

## VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN KAZAKHSTAN: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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The background of professional orientation as a social issue manifests itself in the necessity to overcome contradiction between the objective needs of society in a balanced structure of labor staff and prevailing subjective inadequate professional aspirations of young people. In other words, according to its purposes, vocational guidance system should have a significant impact on the efficient allocation of labor resources, choice of the life path by young people, their professional adaptation. The purpose of the research is analysis of the process of labor socialization and socio-economic adaptation of modern Kazakh youth, identification of work values and attitudes of young people for labor activity. The basic sociological study included the use of two empirical sociological methods: mass public opinion poll of young people and conducting of 5 focus groups with experts in the field of youth labor socialization (Astana, Uralsk, Zhambyl, Semipalatinsk, Kustanay). The number of each focus group was from 8 to 11 persons. Empirical studies allowed to determine the characteristics and specifics of professional orientation of young people in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The results obtained in the course of the focus group survey are used in the framework of this paper. The materials of the study can be useful for the teachers of higher educational institutions providing assistance to young professionals in adaptation on the labor market in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

**Keywords:** Labor market, job, young people, occupation, focus groups.

### INTRODUCTION

Marginalization of the youth, high unemployment among young people, absence of demand for certificated specialists in the labour market upon graduation of education institutions, structural unemployment, when there is a great number of vacancies and many unemployed are problems both developed and developing countries face (Klimov, 1993, 1996).

Vocational guidance of citizens and use of forecasting results, as well as development of the system of active interaction of educational institutions, employers and state are one of efficient means of overcoming that imbalance (Pryazhnikov, 1995; Masalimova & Ivanov, 2016; Masalimova & Chibakov, 2016).

Following the collapse of the USSR, the system of labour nurturing and vocational guidance in schools was lost in the Republic of Kazakhstan, resulting in the following problems: disbalance of labour market and educational systems, mismatch between high-demand and graduated professional personnel, person's

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uncertainty in occupational choice, shortage of necessary specialists, specialists' lack of operating skills, etc. (Aleshina, Repetsky & Semyonov, 2000).

Under the order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan Molodyozh research center undertook a complex sociological survey on the topic of Kazakhstan Youth as Strategic Resource of a Society of Universal Labour to study particularities of socialization and adaptation of the modern Kazakhstan youth in the labour market (Ananiev, 1977).

The survey is based on the idea of a Society of Universal Labor, proposed by the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev (Nazarbaev, 2015) in the article Social Modernization of Kazakhstan: Twenty Steps to a Society of Universal Labor.

*Research objective* is analysis of the process of labour socialization and social and economic adaptation of modern Kazakhstan young people, identification of young people's labour values and settings to labour activity (Kudryavtsev & Schegurova, 1983).

*Research object* is the modern Kazakhstan youth.

*Research subject* is studying features of the process of labour socialization and social and economic adaptation of modern Kazakhstan young people, identification of young people's labour values and settings to labour activity (Ginsburg, 1988).

The base opinion survey included the use of two empiric sociological methods: mass opinion poll of young people and 5 focus groups with experts in the area of youth labour socialization (Astana, Uralsk, Zhambyl, Semipalatinsk, Kustanay). The number of each focus group was from 8 to 11 persons. Focus group surveys were conducted in August-September 2016.

The results obtained in the course of the focus group survey are used in the framework of this paper.

Representatives of local executive authorities responsible for youth policy implementation, participants of non-governmental youth organizations of regions, sociologists, political analysts, representatives of higher education institutions (particularly, of graduate employment services), representatives of employment bureaus, character building deputy principals of secondary schools of the region responsible for school leavers' career guidance acted as experts.

The relevance of the topic of vocational guidance as a social issue makes itself felt through the need for overcoming the contradiction between objective needs of the society in the balanced personnel structure and inadequately formed subjective professional ambitions of the youth. In other words, the system of vocation guidance by its purpose should have a significant impact on the rational distribution of labour resources, choice of walk of life made by young people, their adaptation to occupation [Samoukina, 2003; Khamzina & Semenova, 2016).

Vocational guidance activities are closely related to the system of education, since it's mainly provided in educational organizations (Yaschenko, 1990). The issue of youth motivation in getting a degree is closely related to the vocational guidance issue. The mass character of higher education is one of modern worldwide tendencies, which is manifested in young people's interest to get a degree. Having said that, young people often want to get a degree even when there's no need for it (Kolominsky, 1990).

## METHODS

The next question was included in the focus group guide to find out young people's motivation in getting higher education: "*How much are young people of your district (region, city) motivated in getting a degree? Are there vocational characteristics of young people in your district?*"

Focus group participants' answers to this question were mainly the same. Generally, all answers can be structured into the following groups: the first group is answers on motivation in getting a degree as a mandatory component of prestige. In this case the youth (school leavers) is largely focused on the symbolic content of higher education, that is to say a university degree. ("*90% of our young people wants to get and has a degree. The tendency of the today's youth is that every second young man has a degree and currently we can say that it's 'fashionable' to have a degree, but generally it's not used for its intended purpose*").

The second group of respondents' answers relates to the opportunity of getting free education in a higher educational institution, i.e. getting an educational grant is therefore a priority. Moreover, focus group participants mentioned that in this case we face unconscious and unformed motivation of young people, since value of professional education is being replaced with free education. (*...Our volunteers, they enter, they got a grant, they submitted documents to institutions where their UNT (unified national testing) scores are enough to get a grant, no matter whether they have heart in this occupation or not*).

The third group of answers relates to replacement of young people's motivation with their parents' wish, i.e. school leavers make decision on getting higher education under the influence of their parents and relatives. ("*More common it's not a young man's motivation, but his parents'*").

And the smallest group of answers relates to young people's conscious wish to get a degree necessary for their professional self-fulfillment.

Speaking about regional characteristics of motivation in getting a degree, the western region of the Republic could be pointed out. The focus group participants in Uralsk stated that majority of young people of this region see advantage in getting technical education. ("*When working with young people regarding vocational guidance I see that they're willing to get a degree and even second graduate degree in technical sciences*").

The focus group participants from Astana put an emphasis on a gap between the need for higher education and blue-collar jobs, mentioning that higher education becomes necessary and even mandatory when hiring. (*“For example, when vacancies in the public service are advertised, they always write “higher education” everywhere, i.e. they understate vocational secondary education. Why should young people enter vocational colleges, if they need to get higher education in the long run?”*).

Discussing the question of regional characteristics of young people’s motivation in getting a degree, focus group participants from regions didn’t distinguish any. This again demonstrates that getting a degree for majority of young people becomes just another mandatory stage in their life. In this case we face the situation when young people overestimate the value and need for getting higher education, which leads, strange as it may seem, to its depreciation.

## RESULTS

Vocational guidance activity is closely related to popularization of particular professions. Thus, the President of Kazakhstan Leader of the Nation N.A. Nazarbaev many times emphasized in his speeches the importance and need for propaganda of blue-collar jobs, since the lack of high-skilled specialists affects production rates and competitive performance of the economy of Kazakhstan. “I urge our youth to learn blue-collar trades. We need to learn blue-collar jobs”, stated N.A. Nazarbaev (Aleshina, Repetsky & Semyonov, 2000) in the State of the Nation Address “Kazakhstan in a new global reality: growth, reforms, development”.

The following question was included in the focus group guide: *“What occupations are most popular among young people of your region when entering higher education institutions? Are there occupations, which are specific to your region?”*.

Young people’s preferences in occupational choice, according to focus group participants, are as follows, most popular: economic, financial, legal jobs, international relations, financial and banking sectors, legal studies, economics, management and least popular: blue-collar jobs, agriculture, building industry.

Focus group participants from the East Kazakhstan region pointed out that occupation prestige is closely linked to local industry. In this case young people consider further opportunity of employment the founding principle of occupational choice. This is a positive fact, indicating that certain groups of the youth make their occupational choice consciously and considering the opportunity of further prospects and employment.

Focus group participants from the West Kazakhstan region believe that popularity of occupations relating to the oil and gas industry is widespread and typical for not only youth living in their region but also the youth of all Kazakhstan. It was expected that a priority among the young people of the West Kazakhstan

region is placed on occupations related to oil and gas industry. It is largely due to the opportunity to find employment in the future and build a fruitful career. Nonetheless, disadvantages of that priority were also noted: (*“Everyone wants to work in the oil and gas industry, they get a degree, even second degree, but then cannot find job in the field”*).

Focus group participants from Astana, Kustanay and Taraz told about popularity of occupations among young people in general, without distinguishing regional characteristics. In Astana focus group participants, discussing the issue of popular occupations among young people, made a shift to discussion of shortages of the higher education system. Considering popular occupations are legal studies, economics, international relations, focus group participants brought out an opinion that they're most popular, because *“they're easy to learn”* too. Meanwhile they didn't consider and didn't distinguish blue-collar jobs or technical careers, the question was mainly about social and humanitarian professions.

Because of ever-increasing deficit of professional workers in the labour market, working on vocational guidance of young people and popularization of blue-collar occupations become a top priority (Rezapkina, 2006, 2007). The following question was included in the focus group guide to identify the prestige value of blue-collar jobs for young people: *“How prestigious blue-collar occupations are for young people, for example, builder, welder, plumber, engineer, carpenter, mechanic, cook, tailoress?”*.

The best part of focus groups' participants stated that blue-collar occupations aren't prestigious in spite of their relevance. (*“School leavers' values have been changed dramatically from moral to material. Everyone wants to do nothing and make big money, become a big boss. That's why they choose prestigious, as they think, branches of study, such as customs affairs, banking, finance and credit, economics and management, translation, legal sciences, but labour market has been oversaturated with workers of that fields for long. Such occupations as a cook, tailoress for our youth, can be described as “not fashionable”, because it is a low-wage job*).

According to other participants of focus groups, it's not quite correct to suggest lack of prestige of blue-collar occupations for all young people. Participants of focus groups agree that blue-collar occupations are less popular, but, in their opinion, the situation is changing. First of all, it's due to the lack of specialists of blue-collar occupations in the labour market, which makes employers attract such workers with decent wages.

Moreover, the work of state bodies on the propaganda of blue-collar occupations was noted. However, according to focus group participants, the main instrument that can boost the growth of blue-collar job prestige relates to labour compensation (*“The government makes every effort to attract young people's and adults' attention to these occupations, but I believe that these occupations will be in demand both*

*on the part of young people and adults, only when blue-collar workers' wage will be higher than wage of people, who sit in a chair, in office").*

Focus group participants took a favourable view of government work on the support of blue-collar occupations, while noting the need for informing young people and society on the opportunities of blue-collar occupations, towards raising of its prestige. The ideas of competitions, measures for agitation of the idea of a man of labour were proposed with a focus on the fact that a good specialist, a professional blue-collar worker can earn much more than an official of public sector, have more opportunities for self-fulfillment and enhancing his professional competence (Bendyukov & Solomin, 1997). Besides, it was suggested to use the idea of popularization of blue-collar occupations through the use of prominent public officials' experience (*"Nazarbaev is a metallurgist, Tasmagambetov is a geographer, Esimov is an agricultural specialist. And they do run the country.*) (Bodrov, 2015; Taranov, 2016).

Moreover, focus group participants believe that the demand for blue-collar occupations won't be met until they are prestigious in the society. The main instrument for raising the prestige of blue-collar occupations among young people is, according to focus group participants, using social networks' opportunities. According to focus group participants, we need to change priorities in terms of prestige, i.e. today young people consider it "fashionable to wear a tie, a jacket, to sit in a chair" (Nurgaliyev, 1994; Uznadze, 1966). In this case the well-coordinated work of not only state bodies, employment centers but also institutions of education, culture is necessary. It's necessary to engage in the process of young people's socialization much earlier than they make their occupational choice. Having said that, focus group participants noted that work on improving the image of blue-collar occupations is under way (particularly, free education and retraining), which will yield positive results in the future, however, the problem won't be solved without complex approach to the issue of professional socialization and self-determination of young people (Lisovskaya & Nikolaenko, 2005).

Focus group experts were asked to assess the work of state bodies on vocational guidance of young people. *Are vocational guidance activities carried out in your region? What do you know about these activities? Who does carry out these activities? What state bodies are engaged in vocational guidance in your region?*

When discussing the work of state bodies engaged in vocational guidance, focus group participants expressed their discontent, the most part argues that their work is ineffective. Focus group participants aren't aware of state organizations responsible for this area. The most part of focus group participants consider that only representatives of educational institutions interested in applicants and representatives of small and medium business, in particular, the chamber of businessmen who execute state bodies' order, are engaged in this work. (*"Unfortunately, we don't have such organizations. There are some professional*

*departments in each organization we have. Except higher educational institutions no one comes to us, not a single representative from a hospital, plant came to us and said, "Guys, come to us and study, because we need such specialists". "I can say that each young person after school graduation is left to his own devices and, as a rule, he starts to consider his parents' opinion".*

Focus group participants in the East Kazakhstan region note inefficiency of state bodies in organizing vocational guidance work. References were made to the work of higher education institutions in this field, representatives of which provide vocational guidance on the trades they teach. According to focus group participants, the work of state bodies in respect to vocational guidance is random and is carried out on an occasional basis. Focus group participants gave examples, according to which the notion of vocational guidance for today's youth is replaced with their emotional choice or influence of their parents. (*"The work is being carried out, but there is no telling that it is being carried out in a proper manner. For example, when you're talking with first-year and four-year students, you find out that they chose that profession unwittingly, many become disappointed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year, because it's not their cup of tea and they haven't heart in it, someone chooses technical profile, although he or she has a humanitarian mindset.*). In this case the experts raised an important question of scientific system approach for providing young people with vocational guidance (Baluk, 2012). Vocational guidance should be arranged and provided based on tests, psychological analysis of human abilities, while today it's provided largely on the level of emotions, estimates of occupation prestige regardless of its demand and further employment (Baluk, 2010).

The experts of focus groups in the East Kazakhstan and Kustanay regions, stated that vocational guidance of local executive bodies, local educational institutions is inferior to the work of representatives of Russian higher education institutions. Focus group participants from Kustanay mentioned that fact time and again (*"If we take our boundary regions, the Russian Federation with neighboring territories such as Uzynkol, Karabalyk, Fyodorovka, they work actively and many young people want to go to the Russian Federation for getting a degree, that's why our education, local one, has a lot of work to do"*).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Focus group participants shared the experience of providing pupils with vocational guidance, noting that such work should be carried out regularly, particularly, in educational institutions. In particular, it's necessary to provide pupils with vocational guidance in schools at homerooms and school assemblies, involving pupils, their parents and representatives of vocational and higher educational institutions (Abdullaeva, 2004; Lerner, 2003). Vocational guidance should be carried out not only with school leavers, universities but their parents, since they have a strong hold over young people. Moreover, regard must be paid to vocational guidance of

senior high school students, in order to orient them to conscious occupational choice in advance (Kondakov, 1997).

Focus group participants in Astana noted that they could give joint projects with “National Company “Astana EXPO 2017” as an example of vocational guidance activities. In the course of that projects the issues of young people’s involvement to volunteer activities were negotiated to provide preparation and running of the international exhibition EXPO 2017. The capital experience of vocational guidance of secondary-school students was also given as an example: training in technical occupations has been started since January, 2016 in 24 schools of the city. The pilot project involves two-year professional training for pupils of 10-11 grades. The project goal is vocational guidance of pupils.

Due to the new program school leavers will have basic skills in a certain occupation when getting their diploma. Pupils of the capital will be able to get a graduation certificate with awarding of the following qualifications: hairdresser, computer operator, tailoress, staff assistant, nanny, barman, and waiter.

The undertaken empiric research, therefore, allowed identifying characteristics and specific nature of young people’s vocational guidance in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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