POVERTY TREATED AS A RUSSIAN SOCIAL PROBLEM

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Abstract

Poverty is one of the most burning issues of today. A lot of surveys of both Russian and foreign scientists are devoted to examining its nature and determining its triggers. A great number of researches have been done on the phenomenon of poverty from the point of view of economic, demographic, and social challenges mostly. This paper does not set objectives to study all theoretical approaches to the observation of the poverty phenomenon in detail but considers the most representative social nature of its occurrence conceptually. The paper touches upon various concepts of an approach to assessing the population’s poverty as a socio-economic feature of the society, reveals the methods and techniques so that to study living standards and poverty measurement in Russia. The purpose of this study is to determine the socio-cultural characteristic properties of the phenomenon of poverty in Russia, justify the priority guidelines in order to overcome it. The authors used such methods during the research as structural-functional, contrastive, and system-based and component evaluation. It is noted that poverty is not only one of the most complicated socio-economic issues, but also a complex marker of the social development. The authors review the objective conditions that cause indigence in the Russian society. The authors specify that the socially deprived, as a particular social group that is worth to be shown some special attitude, are moving into the background on the fringes of the fellow citizens’ consciousness. And this implies that helping the poor is being moved away from the ‘agenda’ more often which is considered to be the urgent one for the most segment of the national population. It is proved that poverty is a factor of social stress. It is adequately supported that a split in the social field is accompanied by a worldview split, which threatens the national integrity in fact. The strategic factors that provide joint relations of members of social interaction as well as stable and well-balanced functioning of the society are the principles of development and economic policy making based on the national traditions and value system.

Keywords: poverty, underclass (extreme poor), subculture of poverty, mentality, Russian nation.
1 INTRODUCTION

Poverty has always tracked the humanity closely. It takes place in the face of the extreme everyday battle for survival, in coping with various hardships, in multi-dimensional deprivations that deprive a person of the right to live life that is worth living. But the problem severity lies in the fact that poverty does not manifest itself isolatedly as a man's personal problem who found himself/herself with the low-income as a result of his/her own impracticalness or inappropriateness. This phenomenon is the cause and a confounding factor of many diverse problems: economic, demographic, social. But above all them, poverty is a consequence of dysfunctions of socio-economic and political developments at a macro and microeconomic levels. The increasing number of the poor causes a birth-rate failing, but mortality rate growing. The inevitable companions of poverty are alcoholism, drug addiction, criminalization, rising of mental diseases, coming down a social mental performance. All this takes away the population, results in personal degradation and dehumanization of social interactions. 'Settling-down' a social bottom takes over from poverty inevitably. An underclass is coming. This is a social group outside the society and well recognized and shared cultural values. These are people who lack a way of living accepted in a certain society. Not only personal severities and hardships of people who have been outdone of public life are hidden behind this. The growth of the poor forces the lack of stability in common perception, develops a negative attitude towards the economically disadvantaged people. Numerous studies in that field consider the observed tendency of an attitude towards the poor that is taking a turn for the worse as a wake-up call.

Polarized social relations hold quite a number of risks, one of which threatens the country's national unity. Meanwhile, social disasters in a contemporary society caused by global economic crises, military danger, migration processes made the issue of humanizing social relations actual as the only condition for the state social stability. In addition, the lack of solidarity in the society makes it difficult to carry out reforms, shakes faith in government proposals, and causes protest moods.

The purpose of this study is to determine the socio-cultural characteristic properties of the phenomenon of poverty in Russia, justify the priority guidelines in order to overcome it.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The origins of most sociological and economic ideas about poverty take its rise in scientific works of Aristotle, Plato, and Confucius. According to the philosophers, the lop-sided distribution of income is the reason of the social chaos, though the estate system should be based on observance of the principles of wealth distributive fairness.

The present-day classification of scientific approaches to the study of poverty is discussed in two main directions. The first studies of the issues of poverty originate in Europe and go back to the end of the 18th - the first half of the 19th century. Representatives of the first Social Darwinist ideology were those who supported the views of D. Ricardo, A. Smith, R. Malthus, English principles of utilitarianism. Those philosophers upheld the position of radical bourgeois liberalism and individualism. Those views were worked out in scientific theories. The most prominent representative was G. Spencer, who did not treat poverty as a social phenomenon, an inevitable corollary of resource inequality. Poverty, according to G. Spencer, is a personal destiny that is a result of personality of individual.

In the 20th century, the ideas of Social Darwinism were further developed in the works of O. Lewis, who introduced the concept the culture (subculture) of poverty into general academic circles. According to this concept, individuals learn “a way of living that once emerged is being passed down for generations in the family...” during socialization enriching themselves, and build an individual “psycho-social profile” that hampers fight with one's own poverty (Lewis, 1966).

In O. Lewis's view, the poor were born and grown up in poverty; they do not know another lifestyle, so take it for granted. As a result, they have neither goals, nor motivation to move forward, or work incentive. Therefore, O. Lewis concludes that poverty is not only the poor's own "guilt" and fate but also a certain culture of poverty, a lifestyle passed down for generations. M.J. Farah's study provided evidence of such a "culture": children in classes with low and medium socioeconomic status have a completely different representation of the world; they are distinguished by worse cognitive markers than children with medium socioeconomic status. But a voluntary and conscious assumption of such a lifestyle is not the reason, but childhood, full of hardship, that affects physical brain development and gives its owner a disadvantageous mental performance, thus does not allow breaking free from poverty later (Farah, 2005).
The current studies complete the characteristics of poverty; highlight factors to determine poverty datum line more accurately. According to a present-day classification, indigence is plural; this phenomenon has various intensity and numbers three main expressions.

Relative poverty is an inseparable companion of social stratification (differentiation). Relative poverty is subjective. It determines human condition by external criteria. A person, a group, the society are aware of their poverty level in comparison with the wealth level in other groups, social segments, which are not considered the poor.

Absolute poverty. The condition of absolute poverty is characterized by low income, limited other material resources. It is such a degree of grievances when a person cannot meet even the basic personal needs such as food, shelter and clothing, but has just a poor choice to keep body and soul together. This is an extreme poverty level, i.e. poverty going to the personal degradation, not only because of the shortage of necessary fats, proteins and carbohydrates in the diet, but also because the unwilling lifestyle and deprivation of vital needs, determined by a socio-economic situation causes primitive spiritual and social needs followed by a social relation divide.

The negative effects of poverty are touched upon in the article by J. Bantjes et al., which emphasizes that poverty and a co-morbid depression are well defined suicidal behavior hazards (Bantjes, Tomlinson, Weiss, Yen, Goldstone, Stewart and Rotheram-Borus, 2018).

The paper by A. Gibbs et al. makes the poverty specification complete. It depicts that poverty is the key motive of close partner violence (IPV) (Gibbs, Jewkes, Willan and Washington, 2018).

Jill D. McLeigh et al. make a connection between neighbourhood poverty and child abuse (McLeigh, McDonell and Lavenda, 2018).

The validity of such generalizations is confirmed by the studies of M. Hirons et al. They called poverty a multiple and socially disaggregated phenomenon (Hirons, Robinson, McDermott, Morel, Asare, Boyd and Norris, 2018).

Poverty criteria are added by current research, in particular, by S. Subramanian and D. Mukherjee concentrate on absolute measures and sub aggregates, which the previous researchers used to downplay (Subramanian and Mukherjee, 2017).

The authors of this paper believe that N. Suppa’s view on the point is also worthy because he offers a more comprehensive poverty multidimensional index for a developed economy, like in Germany. The author includes material deprivations and employment as the main poverty specifications, but speaks out against using the lack of income as an additional poverty index. We believe that the author’s vital contribution to the theory of the issue under discussion is the differentiation of poverty according to specific poverty profiles, which have key distinctions among them (Suppa, 2018).

L.S. Chan and K. L. Chou regard elderly people as a special group of the poor similar to it (Chan and Chou, 2018).

The employment condition as the main one in the definition of poverty is supplemented by a gender-related dimension. The working poor are a phenomenon that generates social exclusion or isolation. It is extra high in the United States. 20% of people are at risk of becoming working poor at every age. But, as studies have proved, the risk is usually reduced for men and increases for women throughout the whole biocycle (Van Winkle and Struffolino, 2018).

Researchers J. Y. Duclos et al. propose a new approach to the division of poverty into chronic and situational components (Duclos, Araar and Giles, 2010).

A. B. Kis and A. Gábos differentiate between absolute poverty and long standing (pervasive) poverty (Kis and Gábos, 2016).

P. Ningaye et al. point out that the regional dimension is necessary to take into account concerning poverty characteristics (Ningaye, Alexi and Virginie, 2013).

Some experts distinguish subjective poverty as a poverty characteristic, when estimating one’s position and wealth level is made by the people themselves. The subjective or personal sense of poverty can envision a specific self-concept of personality with a special self-perception of one’s social status, the awareness of discrimination of one’s rights to have an access to the social integration institutions.

The subjective sense of poverty is inherent in not only the emergence of complaint among this social group
about the unfair distribution of resources, incomes, primitive interests, limited material wants, break of social relations, but also poverty conservation, which is a hereditable status. Research outcomes perform that there is a positive correlation between unemployment and poverty levels (Rosas and Jimenez-Bandala, 2018).

A current approach defining the criteria of subjective poverty is observed in the article by E. Nandori. The author suggests the following elements to be the main poverty criteria: “unemployed”, “habits or likes” and “the basic needs are not available”. The authors suppose the “poverty cycle”, “unemployment” and “habits” to be the main reasons for poverty. According to the researchers’ views, the main poverty effects are “the basic needs are not available”, “ill health” and “educational underachievement”. The survey confirms that the subjective poverty line is different from the objective ones. People can be dissatisfied with their lives, even if they are above the poverty line according to the official statistics. To sum up, the efforts to reduce absolute poverty may not be enough to improve subjective well-being (Nandori, 2014).

The poor, wrapped up in their own concerns, do not master socially valuable roles; do not care of spiritual values. Their perception of reality tends to prefer negative assessments (Qureshi, Sutter and Bhatt, 2018).

In addition, as economic inequality grows, people more and more often explain the economic insolvency by the external concurrence that does not depend on the free will of the individual. Such views result in decreasing economic activity (Davidai, 2018).

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Poverty is one of the most urgent social challenges. Suffering from poverty destroys a personality, debarring a person of a well-deserved human manner of life. But the perception of the poor by prosperous citizens is as dangerous as the latter. The negative attitude towards the representatives of the underclass causes social pressure and conflicts in a society: unequal classes and social groups are at risk of socially dangerous situations (Beck, 2000). One of such risks is the destruction of stable public consciousness.

Nowadays, the attitude of Russians towards poverty admits that the integrity of public consciousness is under threat. Ten years ago Russians sympathized and felt sorry for the poor, and current studies assure that sympathetic feelings towards the poor are still prevailing, but the attitude to this category of citizens is changing rapidly and mostly negative now. On the one hand, a person happens to be in poverty because of the survivor, a severe disease, or circumstances not included in the government grant / subsidy register. Such types of hardship still deserve sympathy and participation of the Russians. But on the opposite, poverty is not taken for granted, but arise from certain destructive circumstances caused by somebody’s personal traits (“it is your loss”). In this case, deprivation is treated as a pattern of being inadequate from the point of view of economic, ethical and moral values. Alcoholism, drug addiction, vulgarity, and other dissocial behaviour that have become constant signs of this class need to be especially judged.

Therefore, helping the poor who end up in financial distress is no longer relevant for the majority of the fellow citizens. Moreover, the poor as a specific social group are moving farther and farther over the periphery of the Russian consciousness, generating the idea of marginality as an underclass with special features that have unique behavioural norms and lifestyle in this group only. According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, 13.3% of the Russian population (these are millions of people) have had incomes below the minimum living standards in 2018, therefore, they are poor, and then the scale of potential alienation within the Russian society does cause concern and anxiety.

The authors suggest examining poverty in the Jewish Autonomous Region.

Living conditions in the Jewish Autonomous Region (JAR) can hardly be called favourable: it is at one of the top positions in the list of the Russian Federation regions where the local people with incomes below poverty line in 2014 (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RF Subject</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Russian Federation</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamchatka Region</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primorsky Region</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khabarovsky Region</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amur Region</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magadan Region</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakhalin Region</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Autonomous Region</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chukotka Autonomous Region</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: grade according to data from a sample survey of household budgets and the macroeconomic index of money incomes of the population (http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/poverty/#).

The Jewish Autonomous Region is at one of the bottom positions in the rank of the socio-economic situation of the regions (Table 2).

**Table 2. Rank of the socio-economic situation in the Russian Federation subjects at year-end 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian Federation subject</th>
<th>Rank at year-end 2017</th>
<th>Rank at year-end 2016</th>
<th>Rank at year-end 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sakhalin region</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primorsky Region</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khabarovsky Region</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amur Region</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamchatka Region</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magadan Region</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chukotka Autonomous Region</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Autonomous Region</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2014, 2018 the authors carried out a research to follow the attitude of the inhabitants of the region to the poor. The objectives of the study are the observation of the regional population's opinions and assessments of their social status and living conditions.

The population of the Jewish Autonomous Region aged 18 years and older is focused on the survey. The opinions, assessments and attitudes of the JAR population are the subject of the research, determining their attitude towards the poor.

The authors of the paper used the questionnaire survey method to review the population's attitude towards the poor. Respondent shortlisting is quota sample according to sex and age of the population. In 2014
sampling size, representing population by sex, age and a type of location was 120 people; in 2018 it was 110 people. When asked what they feel about the poor, respondents were asked to choose the appropriate answer from the following options: compassionately, indifferently, despisingly. The JAR resident feedback is categorized as follows (Table 3).

Table 3. Inhabitants’ attitude to poverty in the Jewish Autonomous Region (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compassionately</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifferently</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despisingly</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The studies have found out that sympathy is still the major emotion to poverty, i.e. positive attitude. At the same time, a large part of the population rather antipathies the poor, and the population’s negative feelings to the poor are at their very worst. Moreover, this sense is not a phenomenon typical to the Jewish Autonomous Region only. On the contrary, according to the numerous research findings, such public sentiments are representative of the population in all regions of the Russian Federation.

Imbalances of favours among different social groups, the critical narrowing of consumption standards of basic life prizes by the poor through deleting some living customaries, separating people from one another are threat alarm signals that bear a risk of social destabilization and disproportion in social functioning.

Meanwhile, empathy, emotional generosity, tolerance for poverty is a common historical trait of the Russian frame of mind, stemming from the primacy of soul and spirit over all other parts of human life and activities.

In fact, the origins of the customary system of lasting acquired qualities of the Russian ethnics are partly explained by the peculiar landscape where it took shape, since nature is a key factor in a national character, determining the main characterological ethnic traits.

Poverty reduction in Russia declared the state priority.

What steps do researchers propose? So J. Laird et al. believe that national policy should take into account penal sanctions, as well as the state relations with poverty, breadth and fines (Laird, Parolin, Waldfogel and Wimer, 2018).

Other scientists come up with a solution to the poverty problem of the social welfare system reform (Minas, Jakobsen, Kauppinen, Korpi and Lorentzen, 2018).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The reason for separating people, falling from mutual respect, crumbling of traditional long-standing community-based organization of living is the Western experience transfer to the Russian land without taking into account the ethnic and cultural context, the historical national experience. Indigence is counter-productive, accompanied by noticeable mentality changes and impoverished people themselves. A strategy of survival causes personal indifference, highlights falling from solidarity, crumbling of traditional long-standing community-based existence.

Preference schemes, financial allowances, even fine sanctions will not solve the poverty problem. To improve the situation and solve economic problems together, initiatives are necessary not only in solving economic problems, but also, what is the most important, in changing direction in thinking, freedom from the marginality complex, consolidation of backwoods and the capital, the rich and poor, the young and old. It can be possible in case of economic innovation started are based on the mainstay of the Russian civilization, ‘spiritual bonds’ appreciated and accepted by the nation, the ethnic culture members, and correspond to the cultural and civilization context of the country, attitudes and focuses kept in social archetypes of the Russian culture.

The strategic factors that provide joint relations of members of social interaction as well as stable and well-balanced functioning of the society are the principles of development and economic policy making based on the national traditions and value system.
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