

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE OF «SILVER AGE»: STRATEGY FOR PRESERVING ELDERLY EMPLOYEES ON THE LABOR MARKET

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Abstract

Pension reform in Russia actualizes the problem of development of the «silver» labor market (for people of pre-retirement and retirement age). Its structure, regional characteristics, factors of labor activity of elder people are poorly studied. It is obvious that vocational education is a resource for the preservation of elder people in the sphere of labor. However, the educational needs and strategies of elder people and the conditions of their implementation have not been studied. The purpose of the research is to study vocational education for elder people as a resource for their preservation in the labor market. The tasks of the study are: 1. To substantiate vocational education as the resource for the preservation of «silver age» people in the sphere of labor. 2. To identify the educational needs and strategies of «silver age» people in the Russian region. 3. To describe the conditions for obtaining and continuing vocational education by elder people. The empirical base is the results of research conducted in Sverdlovsk region (2019) with usage of methods of statistical data analysis, content-analysis of job search web-sites, survey of «silver age» people, expert interview.

Key words: «silver» labor market, vocational education, «silver age» people, educational strategies

JEL Code: J26, J11, J14

Introduction

Pension reform in Russia actualizes the problem of development of the «silver» labor market (for people of pre-retirement and retirement age). Policies to promote the employment of older persons should include a set of measures for the professional development of older workers and the transfer of knowledge between generations of professionals (Midtsundstad, 2019; Phillipson, 2019). This policy focuses on the inclusion of workers in continuing education, and employers and educational organizations on the creation of conditions for older persons to do so (Istance, 2015; Fleischmann, 2018). The problem is that in Russia the

level of development of the continuous education system is not high, and the share of elderly people included in Life Long Learning (LLL) is not high.

In the short perspective, Russia will face a growing shortage of high-quality labor resources. There are ephemeral hopes that the demographic boom, the modernization of vocational education or labor migration will quickly provide the Russian economy with effective workers in the right amount. Sustainable social and economic development of the country should be partially ensured by preserving and updating the professional capital of the older generation of Russians. Thus, it is necessary to develop the «silver» segment in the system of vocational education.

1 Methods

The study was conducted using the methods of analysis of demographic and educational statistics, sociological survey of the «third age» people, analysis of the content of websites of recruitment agencies, expert interviews with employers of the Sverdlovsk region. The source of demographic data was the statistical reports for 2015-2018, posted on the official websites of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation and the website of the State Statistics Office in the Sverdlovsk region. The dynamics of older age population in Russia and Sverdlovsk region were revealed. A comparative analysis of the education level of different age groups was carried out.

The survey was conducted in January-March 2019 among residents of Sverdlovsk region over 45 years (quota sample, n=415 people). The tools included blocks of questions on the readiness of the «third age» people to education, their educational needs and ways to implement them (educational strategies). The survey data has been processed using SPSS. The analysis of the content of recruitment agencies' websites and the results of expert interview with employers revealed the valuations of the educational capital of the «third age» people.

2 Results and Discussion

2.1 Vocational education of Russians of «silver age» as a resource of their preservation in the labor market

Russian society lives by the myth of the low level of vocational education among Russians of the «third age», which is the reason for their «washing out» from the labor market. In general, the statistics show a downward trend in the share of Russians with higher and secondary

vocational education in the older age groups (table 1). Especially small is the share of people with such an educational background in the group of people over 60. In the group of pre-pensioners and «young» pensioners, the level of formal vocational education is also lower than in the group of young and middle-aged people.

Tab. 1: The educational level of the population by age groups, in % of those who indicated a certain level of education

<i>Age groups, years</i>	<i>Higher education, in %</i>	<i>Secondary vocational education, in %</i>
18-29	20,8	14,9
30-44	36,6	26,7
45-59	24,8	33,1
Over 60	17,8	25,3
Total:	100,0	100,0

Source: Rosstat. The microcensus of the population in 2015. Section II. Level of education. URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/micro-perepis/finish/micro-perepis.html

However, if we look at the educational level in the group of employed young and old people, the differences will be insignificant. According to the study by V. Lyashok and S. Roshchyn, in 2006 the share of employed 20-24-year-olds with higher education was 10 points lower than that of 60-64-year-olds. By 2015, the difference was already 5 points (25.1 and 30.2%, respectively). The share of people with secondary vocational education in the two groups was almost the same over the past 10 years (Lyashok, Roshchin, 2017).

Expert assessments of the capital of vocational education of the older Russians, collected by us through interviews, are also contradictory. On the one hand, most employers do not employ people of the «third age» or try to get rid of them using legal «loopholes». They explain their behavior, first of all, by the insufficient educational level of this workers:

«By the age of 40, people have a lot of experience, but knowledge is outdated, because 40-year-old specialists studied in the 1990s, when there was a change of economic, political and social systems. To get a quality education on the job is extremely difficult, so managers hire young professionals in their place. It is easier for an employer to hire a young 25-year-old specialist with a fresh knowledge base and teach him practical skills on the job» (O.I., manager).

On the other hand, this explanation of employers often masks other reasons for abandoning age-related workers. Summarizing the interview materials, we identified the following reasons:

1. In conditions of forced staff reduction, employers often try to keep employees who have socially vulnerable status (families with children, disabled people, single parents). The dismissal of age-related workers is due to their lack of children, a difficult life situation.

2. Health problems of age employees. According to one of the informants, *«to be successful you need to be healthy, energetic, educated; health problems greatly affect the learning of new technologies, the ability to think clearly»* (M.K., manager of the Personnel Department).

3. Intergenerational conflict between young managers and age employees, insubordination on the part of the latter: *«As a recruiter I can say that even in interviews with some candidates at the age of slips mentoring tone, what can we say then about the relationship with such a colleague»* (E.S., recruiter).

4. Socio-psychological peculiarities of older people: *«workers in older age have many shortcomings. They are not proactive, work slowly and gravitate to proven solutions. We need ambitious young people who need to get up from an empty whistle to Bill Gates in a couple of months. Retired, of course, in that case, is the weight that pulls down»* (A.H., recruiter).

Thus, interviews show that it is not a lack of vocational education. During these interviews, it was noted that the older generation of Russians received a fairly high-quality general education and in many respects – a good vocational education. The experts attributed to the strengths of the older staff a high level of professional competence, especially in those areas that require fundamental training, as well as a wealth of professional experience. Most experts recognize that often, in terms of experience and skills, older workers are superior to, or at least not inferior to, younger employees.

A critical analysis of the educational capital of older workers shows that, of course, there are serious qualification gaps between its quality and some of the requirements of the modern labor market. We are talking about high-tech sectors of production, IT-sphere, innovative marketing and management. But, as a rule, older Russians do not pretend for jobs in these sectors, their requests are related to traditional areas of employment (education, health, service, agriculture, etc.).

And yet the axiom is an axiom: the need of inclusion of older people in the system of continuous education there is. At least for the same reasons as the inclusion of other age groups in the LLL system (Schmidt-Hertha, Mueller, 2017). First, in order to improve the overall efficiency of the professional activities of older workers. Secondly, in order to compensate for their lack of professional competencies relevant to the modern labor market. Third, to regulate the supply and demand processes in the labor market for older workers in

order to ensure decent working conditions. Fourthly, to reduce the level of fear of unemployment and social tension among «third age» people.

2.2 Educational needs and strategies of «silver age» people in Sverdlovsk region

Sverdlovsk region is one of the developed regions of the Russian Federation. Demographic processes and processes of development of the «silver» labor market in this region are identical to those that occur throughout the country. The structure of the population in educational level is similar to the all-Russian (table 2). In this regard, we can give a general description of the educational needs and strategies of the older Russians on the example of the Sverdlovsk region.

Tab. 2: Educational level of the Sverdlovsk region population by age groups, in % of those who indicated a certain level of education

<i>Age groups, years</i>	<i>Higher education, in %</i>	<i>Secondary vocational education, in %</i>
18-29	18,6	15,0
30-44	38,9	26,8
45-59	23,7	32,2
Over 60	18,8	26,0
Total:	100,0	100,0

Source: Rosstat. The microcensus of the population in 2015. Section II. Level of education. URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/demo/micro-perepis/finish/micro-perepis.html

According to the results of our study, 36.1% of respondents would like to improve their level of education, 50.4% – would not like, 13.5 % found it difficult to answer. Almost half of the respondents (49%) associated motivation to get an education with the desire to continue working life or find a job. Most respondents would prefer to continue their education by correspondence (39.8%) or by distance learning (36.7%).

Let us consider what characterizes the educational strategies of the older residents of the Sverdlovsk region. Over the past 12 months, 27.3% have received any training. These data are comparable to the results of European studies (Philipson, 2019; Hofacker, 2010). The range of directions and forms of training is presented in table 3.

Tab. 3: Directions and forms of senior citizens training in Sverdlovsk region for the last 12 months, in % of the number of respondents

<i>Older people, who...</i>	<i>%</i>
passed professional retraining, professional development	50,0
were engaged in self-education (read professional books and	21,6

magazines, got acquainted with information on the Internet, studied online courses, watched/listened to training programs)	
received additional education (driving, learning foreign languages, computer courses, knitting, sewing, drawing, singing, dancing, sports courses, photo courses, etc.)	18,1
study at the University	11,2
attended educational courses (financial, legal literacy, lectures and workshops in libraries, museums, clubs, etc.)	9,5
trained in secondary vocational colleges	1,7
Total:	112,1 ¹

Source: data of the authors' survey

In many ways, the educational needs and strategies of older people are determined by the attitude of relatives. Their support is felt by the majority of elderly Russians. 72.2% of respondents believe that relatives will support (or already support) their desire to continue their education. Only 9.2% are not sure that they will receive such support.

Financial opportunities are critical to realizing the educational needs and strategies of older people. Unlike young people, they do not receive the same amount of state guarantees and subsidies for education. Support from relatives is mainly moral or is implemented in the form of direct assistance in the development of new competencies. Elderly Russians do not count on monetary investments of relatives. At the same time, the vast majority of them are unable to finance their education on their own and rely on state assistance. 85.7% of respondents believe that the state, conducting pension reform, should enable older people to get education for free. Of those who are willing to invest in their education, 14.1% of respondents are willing to pay for their own education at the University, 4% – in college, 10.1% – additional vocational education.

2.3 Opportunities for people of silver age to receive and continue vocational education

There are four forms of continuing vocational education by «silver age» people. The first is education in universities with the acceptance of all the conditions of this educational form. «Silver» students, the share of which in general is small, integrated into the inter-generational academic groups. They are trained, as a rule, by correspondence under programs of economic, social or humanitarian profile. Cases of training older adults in bachelour programs are rare.

¹ The amount exceeds 100%, as one respondent could give several answers at the same time. The average number of responses per 1 respondent is 1.1.

But in the master's degree, the share of people over 45 increases significantly, reaching 30-45% in some programs.

The study of older people learning in the bachelour programs showed that their main goal is self-realization, compensation for missed opportunities, the desire to prolong youth (Zborovsky, Ambarova, 2017). Undergraduates choose to study at the university as a strategy to continue their working life. The introduction of a system of professional standards in Russia since 2016 in a some of employment areas has forced many older workers to receive specialized higher education in order to keep their jobs. They are employed primarily in the public sector in the fields of education, medicine, public and municipal administration. The Labor Code requires all state organizations to organize the training of their employees, regardless of age. However, the Labor Code does not specify who will pay for such training. This issue remains a matter of consensus between the employer and the elderly employee.

The second form of vocational education for older employees is correspondence in colleges (secondary vocational education). Unlike universities, older students of colleges choose a wider range of training programs – from technical to medical. This is due to the applied orientation of educational programs and low requirements for knowledge, unlike universities. With the introduction of professional standards and an increase in the retirement age, vocational training in colleges has become a very popular form of training for older Russians. Older students of colleges are motivated not so much by self-realization needs as by the need to improve their competitiveness in the labor market.

The third form of continuing vocational education for older people is non-formal educational practices and on-the-job training. The older employees and their employers evaluate this form as the most productive, because it is flexible. It forms the necessary unique competencies. But there are several barriers to the implementation of vocational training in this form. It is recognized only in the commercial sphere. State organizations do not take non-formal education into account when deciding on the continuation of an employment contract with an older worker. In addition, employers in the commercial sector in the context of the economic recession greatly save on the cost of staff training. They do not have free funds for staff training, especially in conditions of the risk of increasing the mobility of a well-trained employee.

The fourth form of vocational training is refresher and retraining courses. It is this form of training that is emphasized today in the state policy of promoting the employment of elderly Russians. This is the fastest and most inexpensive (for the state and employers) way to train pre-pensioners and pensioners.

Owing to the begun pension reform the labor market in Russia was replenished with a large group of pre-pensioners. Measures of state support for this group are fixed in the «Special program of vocational training and additional vocational education of citizens of pre-retirement age for the period up to 2024» (The Order..., 2018). The purpose of this program is to acquire or develop existing knowledge, competencies and skills that ensure competitiveness and professional mobility in the labor market.

What are the risks of this program? The first risk is associated with the timing of its implementation. Pension reform started in the autumn of 2018. The Program organizes training activities of pre-pensioners at the best in the second half of 2019. But since it is necessary to test educational programs, their effectiveness can be achieved only in the long perspective. The second risk is that not all older Russians are covered by the Program. The target group is only pre-pensioners (5 years before retirement) and those who do not require a new profession. The target indicator of the Program – 450 thousand older people trained by 2024 – is clearly underestimated in comparison with the number of pre-retirement age people (in 2018 their number was already almost 10 million people).

The third risk is associated with the quality of education and employment opportunities (job retention) of people after training under the «Special program». It includes: 1) training to work with new equipment, technologies, software; 2) obtaining a qualification category in accordance with the profession without changing the educational level; 3) the formation of teaching skills and mentoring. The «Special program» does not involve the teaching of entirely new knowledge and skills. The question arises: to what extent the employer will be satisfied with this quality of vocational training. There is a risk of imitation of the program.

Today the Russian labor market has a huge number of unemployed pre-pensioners and pensioners. This group of people remains «invisible» to the state. The request for new skills is more often presented by them – unemployed elderly citizens (Continuing education..., 2018). Many of them want to acquire skills and knowledge that are not relevant to their current professional experience. But for this group of people, three months for retraining (as the «Special program» suggests) is clearly not enough. In addition, in order to benefit from additional vocational training programs, these citizens must obtain official unemployment status. This is not done by every Russian, because he does not hope to solve his problems in this way. Such measures of state support for the unemployed contribute to the formation of the army of labor force for low-paid jobs with difficult working conditions.

Conclusion

The problem of our study is the contradiction between the three actors – employers, people of «silver age» and government agencies implementing educational programs for adults. There is no request from employers for older workers. They are forced under pressure of the laws to keep or hire them, but try to avoid it if possible. Accordingly, employers who are not interested in the older workers do not participate in the formation of a request for the quality of vocational education for the older people.

State structures direct the vocational training of the elderly to a narrow segment of the labor market – places of employment with low wages and do not require high qualifications. In addition, the activities of state structures are severely limited by a small amount of funding and focused only on pre-pensioners and the unemployed. As for the «silver age» Russians themselves, their educational capital, educational needs and strategies have not been studied and are not taken into account in the elaboration of employment promotion policy.

Thus, the possibility of achieving the strategic goal of the social state – the creation of conditions for continuing vocational education and working life – is questioned.

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