

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Social Risks and Social Security of Poor Single-Parent Families

Irina G. Sinkovskaya

Cand. Sci. (Soc.), Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Sociology, Reshetnev Siberian State University of Science and Technology (Krasnoyarsk)
iranet.75@mail.ru

Abstract. This article attempts to study modern Russian society from the perspective of the sociological theory of risk. The article gives the definition of social risks, their essential characteristics, and describes different types of risk-solidarity as a risk adaptation strategy. The article also presents the typology of social risks, analyses poverty as a social phenomenon that generates hazardous environment and poses threats in different social strata. Among low-income social groups, the author highlights low-income single-parent families consisting of single mothers with minor children. Such families are considered to be the most exposed to personal and social risks. The purpose of this article is to assess single mothers' ability to exercise self-protective behavior aimed at protecting their families from social threats. The analysis of empirical data helps to reveal the views of such women on social risks. Further analysis helps to identify the dominant locus of control, basic practices of self-preservation behavior aimed at self-protection against expected threats, as well as the main types of sociopsychological reactions to risks. The article also puts forward a number of proposals for social protection of this category of families.

Keywords: society of risk, social risks, poverty, hazardous environment, incomplete families, borderline state, self-preservation behaviour, social protection.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern society has formed an environment where risks have become an integral part of social life and acquired an independent form of existence. As Ulrich Beck, one of the creators of the sociological risk theory, noted, risk becomes a constant companion of progress and gradually turns into man's creation. U. Beck called this stage of civilization development the Society of Risk, where the increase in chaos blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, between classes, nations, and people [2].

The accumulation of risks has led to the need for theoretical interpretation of risk, making it the subject of a number of international (U. Beck, N. Luhmann, A. Giddens, M. Foucault, A. Wildavsky, K. Drake, M. Douglas, etc.) and Russian

(O.N. Yanitsky, S.A. Kravchenko, I.A. Afanasyev, S.R. Akhmerov, V.I. Zubkov, Y.A. Zubok, B.C. Ibragimova, S.A. Krasikov, A.B. Mozgovaya etc.) studies.

Comparing past and present risks, it is necessary to highlight the features of the latter: they are not limited by time and space, are divorced from the past, are of a large scale, lack individuality and voluntariness, they are often of a closed nature, therefore they are difficult to assess, prevent and effectively compensate [12: 336].

According to Ulrich Beck, classification of risks is an extremely difficult task, since they exist in all spheres of public life. In modern sociology, particular attention is paid to social risks which are not due to the biological nature of man or natural processes, but which are manifested in social situations, through human activity or lack thereof in uncertain situations that require individuals to evaluate their own actions, and also through negative social impacts, both on individuals' vital activity, on their health and on the wellbeing of those close to them [2: 220].

A significant feature of modern risks is their ambivalence. Its essence lies in the fact that the basis of risk distribution is a class scheme acting in the following way: if wealth is concentrated in the upper social strata, risks become the destiny of the lower ones. However, sometimes risks are characterized by the "boomerang effect", which creates absolute insecurity for all sectors of society in the face of global risks (for example, the threat of terrorism, ecological or industrial disasters, global economic recessions) [2]. Therefore, comprehension of the universality of social risks presupposes the formation of individuals' reflexivity as a practice of protection against risks or as a means of minimizing the negative consequences thereof. This reflexivity forms such qualities as rationality and responsibility in choosing social relations as a way of managing risks.

Such reflexive rationality has developed new social solidarity practices which are often formed on the basis of opposite ideas about potential threats and risks. In particular, O.N. Yanitsky, one of the developers of the concept of risk society, argues that a new practice of social solidarity is not a "deviation", but a norm of social life [13]. This peculiar modern system of social groups differentiation is unstable, open and ambivalent, as risk producers become their passive or latent victims, especially if it concerns global risks.

Since social order itself generates social risk factors, society develops and adjusts systems of protection against them. For instance, the state creates social security systems. International and Russian legal acts (e.g. the Declaration of Human Rights, ILO Convention No.102 On Minimum Standards of Social Security, the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Federal Law No. 165-FZ On the Fundamentals of Compulsory Social Insurance, etc.) determine types of social risks, protection from which is guaranteed by the Russian Federation as a social state whose policy is aimed at creating conditions that ensure a decent life and free development of a person.

The global character of hazardous environments and the targeted nature of state social support urge individuals to form practices of self-preserving behavior against various threats. This is particularly relevant for the social strata known as the poor or "living below the subsistence level". Thus, the purpose of this article is to de-

scribe actual risks and to analyse self-preserving behavior of the most socially unprotected groups of the population of Krasnoyarsk, one of Siberian megacities. This research is aimed at understanding the degree of financially deprived single mothers' protection against potential threats and at assessing the security level of children being brought up in such families.

MAIN PART

In the Krasnoyarsk Krai, the minimum subsistence for the first quarter of 2018 comprised 11,981 rubles for the working population, 8823 rubles for pensioners, and 11,977 rubles for children [8].

A peculiarity of the social structure of Russian society is the ambiguity of expert evaluation and self-assessment of the social status of a significant part of citizens whose income is close to the minimum subsistence level, which divides the country's population into the poor and the population living at the subsistence level. The method of poor population identification based on the level of the subsistence minimum raises serious doubts, since the consumer basket does not take into account such expenses of the population as utility payments and medical assistance. This is especially evident in the amount of pensioners' subsistence, since this social group is most dependent on medical assistance, but at the same time this group has the lowest degree of material security, which creates a direct threat to their life and health.

According to *Higher School of Economics*, the National Research University, on the basis of the data for the first quarter of 2015, the population with incomes below the subsistence level amounted to almost 23 million people [10: 175]. According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service data for 2017, over 20 million people were below the poverty threshold, which amounted to almost 14% of the total population of Russia. At the same time, Russians whose incomes are close to the poverty line but have not crossed it (40 million according to various sociological studies) also consider themselves to be "poor" because of their inability to fully meet basic needs (food, shelter, clothing) [9].

The poor quality of life of people living below the subsistence level affects their health (triggers the development of chronic diseases), leads to their inability to work properly, generates aggression, anomie, which results in a tendency to deviant practices as a way of surviving in an unfavorable environment formed by society and state.

Thus, poverty as a risk factor in modern Russia is extremely significant from the standpoint of social risks that manifest themselves on three levels:

1. macrolevel, which is manifested in the form of a threat to the security of the state due to an increase in the number of marginalised and lumpenised groups inclined to opposition and extremism;
2. mesolevel, manifested in the form of risks associated with the structure and functions of the family as a social institution and social group (increased divorce rates, domestic violence, an increase in socially disadvantaged families, single-parent families, social orphanhood, etc.);

3. microlevel, when a lack of financial resources leads to double employment and double workload, which affects the upbringing, socialisation, and morality of children growing up in the state of deficiency, not only in terms of basic needs, but also in terms of care and attention. Such children often become subject to stigmatization and discrimination.

Lack of financial resources reduces the ability of low-income groups to resist hazardous environment due to the depletion of vital forces. Being the most important resource, vital forces determine people's social sympathy, as well as the desire and ability to solve problems that arise as a result of various circumstances. The study of a number of low-income social groups, conducted in Krasnoyarsk in 2015-2016, showed that reduction in vital forces caused deprivation, low self-esteem, a decline in the ability to effectively solve emerging problems, and diminished responsibility for the safety of their loved ones [11].

Maksim Topilin, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, speaking at the Congress of Commissioners for Minors' Rights, stated: "According to our estimates, out of the total number of those who are below the subsistence level of income, almost 70% are families with children" [6]. And the number of under-age children living in low-income families is now increasing.

The increase in the number of divorces, separation of partners, the priority of cohabitation over official marriage, the emergence and spread of unregistered marriages between Russian women and labour migrants from the CIS countries, a rise in the number of extramarital births have led to an increase in incomplete families and single motherhood. According to Pavel Astakhov, the ex-commissioner for the rights of the child for the President of the Russian Federation, more than 50 % of parents periodically fail to pay child maintenance, and one in three refuses to pay it altogether. The situation in which divorced men tend to hide their incomes, preferring to pay the minimum determined by the state or not to pay it at all, is conditioned by the traditionally formed gender contract, which "... determines who and to what extent is responsible for the household, childcare and the care for the elderly in the family and outside it" [1].

According to the Krasnoyarsk statistic service, every fourth family in the Krasnoyarsk Krai is incomplete. In total, according to the All-Russian Population Census of 2010, there are 823,000 families in the region. Of these, 271.7 thousand are couples without children, 185.1 thousand are mothers with children, and 19.1 thousand are fathers with children. At the same time, men's employment remains higher than women's: men — 66%, women — 56% (according to the 2002 census, 61% and 49%, respectively) [5].

A large number of incomplete families consisting of single mothers with children are distinguished as a special social group with a minimum degree of protection against social risks and with a high degree of responsibility for the social safety of their children. Such a combination reflects a profound sociopsychological discrepancy, manifested in a role conflict in which a woman is forced to fulfill both expressive and instrumental functions. M. Douglas, a representative of the cultur-

al-symbolic approach, defines such a situation as a “borderline state”, in which a person directly comes into contact with danger [3].

In 2017, in the city of Krasnoyarsk, the author of this article, alongside her colleagues representing the Department of Social Work and Sociology (Reshetnev Siberian State University of Science and Technology), conducted a study into single mothers' views on social risks.

The study was carried out with the employment of the method of formalized interviews conducted at the place of the respondents' residence in a confidential home atmosphere. A total of 114 single-parent families consisting of women and children were surveyed. Special conditions for the selection of single-parent families were the following: family income should not exceed the subsistence level, single mothers should live separately from their parents and other relatives. For statistical analysis of the data obtained, the SPSS software package was used.

In order to reveal single-parent families' views on social risks, the following factors were identified: conditions and standards of living, social well-being, basic threats, locus of control, and practices of self-preserving behavior.

The respondents grouped reasons that led to incomplete families into the following categories: divorce (52%), birth of children out of wedlock (30%), women's decision to give birth to a child “independently” (15%), widowhood (3%).

The conditions and standard of living as resources that women possess include: the number of children in the family, material well-being, education, availability of work and healthcare.

The number of children in the family increases the uncertainty, giving rise to potential risks. Among the respondents, 42% of women have one child, 34% have two children, and 24% have three or more children.

As market economy has become a dominant economic system in Russian society, material values now constitute resources that affect people's ability for social adaptation and determine the degree of social protection from different threats. The limited volume of the article does not allow for including complete data on the level of material security of single-parent families, but it should be noted that fewer than half of the families studied have their own dwelling (34%), the rest are forced to spend money on rent (18%) or social housing (48 %). However, those who live in social housing explain the impossibility of privatization of this housing by the lack of funds for this procedure. Low income of single-parent families is exacerbated by the presence of loans or debts, which are observed in 94% of women.

Answers to the open question: “What material problems trouble you?” were grouped according to the following blocks, presented in Table 1.

All the respondents with two or more children reported a lack of funds for essential needs (food, clothing, and medication). They also reported a lack of funds for educational, cultural, and recreational activities for their children.

Level of education, availability of work, and the degree of satisfaction with it are considered to be of great importance since all these factors serve as protective mechanisms against hazardous environment (Tables 2 and 3). Tables 2 and 3 show that the respondents have a sufficiently high educational and professional potential and a high degree of dissatisfaction with it (62%).

Table 1. Self-assessment of living standards (in % of the total number of responses)

| Responses | Distribution of responses, depending on the number of children | | |
|--|--|------------|---------------------|
| | 1 child | 2 children | 3 and more children |
| I do not have enough money to buy food | 29 | 37 | 54 |
| I have just enough money to buy food | 45 | 50 | 38 |
| I have enough money to buy food and clothes | 26 | 18 | 12 |
| I have enough money for daily expenses, but I have to borrow money to buy more expensive items | 8 | - | - |
| I do not have enough money for additional education for my children | 68 | 77 | 90 |
| I do not have enough money for medication | 50 | 87 | 95 |
| I do not have enough money for cultural and recreational activities | 64 | 84 | 95 |

Table 2. Respondents' education (in % of the total number of responses)

| Responses | Number of responses |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Post-graduate education | 0 |
| Higher education | 27 |
| Incomplete higher education | 16 |
| Vocational education | 27 |
| Secondary education | 28 |
| Incomplete secondary education | 2 |
| No education, elementary education | 0 |

Table 3. Distribution of responses to the questions "What is your occupation? How satisfied are you with your work?" (in % of the total number of responses)

| Profession/occupation | Number of responses | Job satisfaction | |
|--|---------------------|------------------|----|
| | | yes | no |
| Workers, cleaners etc. | 10 | 2 | 8 |
| Engineers and technicians, civil servants, managers | 11 | 10 | 1 |
| Businessmen | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Economists, accountants | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Medical workers | 14 | 5 | 9 |
| Teachers, cultural workers | 14 | 7 | 7 |
| Lawyers | - | - | - |
| Employees in trade, service sector, household services | 12 | 7 | 5 |
| Law enforcement officers | - | - | - |
| I am currently not working/studying | 9 | - | 9 |
| Students | - | - | 9 |
| Other | 23 | 10 | 13 |

Evaluation of women's health as a protective resource was presented in the following proportions: 40% of women rated their health as poor, 38% rated it as satisfactory and 22%, as good. It can be noted that women who have one child tend to assess their health more positively than mothers having more children.

Thus, poor quality of life manifested through inability to meet basic needs, dissatisfaction with the work available, and poor health can be attributed to risk factors.

Women's social well-being was identified through self-evaluation of the emotional state on four levels. The results showed that "calmness and confidence" were not typical of anyone who took part in the survey, "a periodic state of anxiety" was characteristic of 18% of the respondents, "a frequent state of anxiety", 38%, "a constant feeling of anxiety", 41%. In addition, all the respondents agreed that they "lacked confidence in the future", and "had a sense of absolute insecurity." Among the answers marked as "other", in 28 cases the answer was: "lack of vitality".

The respondents tended to associate the concept of risk with threats (92%), danger (88%), damage (86%), uncertainty (84%), decision-making (78%). The respondents' evaluation of the possibility of certain risks in their lives made it possible to identify the "nuclei", which, in their view, posed the greatest threats. In the most general form, they can be represented as follows:

- risks associated with children (children's illnesses, children's propensity for deviant behavior, conflicts with children, difficulties in children's education, fear of children's failure in the future, stigmatization of children) (36%);
- personal risks (loss of health, loss of loved ones, constant stress, uncertainty in realizing aspirations in the future) — 23%;
- socioeconomic risks (loss of work, loss of housing, loss of additional income, inability to repay loans) — 14%;
- sociogenic risks (terrorism, military threat, economic crisis, growth of unemployment, political crisis, risk of the loss of cultural traditions and solidarity, crime growth) — 4%.
- risks of anthropogenic nature (associated with transport accidents, explosions, fires, genetically modified technologies, chemical and radioactive pollution of the environment) — 2%.
- natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, lightning) — 1%.

Questions aimed at identifying the characteristics of self-preserving behavior to avoid these risks showed that, for the most part, the respondents tend to make minimal efforts to avoid possible risks. Thus, despite a high level of personal risk assessment, only 9% of the respondents concerned about their health, regularly undergo medical examination, 15% of the respondents usually consult a doctor when it becomes inevitable, 79% prefer self-treatment via the Internet: they self-diagnose their diseases and choose appropriate medicine. The survey also revealed that fear of the loss of loved ones does not promote close communication based on trust, mutual understanding, and support. The risk of job loss does not form the practice of expanding professional competencies (only 4% of the respondents have mastered other professions and acquired new skills apart from their major qualification). Only 15% of women plan not to take loans in the future.

A special block of questions was devoted to risks associated with children. The survey showed that self-preserving behavior associated with this type of risks is characterized by ambivalence. In the respondents' opinion (obtained via a free interview), all their activities are aimed at ensuring that in future their children are protected from risk situations as much as possible, but the amount of time that they can devote to their children is very low and is spent mainly on solving current problems, which in no way contributes to the formation of a trusting relationship between parents and children; 68% of women emphasized that "they do not have enough time and energy to communicate with their children" and they estimated it as an additional risk factor associated with their children's future.

The question: "What do you do to protect yourselves from possible risks?" helped to reveal the position of the women surveyed. The answers revealed two types of life positions:

- active (the women surveyed try to earn money, take refresher courses, look for high-paying jobs, apply to social services and organise self-help groups on social media) which is characterised by the index of 32.6,
- passive (working on one's own land, saving up, doing nothing) which is characterized by the index of 38.9. Thus, it can be said that a slight majority of the respondents have a passive life position. This position is characterised by the narrowing of social contacts and therefore obstacles for social participation; as a result such people try to solve their problems alone, deliberately avoiding external support.

In this study, the locus of control as a property of an individual to determine his/her activity by external circumstances (externality) or internal factors (internality) is significant from the point of view of understanding the decision-making mechanisms in a risk situation. The locus of control was assessed through a number of factors that affect making rational decisions, through respondents' self-esteem in relation to their ability to influence their lives, through respondents' dependence on other people who can improve their lives.

The results of the study showed that 78% of the women interviewed were not ready to take risk at all; 22% agreed to take risk only in a situation where there was an opportunity to receive benefits; nobody had desire to take risk for the sake of gaining additional experience.

Factors positively influencing decision-making in a risk situation were described as: hopelessness of a situation (66%), presence of support, (56%), high interest in the result (29%), and reliability of information (16%). Factors that interfere with making decisions in a risk situation were described as: fear of error (78%), lack of support (65%), lack of information (23%), and fear of losing something that is already available (18%).

The data obtained showed that women ambivalently assess their abilities of influencing the course of their lives, which suggests the presence of mass consciousness at the verbal level of both the external and the internal locus of control.

The degree of dependence on external influences was clarified with the help of the question: "To what extent does your protection from risks depend on ...?" As

Table 4. Distribution of responses to the question: “In your opinion, to what extent does your protection against risks depend on ...” (in % of the number of responses)

| Responses | Fully depends | Possibly depends | I don't know | Possibly doesn't depend | Doesn't depend |
|--|---------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| On the federal government | 57 | 25 | 2 | 14 | 2 |
| On the regional government | 59 | 28 | 0 | 10 | 3 |
| On the municipal government | 58 | 24 | 3 | 13 | 2 |
| On the policy of the company where I am employed | 18 | 21 | 17 | 23 | 21 |
| On my relatives | 40 | 27 | 6 | 15 | 12 |
| On me | 36 | 22 | 6 | 20 | 16 |
| On my friends | 22 | 26 | 17 | 17 | 18 |
| On people in a similar situation | 2 | 6 | 18 | 31 | 57 |

the basis of the question, we borrowed the wording of the indicator to identify the degree of the locus of control used in the studies by V.G. Nemirovsky and A.V. Nemirovskaya [7: 139] (see Table 4).

Thus, at the level of mass unconscious, the external locus of control manifests itself in people pinning hopes on the institutions of power (more than 80% of the respondents). At the same time, 58% of women are prepared to take responsibility for the protection of their families against possible threats (which indicates the manifestation of internality).

CONCLUSION

The existing poverty line creates a breeding ground for various kinds of risk factors (anomie, crime, a decrease in the human development index, an increase in the conflict level etc.) that threaten the security of the individual, the family, and the society as a whole. A large number of low-income incomplete families raising underage children are the reason for the state's close attention to them, especially from the point of view of the need for their sociopsychological and economic protection against various threats.

The analysis of social risks that Krasnoyarsk single mothers face helped to draw a number of conclusions. Lack of material resources to meet basic needs and necessity to combine instrumental and expressive functions are factors that plunge single mothers into a borderline state, reducing their ability to exercise self-preserving behavior necessary to prevent and protect themselves from potential dangers of external environment.

Lack of resources, both economic (low income, poor quality of life) and psychological (passive life position, external locus of control), raises questions of underage children's safety. The latter, often brought up in an acute shortage of not only basic necessities, but also of due control and care on the part of their mothers, face emotional deprivation. Subsequently, this affects their worldview, their life

position, generates propensity for deviant practices as the most accessible ways of adapting to a hostile society.

Women's awareness of the multiplicity of risks associated with the socialisation of children, however, does not lead to their ability to prevent potential hazards due to the lack of personal resources (poor health, high stress levels, lack of vitality, and lack of time).

The study revealed a low level of risk-solidarity of low-income single-parent families, alongside high confidence in institutions of power as means of support and protection.

The conducted research has revealed the situation concerning incomplete financially disadvantaged families in the city of Krasnoyarsk, one of the Siberian megacities, which, in the author's opinion, allows extrapolation of the obtained results to other regions of the Russian Federation. Verification of this hypothesis is possible in the course of further empirical research in other regions, including the Siberian Federal District, with the employment of a well-developed methodology for studying social risks and social safety of various social groups of the population.

Thus, social risks of Russian society have revealed the necessity to create mechanisms that ensure individual and social security as a necessary practice for the existence in the society of risks. And in this connection, social work covering all spheres of human life (personal, social, everyday, cultural, and political) must become part of the state policy for timely and adequate help for financially deprived families with underage children.

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