

EXCLUSION FROM WORK AND IMPOVERISHMENT IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETIES: THE CASE OF „UNATTACHED MALES“ IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

This article investigates the emergence of a phenomenon new to post-communist societies – the sociodemographic group of „unattached males.“ This group constitutes a growing number of young males with poor skills and little education who 1) detach themselves from the labor force even in the presence of jobs, 2) are not marrying, and 3) are increasingly plagued by a variety of social pathologies and health problems. These pathologies include crime, alcoholism, drug abuse and depression that, in turn, contribute to this group's silent withdrawal from society. A conceptualization of the „unattached male“ as an adaptive strategy is presented along with a typology. Reintegration of these 'unattached males' represents a significant issue for social policy and potential focus for considerable social work practice.

Keywords: marginalization, social exclusion, social transformation

Introduction

Post-communist societies experienced rapid pauperization with the collapse of centralized economies and the loss of support from the extensive social protection and social welfare systems provided under the Soviet system. Poverty and mortality rates increased alarmingly (United Nations Development Program 1998; 1999; Grinspun 2001). Post-independence reforms, driven by neo-liberal ideological commitments and fiscal constraints imposed by organizations such as International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the European Union, resulted in a separation of economic and social policies. These reforms introduced a competitive labor market that resulted in mass unemployment. In addition, privatized enterprises ceased to provide social services to their employees. As a result, the

Human Development Index (HDI)¹ measuring the quality of life in the Baltic States, Caucasus, Western FSU and Central Asia began to decline precipitously. The scope of the issue is massive. According to a UN Development Report (1999), the single largest cost of the transition was a loss of lives of millions of young and middle-aged men. By 1999 there were nearly 5.9 million „missing men“ in the Russian Federation and another 2.6 million in Ukraine. For the transition economies approximately 9.7 million men were „missing.“ While the causes of the „missing“ status are complex, they include increased suicide rates, declining life expectancy, declining health care and increased self-destructive behavior including drug and alcohol abuse.

Parallel to significant demographic losses, there were growing indications that all post-socialist countries were beginning to confront problems associated with a post-socialist „underclass“ (Emigh and Szelényi 2001; Genov 1998; Gorniak 2001; Warzywoda-Kruszynska 1998; 2001). Chronically poor and marginalized groups have existed in the western countries and most notably in the US for some time (Auletta 1999; Mingione 1996; Patterson 1997; Willson 1987), but this is a new development for post-communist societies.

For the purposes of this paper we would like differentiate within the broad category of underclass and focus on the stratum of „unattached males.“ This group is comprised of a growing number of young men with poor job skills and little education who detach themselves from the labor force even in the presence of jobs, are not marrying and are increasingly plagued by a variety of social pathologies and health problems including crime, alcoholism, drug abuse and depression that, in turn, contribute to their silent withdrawal from society.

While marginalization and the growing stratum of the chronically unemployed has received some attention, „unattached males“ has been a neglected area of study. These males are over represented in the ranks of the marginalized. Poverty studies in this geopolitical region remain focused either on issues of the elderly, single mothers with children, and children living in poverty (Gelezevicius and Luksyte 1999; Howell 1996; Milanovic 1996; Mroz and Popkin 1995); or on criminalization of young males (Agocs and Agocs 1994; Vileikiene 2000). Although criminological studies do deal with young males who detach themselves from the labor force, these studies are limited to only one segments of this population. Besides engaging in criminal activities, „unattached males“ are likely to partake in a variety of strategies of survival and adaptation. A typology will be presented for viewing the adaptive strategies of „unattached males“ as well as a discussion of the suggested trajectory of this stratum. The typology suggest that „unattached males“ is not a uniform stratum and that different strategies are being used for adaption. Some are more amenable to intervention than others and each may require a different approach. The success of post-communist transformations will be significantly impacted by the capacity of these societies to preclude further growth and reproduction of this stratum, and to facilitate the integration of these individuals into the mainstream structures of society. It is possible that a permanent underclass may develop from this group. The formation of such a class is not satisfactorily explained through the application of existing contemporary criminological integration theories. The typology presented below will provided a starting point of examining this forming class and also for conceptualizing strategies for limiting further growth.

¹ Human Development Index or HDI defines human development as the process of enlarging people's choices with an emphasis upon those areas of choice that are conducive to a long and healthy life. The HDI is a composite of three components; longevity, educational attainment and standard of living. (Transition 1999, Regional Human Development Report for Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS, UN 1999.)

Redundant Males: The Case of Lithuania

The detachment of young males with poor education and skills from the labor force is being caused in part by the structural changes in post-Soviet Lithuanian economy. The proportion of the labor force employed in manufacturing in Lithuania declined from 33% in 1988 to 17% in 1999. As the country's economy was restructured and by the mid-1990s rebounded, growth occurred mostly in service and, to some degree, knowledge-based (e.g. telecommunications; banking) subsectors of the economy. Employment increased in these subsectors accounting for 22% of employment in 1988 to 55% in 2000 (Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis 2001). Young males with poor skills and education were very negatively affected by such a structural change. Not only was their employment disappearing, they were also losing jobs in the service sector to women and males with limited skills could not participate in knowledge-based occupations. Comparatively most service positions are lower paying than the former factory positions. Employment in this growing sector of the economy may mean a decline in the standard of living.

In 2000, 26.7% of men in the age group of 20-24 were unemployed. In this age group long-term unemployed males outnumber females 2.4 to 1. Overall males constitute 59.8% of the long-term unemployed while being 50.1% of the labor force (Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis 2001). Poorly educated, low skill youth are over represented among the unemployed. In 2000, 41% of youth without vocational training were unemployed (United Nation Human Development Report, National Report-Lithuania, 2001).

Some young males who lost their jobs attempted to legally or illegally migrate to the Western European countries in search of employment (mostly to Sweden and Great Britain). Others, who were left without jobs when the Soviet era factories closed, dropped out of the labor force altogether, initiating formation of what can be called „the unattached male“ syndrome. From 1990 to 2000 the labor force decreased by 3.3%. The employment rate also decreased from 65% to 61% for the same time period (Lietuvos Statistikos Metraštis 2001).

Besides economic marginalization, the „unattached males“ syndrome also involves the several other concomitantly occurring process of social marginalization. More specifically, the withdrawal of young males from the labor market is producing the second form of their redundancy: loss of the traditional male role in the family (Juška 1999; 2000). As employment opportunities shrink and the males economic role in the family declines, many young men are beginning to postpone marriage. In 1990, out of 1000 men age 20-24, 125 were married. In 2000 this number declined to 48 out of 1000. For women these numbers are, correspondingly, 117 and 57 (United Nation Human Development Report, National Report-Lithuania 2001, p. 42).

Cohabitation, a very new phenomenon in Lithuania, is beginning to spread. Furthermore, some unemployed young males are increasingly becoming dependent on their aging parents, and especially on their mothers. Anecdotal evidence started to accumulate about numerous young men spending all their days in front of TVs while their mothers are working two jobs to provide for their adult sons. This is indirectly supported by statistical data indicating that in 54% of the households in Lithuania only one person is employed. (Gruzevskis 1997, p. 212). Media reports indicate criminal activity has also begun in this socio-demographic group, it is too soon to confirm this empirically.

The social and economic marginalization of young males with poor skills and education is also redefining gender roles in post-communist Lithuania. Women's economic role in the family is increasing at a time when social security and welfare services are rapidly deteriorating and Lithuanian society is beginning to age. As family responsibilities are being disproportionately shifted onto women's shoulders, conflicts and tensions within families are being generated. The divorce rate in Lithuania is higher than EU average and for individuals 30 years of age and younger 65-70% of the divorces are initiated by women (United Nation Human Development Report, National Report-Lithuania, 2001). Politically, this conflict is expressed between the revival and strengthening of patriarchal ideologies and the rise of the vigorous women's movement in Lithuania through the creation of the Women's political party

and the spread of feminist activism across university campuses. The most likely outcome of these processes will be an increasing social differentiation and stratification among males and females, resulting in a construction of multiple masculine and feminine identities, including that of „unattached males.“

Psychologically the „unattached male“ syndrome seems to be expressed in a mixture of apathy and aggression, the anti-social aspects of which are exacerbated by the frequent use of alcohol and other drugs. Public opinion is very harsh on such adult males, portraying them as grown-ups with the mentality of teenagers. Individuals affected by the „unattached male“ syndrome were 14-17 years old when the Soviet economy collapsed. According to public opinion, these individuals continue to act like 14-17 years olds despite the fact that 10 years have passed since the USSR's disappearance. Sadly, very few commentators suggest that stereotypical masculine maturity, i.e., being a provider, being in control, etc. is hardly possible in the current economic situation. The supposed teenager mentality has less to do with flaws of individual character than with the structural conditions that produced the early 21st century version of the superfluous man.

A Typology of „Unattached Males“

The lack of attention to the „unattached male“ phenomenon in the literature can be explained by the fact that this stratum did not have precedent in the former state socialist societies and it is only at the early stages of formation. In Western countries, including the US, individuals who can be characterized as „unattached males“ are primarily geographically concentrated members of ethnic and racial minorities living in the ghettos of inner cities (Massey and Denton 1993; Patterson 1997; Samers 1998). This is not the case in Lithuania, which is an ethnically homogenous country. Moreover, „unattached males“ in Lithuania are not geographically concentrated but dispersed through a variety of neighborhoods because (a) previous equalitarian Soviet housing policies, (b) the shortage and high costs of housing; (c) relatively modest (by Western standards) wealth and class differences (the rich in Lithuania are only beginning to create their own secluded neighborhoods); and (d) the concentration of employment opportunities within the cities.

Peculiarities of post-communist transformation (i.e., early stages of underclass formation, relatively weak class stratification and geographical isolation; and absence of the racial/ethnic dimensions) put severe limitations on the ability of Western social science models to analyze this phenomenon in post-communist societies. Currently, the most prevalent approaches to analyzing the underclass are – economic (impact of de-industrialization on labor markets) (Wilson 1978; Wilson 1996); cultural (culture of poverty thesis) (Battle and Bennett 1997; Moynihan 1969); and institutional (welfare dependency) models (Bartle 1998; Besharov 1996) – tend to reify „the poor of the poor“ and treat them as collectivities within the intersections of class and racial/ethnic structure.

There are alternative approaches more fitting to the situation in Lithuania. „Unattached males“ can productively be conceptualized as a dynamic category or as a point within a social trajectory of a group that was born during the late Soviet period and schooled to become industrial workers. When the USSR collapsed in 1991, its noncompetitive, centralized economy also disintegrated. Plant closure and massive layoffs had a devastating impact on the young males who were destined for the lifestyles and jobs of relatively well-paid industrial workers. The future for which these males were prepared never came to fruition. They are ill prepared for the new Lithuania and face social delegation to a burgeoning lacuna class.

Instead of treating „unattached males“ as a structural category, this group can be conceptualized in terms of the totality of strategies that individuals detached from the labor force use to adapt and survive. Hypothetically, such strategies could be described by the intersection of two axes: direction of adaptation (integration/self-isolation) and mode of adaptation (self-reliant/passive) (Figure 1). In such an interpretation the syndrome of the

„unattached male“ becomes a social trajectory within the two- dimensional plane constituted by these two axes.

(Insert figure 1)

The intersection of the mode and direction of adaptation axes produces four ideal types of the „unattached males“ syndrome. They have been named for colloquial expressions used to characterize socially and economically marginalized males in Lithuania. More specifically, Type 1 are „Part Timers“ represented by individuals who for a variety of reasons, very often related alcohol and drug abuse, have trouble holding long-term employment.

Type 2 can be referred to as „Intelligentsia“ or „Hot House Boys“. They are constituted by withdrawn, self-isolated, and apathetic dreamers who hold strong convictions that some day, in the future, they will be active and productive again. „Hot House Boys“ are called such because they live like plants in the hot house being cared for and sheltered from the outside world by their parents. Unlike Part-Timers they are reluctant to take part-time jobs. This type of „unattached male“ resembles the literary character of the „superfluous man“ described by the late 19th century Russian writers Tugenev and Chekhov, and epitomized in Ivan Goncharov's novel *Oblomov* (1859), „Superfluous man“ and „unattached males“ are both produced by capitalist transformations. The former was produced by the capitalist transformation of agricultural societies in the Tzarist Russia, while the later emerged in the course of the capitalist transformation of centralized and state planned economies.

The characterization of Type 3 the „Pensioner“ is young males who, for prolonged periods of time, 6 months or more, receive unemployment benefits and very often end up spending all their allowances on alcohol. Although the unemployment benefits in Lithuania are extremely meager, males receiving them are stigmatized. Pensioners differ from the Hot House Boys because their parents or family do not support them.

Finally, Type 4, „Petty Criminals,“ those young males who have frequent arrests and court appearances resulting in considerable experience with the criminal justice system and the developing lifestyle typology associated with chronic offender profiles. The offender profiles of this group are unique in that they display familiar and unfamiliar criminogenic traits. The traits are familiar, because petty criminality committed by unemployed and socially disaffected males is well documented, and unfamiliar because the rejection of relationship values and social embracement does appear to be occurring once adult maturity is reached. The use of the term „Petty Criminal“ here does not reflect a typology of offending that is located solely within a sub-group of misdemeanor offending. Here „Petty Criminals“ are known to be committing a broad range of offending, both legally serious and less serious. The focus of the term, as used here, is upon class definition, these offenders are petty or petit, that is of the lower and lower middle classes.

The common feature of these types is that they are adapting, with varying degrees of success, to a changed and changing social order. The strategies differ as well as the degree to which the types are publically visible. Type 4, „Petty Criminals,“ is the most easily identified because of their public behavior. This is also the most brutal social environment of the four types. Here the individuals are socially excluded and within their own group the social relations are brutal and exploitive. There is movement across types and type 4 may be the residual category of primarily failed adaptive strategies. A focus upon this type though limits the visibility of the others. Also, the behaviors of the inhabitants of the Type 4 category are easily attributed to „moral failure.“ Such an explanation conceals the broader issues created by the transformation of former Soviet states. Nonetheless, criminal behavior is a prominent features in the typology.

The basis of reliable and quantifiable criminological theory is that known facts are harmonious and empirically valid. Accordingly the strength of any crime pattern prediction is dependant upon reliability and truth. Frequently the basis for new theorizing is the unsatisfactory answers that existing theories provide but nevertheless may form a useful

starting point for discussion and exploration. This can be said of petty criminality in the context of marginalized „unattached males“ where an integrated multi disciplinary theory approach, such as that introduced by Moffat (1993) is persuasive. However, desistence at adulthood is common amongst expressive and petty crime typology offenders. The data from Lithuania does not support this and suggests that criminality amongst juveniles is progressive and accumulative into adulthood contrary to expected economic and social integration expectations. Rather than either progressing onto more sophisticated patterns of criminality, as one might expect from those persistent juvenile offenders who do not desist at adulthood, the evidence is that these „Petty Criminals“ continue with juvenile crime typologies and as yet, are not gravitating into life course professional criminals or socially integrated former petty, juvenile, criminals nor are they rejecting a criminal career in totality in exchange for employment and stable partner relationships. In the face of a new pattern of marginalized criminality an appropriate logical theoretical explanatory value requires elaboration.

Conclusion

The development of a marginal underclass of socially and economically isolated males has traditionally been viewed as a Western phenomenon. Consequently, existing conceptual models of Integration theory, whether, *inter alia*, Developmental, Life Course or Self-Derogatory are impotent in satisfactorily explaining and articulating ‘unattached males’ in Lithuania. The four types outlined in this article represent those males that have been identified. There may well be further nascent groups and sub-groups that have been formed or are currently under construction. The issue is to address the problem now in order to influence the process of marginalization. While some marginalization may be inevitable with a market economy the degree and persistence of the marginalization can vary.

The issues of marginalization and the implication for criminal behavior are not unique to Lithuania. While each region of the former Soviet Union has its own history and unique features these post-communist societies face many similar issues. There is evidence that the development of a marginalized underclass is common to post-communist transformations occurring today.

Recent crime statistics for Lithuania indicate that those males who have leave formal education before minimum completion requirements are 24 times more likely to engage in criminality than the cohort who remain in school and progress onto higher education. This is not unique to Lithuania. The pattern of social dysfunction developing suggests that a fusion of political, economic and social integration by „unattached males“ is fertile terrain for the „unattached male“ to become the „unattached criminal male“ – perhaps initially through social frustration, manifest in expressive criminality; gratuitous damage to the representations of capitalist success, or a perceived inability by the government to facilitate these misplaced males. Alongside is economic isolation, sexual isolation and gender frustration culminating in an increase in sexually motivated crimes. Lithuania has already seen a significant increase in illegal drugs use and drugs related crime. This, also, is likely to increase across all categories of the „unattached male.“ Again, this phenomena is not isolated to Lithuania.

Traditional explanations of social marginalization may help in giving shape to the face of „unattached male“ but it cannot fully explain the phenomena. A new approach that investigates possible structural and dynamic responses to the problem is needed in order that further decomposition of „unattached male“ does not normalize into contemporary Lithuanian life.

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SOCIALINĖ ATSKIRTIS IR NAUJŲ MARGINALINIŲ GRUPIŲ ATSIKIDIMAS POSTKOMUNISTINĖSE ŠALYSE: „NEREIKALINGŲ ŽMONIŲ“ SINDROMAS LIETUVOJE

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamas naujas reiškinys postkomunistinėse šalyse – sparčiai besiformuojanti „nereikalingų žmonių“ socialinė–demografinė grupė. Šio sluoksnio daugumą Lietuvoje sudaro palyginti jauni (25–35 metų), menko išsilavinimo vyrai. Jie ilgą laiką neturi darbo, netgi esant galimybei įsidarbinti dažnai vengia dirbti, nesituokia ir nekuria šeimų ir pasižymi socialiai destruktiviu elgesiu (nusikalstamumu, girtavimu, valkatavimu, depresija, ir savižudybėmis). Straipsnyje pateikiama šio reiškinio koncepcinė analizė ir pabrėžiama, kad „nereikalingų žmonių“ integracija į „normalią visuomenę“ turėtų tapti svarbia socialinės politikos ir socialinio darbo praktikos dalimi.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: marginalizacija, socialinė atskirtis, socialinė transformacija