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**LIFE PRIORITIES OF RUSSIAN STUDENTS**

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**Abstract**

The article deals with the value priorities of Russian students. This group does not have sustainable socio-economic characteristics and therefore requires continuous scientific monitoring. The authors analyse current social problems and their changes caused by the transformations of the last period. They discuss the results of diagnosing the personal values and behavioural practices of young students in the current context. Young people have always been the most dynamic, energetic and critically minded part of society, with the fastest-growing professional and career paths. Youth feels and experiences change more deeply than others, and is a kind of change indicator, builds capacity and is a major driving force for society's progress. Many countries, including Russia, face a sharp increase in the social problems of young people. The nature and direction of current transformations are increasingly determining the worldview of young people and its most educated part – the student class. Student youth inherit the achieved level of development of society, are the main participant in social mobility and economic initiative, and determine the essence of social reproduction in all spheres. But not all young people find their place in the market system, there is a decline in their social status, access to education and cultural values, an increase in crime, deviant behaviour, unemployment and social inequality. Creating the conditions for the country's progress contributes fully realization of the potential of students, the use of professional, moral, legal, general humanistic attitudes for the creation and social cohesion.

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## 1. Introduction

In accordance with the current regulations of the Russian Federation, young people include citizens between 14 and 30 years of age inclusive. In some cases this category includes people up to 35 years of age, as many regions of the country have recently shown a trend of shifting the age of youth up to 35 years of age. This is apparently the reason for the current discussion of the bill which would officially consider Russian citizens from 14 to 35 years of age as young people. We note that neighbouring Ukraine and Moldova have already legislated for the 35-year age threshold.

According to official data, in 2004 Russia had the largest number of young people aged 15–29 years old in this century – 36,469,000, or 25.3 % of the country's population. Further, in 2010 it fell to 32,540 thousand or 22.8 % and in 2015 to 28,742 thousand or 19.7 % (Rosstat, 2019). The downward trend in the number of young people covers all federal districts of the country and will continue, according to the forecast, until 2023 (amounting to 22,228 thousand), after which, increasing to 25,944.7 thousand people aged 15–29 years in 2031 (Avraamova et al., 2017).

Young people today grow up in an environment of new social relations, globalization, the informatization of society and socio-cultural change. Young people's life priorities are constantly changing, undergoing a major revision. Many works are devoted to their regular study (Bykov & Nastina, 2020; Elassy, 2013; Elena, 2014; Karpushina & Kaptsov, 2009; Kireev et al., 2013; Lenkov, 2020; McGuinness et al., 2016; Nazarova & Zelenskaya, 2019; Orlik et al., 2019; Roccas et al., 2017; Zhukov, 2017; Zhuravleva, 2006). Obviously, knowledge of youth issues contributes to the prevention of conflicts and an effective and rapid response to the emerging crisis among young people.

## 2. Problem Statement

The socialization of young people is a complex, long-term process involving a reassessment of traditions, norms and values. Every society has its own structure of values. A study of the life priorities of young people reveals the real extent of their participation in social relations, their adaptive capacity and innovative potential, and their attitude towards the culture, history and traditions of the country. Young people inherit the achieved level of social development and determine the essence of its reproduction in the economic, political, social, cultural and other spheres.

The value systems established in the minds of young people determine their life strategies – a system of long-term orientation. Therefore, to develop and realize the socio-economic, political and cultural potential of young people, it is necessary to regularly study their value system and adjust the strategies of state youth policy on this basis in a timely manner.

## 3. Research Questions

The object of the study is the students of Moscow's universities. The subject of the study is the dynamics of the main indicators determining the life principles and strategies of young students.

This group does not have stable socio-economic characteristics and needs constant scientific monitoring of the image, standard of living and quality of life, value systems and behavioural strategies.

Most young people feel its social potential has not been fully realized. This causes resentment, aggression, apathy and alienation towards happenings, a sense of social disempowerment and injustice.

Moscow as the political, economic, scientific, cultural and information centre of the country, multiplies the social burden on young people, who are susceptible to all changes and new trends. The growth of negative social deviance among young people is a noticeable manifestation of a systemic crisis that began back in the 1990s. It is triggered by a complex set of factors: youth unemployment, poverty and social dislocation, socio-economic differentiation, inconsistent legal framework, and rising prices.

Issues of education, employment and career development, material wellbeing, leisure, health and sports, social and legal protection have been the main value priorities of young people over the past decades. These problems remain unresolved in the country, and the adequacy and effectiveness of their solutions will determine the place of young people in the development of society.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify the signs, extent and depth of change in the social preferences of Moscow students. It has accomplished the following tasks: monitoring, establishing the priority life values of young people and their dynamics at the present stage.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Studying the dynamics of the life values of contemporary young people shows dissatisfaction with their professional life: they have a poor idea of the prospects of their professional work; they believe that vocational education does not guarantee successful employment or material wellbeing. We know what young people want from their jobs: a high salary, good working conditions, a social package and the possibility of fast career development. However, about 19 % of young people in Moscow are unemployed, while only 33 % are employed in their profession. However, 41 % of respondents do not see employment as a disaster.

Education is one of the primary life values of Russian youth. It increasingly sees education, skills and qualifications as capital for investment. However, even students are not fully aware of the modern features of professional activity, associating a career with material goods, high office.

Young students have great potential as productive forces, ready to absorb and apply new innovative technologies. They are the best, most active and most promising part of the young people. Students lead in all areas of life. They have already expressed their positive attitude towards the value of higher education as a priority.

Student age refers to intensive work on shaping personality and developing one's own style of behaviour. We have been monitoring the life priorities of full-time university students in Moscow for many years. Respondents are asked to personally assess a number of values and their various interrelationships. As a result, we get an idea about the structure of the life orientations of modern young students, identifying their main values, plans, and life strategies.

## 6. Findings

During regular monitoring, we found out students' opinions on the most acute problems of the megacity: unemployment and inability to find a well-paid job of their own liking (58.8 %), rising prices, including education and housing fees (54.5 %), poverty (52.9 %), financial difficulties (49.2 %), alcoholism, drug and gambling addiction (47.4 %), high crime rate (45.1 %), corruption (44.6 %), fear of losing their job (38.2 %), soullessness of public life (24.7 %). Meanwhile, 26.3 % of respondents did not experience any major difficulties.

Students consider employment as one of the most pressing problems for young people. Graduates cannot find jobs according to their field of study, in particular, due to insufficient qualifications inadequate to meet employers' demands (Logachev & Zhukova, 2020; Vasiliev, 2019; Zhuravleva, 2006). There is an obvious social contradiction: on one hand, young people want to take their place in the labour market and realize their potential, and on the other hand, there is no effective technology to realize this employment. According to official data, young people under 25 make up 37.8 % of the unemployed, including those aged 20-24 who are 29.6 % (Rosstat, 2019). Our 2020 survey showed that 73 % intend to work in their chosen profession; 77 % aspire to career advancement; 83 % want material wellbeing, high wages. However, only 26 % of this year's graduates said they had a potential job in their field of study.

Obviously, competitiveness in the labour market and successful employment are only possible for students who have mastered their qualifications, acquired the required competencies and continuously improved their knowledge. The study showed that when choosing a career, 85 % of respondents prioritized a high salary, of whom 46 % wanted fast career progression and professional recognition. Only 13 % cited prestige as one of the criteria for choosing a job, and 8 % want the job to be of benefit to society.

In 2010, 89 % of respondents ranked economics and law among the most prestigious occupations, but now respondents have added managers, IT specialists and programmers. The number of people calling government jobs prestigious has risen from 12 to 23 % in 10 years. Meanwhile, the number wanting any managerial position fell from 17 to 6 %. 69 % of respondents think that the biggest profits come from the oil, gas and banking sectors. They also named lawyers, notaries, prosecutors and senior civil servants as the most profitable professions (Zhukova, 2018).

The desire of Moscow students to do business declined markedly (from 15 to 8 % in 10 years). In their opinion, the business has become more and more difficult, and no longer a guarantee to become authoritative, to occupy high government positions.

The 2020 survey on students' biggest aspirations in life showed the following results: to have a successful career – 67.5 %; to realize one's potential and abilities – 61.7 %; to be rich – 58.8 %; to have family happiness – 53.4 %; to live quietly, without interfering in anything – 30.4 %; to meet true love – 25.2 % (mostly girls); to benefit people and the country – 12.3 %; to take power – 11.4 %; fame – 7.3 %; other – 4.1 % (e.g., to open their own business, get married successfully, improve their talents). 73.3 % of respondents highlighted diligence, 69.2 % – talent, 71 % – useful links, 70.4 % – help from relatives and friends, 41 % – lucky chance, 20 % – state support.

Over the last ten years, young people have become more unscrupulous: 41 % believe that they should strive to have an income, regardless of the way it is earned (in 2010 it was 32 %). Most students

interviewed marked the following mottos in their life: "You must hurry if you want to survive", "The end justifies the means", and "Go for it, no matter what". 19.4 % of respondents ranked "The ability to adapt to life" as the highest value, while another 24.8 % ranked it as highly significant. 66.2 % of respondents said that to achieve goals and success, it was necessary to transcend many principles and norms, since they were supposedly outdated. About 14 % found it difficult to answer about the relevance of moral values.

The study of family values among students is of great interest, particularly in terms of predicting fertility trends (Adserà, 2011; Knapp & Wurm, 2019; Tarchenko & Biyzhanova, 2018). It was not a one-time or spontaneous development of young people's ideas about marriage and the family, their attitudes and value orientations towards premarital behaviour. Students ranked the values influencing family and marriage in the following order: good employment and material security (89 %), health (62 %), prosperous family life (53 %), love (41 %) and children (22 %). However, respondents actually think of the importance of family as being only needed to support them in difficult crisis and to alleviate stress and conflict.

The vast majority of studies confirm the value of the family in the eyes of young people (Gigin & Grishchenko, 2021; Kireev, 2013; Zhukov, 2017). In our monitoring, 78 % of students said about the impossibility of starting a family in the next 3-5 years because of economic instability in the country. The promotion of free love, alternative forms of cohabitation, a dramatic increase in abortions and sexual deviations also contribute to the situation. Still, students do not welcome singleness and non-family life: 71 % intend to get married in the future and 2 % have already married. 30 % of respondents would consider the opinion of their parents when getting married; 15 % would not take the opinion of their relatives into account. They said the optimum age for marriage was 24–27 for girls and 32–35 for boys.

The students have an orientation towards a lowering of the marriage norm and a loss of the value of family life. Currently, young people (42 %) positively evaluate (38 %) and use (38 %) unregistered premarital relationships, considering them even necessary, explaining this by physiology, experience, lack of money to support a 'real' family. Only 17 % are against premarital sex. More than 60 % do not consider it possible to have a child without marriage.

They cited financial difficulties, domestic violence, aggression, infidelity, alcoholism, drug and gambling addiction as the main reasons for divorce. 63 % of respondents said that keeping a marriage with someone they do not love is not worth it, even if they have children.

One alarming consequence of the change in young people's attitudes towards the family is the declining birth rate. Nevertheless, 71 % of young students see themselves as parents in the future. 33 % plan to have two children, 38 % have one child, 4 % have three, and 2 % have four or more. Another 9 % do not want to have children at all, while 14 % are not sure. Answering the question about government measures that would increase the birth rate in Russia, respondents named: providing housing – 73 %, employment guarantees for families with children – 68 %, increasing the size and expanding the system of benefits for children, families with children – 65 %.

The financial situation is always a concern for young people. Students with a family admit to being totally (37 %) or largely (48 %) financially dependent on relatives and friends. Only 15 % are self-supporting.

Sources of increased tension in the student environment include unresolved social problems, high levels of youth crime, increased aggression, and the lack of a coherent system for preventing negative social deviations and promptly responding to them to prevent recidivism. Young people experience a negative impact of low-quality internet products and TV shows that foster aggression, violence, suicide and crime.

A significant factor about students remains the deterioration of living standards and quality of life; lower incomes and food consumption; and the rejection of higher-priced health and other services. The standard of living of Moscow residents is declining (Rosstat, 2019). There has been a sharp stratification of society into rich and poor, so students have a heightened sense of social inequality and insecurity. Instability in the social and labour sphere makes students insecure about the future, encourages them to participate in the shadow economy, raises doubts about social justice, and leads to aggression and protest. About 17 % want to leave Moscow for another region, 25.3 % want to go to another country (40 % name the USA, Western Europe).

The main fear is being left without a livelihood, and the associated fear is to lose or be unable to find a job. It is not a coincidence that among the most pressing personal problems the respondents cite financial difficulties, the inability to find a well-paid job of their own liking and to realize their personal potential. The respondents assessed their financial wellbeing as follows: high – 4.6 %; above average – 26.7 %; average – 42.2 %; low – 17.9 %; very low – 8.6 %. Almost 57 % consider family support to be a significant source of funds. 16 % depend on scholarships, allowances, pensions (for young disabled people, orphans, low-income people) for their livelihood.

The social capital of students is built up by acquaintances, connections with people who can influence a good education, successful employment, career progression. Professional fulfilment became the main component in the students' perception of life success (65.1 %).

## 7. Conclusion

The transformation of the Russian economy has led to significant changes in the social worldviews of Russian students. This group of young people does not have sustainable life strategies and therefore requires constant scientific monitoring. There is a need for regular research on students' lifestyles, values and behavioural strategies to inform the development and timely adjustment of national youth policy programmes. Finding solutions to the problems identified will help to prevent conflicts, respond effectively to emerging crisis, and get out of them quickly so that social work with young people becomes effective and efficient.

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