

# **Accessibility of education as a social problem (differentiation of access to higher education and population's attitude towards it)**

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## ***Problem***

Considerable part of population of Russia aim at getting higher education, which is perceived as a kind of guarantee of preservation of the current social status or a tool for its improvement.

Increased demand of population for higher education has lead to extension of enrolment to the existing higher schools, as well as opening of new schools. However, higher education is far from being accessible for everybody. The most difficult is access to higher schools providing for high-quality training for professions demanded in the labor market.

## ***Objectives and methodology***

The purpose of the study was to identify the most important factors of differentiation of accessibility of higher education.

The following factors were examined:

- economic capital of the parents' family in the form of its income;
- cultural capital in the form of parents' educational status;
- urbanization level of the school-leaver's residence location.

Particular attention was paid to institutional factor conditioning inequality of access to higher school for school-leavers with complete secondary education.

The study of the problems of accessibility of higher education was based on analysis of aiming at getting higher education among leavers of full secondary schools, secondary professional schools colleges) and vocational schools, i.e. representatives of age group crossing the threshold "secondary school – higher school". A peculiarity of this study is that the poll could cover not only students, but their parents also, who are with no doubt play a big role at making up educational plans of their children and their further implementation.

Scope of the sampling covered by the study is distributed proportionally by territorial-economic regions in compliance with the density of the population representing the age group concerned. The sampling makes 1400 students and 1400 parents of these students and covers 18 regions of the Russian Federation. 79.6% of the sampling are urban population (2 megalopolises): Moscow and Saint-Petersburg), regional and district centers). 20.4% of the sampling are represented by rural population. 43.2% of the pollees are young men, and 56.8% are girls. 874 students of secondary schools, 263 students of vocational schools and 263 students of colleges were interviewed. These proportions were taken basing on real proportion of leavers from those schools and accounting for the recent tendency of growing number of leavers from secondary schools compared to leavers from vocational schools and colleges.

The survey was completed in April 2003.

## ***Findings***

1. The study has made it possible to find out that none of the factors of differentiation of accessibility of higher education (residence, socio-professional status of the family, cultural capital, economic capital, institutional factor) taken separately is decisive for making up aims at getting higher education. However, if taken together, they produce cumulative effect determining motivation and, in particular, practices of resource accumulation for entering higher school accompanying motivation.

2. In general, it is possible to assert that practically all secondary-school leavers aim at higher school regardless of their residence location. Inhabitants of both capitals, big cities, medium-size and smaller towns massively (from 82.5 to 89.8%) aim at continuing education at higher school. School-leavers from rural area are only slightly inferior to urban people: 70.1% of secondary-school students aim at getting higher education.

Aiming of college students at higher school depends on residence location. Very high desire for higher education among inhabitants of both capitals and big cities (respectively 80.0 and 80.6%) is in opposition to rather moderate desires of rural inhabitants (57.1%). At the same time, in general youth in urban areas, in particular in big cities, who terminate colleges, the same as students in secondary schools, aims at continuing education at higher school.

For vocational school pupils from various types of human settlements, there is an unexpected inversion of orientation to higher school: the most of those who desire to get higher education are found among rural youth (44.4%), and the least among youth living in both capitals (31.8%). This is probably due to the fact that the capitals and big cities offer better conditions of employment to vocational school leavers than in rural areas. Most probably, the difficulties in finding jobs push rural youth from vocational schools to continue education at higher school.

3. Socio-professional status of the family is not the factor which unambiguously determine orientation to higher education. Certain number of those who do not plan to get higher education is present among children from well-off families (children of businessmen and top managers). At the same time, orientation to higher education prevails in families of workers and office employees with no higher education.

4. The role of family's cultural capital in developing orientation to higher education is very important. Among youth terminating various types of schools (including vocational schools), the most intensive expression of their intention to get to higher school is observed with those of them whose parents (or one of them) have got higher education. At the same time, children from families with low level of education also massively express their aim of getting higher education.

5. Economic factor is now major source of inequality in accessibility of higher education. The higher income level is, the more frequently parents associate their children's future with entering higher school. While entering higher school is planned by 66.6% of families having low income, among parents with above-medium and high income such families are 88.6%. Meanwhile, the same data testify to the fact that a majority of the families aim at higher education regardless of income level: two third of the families with low and below-medium income plan to give higher education to their children.

6. At the same time, the pollees are clearly conscious that major resource determining accessibility of higher education, equally with financial potential, is intellectual capital and accumulated knowledge. Lack of capabilities and desire to learn, as well as bad results at school are cited by the pollees as major factors limiting accessibility of higher education .

7. The role of institutional differences between secondary schools, colleges and vocational schools as factor determining orientation to higher education is not so important as it could be expected. Not only youth terminating secondary schools, but students from colleges and vocational schools also massively, though in different proportion, highly estimate the value of higher education and express the intention of getting it. According to the data from the study, 83.1% of students in secondary schools, 74,0% of students in colleges and 38.5% of students in vocational schools intend to enter higher school.

However, modes and scopes of preparation for higher school, as well as strategies of entering higher school substantially differ depending on the type of school pollees terminate. As compared to students in secondary schools, students in vocational schools and partly in colleges show less intensive accumulation of knowledge, lesser variability of the ways from their school to higher school, less considered strategies of entering higher school, and lesser reliance on their own force. As compared to students in secondary schools, youth from vocational schools is less prepared for attempting entering higher school and aware of their lesser competitiveness. In this respect, students from colleges occupy an intermediate position.

It can be stated that in spite of some growth of accessibility of higher education for students from vocational schools and colleges, positioning of these groups with respect to higher education remains rather modest as compared to students from full secondary schools, which keep leading positions in this respect. Those who would like to get higher education, but would not enter higher school are: 8% among students from secondary schools, 20% among students of colleges and almost 40% among vocational schools.

8. In general, consciousness of need for payment for schooling is rather strongly implanted among the population. However, whatever their income is, most of the families are first of all looking for their children entering budgetary department, considering paid education as spare option of higher education. Paid education is taken as a compensation mechanism, in some way equalizing chances of entering higher school for those who do not have enough educational resources.

9. At the level of value judgements regarding the role of higher education, its functions and importance for getting success in life, the difference between representatives of different social and professional groups and coming from different types of schools is not fundamental. In general, all the groups of pollees (though in different proportion) are sure that higher education is necessary and has unconditional value.

At the same time, it has been discovered that motivation for getting higher education (like aims as mentioned above) are differentiated depending on parents' cultural capital expressed as their education level. The more strongly the values of higher education are implanted in the family, the more determined and consequent the children from these families are in their motivation and aims with respect to higher education. Even bigger difference between children from families with higher education and families where parents have no higher education is observed as far as practices of accumulation of educational resources required for successful crossing the threshold "secondary school – higher school" is concerned.

10. All pollees among school-leavers and their parents recognize that there are certain discriminatory practices at the stage of selection to higher schools.

Among the students, inequality of access to higher education is the most frequently mentioned by those who dispose of minimum amount of accumulated cultural and educational resources and, consequently feel less assured in competition for entering higher school. As far as parents are concerned, major factor determining their attitude towards the problem of accessibility is family's welfare. The lesser income they have, the more pronounced the feeling of unfairness and insuperability of the obstacles before them is.

# **Accessibility of higher education and prospects of positive social dynamics**

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## ***Problem***

Intensive vertical mobility is one of the factors providing social stability and public integration. Higher education is traditionally treated as condition for promotion on the status staircase. High educational level entails adequate status positions and respective wellbeing standards. To what extent such relationships are attributive of the Russian society which is currently phasing in? This issue was pivotal for this research.

## ***Objectives***

The purpose of this study was to reveal possible types of social dynamics proceeding from the analysis of educational strategies of the younger generation which are formed on the basis of available social resources at household and individual life scenarios. The social dynamics was understood as variability of social behaviors and mechanisms of vertical mobility while educational strategies implied firstly a decision in favor of receiving higher education and secondly selection per se of an educational facility and motivation for such selection.

The following tasks were solved in course of investigations:

- Assessment of the availability of higher education of various levels from the viewpoint of diversified resources parameters (social status, wellbeing, place of residence, type of adaptation behavior) of households with students attending various institutes.
- Identification of differences in motivations of students in respect of higher education acquisition.
- Analysis of models of 'educational behavior' of students<sup>1</sup>.
- Clarification of life scenarios of students.
- Comparison of matriculation practices and future job placement.
- Forming concept of routes of social dynamics.

## ***Methodology***

Information basis of the investigation was consolidated using returns of poll of 936 students from various higher educational institutions Moscow, Vologda and Taganrog (ratio 336: 300: 300), performed in 2003. Polling venues selection was based on the necessity to get an

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<sup>1</sup> Educational behavior implies the behavior in course of the process of education (deep studies acquisition of supplementary skills and employment in course of education).

image of metropolitan developments and also of the provincial patterns as well (center of province, and a large- scale provincial city).

## ***Results***

1. Evident correlation was revealed between provision of the family with resources, availability of higher education facility and prospects which education opens up. The greater the resource potential<sup>2</sup> of the family, the higher the chances of the children to get high quality, market demanded higher education related to clear-cut material and social prospects. However the doors to medium and high prestige institutions of higher education are not closed before children whose parents do not have command either economic or social resources.

Prestige faculties provide education to students of whom 28% come of families with low resource potentials, 47% from families with average resource potentials and 25% from most well-to-do families in terms of provision of resources. Notable differences in household capabilities come to light in case of elite institutes where 47% of students belong to most well-to-do families, 41% from average and only 12% from families with weak resources provisions. Such situation is adequately tracked by public opinion: 60% of respondents are convinced that 'for talented but low income young people elite institutions are inaccessible'.

2. The image of benefits generated by the profession obtained at the institute is specified to a great extent by educational strategies of the household. Professions which in the opinion of respondents will never yield material or status returns are usually taken up by children from families least provided with resources. Professions with best prospects are mastered by those who come of families with high level resources backgrounds. It shall be noted that professions yielding high profits but disadvantaged by low prestige with the public or conversely highly respected, but bringing small income stayed out of interest with families of high resources potential. On the opposite such professions prove attractive to children from families with lower incomes.

3. There are three principal matriculation strategies. The first one concentrates solely on knowledge of entrants. It is implemented by 38.5% entrants. Most widely spread strategy (51% of entrants) is feature by intervening parents who involve money and/or connections while the entrant is really preparing for the examination. The third strategy (10%) solely relies on the use of money and/or connections of the parents.

Orientation on knowledge alone is least spread in Moscow where 65% of all parents use money and/or connections and one third of this amount resort solely to this resource. In province informal methods are widely spread as well but the strategy totally neglecting knowledge is represented more modestly. Informal matriculation methods are employed not only by well-off families but also by those whose social and economic resources are rated low. The strategy based on connections and money of parents gains momentum as the matriculation aims at more prestigious faculties.

Half of families irrespective of resources level spend for matriculation money or use connections in addition to the examination tests.

4. The research posed a problem to assess the attitudes of respondents towards alternative models of matriculation including:

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<sup>2</sup> Resource potential of a household was estimated in form of integrated numerical score inclusive educational level of adult family members; evaluation of material assets; amount of savings; level of social self-appraisal; adaptation level.

- Matriculation on the results of entrance examinations. This model was rated best by 29, 5% of respondents.
- Matriculation of all applicants with subsequent sending down slow students (the Sorbonna model). This model was favored by 34,2% of respondents.
- Educating both who passed competitive exams and who paid for the training. Best model for 24,4% of respondents.
- Matriculation on the basis of uniform federal examination was preferred by 12,5% of polled students.

5. Principal motivations for getting higher education are: education for the sake of knowledge; education for the sake of money; education for the sake of prestige. Combined grouping of returns allowed singling out main educational motivations:

- 1) Intellectual and pragmatic - getting knowledge and converting knowledge into high profits – 31,5%;
- 2) Mainly intellectual – 23,0%;
- 3) Mainly pragmatic – 31,3%;
- 4) «Side» or extra-educational motivations – education as a token capital or as a tool to rid the problem (army draft, employment) or put it off – 14, 2%.

6. On the basis of obtained returns (data on attendance, selected additional books on profession, employment in course of education) educational behavior typology was arrived at:

- Studies and works – 20%;
- Studies – 55,8%;
- Works – 6,8%;
- ‘Doesn't study, doesn't work’ - 17, 4%.

Comparison of students' behaviors in course of training with respective practices of matriculation reveals that every fifth student irrespective of the effort spent on matriculation is involved into most active forms of educational behavior, combining education and permanent employment. The number of students in other groups to a great extent depends on personal inputs of a student into matriculation. Among those who spared personal effort by using the 'services' of parents the share of those belonging to 'doesn't study, doesn't work' reaches 30%. This indicator is twice higher than with the students who entered the institute all by themselves or using personal efforts and parental resources.

7. Identification of persistent type of social behavior was done with the help of cluster analysis<sup>3</sup> which revealed that the majority of students (64,1%) demonstrates a conformist model of behavior. Supported by the reserve of knowledge and abilities of parents at a time, they are prepared to realize such practices which, providing demanded by emerged institutional environment, will be effective "here and now". Though understanding the fallacy of the existing mechanisms of vertical mobility they will feel bound to think that nothing could be changed. However if there is a change in the 'institutional matrix' proper they will find a possibility to update both their models and behaviors.

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<sup>3</sup> The following variables were used: strategy to enter a higher education institution, type of educational behavior, intended employment in Russia or abroad; placement strategy; comprehension of the employer's priorities; comprehension of the necessity to change the existing mechanisms of vertical mobility; social and economic orientations (comprehension of the role of the state in the development of economy and social relations); social and political orientations (comprehension of the role of the state in mass media activities).

Second large group (29%) has intents to reproduce informal social practices. Representatives of this group feel comfortable with the environments in which, as they strongly believe, they will work on their professional career even if the conditions do not match their concept of abstract 'due'. Their sole difference from the 1<sup>st</sup> group is that at changing institutional conditions when other behavioral models become feasible and effective ( models based only on social relations) they will be the losers.

The third group puts together 'independent' individuals who support themselves with personal effort, knowledge and resources (6,3%). It is they who support individual-liberal vector of development. Representatives of this group may be considered as a power which will be instrumental for changing the 'institutional matrix' and remodeling the mechanism of social dynamics.