

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Child population in Russia: main problems of development

The article presents a comprehensive analysis of the problems of childhood in modern Russia, the relevance of which determine the severity of the socio-economic transformations of a society in which this part of the population is most vulnerable. At the same time investments in children's development – an investment in future human capital of the country. The results of this study allowed the author to highlight three laps problems associated with “the field of childhood”. First round – problems related to the scope, size and structure of children. The second set of problems related to analysis of conditions and institutions of formation of childhood. The third set of problems of the younger generation in Russia – is an unprecedented deterioration in health. Thus, the main objective of social policy is to improve the quality potential of children in the context of reducing their numbers. In the first place in this context is the task of improving health, from birth, followed by education and socialization throughout their internal relationship as a foundation for the development of system programs of public policy with regard to childhood.

Children's demographic crisis, the conditions and institutions of formation of childhood, reducing the number of children, the deterioration of child health.



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Research studies of childhood are of particular importance today which is determined by two reasons. First, in 2010 (if children is the population under 18 years old) the first cohort of “crisis” children enter their adulthood, these children were born in the period of demographic crisis, the beginning of which (1992) randomly coincided with starting point of

socio-economic reforms which in their essence, had a revolutionary character. The changes having come into the country, together with the transformations had a dramatic impact on all aspects of the life of Russian society – political, economic, social, national, ethnic, and cultural. They in some way touched every citizen and still have an impact on all struc-

tures of society. There can be no doubt that this influence having not only positive but also significant negative character was manifested in the field of demographic processes, defining all aspects of human reproduction.

Secondly, the socio-economic structure of the population changed fundamentally, having formed two acute problems. One of them was that there was a significant layer of the poor and the poorest, while poverty as a special phenomenon was generally absent in the earlier period of the society's life. Another problem, closely related to the first is deep social differences that led to actual formation of "two Russias": a small-scale one (3-5% of the population) that captured the bulk of the country's wealth at their disposal, and the most significant (35-40%) suffering in poverty. The acuteness of the situation lies in the fact that these major socio-economic problems after twenty years of reforms are not reduced in their strain, but tend to increase. Of course, children proved to be under the double negative impact to a greater extent than any other population groups; they will transfer characteristics of their condition to future generations with the lag in the demographic processes.

Reformations of socio-economic nature significantly affected the quantitative parameters of population dynamics increasing the mortality curve increase with decreasing birth rate. In 1992, there was their intersection, which can be conventionally regarded as the "beginning" of the demographic crisis that led to the emergence of areas of natural loss, which still persists to this day despite the weakening of the process. During the period from 1992 to 2010 natural loss amounted to about 13 million people, part of which (about a half) was compensated by positive surplus of migration. But the greatest losses were in "the field of childhood", particularly in the bent of quality.

At one time, Petrie Sorokin¹ pointed out that major reforms (revolutions) act as an instrument of "topsy-turvy" humanity selection, killing "the best" elements of the society

by their hereditary and contributing to the survival of "the worst". As a result of these processes, "people who are biologically more healthy, energetically more able-bodied, mentally – the most strong-willed, talented and intellectually developed, morally – the most steady, having strong moral reflections" are mostly killed. This cannot but effect on that the gene pool of the country changes for the worst and the positive properties of the people are reducing, it contributes to degradation and degeneration. Decrement of health and viability of the surviving elements of the population operate in the same direction.

In addition to direct effects, causing a negative state of the gene pool of the country, there is an indirect one, resulting from political exile mainly not only of better educated, living in mental work and an "outstanding" part of society. Under the influence of direct and indirect effects the reforms become an instrument of "negative selection" of population reproduction in the "topsy-turvy" format "Biologically inherited fund" weakens and loses its quality in all respects, as one cannot expect first-class descendants from the deteriorated producers. Researchers have shown that the average age of the leaders of revolutionary and reformation periods rarely exceeds 40 years, and the principal payments on the bills of these events come later. Russian authorities of the first half of the 90-ies should have understood this when they widely used slogan: "Soon all will change for the better, but now we need to tighten our belts". In life, there is no way to get something today, without any payment for this later. Payback will certainly come. This refers to the young generation born at the time in general. "They pay their own health and their degradation for the sins of their fathers", for the "achievements of the revolution", for all its crimes and deeds"².

This is particularly clear, and clearly defines the need for in-depth analysis and assessment of state of the children who came into this world with the socio-economic crisis which Russia is

¹ Sorokin P. Revolution sociology. – M., 2005. – P. 183.

² Sorokin P. Ibid. – P. 200.

experiencing today. “The field of childhood” itself, having a steady trend towards reduction, is multifariously, dimensionally, and constantly being transformed in different directions, which are not only positive but also negative. Of course, it is impossible to cover all aspects of life of the younger generation in one research study, but we managed to still stay on those that are the most relevant and socially critical, largely determining the promising movement of childhood.

The first set of problems concerns the scale, size and structure of children. The main conclusion is that “the field of childhood” shrinks as “shagreen skin”. Over the past 15 years (1995 – 2009) the number of children aged 0 – 17 years old has decreased by almost 12 million, or by about a third.

However, according to demographic projections of Rosstat in the next ten years, their number will grow significantly and it is not only a result of fertility decline, but also of high mortality rate. Having divided children into five socio-biological groups: infants aged under 1 year, early childhood aged before 3 years, preschool children aged 3 to 7 years, first stage pupils aged from 7 to 14, second stage students aged from 14 to 17, we see that the first group is 6%, the second is 13%, the third is 22%, the fourth is 40% and the fifth is 19%. The need to develop an appropriate service infrastructure depends strongly on this structure. Current projections of the Russian population indicate that in the period up to 2030 the number of children varies, but not significantly.

In modern conditions of deep post-Soviet socio-economic reforms realization, not only the quantitative parameters of “the field of childhood” change which are predominantly related to demographic processes in the country, but, what is more ominously, the quality characteristics of the younger generation are declining. Against this background, social and demographic problems of this most mobile segment of society are clearer.

The most important and the most acute problem of children in the Russian Federation is the low level of health which does not improve

over time. Only 27.1% can be considered healthy (i.e., less than one-third) representing the first group, 51.7% have functional abnormalities or risk factors for disease (group II), 16.2% having chronic diseases (groups III, IV, V).

Of particular concern is infants’ health, among which 37.3% were born sick or became ill immediately after their birth in 2008. One in twenty (5.3%) was born prematurely.

The number of reported illnesses among children in the first year of life is growing (2982.8 thousand in 2000, 4 120.2 in 2008). Per 100000 children aged 0 – 14 years the disease incidence in 2000 was 146 236, and in 2008 – 182,714, i.e. two diagnoses per a child on the average. The relative disease incidence among older children is also increasing: for the period 2000 – 2008 the ratios have increased by almost half.

One of the most serious problems in Russia is the disability of the child population. In 2008, there were registered more than half a million children with disabilities, among them almost half received the disability status due to mental insanity, behavior and nervous system disorders. Education is available not to all of them. As a result of the low level of health 30% of youths aged 17 are recognized as unfit for military service every year.

The problem of alcoholism and non-medical drug use among children and the younger generation is not less acute: more than half of children aged 11 – 18 regularly consume alcoholic beverages and beer.

Another problem is the inequality of children in receiving educational services which significantly increased over the past two decades and is the result of increase in income differentiation and the degradation of a significant segment of knowledge acquisition.

The problem of inaccessibility of preschool education has exacerbated. The coverage of preschool for the period from 2000 to 2008 has increased from 55 to 59%, but the waiting list for placement children in preschool institutions increased 7 times. These institutions play a role not only of a training tool for school, but also determine the possible participation of mothers in full and gainful employment.

The sign of recent decades is a significant number of children (7 – 18 years), not enrolled in school. The reasons are illnesses, as well as a substantial proportion of adolescents isolated from society. There is an essential part of the adolescents who are orphaned or left without parental care, limited in their rights or even deprived of them.

Of special significance is the problem of violence against children. In 2008, 126.5 thousand of minors were subjected to these impacts.

More and more intensive decrease in the number of children and their proportion in the population, which actually determines not only the intensifying of technological processes of society modernization, but even more substantially – the development of innovative technologies, greatly exacerbates the reduction in “the field of childhood”. That is the younger generation and youth, who first of all have a creative potential and higher creative activity in the sphere of economy. The efficiency and quality of labor resources depend on its real extent in human capital.

A new component to increase fertility will occupy its significant place in demographic process – it is assisted reproductive technologies (ART), based on in vitro fertilization, as observed in many developed countries. It is no coincidence that the opening of these technologies, and its author was awarded with Nobel Prize in 2010. Essentially ART is nothing but the use of new bio-innovations in demographic processes of society, defining fundamentally different aspects of demography as a science.

The condition of children, their socio-biological characteristics are the basis for building human capacity and human capital in modern society. The environment of the younger generation such as the family, the mechanisms of socialization, the availability and quality of education, social values affect the formation of the labor force in the country.

The generation of “children of reforms” is influenced by a strong social stratification

according to the criteria of welfare, education and culture. As a result, one and the larger part of the children appeared in a great poverty, and another one is “experiencing” their families’ prosperity. This prevents the spread among the youth the processes of tolerance with all the ensuing consequences.

Statistics show that according to the parameter of education the generation of “children of reforms” differs significantly from other age cohorts. In no generation (except for the oldest cohort, 65 – 72 years old) there was such a high proportion of poorly educated and often illiterate workers, as among today’s young people aged 20 – 34. Childhood is an unmet stage in the formation of human capital.

On the one hand, the increased demand of a young generation of “children of reforms”, titled “Revolution of claims” due to the impact of consumer society, served as a powerful incentive to achieve success in life, on the other hand – the lack of legitimate opportunities for the realization of the increased demand has led to an increase in drug abuse and crime among a certain part of this generation.

Of particular importance in connection with the negative shift in gene pool of the Russian population and a large emigration (brain drain) is the study and understanding of the socio-demographic processes associated with the existence of gifted children in Russia. Featuring the latest scientific developments, experimental sites and experiences in creating models and socio-pedagogical techniques to identify and support gifted children in our country unfortunately there has not been established social order and national idea of development and conservation (demand for) talents. Russian teams are giving up their positions in the international comparison of intelligence, international competitions, which is a sign of backwardness of Russia on gifted children. School-leavers entering the departments of Computational Mathematics and Cybernetics are lower and lower in their level of preparedness. Despite the fact that the “cream” comes there, this “cream” is becoming more liquid.

A child as an individual person, endowed with rights, entered the Russian legal framework not so long ago. In most cases, the rights of children are violated by their parents – 38.3% and other relatives – 9.4%. There were a significant number of cases of violations of the child's legitimate interests by representatives of agencies and organizations of the executive power – 39.3%. The weakening of educational functions in a certain part of Russian families is due, among other things, to their poverty, which leads not only to material deprivation, but is often accompanied by moral degradation of parents – alcoholism, drug addiction, immoral life, the rejection of the maintenance and upbringing of children.

The second set of problems related to the analysis of conditions and institutions of childhood formation. Among them special attention, of course refers to the family, including its incomplete forms, to preschool and school education, assessing the role of CT and substantial potential of entrants, receiving vocational training, as well as socio-psychological problems of adolescents.

Significant changes in matrimonial behavior such as reducing marriage and increasing divorce rates, replacement of marriage by free partnerships, transfer of children birth to a later date, and abandoning them at all increase the proportion of single-parent, predominantly maternal households, which significantly weakens the process of socialization of the younger generation and leads to unstable family structures. Alternative forms of marriage are proliferating: “open” families in which each partner has relations on the side, “swinger” families engaged in temporary exchanges of partners, “group” families where all children are considered common, as well as polygyny and polyandry. The younger the respondent, the more he or she agrees with the assertion that marriage is outdated, but a union without formal registration is standard of living. However, the traditional monogamous family retains its position in the mass consciousness, but under the influence of the changed conditions of life

it is transforming. From half to two thirds of family men and women have negative attitudes to non-traditional forms of marriage.

According to the 2002 census there are 39% of families without children, 61% having children, half of which (31%) have one child, 24% – two children, 6% – three and more children. The form of marriage significantly affects the number of children in the family. Among the common-law marriages nearly two-thirds have no children.

In accordance with the law the preschool education is not compulsory, but its reception is guaranteed by the state. The decision of the Government of the Russian Federation from September 12, 2008 states that preschool educational institution provides education, training and development, as well as the supervision, care and rehabilitation of children aged from 2 months to 7 years, and the state guarantees its being accessible and free. Unfortunately, these obligations are not met. Meanwhile, the development of high-quality preschool institutions available to most families has a positive impact on demographic processes, increasing fertility, contributing to the effective employment of women and is an important factor in increasing productivity. Status and importance of preschool education and training in modern conditions change radically. And this is a global trend.

It is necessary to recreate the pre-school education system that existed in the pre-reform times. We are not talking about the restoration of institutions of the Soviet period, but about the formation of a system of a new type.

Education system is a unique social institution designed to develop and increase social capital in society. Social future is designed and reproduced through this system. Success of education's fulfillment of its functions depends on the ideological foundations of its organization. In this case the two ways are possible: either the total construction is outlined today by political ideology of the society, when formal knowledge begins to dominate over their meaning, not allowing not only know but also

understand them, or the future is constructed by social practice of amateur and free people, and education advocates as a developmental factor that reduces the risks of failure and inefficient decisions. A striking argument of the first direction of the education system formation is the introduction of CT as a tool for knowledge evaluation. The main motive of its introduction was to get a powerful lever for the financial impact on universities, implemented through the establishment of SPFO (state registered financial obligations), i.e. introduction of market mechanisms in education. CT proved to be an ideal preparation for life in the “consumer society”, the ideology of which is not formed in schools and universities but by the media. It is an element of mass manipulation by people who simply have a lapse of brains. Moreover, the cessation of funding education of “mediocre students” can only mean one thing – reducing the availability of higher education. The introduction of CT has not overcome bribery when admitting to universities, but even has provided the mechanism of “social boomerang”, resulting in that one corrupt system has been replaced by another, from the university corruption moved to the school.

Demographic dynamics (today it is “demographic hole”) has a significant impact on the scope, structure and quality of education at all levels, bearing in mind general and professional. The emergence of teachers “surplus” (according to the Minister A. Fursenko), as a consequence of the old rules of the number of pupils per teacher, which has arisen from a decrease in the number of students, is happy circumstance, as it helps to improve the quality of education, bringing our standards to European ones at least for this indicator. We must rejoice at this, and not think about how to use the “extra” 200 thousand teachers.

In fact, the same can be noted with respect to the desire of the officials to limit the number of universities, because the number of school-leavers and the potential number of places at institutes of higher education, we can say, has equalized. So, this process has a great reason to

raise the quality of education because it opens new possibilities for its expansion. Of course, in this case, it needs a special organization. And it is not at all enough for Russia mechanically to join in the Bologna Process. In addition, experience shows that additional education (one, two, three) and diplomas evidencing this have never been able to degrade the quality of professional employee, regardless of his or her job. But if the state strives to save its resources on education, then it should not expect quality. Every school-leaver must imagine a system of professional knowledge acquisition, including bachelor, specialty, master and postgraduate study, and also see the opportunities to obtain diplomas of foreign universities.

It should be borne in mind that in Europe, as well as in Russia there is a process of humanization of education when young people do not want to “stretch their brains” in the field of exact sciences. But China and India demonstrate other patterns of young people’s behavior, whose share is high in programs for technical and engineering sciences. In Russia “to reverse” the students to the exact and natural sciences it is necessary to create a demand of the state and society.

Value orientations are not the last in the behavior and attitude of adolescents and youth. Typological values and value orientations are divided into three types:

- gender-neutral, i.e. not depending on cultural sex;
- gender-oriented, depending on cultural sex;
- latent gender neutral – when the typological values (indices) are neutral, but values that make up the index are gender-oriented.

For boys and girls the most important typological values are Independence and Benevolence, and the least is Traditionalism. Value associated with the achievements at the expense of others people’s success (power – control over others, dominance, domination, leadership, public image), and also due to modesty and moderation, finished last. In the first place there are values to be achieved through own efforts.

Socialization of children and youth in the post-Soviet period is characterized by variability caused by differences in traditions, style and way of life of individual families, which differs it significantly from the high degree of uniformity in the Soviet era. By the turn of the new century there had not yet occurred profound changes in public opinion, determining the formation of the new modernized system of values and the corresponding to it samples of civil behavior, as well as the mass of social practices. During the period of social transformation the divergence in children's and parents' views about life increases sharply. Moreover, the gap between generations of children and parents increases significantly. On this basis, the crisis tendencies in the functioning of key institutions of socialization – family and school – are manifested.

Attention is drawn to the progressive reduction of grandparents' role in family education, which had been the main “translators” of cultural norms and values for decades of the Soviet era. As despite the fact that in post-Soviet period there was a renaissance of the ideology of the family with the husband-breadwinner and the wife out of work, most young mothers are working and willing to work outside the home. This explains the increase in babysitting services, which replace the lacking children's institutions. Commercialization of concerns for children's socialization pulls the whole train of new challenges for both parents and child.

Overloaded parents are unable to devote sufficient attention to the children responsibility, self-control, curiosity, emotional responsiveness and attention to others, and this, in turn, significantly increases the likelihood of deviant behavior in children and adolescent environment. Drastic stratification of Russian society, increasing risks of poverty for a large number of families are also acting in the same direction.

Liberalization in attitudes towards teenage sexual activity has led to a decrease in age of beginning of sexual life. Following this is activation of alcohol, tobacco and drugs consumption. The significance of parents' education level as a factor of adolescents' socialization is

declining, but the role of religiosity is growing. The main danger lies in the fact that most teenagers do not find any solutions to their problems. A special place in this process belongs to single-parent families, most of which were maternal nuclear organizations. The problems of marital behavior of young people leads to a gradual increase in single-parent families and increasing fertility out of wedlock, which entails a high risk of poverty. And this actually does not depend on employment or unemployment of mothers. Economic stability of single-parent families is substantially lower than of two-parent ones. And the point here is not only that the ratio of the number of employees and dependents is unfavorable. Of particular importance is also the health of the worker, which is a factor of occupational mobility, and the presence of disability of working age people is an insurmountable obstacle to his or her employment. An additional poverty risk factor for single-parent families is unemployment; it significantly increases the state of poverty.

The third set of problems of children and the younger generation in Russia is unprecedented health deterioration. Here it is necessary to consider two important circumstances.

Deterioration of children's health is due to the sustained trend in downward women's health, increasing pregnancy and childbirth pathology. There is a “pathological cargo accumulation in generations”. Here appears a vicious cycle: ill woman – ill fetus – ill child – ill teenager – ill parents. Medical advances partly contribute to this process ensuring the survival of premature, underweight children, children with severe perinatal pathologies.

The second factor is reduced to the fact that throughout the life cycle the child's health is deteriorating on all types of diseases. For the period 1990 – 2008 there was an increase in incidence. The indicators of physical development are deteriorating: normal weight is reduced, the number of undersized children is increasing, functional abilities are lowering. The proportion of children with chronic diseases is increasing. The actual number

of disabled children in Russia is higher than the official, it makes up 1 – 1.5 million. The main causes are diseases of the nervous system (32%), psychiatric disorders (24%), congenital anomalies (19%).

Child health deterioration in the process of life is determined by many cross-cutting factors that can be divided into environmental factors (social and physical) and behavioral. Their relative role is constantly changing. All they come under various influences and their overcoming requires urgent intervention of the state and society.

High morbidity and mortality of children and adolescents forced to implement a special longitudinal study of the dynamics of health and health-factor dependence in real time, having chosen four cohorts in the Vologda oblast. The study showed:

- for the period from 1998 to 2007 the overall incidence increased by 43%;
- for the period from 1995 to 2004 the proportion of completely healthy newborns (group 1) has decreased significantly, and the proportion of infants with a history of identified functional abnormalities has increased (29% to 34%);
 - gender analysis shows that girls' health is better than boys' health;
 - according to doctors' estimation the health of urban children is worse than in the regions; the share of children with chronic diseases in urban areas is 2 – 4 times higher; a similar situation is noted in relation to the assessment of physical development;
 - the major risk factors, which have a significant impact on children's health include: poor maternal health during pregnancy, mother's and other relatives' smoking, adverse environmental conditions, abnormal living conditions, family's inadequate health activity; risk factors are concentrated primarily in low-income families, which leads to a deterioration of meals, inability to acquire the necessary things for child care or visit paid professionals;
 - reducing of children health potential at birth occurs gradually and stepwise, the main critical periods are marked in the first year of

life (at birth there are 60-40% of healthy children, by the end of the first year this figure is reduced to 20-15%); and 6 – 7 years, when the proportion of children with chronic diseases is increasing by 5-6%.

Generalization of health factors shows a marking of four major groups: medical and biological (maternal health, low hemoglobin level) conditions, the level and style of families' life (parents' bad habits, working conditions, nature of feeding, nutrition, level of parents' socio-hygienic literacy and medical activity), environment quality (living conditions, ecology in the area of living).

The health of children and adolescents is in the internal relationship with their level of their achievement at school. A certain part of school-age children is not only unable to attend the annual classes because of their ill health, but cannot and is not ready to learn at home. Curriculum complications lead to the fact that only 10% of school graduates can be considered completely healthy. There is a clear trend towards deterioration of mental health of children and adolescents.

On the other hand, it is clear that school performance drops steadily, and one of the main factors of this trend is health deterioration and spread of the following diseases: scoliosis (25%), myopia (12.5%), neuropsychic disorders (25%), gastritis (15.63%). Almost half the students say they have the effect of fatigue.

Widespread of bad habits is also marked, such as drinking, drugs, smoking, which covers ever more significant range of children and adolescents. Experts believe that, given the intensity of the consumption such behavior concerns 1 million teenagers.

Appearance of psychogenic conditioned somatic disorders in childhood and adolescence due to the high frequency and severity of deconditioning impacts leads to a significant reduction in mental health, promotes more rapid formation of psychosomatic diseases in the early age stages and in adulthood. Triggering factors in shaping children's and adolescents' psychological and mental distress are: the poor

family, hygienic and social climate generated by parents' excessive employment (parents' selfishness, their responsibility and authority reducing, wrong approach to education and child-rearing, poor housing, nutrition, poverty); children's overload in schools or, alternatively, lack of opportunities for additional training to meet child's needs and interests; computerization and, especially, "internetization" of schools at the expense of studies and development of the national classical heritage.

Generalized level of mental health of the population reflects the prevalence of its mental illness, alcoholism and drug addiction, mental retardation, and suicide. Mental health of the entire population and especially children is alarming.

Problems of social reform of modern society, the transformation of socio-economic behavior, moral values, quality of life, priorities of psychosocial factors in shaping children's and adolescents' mental health require urgent multidisciplinary measures, timely prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of mental health disorders of the younger generation. Insecurity and the rapidly changing "rules of the game", which lead to difficult life situations, dissatis-

faction with life, especially among youth have significant impact on young people's development and behavior.

Today in Russia, youth subcultures are widespread; they cause destructive phenomena of drug use, hooliganism, crime, suicides. Russia ranks first in the world in the number of suicides among children and adolescents. Prevalence of subcultures, the variety of their modifications and various degrees of "contamination" of these movements' participants require society's attention and the use of good practices to assist them.

Synthesis of the main childhood problems allows us to formulate the main directions of social policy, the implementation of which is now urgent from the demographic, economic and political points of view. The target is that in the context of reducing the number of children we should ensure the improvement of their quality potential. In the first place in this context there is the task of improving health, beginning from birth, then follows education and socialization throughout their internal relationship as the foundation of the development of system Program of public policy with regard to childhood.

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