usual in statistical work. This will provide an answer to the question of how far the tendencies found by the researchers are actually random.

Applying this concept to Russian registers of births, deaths and marriages turned out to be difficult and very labour-intensive because it was practically impossible to find a complete set of nineteenth-century registers preserved for any one parish. For instance, E.G. Tverdyukova of St Petersburg University found that it was not possible in the Novgorod region because the registers of

[9] P. Kooij and A. Mennens-van Zeijst, 'Demographic behaviour in the Groningen clay area. The results of cohort analysis', in: P. Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet. Dutch and Russian regional demographic development in a comparative perspective 1880-1917* (Groningen/Wageningen 1998) 189-201, 190.

births, deaths and marriages, which had survived wars and occupation by the Germans, were destroyed after the last war. The same is true for the Pskov province. The Olonets province has fared somewhat better in this respect than other provinces in northern Russia. Historians taking part in this project who set out to find parish documents preserved in the Yaroslavl and Tambov provinces met with the same problems.[10] For this research they selected the parish of Malye Pupki in the Tambov province and two parishes in the Yaroslavl province – Velikoye and Vyatskoye.

This paper deals only with matters related to conjugality in rural parishes. Information obtained by Russian historians concerning the average age at marriage is shown in the work referred to.[11]

There is hardly any pattern detectable in the information for the Tambov parish. The average age of men at marriage increased steadily at first, then decreased and then increased again, while the age at which women married decreased for three generations but then increased for the cohort of 1870–1871.[12] There does appear to be a tendency to increase in the two Yaroslavl parishes but the number of people who married, as found by the researchers, was surprisingly small, with only 20 people marrying in 8 cohorts and in one case the number was as low as 6.[13]

When using the available Russian data, inferences about the amount of information actually preserved must be drawn. It is necessary to use the mathematical and statistical procedures appropriate for dealing with small samples to calculate the sampling error. Unfortunately, this part of the work is not yet finished.

Table 1 Age at first mariage in Tuksinsky parish (Olonets province), cohorts 1810-1870

	Men				Women			
Cohort	Average age	N	Standard declines	Standard error	Average age	N	Standard declines	Standard error
1810	27.75	12	6.54	1.89	21.55	11	4.50	1.35
1830	26.88	16	4.70	1.18	20.35	17	2.94	0.71
1850	25.39	18	3.24	0.76	21.78	9	4.94	1.65
1870	25.20	20	4.63	1.03	21.40	15	2.82	0.72

[10] Y. Mizis and V. Orlova, 'Sources and methodology for cohort analysis. The case of Malye Pupki, Tambov region', and A. Danilov and N. Obnorskaya, 'Sources for research on demographic behaviour in the Yaroslavl region in the nineteenth century', both in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*.

[11] P. Kooij, 'Dutch and Russian regions compared. Some results of cohort analysis', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 224-225.

[12] V. Dyatchkov, V. Kanitschev, Y. Mizis, V. Orlova, L. Protasov and S. Protasov, 'Cohort analysis of Malye Pupky's population: some preliminary results', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 146.

[13] S. Golubeva, 'Age and patterns of marriage of Russian farmers in the Upper-Volga region', in: Kooij (ed.), *Where the twain meet*, 170-171.

Calculation of the sampling error for the Tuksinsky parish in the Olonets province can be given as an example (Tables 1 and 2). The small sample method must also be used for the Tuksinsky parish, although in contrast to the Tambov parish it was possible to discern some tendency to decrease in the age of men at marriage. However, it is not possible to say anything definite about the age of women at marriage.

Table 2 Age at first marriage in Tuksinsky parish (Olonets province): confidence intervals, cohorts 1810-1870

Cohort	Men		Women	
	Probability 68%	Probability 95%	Probability 68%	Probability 95%
1810	(25.86-29.64)	(23.60-31.90)	(20.20-22.90)	(18.53-24.57)
1830	(25.70-28.05)	(24.37-29.38)	(19.64-21.06)	(18.84-21.86)
1850	(24.63-26.15)	(23.77-27.00)	(20.13-23.43)	(17.98-25.58)
1870	(24.17-26.23)	(23.03-27.37)	(20.68-22.12)	(19.84-22.96)

When information from values of sampling errors and confidence intervals is analysed the results show that the confidence intervals at the 68% and 95% reliability levels overlap so that there is no certainty that conclusions drawn will be reliable. For instance, for men from the cohort of the year 1810 the confidence interval at the 68% reliability level is (25.9 – 29.6) and for the cohort of the year 1870 it is (24.2 – 26.3). These intervals intersect and it would be incorrect to say that the general mean for the year 1810 is greater than the general mean for the year 1870. The results are much worse for other cohorts and higher reliability levels.

Results

It is hoped that the above discussion will have clarified the situation in the Tambov and Yaroslavl parishes. Conclusions based on 1 or 2 cohorts of 120 people are certainly unfounded. When having to deal with small samples researchers occasionally obtain results which have no rational explanation. The number of cohorts must be several times greater than this if reliable conclusions are to be drawn, but unfortunately this is not possible, either because there is no data or because, as in this case, the work would be too labour-intensive. Therefore the method used for the research has to be changed.

When studying conjugality in the Tuksinsky parish, another method of forming birth cohorts allowed the number of cases studied to be significantly increased. The registers of births, deaths and marriages not only gave the dates on which the marriages took place but also the ages of the brides and bridegrooms. This allowed the year of birth of the people marrying to be calculated with only a few possible errors and these married people could then be grouped according to the results.

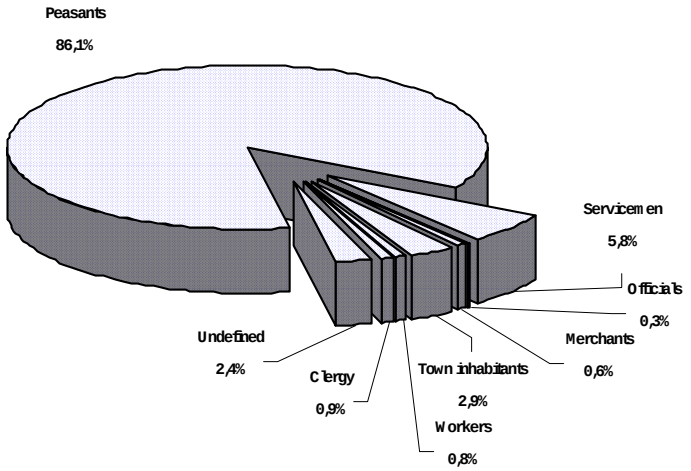
For instance, a group of men born between 1806 and 1815 and who married, as recorded in the registers of births, deaths and marriages, can be singled out. The ten-year interval between 1806 and 1815 was taken in order to have a sufficiently large number of observations. The average age at marriage for this group could then be calculated. Similar indicators were obtained for other groups in subsequent ten-year periods. The results for the Tuksinsky parish are shown in Table 3.

When Tables 3 and 4 are studied it is clear that the slight tendency towards a decrease in the age at which men married as seen in Table 1 for cohorts from the years 1810, 1830, 1850 and 1870 is still visible in the cohorts from the years 1806–1815, 1826–1835, 1846–1855 and 1866-1875. However, sampling errors in Table 3 are essentially less, because of the greater number of observations, and the conclusions are much more reliable.

Table 3 Age at first marriage of men in Tuksinsky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	27.50	0.71	68
1816-1825	26.36	0.41	133
1826-1835	25.97	0.43	133
1836-1845	26.29	0.47	138
1846-1855	25.95	0.38	130
1856-1865	25.32	0.35	126
1866-1875	25.42	0.30	123

Figure 1 The social structure of rural parishes in the Olonets district (according to parish register data, 1793-1905)



Most of the population of the region investigated were peasants with only a minority of other categories of inhabitants (Figure 1).

Therefore, it would be reasonable to carry out most of the research on the state-owned villages, although not even the population of these villages was totally uniform. There were middle-class people such as merchants, priests, and military among the village inhabitants. Some categories of the population must be investigated separately as their demographic characteristics could significantly influence general indicators and distort the pattern obtained for state-owned peasants.

Perhaps the most significant group of those mentioned above was the military. This group included both soldiers in active service and retired men who had served their term in the army. Two periods will be considered, firstly 1843 to 1873, that is before the military reform of 1874 which implemented general conscription, and 1874 to 1905, the post-reform period.

Table 4 Age at marriage of 'military bridegrooms' in Tuksinsky parish (Olonets province), married 1843-1905

Years of weddings	Average age	Standard error	N
1843-1873	35.33	2.87	6
1874-1905	27.28	0.37	64

In the first period the average age of the military bridegroom was 35.33 years. After the year 1874 this decreased to 27.28 years (detailed information is given in Table 4). These figures are clearly for a specific group of men who show specific conjugal behaviour.

Calculations have also been made for people specified in the registers of births, deaths and marriages as peasants and information for these people is shown in Table 5. It would appear that the data collected in this way is actually representative of the process of a decrease in the bridegroom's age during the whole of the nineteenth century in the Tuksinsky parish under study. It would, of course, be unreasonable to draw final conclusions on the basis of information from just one parish.

Table 5 Age at first marriage of male state-owned peasants in Tuksinsky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	26.69	0.91	47
1816-1825	26.17	0.40	109
1826-1835	25.54	0.41	113
1836-1845	25.57	0.46	122
1846-1855	25.56	0.42	111
1856-1865	24.98	0.40	100
1866-1875	25.08	0.36	93

Information has now been collected about the age of men at marriage in four rural parishes – Kotkozersky, Loyansky, Megregsky and Tuksinsky – in the Olonets province during the whole of the nineteenth century. It is clear that combining the information for these four parishes greatly increases the number of observations. The combined information on the age of bridegrooms – state-owned peasants born between 1806 and 1815 and in subsequent decades – is shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Age at marriage of male state-owned peasants in 4 rural parishes in Olonets province, born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	26.55	0.39	233
1816-1825	26.00	0.22	403
1826-1835	25.48	0.25	362
1836-1845	24.38	0.14	449
1846-1855	24.93	0.21	416
1856-1865	24.62	0.19	384
1866-1875	24.66	0.17	383

The data confirms the general tendency, already mentioned above, of a decrease in the average age of men at marriage but it also reveals a new, just discernible pattern that the minimum age of bridegrooms occurred not at the end of the century but in the cohort of 1836–1845, and that after that there was a slight increase in the age at marriage or at least a stabilization. This tendency can be traced with certainty in two parishes – Megregsky and Loyansky. The data are shown in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7 Age at marriage of male state-owned peasants in Megregsky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	28.21	1.57	31
1816-1825	26.67	0.59	48
1826-1835	26.41	0.48	58
1836-1845	24.42	0.38	62
1846-1855	24.62	0.64	43
1856-1865	26.21	0.68	52
1866-1875	26.51	0.52	52

It is possible that this trend was caused by the peasant reforms of the 1860s, which led to the abolishment of the system of serfdom. The generation of men born in the period 1836–1845 appeared on the marriage market on the eve of the reform and in the first few years after this took place in 1866 in the state-owned villages. Peasants in the midst of the new post-reform circumstances (the generation of 1846–1855) had other things to consider than get-

ting married early so that there was a general increase in the average age of men at marriage; later on this average age stabilized or decreased. This situation is clearly seen in the Kotkozersky parish (Table 9).

Table 8 Age at marriage of male state-owned peasants in Loyansky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806–1815	28.14	0.80	25
1816–1825	24.88	0.38	80
1826–1835	23.81	0.42	52
1836–1845	22.96	0.32	93
1846–1855	23.56	0.31	95
1856–1865	23.38	0.28	80
1866–1875	24.26	0.34	79

Table 9 Age at marriage of male state-owned peasants in Kotkozersky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1816–1825	26.37	0.38	163
1826–1835	25.69	0.50	137
1836–1845	24.24	0.29	172
1846–1855	25.36	0.35	167
1856–1865	24.49	0.29	152
1866–1875	24.02	0.24	159

Table 10 Age at marriage of female state-owned peasants in Tuksinsky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806–1815	22.56	0.76	49
1816–1825	22.33	0.32	98
1826–1835	21.90	0.31	127
1836–1845	22.32	0.40	114
1846–1855	23.20	0.46	118
1856–1865	22.69	0.37	128
1866–1875	23.80	0.31	124

What can be said about the age of the brides? It can be seen from table 10 that there were no significant tendencies to change in the brides' age in the Tuksinsky parish. The age first decreased down to a minimum in the years 1826–1835, then increased, then decreased once more and the process was then repeated. No patterns were discerned for brides in the Megregsky, Loyansky and Kotkozersky parishes (Tables 11, 12 and 13), not even when the data for all the parishes was combined (Tables 14 and 15).

Table 11 Age at marriage of female state-owned peasants in Megregsky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	23.26	0.91	33
1816-1825	23.26	0.59	41
1826-1835	24.81	0.55	70
1836-1845	22.53	0.41	56
1846-1855	22.96	0.45	54
1856-1865	22.90	0.47	55
1866-1875	23.84	0.39	65

Table 12 Age at marriage of female state-owned peasants in Loyansky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	24.81	1.16	13
1816-1825	22.61	0.32	71
1826-1835	21.73	0.35	79
1836-1845	22.13	0.38	98
1846-1855	20.98	0.33	98
1856-1865	20.58	0.27	122
1866-1875	20.86	0.27	103

Table 13 Age at marriage of female state-owned peasants in Kotkozersky parish (Olonets province), born 1806-1875

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	22.26	0.37	130
1816-1825	23.73	0.32	167
1826-1835	23.78	0.35	185
1836-1845	22.49	0.32	181
1846-1855	22.49	0.27	210
1856-1865	22.39	0.22	220
1866-1875	21.53	0.20	215

Table 14 Age at marriage of female state-owned peasants (born 1806-1875) in 4 rural parishes in the Olonets

Years of birth	Average age	Standard error	N
1806-1815	22.62	0.31	225
1816-1825	23.10	0.19	377
1826-1835	23.07	0.20	451
1836-1845	22.38	0.19	459
1846-1855	22.41	0.19	480
1856-1865	22.10	0.15	525
1866-1875	22.00	0.14	507

Table 15 Comparison of the age at marriage of female state-owned peasants (born 1806-1875) in 4 rural parishes in the Olonets province

Years of birth	Megregsky parish	Tuksinsky parish	Loyansky parish	Kotkozersky parish	4 Rural parishes
1806-1815	23.26	22.56	24.81	22.26	22.62
1816-1825	23.26	22.33	22.61	23.73	23.10
1826-1835	24.81	21.90	21.73	23.78	23.07
1836-1845	22.53	22.32	22.13	22.49	22.38
1846-1855	22.96	23.20	20.98	22.49	22.41
1856-1865	22.90	22.69	20.58	22.39	22.10
1866-1875	23.84	23.80	20.86	21.53	22.00

Other methods of analysing the age at which people married were also used. The average age of brides and bridegrooms from various social groups who married for the first time in the period 1897–1905 was considered. This period was chosen because the relevant information is available for 11 parishes (Tables 16 and 17). The average age of peasant bridegrooms from a group of 1,162 men who married during this period was 25.0 years and of peasant brides from a group of 1,300 women 21.7 years.

Table 16 Age at first marriage of men in the Olonets province, married 1897-1905

11 Rural parishes of the Province of Olonets			
Inhabitants categories and districts	Average age	Standard error	N
All inhabitants	25.51	0.11	1,492
Servicemen	27.55	0.22	221
Peasants	24.97	0.13	1,162
Town inhabitants	28.79	1.22	31
Peasants in separate parishes			
Loyansky	23.58	0.35	78
Megregsky	26.58	0.64	61
Tuksinsky	25.03	0.35	101
Vedlozersky	25.02	0.39	138
Verhovsky	25.73	0.61	77
Vidlitsky	24.46	0.32	140
Kotkozersky	24.28	0.22	164
Obzhansky	24.03	0.52	49
Sambatuksky	25.34	0.51	77
Tulomozersky	24.43	0.39	153
Urgilsky	26.54	0.98	35

It must be noted here that the age at marriage differed significantly for bridegrooms from the various social groups. Middle-class men and military men were much older than peasants when they married, 27.5 and 28.8 years respectively, compared with the average age of peasant bridegrooms of 25 years. In the same period girls from families of retired military men married somewhat earlier than peasant girls, 20.8 and 21.7 years respectively, but no

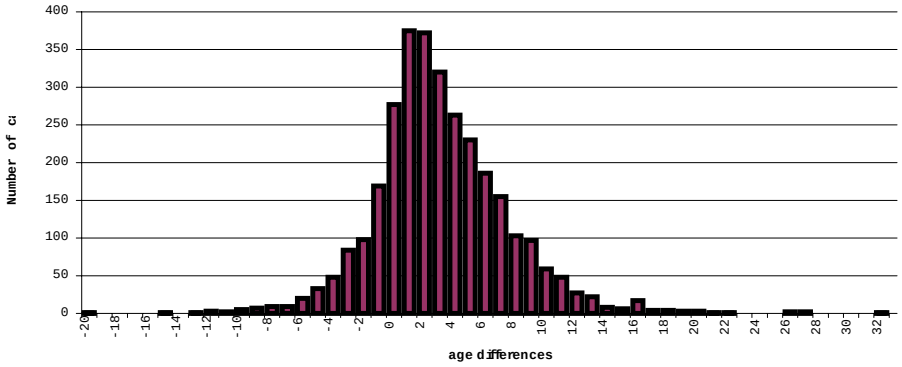
reliable conclusion concerning the average age of middle-class brides can be drawn here because the number of observations, only 17, is too small.

Table 17 Age at first marriage of women in the Olonets province, married 1897-1900

Parishes	Average age	Standard error	N
All 11 rural parishes	21.83	0.09	1,459
Loyansky	20.88	0.24	103
Megregsky	22.87	0.43	67
Tuksinsky	22.40	0.34	120
Vedlozersky	22.14	0.36	168
Verhovsky	21.82	0.31	95
Vidlitsky	21.65	0.23	181
Kotkozersky	21.40	0.20	214
Obzhansky	21.45	0.33	62
Sambatuksky	21.97	0.32	93
Tulomozersky	20.82	0.22	182
Urgilsky	22.98	0.40	44

It should be noted that in different parishes which had much in common with each other in their social structure and in the level of social and economic development the average age at which peasants married differed significantly, sometimes by two or three years. This confirms the view that it would be highly unreasonable to draw general conclusions based on the data from an individual parish.

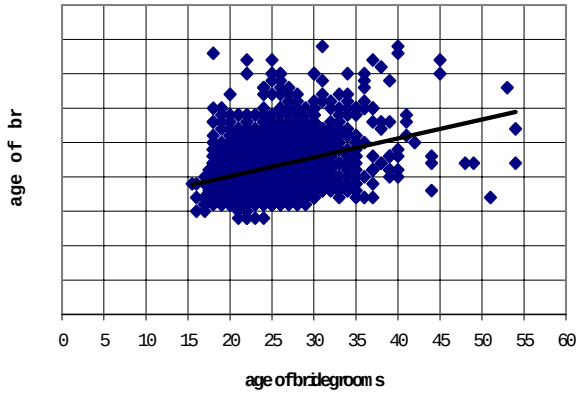
Figure 2 Distribution of age differences between brides and bridegrooms (peasants, first married 1793-1905)



It is of great interest to analyse the age difference between brides and bridegrooms. Figure 3 shows the ages of peasants who married for the first time in the period 1807–1905. The bridegroom's ages are shown on the X axis and

the bride's ages on the Y axis. The conclusion can be drawn from the graph that there is practically no correlation between the ages mentioned above (linear correlation coefficient is 0.36, determination coefficient is 13%). The relationship is plotted (regression equation) as a bold slanting line on the graph. If the coordinate angle 1-3 is bisected the set of points located above it corresponds to couples where the bride was older than the bridegroom, there were 13.4% of such cases, in 9.3% of the marriages the bride and the bridegroom were the same age, and in 77.3% of the marriages the bridegroom was older than the bride. On average, bridegrooms were 3.35 years older than brides. The distribution of the age difference is shown in figure 3.

Figure 3 Age of bridegrooms and brides (first marriages only), 1807-1905



Reliability

In this way sufficiently reliable data of the age at marriage in the Olonets province in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were obtained. This data shows that peasants married comparatively late during the whole of the nineteenth century, but there is some evidence that there was a tendency for the age of men at marriage to decrease. To a certain extent changes in the men's age at marriage were caused by the economic situation becoming more favourable after the reforms of the 1860s and 1870s, in particular those which abolished serfdom and introduced conscription.

The demographer is usually more interested in the average age of brides but here it is very difficult to discern any pattern. Presumably the sparse population, the small number of parishioners in parishes and the large distances between them made the potential market of brides for local bridegrooms very limited. While the bridegroom was in a position to determine

the time of marriage best suited for him, related to having completed military service or attaining a certain economic independence, he was often forced to marry any available bride, no matter how old she was.

Problems with the reliability of the information contained in the registers of births, deaths and marriages were discussed at the conference in Tampere. It was pointed out that at present the maximum progress possible has been achieved in the field of the search for sources, their formalization and the development of computer databases. At the same time, it is necessary to apply more accurate mathematical and statistical methods of analysis to compensate for missing information and to determine sampling errors. The critical factor in research is the detailed analysis of documents using the scientific methods available to determine how reliable these are. If this stage of the research is omitted there is little sense in performing calculations.