

Life-course patterns of new working-class youth in Russia

Life strategies
for working-
class youths

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to explore the dominant normative patterns that establish the timing and order of life events, determining the desirable life strategies for working-class youth in modern Russia.

Design/methodology/approach – Exploring the interrelationship between new working-class studies and life-course studies, this research combines the consideration of life course as a structurally organised integrity with a phenomenological perspective on the study of life strategies. The empirical basis of research consists of a survey of 1532 young working-class representatives living in the Ural Federal District of Russia and biographical in-depth interviews with 31 of them.

Findings – The study resulted in persisting significance and values of traditional life-course structures while showing that the current social conditions do not allow for this life strategy to be fulfilled. Young workers choose adaptation and survival life strategies that restrict the realisation of their professional and cultural potential. The obtained data have confirmed the presence of some worldwide tendencies, such as the dispersion of events during transition to adulthood, a combination of schooling and full-time work and an earlier career start of working-class representatives.

Originality/value – The sequencing and timing of life-course events of Russian working-class youth is an original research topic. The present study proposes and substantiates the notion of the new working class and criteria for its definition.

Keywords Russia, Life course, Working class, Life strategies, Normative patterns, Working-class youth

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

This research aims to contribute to class-focused life-course analysis, which is largely missing from the Russian sociological discourse. We seek to study the dominant normative patterns that structure the course of life and shape the identity of working-class youth on the empirical example of the Ural Federal District of Russia. Exploring the interrelationship between the new working-class studies and life-course studies, we concentrate on the implementation of normative class patterns and their consistency with individual life strategies, as well as the means by which these are being constructed and legitimised in the context of the structural conditions of a society.

The consequences of deindustrialisation, collapse of existing cultural hierarchies, growing individualisation of consumer practices and lifestyle diversification have allowed a number of researchers to assert the breakdown of late modern or postmodern society class structures (Clark and Lipset, 1991; Pakulski and Waters, 1996). Class as a term that could no longer reflect real collective identities was regarded as a “zombie concept” (Beck, 1992); the Marxist notion of exploitation was substituted by the neutral concept of social exclusion, which made it possible to escape from accusatory discourse and focus on the lack of certain resources as the consequence of individual life situation. However, the end of the 1990s was marked by convincing criticism of the postmodern approach based on the lack of attention to global power dispositions. The functional differentiation of nation states turned some of the developing countries into the largest industrial centres and worsened the position of the local working class, spawning new forms of class oppression on a global



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scale (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991). On the one hand, neoliberal politics and neo-management in Western countries formed the illusionary image that workers themselves were the only responsible ones for their successes and failures. Coupled with the massive decline of the trade union movement, this ideology led to the disintegration of labour communities and disarmament of collective protest movements. On the other hand, information technologies provided managers and owners of enterprises with new sophisticated instruments of control, while simultaneously increasing the psychological burden of workers due to the growing complexity of technologies that require more vigilance and concentration. By the end of the 20th century, all these tendencies led to the increase of working-class exploitation, with a paradoxical reduction in wage costs throughout the world (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007).

Parallel with these fundamental changes of capitalistic economies, post-Soviet Russia went through a long transitional period, which led to the consolidation of a particular type of power hierarchy. The restructuring of the economy was ideologically based on a specific form of neoliberalism which ended in violent deindustrialisation (Mah, 2012, pp. 98–126), the dramatic surge of precarious work (Shkaratan *et al.*, 2015) and “shadow” economic practices (Barsukova and Radaev, 2012). Global research centres have detected a rise of social inequality in Russia in recent years (Global Wealth Databook, 2018, p. 159) since a small group of big property owners uses the main part of state resources, including human capital assets (Toshchenko, 2018). In such conditions, there are few possibilities for empowerment of democratic institutes, human capital growth and realisation of citizens’ social potential. The most vulnerable group consists of working-class youth whose life opportunities are further restricted within the abovementioned structural limitations. These problems especially concern young service workers who, in contrast with the industrial working class, do not have a historical background for class identity and solidarity and are not represented either in the state or public and scientific discourses.

To disclose the dominant normative patterns that regulate the life course of Russian working-class youth, we regard the key life-course trajectories of (1) education, (2) family and (3) career as the main research topics of this article and seek to measure and understand the following aspects:

- (1) normative temporal limitations and preferred sequence of the main role transitions of working-class youth (finishing education, getting a full-time job, first career promotion, marriage, having the first child);
- (2) the correlation between real and preferable time and sequence of role transitions;
- (3) the preservation of traditional class distinctions within the normative patterns of the life course or their inversion, differentiation or displacement by other patterns and values during the period of emerging adulthood.

The conventional framework for life-course studies has become the ground for the given goals. Here the life course is considered as a timed and ordered sequence of events and role transitions within a lifespan (Jackson and Berkowitz, 2005, p. 56). Moreover it is analytically split into several basic trajectories where education, family (including marriage and parenting), profession and career are the main ones (Elder, 1985, pp. 32–33).

2. Literature review

This chapter is aimed to review the recent literature on working-class studies and life-course studies paying attention on their interrelationship to analyse the peculiarities of the working-class youth life course in the Russian context. We also highlight the specifics of the Russian sociological discourse concerning class issues in comparison with the Western studies.

2.1 Working-class issue in recent sociological discourse

A new perspective to social inequality emerged in the UK and the USA in the late 1990s at the junction of socio-political activism and academic tradition, i.e. when new working-class studies appeared as an interdisciplinary platform for discussions aimed at solving practical problems (Linkon and Russo, 2016). The participants of this new research field set themselves the task of expanding the boundaries of the theoretical understanding of the class, including the problems of identity and lifestyle in the changed cultural landscape, while not rejecting the idea of the material basis of class structures. Some of the prominent topics include the consequences of neoliberalism for the working-class (Zweig, 2000), negative media representation of this social group as a form of control and existing inequality structure consolidation from the position of the dominant class (Jones, 2012), cultural and social capital as the major class differentiating factor (Savage, 2000) and the specifics of employment relations in the service sphere (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013). At the same time, the category of class lost its dominant position in the discourse of social inequality, being placed alongside notions such as gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Intersectionality as a theory of overlapping discriminations has lately been introduced in class analysis for understanding the reproduction of mechanisms of social injustice (Gavrilyuk and Bocharov, 2018). The participatory and actionist nature of new working-class studies is embodied in their mission to serve the interests of real people and create conditions for positive changes in the lives of workers, forging and strengthening ties between the academic community, trade unions and other public organisations whose aim is to achieve justice for the working class.

Currently there are two dominant trends of scientific interpretation of the working-class social position and role. The first one is shaped in response to the feminist and postmodernist challenge of the 1970–1980s. Its supporters use the language of the “cultural turn” while studying the micropolitics of differences within the working class, identity and class behavioural pattern translation and reproduction (Bottero, 2004), social and cultural capital of working-class representatives (Savage *et al.*, 2013) and class-based peculiarities of cultural taste (Bennet *et al.*, 2009). The second direction of working-class studies is based on the language of critical theory and brings us back to the classical Marxist terminology of class antagonism, social justice and exploitation. A number of authors draw upon the idea of unification of the working class on the basis of common class interest, which allows for considering it as a global collective agent of social action, antagonistic to the ruling class (Foley, 2002; Zweig, 2016; Hallet, 2017).

Concerning the Russian sociological discourse, the concept of working class disappeared in post-Soviet times because of its exclusive association with the discourse of Marxism–Leninism, which was rejected in the sociological community. The first works that explore the nature of the social structure of the Soviet society without using the Marxist class approach appeared during the perestroika period in the late 1980s. On the basis of the Weberian social differentiation criteria, authors declared the classlessness of the Soviet society, pointing out the etacratie nature of its social structure, which means that the ruling force is the bureaucratic layer of the party nomenclature. The positions of individuals in such society were determined by the degree of proximity to the sources of centralised distribution (Shubkin, 1987; Gudkov *et al.*, 1988).

The theoretical search in Russian sociology during late 1990s and early 2000s was concluded with a description of social differentiation in terms of structural functionalism, which is a conceptual framework that still persists. The question of criteria for the social stratification of the Russian society has become most acute in post-Soviet times. Attempts to construct multidimensional classification models of a society in a state of incomplete transition were unsuccessful due to the uncertainty and extreme detailing of the proposed criteria and uncritical declaration of the middle class as the societal basis (e.g. Belyaeva, 2001). The impossibility of a clear description of social strata and their relationships was explained

in terms of modernisation and social transformation of the Russian society, when the social status and roles of various groups were in a state of instability (Golenkova, 2001). The latest studies of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Science have been carried out in line with the structural functionalism of T. Parsons, and they all share the conclusion about the instability, uncertainty of the social structure and incompleteness of the transition to any of its specific models (Golenkova, 2017).

Summarising the above, it should be noted that in Soviet and post-Soviet sociology it was common to oppose the stratification and the class approach, since the former was associated exclusively with Marxism, while classes in Western sociology were historically a part of the stratification discourse in its various conceptual variants, present as a kind of stratification in the works of Weber (1970) and Parsons (1940). Furthermore, in the conventional approach of Russian sociology, a substitution of concepts has taken place, whereby the middle class is interpreted as a stratum, and the working class, which is actually the vast majority of the population, remains unnamed or replaced by euphemisms – for example, “basic layer” (Zaslavskaya, 1997) or “median” class, characterised by low-income standards (Tikhonova, 2014, p. 160). The accounts of workers as a social group but not as a class have been provided by researchers, but usually only traditional industrial workers have been examined (Karkhanova *et al.*, 2014; Karavai, 2016). Therefore, the question of the criteria and the main features of the working class that allow for a clear distinction between this class and other social groups remains unresolved. In recent years, a few works by Russian authors have articulated the need to rehabilitate class analysis and return the concept of the working class to the scientific discourse (Zabelin, 2011; Vanke, 2014; Samygin, 2016). A sociocultural approach to the study of working-class youth close to Bourdieu’s concept was used in the empirical research under E.L. Omelchenko’s guidance (Omelchenko and Nartova, 2013). Particular attention should also be paid to the studies of foreign authors who have provided detailed overviews of various aspects of working-class life experiences in contemporary Russia (Morris, 2016; Walker, 2014).

Consequently, in the analysis that follows, objectives will be both to propose a notion of the new working class in modern Russia, which now comprises not only industrial but also service workers and disclose the specifics of the working-class youth experience, values and life patterns from the perspective of life-course studies.

2.2 Normative class patterns and transition to adulthood

Normative class patterns of transition to adulthood are a widely discussed topic on the intersection of life-course studies and class analysis. The conventional framework for life-course studies as a multidisciplinary research program was formed by the mid-1980s. The life course as a key concept is conventionally understood as a timed and ordered sequence of events and role transitions within a lifespan (Jackson and Berkowitz, 2005, p. 56) and usually analytically divided into several basic trajectories, the main ones being education, family (including marriage and parenting), profession and career. Trajectories are limited and determined by the transitions that imply the emergence or completion of a new condition, direction of activity and change in social roles (Elder, 1985, pp. 32–33).

The growing differentiation of the ways of transition to adulthood, the change of its markers and duration increase are most often viewed as some of the consequences of post-industrial economic transformation. Researchers notice that since the mid-2000s the conventional age frame of this transitive period in the scientific discourse is shifting to up to 35 years of age (Lee and Waithaka, 2017). In Western societies, an increase in the duration of transition to adulthood is also accompanied by the decompression of markers of this condition. If in earlier times key social transitions occurred during a relatively short period, in modern societies they became rather dispersed and substantially distant from each other. The traditional sequence of role transitions – schooling/full-time work/marriage/childbirth

(Hogan, 1981) – has been replaced by the situation where people simultaneously perform multiple social roles, which in earlier historical periods used to be considered as the characteristic of a particular stage of the life course. Social roles themselves become unstable and reversible (returning to school during work, young adults returning to their parents' home, etc.) and characterised by internal conflicts; they also became desynchronised, separated and mixed, moving away from a single regulatory standard (Macmillan, 2005, pp. 17–18).

The increasing complexity of the life-course structure, its dependence on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, actualise the study of life course within an intersectional perspective that includes class-sensitive analysis. These differences have given rise to a significant differentiation of modal life paths in developed societies, where each group forms its own normativity, influencing life events and their sequence. The stratification approach which connects life trajectories with various factors of social differentiation is currently dominant in life-course studies discourse (Fussell and Furstenberg, 2004). The class approach is presented to a much lesser degree within the field; nevertheless, although not articulated as central to research methodology, class problems can be traced in a variety of works from a stratification or intersectional perspective (Goldstein and Kenney, 2001). At the same time, the majority of studies focussing on the problems of inequality retain the original assumption of differences in lifestyles and normative patterns of the middle and working class (Geronimus, 1987; Meier and Allen, 2008).

Class differences affect school to work transition and influence the attitude towards labour, motivation, adaptation abilities and career development (Blustein *et al.*, 2002). The increasing gap in access to higher education forces young people from marginalised groups of the population (low-income families, ethnic minorities) to start working earlier. Research shows that there is a general tendency for a faster transition to adulthood among working-class youth in comparison with their middle-class peers (Furstenberg *et al.*, 2004). According to a number of authors, the unified normativity in the content and sequence of life events as markers of maturity acquisition reflects only the perspective of a white middle-class man. The precocious transition to adulthood is more normative, or at least less stigmatised within the social environment of the lower class (Augustyn and Jackson, 2017, p. 17). Life strategies and legitimate means of success for historically discriminated social groups of young people differ from the traditional ones prescribed by the dominant middle-class culture (Ogbu, 1993).

Verifying these crucial assumptions on the empirical example of the youth from the new Russian working class, this study pays attention to the normativity of the main life-course trajectories sequence and timing, the dominant patterns which structure the life path and prescribe desirable life strategies for the group under consideration. We also compare the patterns of life success achievement of working-class youth and the students of higher education institutions.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Conceptualisation of the research subject

Anticipating the upcoming global changes, the concept of the new working class was proposed by theorists in the 1960s and was defined as a stratum within the industrial working class, which is fundamentally distinguished from it. The transition to high-tech production required continuous monitoring by operators and therefore should have led to the emergence of a group of highly qualified workers integrated into organisational activities – the new working class (Gorz, 1967; Mallet, 1975). According to the proponents of this concept, these processes should empower workers in terms of labour management and control, increase trust between workers, managers and owners of the enterprise based on common interests and form new political consciousness among workers. Today we observe that labour conditions, civil participation, sense of belonging, lifestyles and identities of the post-

industrial working class drastically differ from the working class of the industrial age. The former nowadays represent only a group within it, no longer being able to shape core ideas for collective identity in the conditions of the dominating neoliberal economy and ideology. Subsequent empirical studies did not confirm the initial provisions of the new working class concept, so this notion lost the connotations that post-industrialism theorists had put into it and could be re-launched in contemporary realities.

The analysis of the research field allowed us to distinguish the basic criteria for separating the new working class from other classes and stratification groups: property ownership, participation in management of a particular enterprise and the nature and content of labour. Based on this, we consider the new working class as a group of employees engaged in all areas of material production and service whose work is routine, divided into standardised segments amenable to an algorithmic sequence, the results of which can be quantified; these people are not involved in management and have no ownership over means of production. A detailed analysis of the new working class concept and the possibilities of its empirical application can be found in our two collective monographs on the topic (Gavrilyuk, 2019, 2020).

3.2 Sampling, participants and procedures

The empirical basis of this research consists of a mass survey and biographical in-depth interviews with young working-class representatives from different occupational spheres living in the Ural Federal District of Russia. This region was not chosen accidentally. It is rich in natural resources and it used to be the country's basis of industrial production in the fields of mining, steel-making, mechanical engineering and woodworking in the 18th century. Historically, the working class was formed here, along with several regions of central Russia. In the 19th and 20th centuries the Ural industrial potential was used for initial and subsequent industrialisation of the previously agrarian country. An important role in the development of the region was played by the forced relocation of technologically advanced enterprises of the USSR to the Urals during the Second World War. The evacuation of almost all modern factories for that period with their equipment, professional engineering and labour personnel from the European part became a powerful impetus for the industrial development of the Urals. Today, the Ural Federal District includes four regions: Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, Kurgan and Tyumen. The Tyumen Region is the basis of the country's fuel and energy sector and the main exporter of oil and gas; its recent inclusion into the region strengthened the interaction of the mining and processing industries of the Urals. The post-Soviet industrial decline together with the effects of globalised economy in the late 20th and early 21st century led to significant changes in the structure of the Russian working class. Today, in line with global trends, the size of the traditional working class is decreasing and the share of those employed in the service sector is rising. The statistics of youth employment of the Ural Federal District by industry are quite consistent with national trends (Gavrilyuk and Ustinova, 2018, pp. 25–26). Therefore, industrial legacies and strong working-class background coupled with partial deindustrialisation and service economy growth make the regional context of the Ural Federal District particularly interesting.

Data collection for the qualitative survey was carried out from April until July 2018 in three major cities of the Ural Federal District: Ekaterinburg, Tyumen and Kurgan, as well as typical rural settlements of this area. The subjects of the study were 1534 younger adults in the age range from 16 to 29, divided into cohorts of 16–19 (33%), 20–24 (33.4%) and 25–29 (33.6%), which is based on the standard of official Russian statistics. As regards gender, 50.3% are men and 49.7% are women. They come from cities (76.2%) and the countryside (23.8%) of the Ural Federal District and work in commodity production, including agriculture (45.2%) and the service sector (54.8%). Participants in the study were selected randomly. Since the study focused only on the employed part of working-class youth, the survey was

conducted mostly at workplaces and it was arranged with the management of companies. The youngest cohort of the sample (aged 16–19) was surveyed at the places of study (vocational education institutions) but in so doing, only the employed students were selected to take part in research. Participants were instructed how to fill in the traditional printed questionnaire and the completion took 40–50 minutes on average. Research results were processed using statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20.

The qualitative part of the study took place from February until August 2018 in Tyumen city. To ensure trust in the conversation process between the researcher and the participant, the selection of informants was carried out using the snowball sampling method. The decisive criterion of selection was the belonging of a person to the new working class. All participants in the sampling were supposed to occupy working-class job positions and not be full-time students at higher education institutions at the moment of the interview. The sample included 31 working-class young adults. Half of them had traditional working-class occupations in industry, mining, construction or technical maintenance, whereas the other half performed their duties in retail or other kinds of client service. Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to 2.5 hours and was conducted in a place convenient for the informant – their home, workplace, or a cafe. All sessions were based on a detailed interview guide; they were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Participants in both the quantitative and qualitative survey were informed about the purpose and length of the study, the content of the questions and the intended use of data. They were not paid or provided with any other compensation in return for participation.

3.3 Research design and analysis

Among the life-course research approaches, the axiomatic one of “agency within the structure” substantiated by [Settersten and Gannon \(2005\)](#) was chosen to develop an empirical study design of the subject matter. With these concepts authors overcame the core tension of the field of life-course studies, where one line of explanation interprets life course as a product of social forces (social structure), while the other one emphasises the role of individual efforts and capacities (human agency). The model of agency within the structure implies “understanding how the life course is partly the result of active and free choices, partly created within a fixed set of possibilities and partly imposed from outside” ([Settersten and Gannon, 2005](#), p. 52). The approach proposed by the authors allowed us to use mixed methodology, combining an algorithmic approach that considers life course as a structurally organised integrity with a hermeneutical perspective in the study of life values, patterns and strategies, ways of its legitimisation and specific forms of implementation by young working-class representatives.

Thus, in the first stage, the main types of statistical analysis (frequency and contingency table analysis) of quantitative survey data were implemented to reveal the main trends. Frequency tables with ordinal and nominal scales were interpreted and described. To determine the presence of correlations in contingency tables, we used the statistical criterion χ^2 (Pearson chi-square). In the second stage, we conducted an in-depth biographical interview intended to understand the ideas collectively shared in the mass poll, as well as their construction and legitimation. The obtained material was examined using a combination of the following research tools: 1) sequential division and coding of the text array on the basis of the research categories previously incorporated into the conceptual scheme and toolkit; 2) identifying additional categories that have arisen during conversation and further structuring of texts; 3) condensation of the meaning of statements, quoting the most representative of them; 4) phenomenology-inspired analysis that reveals the intentionality of utterances, non-reflexive knowledge (non-problematic for the informant) and the logic of building links between the events in one’s own biography.

4. Findings

4.1 Life-course trajectories of the new Russian working class

We consider life course in the conventional sense as a sequence of events and role transitions within a lifespan which is temporally organised and ordered (Jackson and Berkowitz, p. 56). The events described by the informants as their crucial life turns are the major role transitions on their way to adulthood. The respondents of the mass poll were asked to answer the question “At what age do you think it is best. . .?” (Table 1).

As Table 1 demonstrates, the traditional markers of successful adulthood have retained their importance for working-class youth. Namely, traditional Russian society age limitations prescribe that one should finish the transition until 30 [Don’t want to study. . ., 2017]. Orientation towards starting a family in their 20s, an early start of work and fast career promotion are clearly represented, but the sequence of these events is rather specific for this particular social class. Out of those interviewed, 29.4% are ready to start working even before reaching the age of 18 and the absolute majority stated it was necessary to study and work at the same time.

The correlation of personal plans and normative temporal patterns can be traced in further analysis. Concerning educational trajectories, Table 2 shows the consistency of normative expectations and the real educational level of respondents. The vast majority (92.8%) believe that one should get professional education by the age of 24. In reality, the percentage of those who have it or are in the process of obtaining it among the cohort of 20–24 is 83.1%.

The legitimization of the necessity for education and the attitudes towards education differ across age cohorts. Figure 1 shows that the level of importance of higher education goes down in the older group, the evaluation of vocational education stays the same, but the influence of luck increases. Around 50% of respondents intend to continue their education.

The motivation for getting professional education is presented in Figure 2. Only about a third of the working-class youth desired to work in the professional field they have chosen, while for the rest of the respondents more significant factors were the prestige and demand for the profession, future income, or availability.

In the interviewed sample only service workers had higher education or were in the process of higher education distance learning, but no one worked in their professional field.

Table 1.
Normative temporal
attitudes regarding
transition to adulthood
(% of the sample)

	Before 18	18– 24	25– 29	30– 34	After 35	Not necessary in life	Total
Get professional education	19.4	73.4	4.4	0.2	0.1	2.5	100
Get married	0.6	36.1	51.6	5.1	1.2	5.3	100
Have the first child	0.4	23.9	57.4	12.0	0.9	5.4	100
Start working	29.4	57.1	11.5	1.3	0.2	0.4	100
Be promoted at work for the first time	1.2	35.9	46.2	10.3	0.8	5.6	100
Become a manager	0.7	7.4	30.6	36.9	11.9	12.4	100

Table 2.
Working-class youth
educational level (% of
age groups)

	15–19	20–24	25–29
Lower secondary education	20.3	4.7	1.9
Secondary education	21.7	12.2	7.4
Basic vocational education	10.4	7.5	10.1
Secondary vocational education	24.3	43.9	53.8
Unfinished higher education	22.1	20.9	9.9
Higher education	1.2	10.8	16.9
Total	100	100	100

Most of them have a tendency to choose their specialisations spontaneously, under the pressure of their parents' authority. For example, Aliona, 24, clothing store administrator and bachelor in the field of agriculture, said,

First of all, it was my desire not to disappoint parents . . . I just wanted to get a good score, go to a state-funded place and wanted everybody to leave me alone.

Most of the informants do not regard the experience in higher education institutions as useful, or admit that it only had formal significance for getting the job or future promotion. In contrast to service workers, nobody from the traditional working class who worked in commodity production, mining or building had a higher education degree at the moment of the interview. The usefulness and significance of basic and secondary vocational education have been rated higher in comparison to higher education. For example, Ilia, 29, technician with secondary vocational education who quit university, said,

I'm not planning to enter the institute. I'm satisfied with everything and I do not see the point. Guys graduated from the institutes and work the same way as I do. Now education is generally screwed. Technical school is enough.

Life strategies for working-class youths

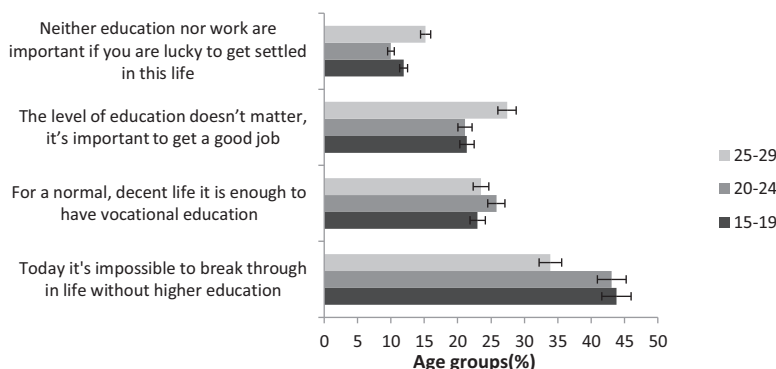


Figure 1. The distribution of responses to the question "In your opinion, which educational level is necessary to succeed in life nowadays?"

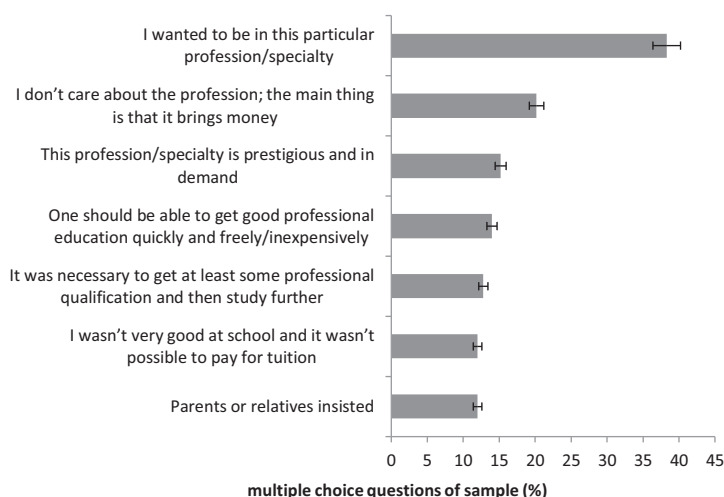


Figure 2. The distribution of the responses on the question "If you have professional education, why did you choose this particular profession/specialty?"

It is possible to distinguish two main patterns of this attitude legitimation: the experience of important others like parents or friends, or system restrictions like corporative requirements.

It is also common within working-class youth to associate themselves with the image of businessmen or creative professionals who have achieved success without institutional education, relying only on their outstanding personal features, natural intelligence and learning via online tutorials.

The observed attitudes towards higher education in Russia were expected. The general problems of the higher educational system of Russia such as corruption, extreme bureaucratisation, incessant process of reformation and detachment from the labour market have been widely discussed in literature (Osipian, 2012; Kholostova, 2008).

The next issue under investigation is the consistency of family patterns and the observed demographic behaviour of working-class youth. One of the most striking features is the discrepancy between family intentions and the existing statuses of the respondents.

As many as 80.6% of the working-class youth are convinced that it would be better to have the first child before the age of 30. However, in reality, as Figure 3 shows, 63.5% of respondents from the older cohort and 79.1% of the middle age cohort do not have children. The difference in reproductive behaviour between industrial and service groups of the working class has not been detected.

Interviews show that family remains the main value for new working-class youth. Most of the informants, who are not married yet, show the intention to start a family in the next several years. For male informants from both service and industrial sectors, the traditional breadwinner pattern is crucial: they usually connect family creation and childbirth mostly with external factors like social normativity, steady job and sufficient income, rather than inner readiness and emotional states. For example, Vitaliy, 22, security guard said,

I have not thought about the family yet and I will not do so until I stand firmly on my own two feet. . . You need to think if you can provide for a child. That would not be the case when a dad ruins himself by drinking, a mother disappears, and a child finds himself in an orphanage. You need to know that you can do it financially, physically. I cannot do this, for example. In my situation, if I spend time with my family, I will lose money.

The claim of one of the first proponents of working-class masculinity from the 1970s that “in our society the main focus of masculinity is the wage” (Tolson, 1977, pp. 58–81) has not lost its actuality in collective attitudes, being internalised by service workers as a new part of the working class whose job is not connected directly with hard physical labour.

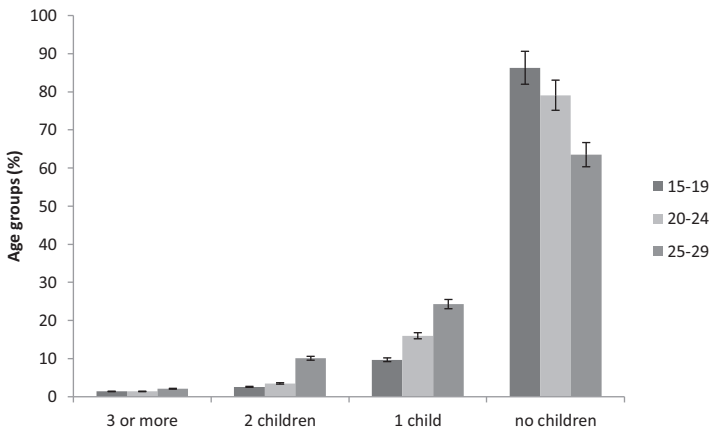


Figure 3.
The number of children
in working-class youth
families

Almost all single female informants demonstrate the intention to get married and have children, which is in their view self-evident knowledge taken for granted. Only one of them referred to her current financial and social status and mentioned the intention to pursue professional career, while the rest of the interviewed girls were already married or expressed a general intention in the form of: “Like everyone, one day I want to get married, have children.” In comparison to men, matrimonial plans of female informants are vague, which can be interpreted as their belief in the lack of ability to influence this process or have it under control in a patriarchal social world.

The abovementioned tendencies can be explained not only by the informants’ perceptions of the necessary facilities and conditions for family creation but by the structural factors concerning the quality of their life. As Figure 4 demonstrates, the income level of interviewees is low. In addition, women are more likely to have an extremely low-paid working-class job than men. At the same time, more than a half of the subjects generate income at the very survival level, which does not allow for making even minor savings.

In comparison to middle-class youth from metropolises, 75.3 % of the provincial working-class youth share the belief that real adulthood starts with owning a place to live, whereas 11.3% think that this is necessary only if you have your own family. Only 7.7% are ready to live in a rented dwelling and 5.6% regard the possibility to live with their parents as an adult. Regarding the financial situation, 36.1 % of the sample has taken various loans and around a third of those who have loans claimed to be unable to cope with the debt pressure and pay on time. The results of the interviews also show that a lot of young people are ready to fulfil the dream of home ownership, but only few can afford to take a mortgage (workers in automobile or oil industry). The average mortgage rate in Russia is 9.8 % (Housing [Mortgage] Loan Market, 2018).

4.2 The pathway to successful adulthood: individual and structural factor estimation

In order to show the difference in middle and working-class youth perspective, normative orientations and patterns of the life success achievement, we compared the sample under study with the results of our previous research with higher education students from 2016 (Gavrilyuk, 2016).

Understandably, students are more inclined to choose self-education and their own persistence in goal attainment as the key factors of success in comparison with working-class youth. However, trust in institutional education is rather low in both groups, as well as the hope for having a prestigious university diploma, since that is not affordable for the majority of provincial youth. In general, we can distinguish a trend for students to attribute more significance for achieving success to their self-development (57.4%), talents (16.8%) and special

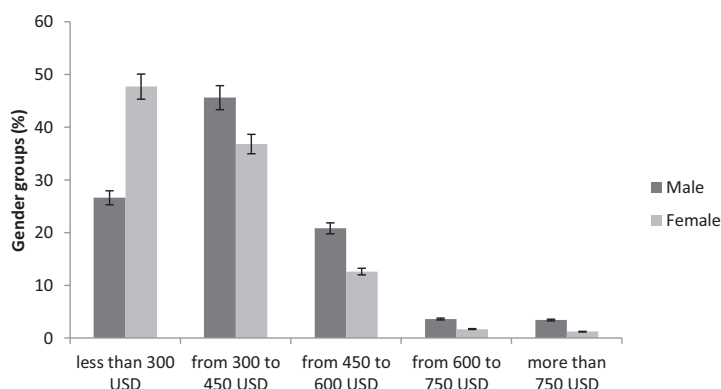


Figure 4.
The income level of
Russian working-class
youth (% of gender
groups)

personal traits (22.1%), whereas working-class youth are more likely to underline the impact of social capital, i.e. the necessity to have the “right” acquaintances or relatives who will facilitate job promotion (23%). It is interesting, that only a part of students (13.9%) hopes for a happy marriage as a key for a life success, which is not the case with their working-class peers. At the same time, we can conclude that the horizon of expectation is more uncertain for working-class youth; they are more likely to believe in a sudden fortunate coincidence (19.5%) (see Figure 5).

Interview data confirm these trends, since 8 of the 17 interviewed service workers and 8 out of 15 industrial workers found their job or expected promotions with the help of relatives, friends, or it was a matter of a fortunate coincidence to get acquainted with the “right” people. For example, Anton, 26, stagehand, said,

Well, naturally, we live in Mother Russia, that’s why the word of mouth, acquaintances of the acquaintances, acquaintances of parents. . .

The second popular option for job searching is specialised Internet resources. Talking about their future, informants usually have a very short horizon of expectation connected with the achievement of individual goals, but not the strategy of its realisation. Most of them refer to the unpredictability and instability of the future, which makes the attempts of rational planning senseless. The majority of working-class youth do not try to count the opportunities and restrictions of the social surroundings, preferring to “let life go as it is”. The common motives of “going with the flow” are the fear of disappointment and the lack of ambitions. For example, Evgeniy, 28, electrician, said,

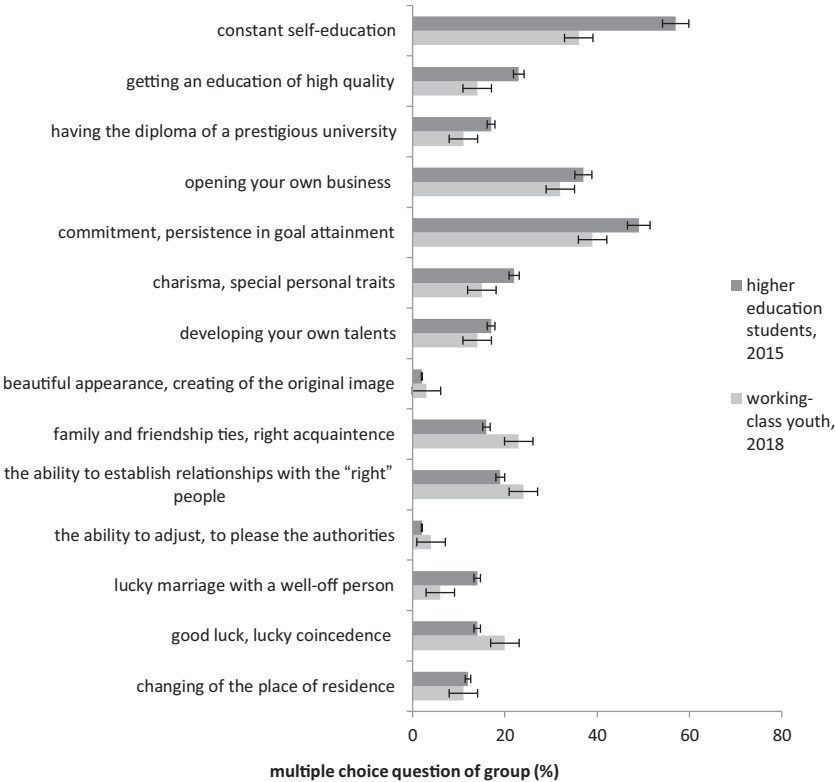


Figure 5. The distribution of responses to the question “In your opinion, what are the best ways to achieve life success in the future?”

I do not like plans at all. At first, I thought maybe I would go to college. And then – no. I am not very competent. And when I build a plan–bang! Some shit is going on! Now I just want to buy a car. That's a plan.

Anton, 26, stagehand, said the following about his plans at the moment of finishing school:

I planned my future approximately at the level of not becoming an alcoholic or a hobo sleeping under the bridge.

Besides, almost all informants demonstrate a low degree of civic participation; they share a common attitude that their voice cannot be heard in our society, where everything is decided “above” without taking into account the positions of different groups.

5. Conclusion and policy implications

The conservation of the transitional forms of social life and the highest level of social polarisation lead to the alienation of the new generations of young workers and the breakdown of their social identification in various ways. The modern Russian society deals with the threat that life perspectives may be lost by big social groups, particularly youth from a low social class. The study of dominant normative patterns of working-class youth has shown the persisting significance and value of traditional life-course structures while current social conditions (wages, mortgage rates, access to higher education and its quality, interrelation between education and market requirements, etc.) do not allow for this life strategy to be fulfilled any longer. The trendy normative patterns of middle-class youth such as rejection of institutional education or freelance jobs are used as tools for facing existing class barriers, lack of accessible resources, or fundamental lack of trust in major social institutions. Due to these reasons, young workers choose adaptation and survival life strategies which restrict the realisation of their professional and cultural potential. In a longer perspective, this can be regarded as sufficient reasons for sharpening class conflicts.

Our empirical data for working-class youth confirm some of the worldwide tendencies, like the dispersion of events during transition to adulthood, a combination of schooling and full-time work and an earlier career start. Consequently, the idea of a single normative life path as a sociocultural determinant of life-course standardisation that emerged in the 1970s is irrelevant nowadays either in the Western or the Russian context even for the working class as a group which is usually regarded as a carrier of conservative consciousness. In our sample, we have also detected some differences between working and middle-class perceptions of the way towards successful adulthood. Namely, it was found that the role of social capital and coincidental luck is significantly higher for working-class youth, as well as the constant efforts to restrict dreams by the fear of disappointment which accompanies uncertain life strategies.

Therefore, the retrieval of class-focused analysis of life-course specifics allowed for highlighting the peculiarities and contradictions of the new working class values, attitudes and life-course normative patterns in a temporal perspective. The results can be used in the development of youth policy programs that urgently require more nuanced and class-sensitive analysis of youth life strategies. Research results allowed us to formulate a number of recommendations that can increase the effectiveness of regional and municipal social policy for youth. One of the effective measures at the state level would be the adoption of amendments and additions to the existing Fundamentals of State Youth Policy (Fundamentals, 2014), highlighting the new working class youth as priority. The need to distinguish new working-class youth from the total number of young people is justified by the trends of modern Russian socioeconomic conditions: the annual reduction in the number of vocational education institutions, decrease in the admission and number of its graduates, shortage of professionals in traditional working-class occupations together with overproduction of specialists with higher education

(Konstantinovskiy and Popova, 2015). Currently, there are no examples of regional legislation which deal with working-class youth and no planned measures to support it. It is advisable to develop and adopt the youth social policy program for the subjects of the Ural Federal District with the provisional name "Working-class youth of the Urals", which would target priority areas of working-class youth support such as: (1) affordable housing (preferential mortgage, subsidies for housing and communal services, provision of dormitories); (2) young family support (accessibility of social infrastructure, primarily preschool and medical institutions; loans for the purchase of large household appliances; additional job security and special working conditions for young mothers, etc.); (3) adaptation to the labour market and career support (creation of career counselling centers; mechanisms for mentoring and self-government in enterprises, etc.); (4) high-quality vocational education (modernisation of the material and technical base of vocational education institutions; improvement of interactions between commercial and educational institutions, etc.). To take measures at an institutional level, it is necessary to understand that the effectiveness of social policy depends on the degree of involvement of the new working-class youth itself in the development of planned social activities. While designing and implementing social policy programs, it is also crucial to regard the new working class as an inhomogeneous group. In other words, the policy would need to take into account a wide range of internal differentiating factors, such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, the form of employment, which determines the degree of its stability and social guarantees, employment sector, degree of labour routinisation, lifestyle and cultural capital.

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