

PRECARITIZATION AND LABOR SELF-FULFILLMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE: TRENDS AND EFFECTS

Liliya Kh. Bulatova¹

Liliya R. Nizamova²

Abstract: Evaluation of the current transformations of the social and labor structure of society is one of the central topics in sociological knowledge. At the present stage, all social structures and institutions are becoming more flexible, mobile and changeable, characterized by instability and insecurity. Labor practices, professional trajectories and careers of young people also become unstable. The attention of an increasing number of scientists is attracted to non-linear youth employment strategies that contribute to the formation of a new “group” in the social structure of modern Russian society - the precariat. This article presents the results of a study of precarization in the youth environment as a consequence of the socio-economic transformations of recent decades. On the basis of semi-structured interviews with unstable busy young people of Kazan (Republic of Tatarstan, Russia),

as well as a secondary analysis of sociological and statistical data, factors, motives and consequences of young people choosing precarious employment are considered. It is shown that precarious forms of employment are considered by young people as a temporary measure, consent to such work leaves the possibility to easily and simply refuse it if it does not fit, and the decision on unstable employment without social guarantees can be either forced or voluntary.

Keywords: precariate, precarization, precarious work, temporary employment, youth, labor market.

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in scientific interest in the

¹ Kazan Federal University. e-mail: lbulatova@yandex.ru

² Kazan Federal University. e-mail: lbulatova@yandex.ru

study of precarious employment and the phenomenon of “precariat” - “unstable, unstable proletariat” [1 - 4]. The term “precariat” was introduced relatively recently to refer to workers who are distinguished by extreme instability with respect to the nature and duration of labor relations [5]. According to scientists, the formation of the precariat is associated with the policy of neoliberalism and indicates a crisis in the institution of wage labor in a post-industrial society [1, 4]. Among other sources of precarization, the current global recession [6, 7], economic and technological determinism and the transformation of personality attitudes [5] are distinguished.

In Russia, this phenomenon is associated with the reforms of the 1990s. and the so-called “adaptive” non-standard and informal forms of labor relations. Domestic economists believe that such forms of employment that during the crisis “restrained the outflow of labor from the labor market or unemployment” are deeply rooted in the post-Soviet space [8]. Currently, representatives of state authorities have started talking about the growth of unstable workers. So, in 2013, Deputy

Prime Minister O. Golodets noted that of the 86 million able-bodied people in Russia, only 48 million are officially registered and work; “The remaining 38 million is not clear where, what and how busy” [9].

One of the most economically vulnerable social groups in the face of increasing instability, according to researchers, is youth entering an independent life [10, 11]. Russian sociologists also note that it is “the status of youth that often enhances the precarization of its carrier” [12]. Young people, represented by recent graduates, forced to remain uncertain for years, are the “social base” of the precariat [1].

A significant number of works are devoted to the study of the specifics of employment of Russian youth in the context of post-Soviet transformations. Sociologist Ya.V. Didkovskaya, for example, found that with the emergence of the labor market and the market for educational services, the “linear” model of career development is replaced by a flexible “non-linear” model, according to which professional self-determination less and less precedes (or does not precede at all) a professional career [13]. In the studies of D.L. Konstantinovskiy

and G.A. Cherednichenko, based on statistics, revealed the basic conditions for the transition of youth from education to work [14, 15]. Moreover, the literature indicates that the analysis of the problem of labor self-realization of youth does not always take into account the intensification of the precarization process.

The purpose of this article is to determine the main trends and effects of precarization in the labor self-realization of youth who have completed the stage of obtaining a vocational education. To do this, it is necessary, first of all, to analyze the labor experience of unstably busy young people.

2 Methods

The empirical basis of this study was semi-structured interviews with young people of the city of Kazan, conducted from April to May 2018. The selection of informants was carried out using the "snowball" method according to the following key characteristics:

1. Lack of stable work - underemployment; employment under fixed-term employment contracts; informal employment, the hallmarks of

which are the lack of social guarantees of labor or their truncated nature;

2. Work experience - from 1 year or more;

3. Age - from 18 to 29 years old;

4. Graduated secondary and / or higher professional education.

We proceeded from the assumption of the heterogeneity of the Russian precariat and precarious labor [5]. Therefore, young people with different levels of job instability were selected. As a result, 15 semi-structured interviews were collected with young people in the age group from 20 to 28 years with different levels of education. The work of informants (for example, courier, sales assistant, taxi driver, etc.) was not related to the specialty received in educational institutions and did not require special training.

The study also used materials from the Federal State Statistics Service of Russia, data from the 25th wave of the "Russian Monitoring of the Economic Situation and Health of the Population of the Higher School of Economics" (2016). For a secondary analysis, the results of empirical studies of domestic sociologists and economists for 2012–

2016 were used. So, according to the results of a sample labor force survey in 2015, the share of informally employed youth in the age category “20-24” was estimated at 25%, while the share of all informally employed in the economy was 20.5% [16].

In most types of precarious labor, the proportion of youth is much higher, which gives reason to talk about the “youth face” of the Russian precariate [4, p. 109].

3 Results

Professional self-realization of a person begins with the choice of the sphere of professional activity and educational institution. As the analysis of the interview showed, for the majority of informants, the choice of an educational institution was not a sequential and planned step, on the contrary, it was formed under the influence of many other factors, such as, for example, passing points at a university. In some cases, the choice of the educational institution for the informants was carried out by their parents, or getting an education (mainly higher) could have independent value, not related to gaining

a profession: “you need to go to university without any reason, because it is so established.” Therefore, some already at the training stage understood that they would not work in their specialty and made a decision on a complete change in the sphere of professional activity. Others, despite the complexity of self-realization in their specialty, simply hoped for good luck.

Young people are involved in precarious work before and during vocational training. The informants themselves associate this not only and not so much with the possibility of gaining income and financial independence from parents: involvement in an unstable professional environment at the training stage could be determined by the influence of a busy close circle (“everyone works, but am I worse?”)

Finding a job (any, “just a job”) is not difficult for young people at the present stage - it is everywhere, “it is always there”. But finding a “good” job is really difficult. Among the most problem areas were noted: lack of jobs, low-paying and unpromising jobs; an unworked system of practical training in professional educational institutions, which does not allow young people to

further apply the acquired skills “in practice”; high competition in the labor market, etc. An analysis of the interview showed that the motives for choosing precarious employment formed under the influence of these factors can be very diverse, the main ones being:

1. Gained work experience - investment in a career and / or a resource for increasing competitiveness in the labor market:

“<...> in general, I went there to work, so that I would have at least some experience <...>. Because many employers now require work experience” (Interview 1, female, culturologist, working as a sales assistant)

2. Temporary work as a way to gain a foothold in prestigious companies with guarantees and career prospects:

“There is a hope that they can extend the internship, take them to work, there is still hope. <...> (Interview 8, female, economist, working as an intern)

3. “Stable instability” as a lifestyle or finding oneself is the motive for deliberately rejecting a tough professional rut, formed by the inability to do boring and “routine” work, the material reward for which does not

compensate for the “efforts you spend at work”.

4. “Just to have money”:
material attitudes formed under the influence of internal / external factors: a change in the sphere of professional activity as a result of personal choice (work is poorly paid or uninteresting) or due to an unfavorable socio-economic situation (for example, a crisis in a company).

However, in this case, labor activity is reduced only to receiving material compensation, contributing to the formation of an instrumental attitude to work (“I just work to get money”).

This type of employment, despite its temporary and unstable nature, has several advantages. Informants associate with temporary work the opportunity to provide themselves financially and not burden themselves with long-term obligations. This type of work is “convenient” for young people, especially in those cases when “you cannot find a job by profession”.

Among the possible negative consequences, informants called insecurity in obtaining a guaranteed income, “anxiety” about a possible loss

of a job, the absence of clearly defined boundaries of working time and non-working hours. Therefore, the informants themselves in most cases do not connect their further fate with such work and perceive it precisely as a “temporary” measure:

“... Well, as for me, working as a sales assistant is not the ultimate dream. It should develop somehow” (Interview 1, female culturologist, works as a sales assistant)

In addition, the “instability” (which in a broader sense covers not only labor relations, but all other areas of life), does not allow to plan life in the long term. It is stability in the sphere of labor relations that “gives you stability in everything in the long run.” With constant, guaranteed income, informants associate an approximate vision of their future life (and vice versa).

4 Discussion

The phenomenon of precarious employment and, therefore, workers included in seasonal and temporary work is not a new phenomenon for the present: there have always been such people. However, the crisis associated with the

instability of labor activity, and the formation of the precariate becomes especially relevant precisely in the post-industrial era of the development of society. An influential theorist of our time Z. Bauman writes that with the advent of “spreading” modernity, traditional and guaranteed labor is replaced by flexible, unstable and forcing one to earn a living “in Brazilian style: from time to time intercepting casual, short-term work, without any agreed guarantees, without the right to retirement and compensation” [17].

In conditions of increasing instability, one can more and more often encounter phenomena such as temporary unemployment, disqualification, and a change in the spheres of professional activity, which is especially characteristic of the younger generation. Linear models of career advancement are replaced by volatile, unstable career paths in which unstable, temporary forms of employment become important tools on the path of self-realization of youth.

The entry of youth into adulthood is largely determined by external conditions: the situation in the field of employment and social and labor

relations, as well as the state of labor market institutions in the country as a whole. The entry of modern Russian youth into the labor market and the choice of life path is carried out in conditions of unstable market competition and large-scale changes in the social structure of society. Their manifestation and impact on the career paths of young people are very diverse: increasingly, young people are faced with such phenomena as part-time work, secondary employment and employment in the informal economy [15].

It is believed that the widespread informal sector in Russia in the 1990s “amortized the decline in employment in the formal sector and thereby mitigated social tension in society” [15]. This also explains the growth of unstable and non-guaranteed forms of employment among young people, which have low starting opportunities for successful employment. In conditions when it is not possible to find a stable and promising job that would meet the requirements of young workers, precarious labor acts as an alternative to unemployment [18]. It is this type of employment that young people are increasingly considering as

the most effective form of labor self-realization at the initial stages of their professional path.

5. Conclusions

At the present stage, the work biography of young people is variable and controversial, as in the conditions of increasing instability it is becoming more and more difficult to find a “good” and interesting job, with career prospects. Numerous studies and statistics show that a significant proportion of young people are increasingly living in conditions of involuntary unemployment, changing (involuntarily and / or consciously) the scope of professional activity, occupying semi-skilled jobs with a fairly high level of professional training. Moreover, it is temporary forms of employment that become one of the markers of the professional development of youth.

Interviews with young people showed that inclusion in unstable forms of employment is determined by many factors: both the small number of promising and highly paid jobs, and high competition in the labor market. At the same time, unstable forms of labor practices of young people are not only a

forced, but also a consciously chosen employment strategy, formed under the influence of external factors. This is facilitated by internal motives for choosing unstable labor relations associated with the acquisition of primary professional experience, the desire to receive more material rewards, as well as the reluctance to engage in “routine” work, complemented by the desire to get an “interesting” and “boring” job in the future.

Such forms of employment, on the one hand, make it possible to provide for oneself financially, to have an income, in the case, for example, if one cannot find a permanent job. On the other hand, they contribute to the formation of an instrumental attitude to work, erase the once clearly delineated facets of working time and nonworking. Often precarious work is accompanied by a sense of hopelessness projected into the future and the inability to plan life in the long run. Therefore, these forms of employment are considered by young people precisely as a temporary measure, consent to work on which leaves it easy and simple to refuse it if it does not fit.

Unstable forms of labor relations give greater freedom in

choosing a professional path, both at the training stage and after. However, the long-term lack of stable employment upon completion of training can lead to the depreciation of the human capital accumulated by young people and, therefore, reduces the likelihood of taking promising jobs in the future. A frequent change in the areas of professional activity, in turn, does not allow for the formation of a professional identity.

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