

Article

Social and Bioethical Consequences of Consanguineous Marriages: A Sociological Analysis Based on the Case of Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive sociological analysis of the social, demographic, and bioethical aspects of consanguineous marriages using the case of Uzbekistan. The study is based on national and international statistical data, legal documents, and the results of empirical sociological surveys conducted between 2022 and 2025. It examines the main reasons for the prevalence of consanguineous marriages, their impact on family stability, social relations, and the health of future generations. Special attention is paid to marriage initiation mechanisms, types of kinship relations, and changing attitudes among young people toward consanguineous unions. The article also assesses the risks associated with genetic diseases, disabilities, and family conflicts from a bioethical perspective. Based on the findings, the paper proposes practical recommendations in the fields of social education, medical and genetic counseling, institutional regulation, and legal policy.

Keywords: Consanguineous Marriage, Family Institution, Social Norms, Bioethics, Genetic Diseases, Reproductive Health, Sociological Research, Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

Globally, the practice of marriage between close relatives is rooted in deep ethno-historical and cultural factors. According to international demographic analyses, approximately one-fifth of the world's population has formed families based on consanguineous marriage. In South Asia, North Africa, and Central Asia, this practice has developed as a cultural norm over many generations. For instance, consanguineous marriages account for approximately 60% of total marriages in Pakistan, 40% in Iran, and nearly 30% in certain regions of Turkey.

According to the World Health Organization and other scientific institutions, the probability of hereditary diseases in children born from consanguineous marriages is two to three times higher than in standard marriages. Such cases stand at the center of the global community's attention not only as a medical issue but also as a social and bioethical problem. The 2005 UNESCO "Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights" identifies protecting human health, ensuring biological safety, and guaranteeing reproductive rights as international priorities.

This issue is also of significant relevance in Uzbekistan. As President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted, "the organization of medical services in a targeted, effective, and mass form, and the protection of children's health, is one of the priority directions in the country's healthcare policy". Scientific analyses conducted in Uzbekistan show that hereditary mutations were recorded in approximately half of the children suffering from

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rare diseases. Test results revealed that 86% of these children were carriers of at least one pathological gene. This situation is evaluated as being linked to the high proportion of marriages between close relatives in the republic.

The necessity of scientifically studying the impact of such marriages on the health of future generations is urgent. State policies aimed at reforming the healthcare system and developing preventive measures—specifically the Presidential Decree No. PF-88 of May 19, 2025, the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy (PF-158), and the Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026 (PF-60)—set tasks for improving the healthcare system, early detection of genetic diseases, and strengthening preventive measures.

The family is the primary social institution of society, and its stability is directly linked to social progress, demographic status, and the quality of human capital. In modern sociology, marriage and family relations are interpreted not just as personal choices but as complex phenomena determined by social norms, cultural traditions, and institutional regulation systems. In this sense, the issue of marriages between close relatives is a pressing problem encompassing social, demographic, cultural, and bioethical aspects.

2. Materials and Methods

In this study, an integrative methodology of sociological, bioethical, and demographic approaches was employed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the social and bioethical consequences of consanguineous marriage (marriage between close relatives) based on the experience of Uzbekistan. The research was conducted based on the mixed-methods principle, harmonizing qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical and empirical sociological design, aimed at identifying the social factors, bioethical issues, and health-related consequences of consanguineous marriages in society. Throughout the research, the evolution of the institution of marriage, the historical and cultural roots of kinship marriages, and their role in modern society were analyzed.

Object of the research: The phenomenon of consanguineous marriage occurring within the society of Uzbekistan.

Subject of the research: The social, bioethical, and health-related consequences of this form of marriage, as well as the social perceptions and attitudes of society members toward this phenomenon.

The research utilized sociological surveys, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of scientific literature and legal-normative documents. The collected empirical data were processed using statistical and interpretive analysis methods to identify correlations and trends. Quantitative data were analyzed through statistical indicators, while qualitative data were synthesized via thematic analysis. Bioethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

3. Results

From a sociological perspective, consanguineous marriage is characteristic of societies where collective values prevail; it traditionally served the functions of strengthening kinship ties, preserving property resources, and reinforcing social control. According to historical sources, in tribal societies, marriage was viewed not as a personal choice but as a collective agreement.

In modern societies, however, the rise of individualism has altered the essence of the institution of marriage, fostering a critical approach toward kinship unions. Nevertheless, in certain regions, this practice persists due to the influence of social stereotypes and traditional values.

According to the results of a sociological study conducted by the "Mahalla and Family" Research Institute in 2022, 1,210 cases of marriage between close relatives were recorded in Uzbekistan between July and December 2021. Approximately 67% of these marriages occurred in the Qashqadaryo, Surxondaryo, and Xorazm regions (Figure 1).

The data presented clearly indicate a predominance of matrilineal kinship (kinship on the mother's side) in marriages concluded between close relatives. Specifically, 69.1% of total marriages (836 families) were based on maternal kinship, which is nearly double the rate of paternal kinship (30.9%, 374 families). This situation suggests that social bonds formed through the female line are relatively more active and influential within kinship relations.

When analyzed by the specific type of kinship:

Maternal cousins (children of sisters/xolavachcha): Account for the largest share at 43.7% (529 individuals). This indicates a higher level of trust toward maternal relatives within society and suggests that such marriages are considered more socially acceptable.

Maternal cousins (children of brothers and sisters/tog'avachcha): Follow next, accounting for 25.4% (307 individuals).

This further confirms the overall dominance of consanguineous marriages occurring through the female lineage.

Distribution of Consanguineous Marriages

Families with maternal kinship — 836 (69.1%)

Families with paternal kinship — 374 (30.9%)

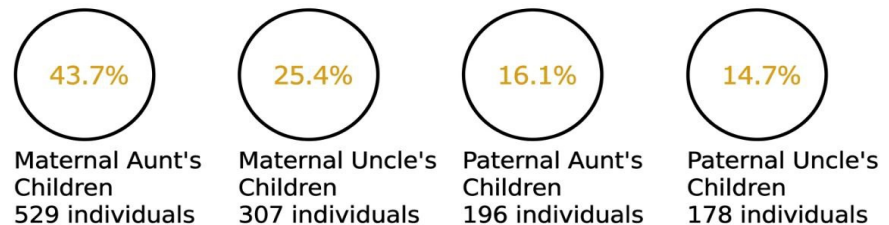


Figure 1. Structural composition of consanguineous marriages by maternal and paternal lines

Among marriages based on paternal kinship, paternal cousins (children of aunts/ammavachcha) account for 16.1% (196 individuals), while paternal cousins (children of uncles/amakivachcha) make up 14.7% (178 individuals). These figures suggest that marriages within the paternal line are approached with relative caution in society and, in some cases, are practiced less frequently due to social restrictions or traditional perspectives.

Overall, the diagrammatic data demonstrate that the lineage of kinship (maternal or paternal) is a significant social factor in the practice of consanguineous marriage. The high prevalence of marriages established through maternal kinship ties indicates that this practice is closely linked to cultural-traditional foundations, family trust mechanisms, and forms of social control. This justifies the necessity of analyzing kinship marriages not only from medical or legal perspectives but also within a broad socio-cultural context.

The majority of those married to close relatives cite various reasons for their union, such as further strengthening kinship ties and preventing property from passing into the hands of "outsiders." The primary initiators of marriages between relatives are the parents.

Distribution by Gregees of Relationship

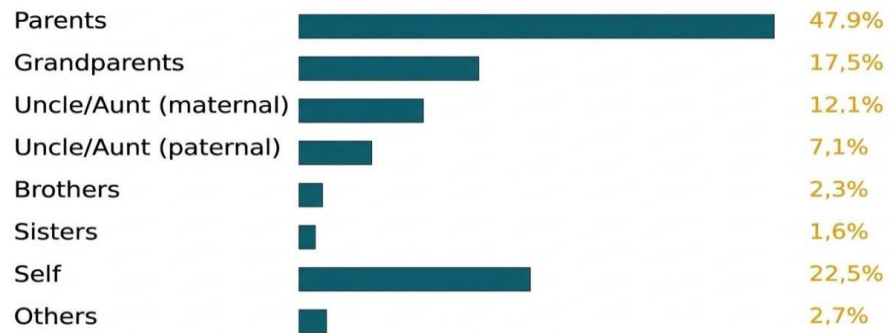


Figure 2. Distribution of initiating entities in marriages concluded between close relatives (%) (Based on the results of a sociological study conducted by the "Mahalla and Family" Research Institute in 2022)

The largest share of marriage initiatives is attributed to parents, with their figure reaching 47.9% (Figure 2). This situation indicates that the decision of the older generation takes precedence over the personal choice of young people in marriage matters, and it also demonstrates that traditional family norms still exert a powerful influence.

The self-initiative of the marrying parties ranks second, at 22.5%. Despite this ratio being relatively high, it is significant that it remains considerably lower than parental initiative. This indicates that the opportunities for young people to make independent decisions in marriages between close relatives are limited.

Among those who initiated marriage between relatives, grandparents (17.5%) and maternal uncles and aunts (12.1%) also hold a substantial share. These figures testify that the kinship network influences marriage decisions across a wide scope, and that marriage is perceived not as a relationship between two individuals, but as a social decision encompassing the interests of the entire family and kin.

At the same time, the share of marriages initiated by paternal uncles and aunts (7.1%), brothers (2.3%), and sisters (1.6%) is relatively low, showing that their influence on marriage decisions is limited. The fact that the "Others" category accounts for 2.7% means that, in some cases, the marriage initiative is also formed through the broader social environment or informal connections.

Overall, the diagrammatic data confirm that the social control of parents and the older generation is predominant in marriages between close relatives. This shows the necessity of studying this type of marriage not as a personal relationship, but as a social process formed under the influence of traditional, cultural, and institutional factors.

Table 1. Sources of initiative in consanguineous marriages in 2025 (Results of the author's sociological research, %)

Initiator of marriage	Share(%)
Parents	28.0
Grandparents	8.5
Uncles/Aunts (maternal)	6.0
Uncles/Aunts (paternal)	4.0
Brothers	1.5
Sisters	1.0
Couples themselves (chosen a non-relative partner)	47.5
Others	3.5
Total	100.0

The 2025 research results indicate an increasing negative attitude among youth toward concluding marriages between relatives. In particular, the voluntary selection of a non-related partner by the marrying parties accounts for 47.5%, which is distinguished by being significantly higher than the share of parental initiative.

The decrease in the share of marriages concluded based on parental initiative to 28.0% signifies a weakening influence of traditional social control mechanisms. Notably, the sharp decline in the influence of grandparents, maternal uncles/aunts, and paternal uncles/aunts shows an increased level of independence among youth in decision-making.

This trend is explained by the following factors:

Increased awareness among youth regarding medical and genetic risks;

Rising educational levels and urbanization processes;

Widespread dissemination of alternative marriage models through social networks and mass media;

The impact of state and public initiatives regarding healthy families and reproductive culture.

Overall, the 2025 data confirm that social support for consanguineous marriage is declining, and individual choice alongside healthy family values is becoming a priority among the youth.

Sociological research results show that a large portion of individuals married to close relatives did so under the influence of various social and cultural factors. Specifically, respondents cited strengthening kinship relations, preserving family unity, and preventing property from passing into the hands of outsiders as the primary reasons. This indicates that consanguineous marriage is not merely a personal decision but a social practice linked to the interests of the extended family and community.

According to the research materials, the most significant reason for marriages between close relatives was recorded as the desire not to give a girl, deemed "worthy" within the kin, to another family (Table 2). Furthermore, factors such as preserving customs and the family lineage, maintaining continuous kinship ties, as well as fulfilling the dreams and aspirations of the older generation—grandparents—have also influenced the prevalence of this form of marriage.

The following table presents the factors leading to the conclusion of marriage between close relatives and their respective percentages.

Table 2. Primary reasons for marriages concluded between close relatives

Reasons	Percentage (%)
Preserving traditions and family lineage	29.5%
Protecting family property from passing to outsiders	12.4%
Not giving a suitable girl from the relative circle to another family	39.0%
Lower costs (dowry, wedding, and subsequent ceremonies)	6.1%
Continuing the parental tradition of marrying within the family	12.0%
Marrying a relative to fulfill the dreams of grandparents	18.0%
Striving to maintain kinship ties	23.4%
Living in the same area as the clan/relatives and local marriage traditions	5.0%
Other reasons	1.8%

Research indicates that 69% of such marriages are concluded between maternal relatives (xolavachcha, tog'avachcha), while 31% occur between paternal relatives

(amakivachcha, amnavachcha). This situation demonstrates the strong social influence of the female line within the kinship system.

According to empirical data, families based on consanguineous marriage exhibit higher levels of social and health-related problems. Research results show that 27.6% of such families have children with disabilities or hereditary diseases. For comparison, this figure does not exceed 5% in unrelated families.

Furthermore, kinship marriages lead to an expansion of family conflicts. 30.8% of respondents reported that disagreements between young couples resulted in cold relations between the relatives. This suggests that the disintegrative consequences of such marriages may outweigh their social integrative functions.

In modern societies, a bioethical approach toward consanguineous marriage is strengthening. Bioethics is based on the principles of ensuring a healthy generation, reproductive responsibility, and social accountability. The introduction of mandatory pre-marital medical examinations in Uzbekistan is a significant step in this direction. However, research shows that medical measures alone are insufficient; over 42% of respondents stated they lacked adequate knowledge regarding contraception and reproductive health issues.

4. Discussion

Scientific solutions for regulating the issue of marriage between close relatives

Taking into account the social, demographic, and bioethical consequences of marriages between close relatives, effective regulation of this issue requires a complex and systematic approach. Below are scientific solutions based on sociological analysis and international experience:

Strengthening socio-educational mechanisms: It is crucial to increase awareness among the population, especially youth, regarding the negative medical and social consequences of kinship marriage. It is advisable to implement educational modules on "Healthy Family," "Reproductive Culture," and "Foundations of Bioethics" in schools, vocational colleges, and higher education institutions.

Harmonizing pre-marital medical and genetic counseling with a social approach: The current medical examination system should function not only as a control tool but also as an institution that provides explanation, counseling, and support for informed choices. Strengthening cooperation between doctors, psychologists, and sociologists in this process will yield positive results.

Enhancing the preventive role of the Mahalla institution: Mahalla citizens' assemblies have traditionally performed functions of social control and counseling in family and marriage matters. By adapting this institution to modern social needs and providing specialized training for mahalla activists, a systematic approach to explanation and warning regarding kinship marriages can be established.

Strengthening the social status of women and youth: Research shows that the prevalence of kinship marriage is often characteristic of societies where women's opportunities for education and independent decision-making are limited. Therefore, social programs aimed at increasing women's education, professional development, and economic activity will indirectly contribute to the reduction of kinship marriages. **A cautious approach to improving the legal-normative framework:** International experience shows that preventive, advisory, and incentive measures are more effective than strict legal bans. Thus, legal norms should be developed taking into account bioethical principles, national values, and the actual state of social consciousness.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of marriages between close relatives requires a scientific approach based on integral cooperation between social policy, education, healthcare, and mahalla institutions rather than a single-sector approach. The

implementation of these proposals will serve to strengthen the institution of a healthy family and ensure sustainable social development in Uzbekistan.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of international and national experience shows that consanguineous marriage is a complex sociological phenomenon requiring a multifaceted regulatory approach. In the context of Uzbekistan, strengthening cooperation between the mahalla institution, the education system, and healthcare facilities is of paramount importance.

By increasing the social consciousness and cultural literacy of the population, and particularly by promoting healthy family values among youth, the negative consequences of kinship marriage can be reduced. Adapting international experience to national socio-cultural conditions serves as an important scientific basis for improving family and marriage policy in Uzbekistan.

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