
RELIGIOUS SECTS

REASONS FOR THEIR INFLUENCE ON YOUTH

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Abstract

The article is devoted to studying the phenomenon of religious sects, defining their types and determining the psychological conditions of youth involvement in religious sects. The purpose of this study was to identify the psychological characteristics of young people involved in religious sects. Theoretical analysis is conducted on a joint study of the sociology of religious movements, political factors and the psychology of personality socialization. It is an attempt to describe the social and psychological factors and characteristics of the groups of young people who fall under religious dependence in terms of the socio-psychological analysis.

Keywords: religious sect, self-perception, groups, life meaning, orientations

1. Introduction

The problem of involving young people in religious sects becomes nowadays very topical, since sharpened social contradictions intensified their anti-foreign forces that seek to disorganize the state structures, as well as due to age characteristics. The number of radicalized people has always been higher among young people in different countries [1-3]. Adolescents and negative sentiment youth quickly absorbs ideas of radicalism in comparison with the more stable the older generation. This is primarily due to the crisis of identity, the desire to express them, but also because of unfavourable socialization, aborted moral standards, with increased activity and the lack of a certain social status [1]. The reason for involving young people in extremist movements is now the problem of employment and political alienation. It is important to stress that the behaviour of young people is due not only to the negative factors of the social environment, but also to individual personality traits that determine the

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specificity of response to different situations. In the case of the strain of social values is a growth of diversity manifestations of criminal behaviour, as vacuum in the value orientations regularly filled by antisocial views [2, 3].

The problem of youth involvement in religious sects is the case for many countries with different socio-cultural values and economic indicators. This research is highly relevant as far as scholars have not created a consistent approach to the solution of this problem, which means that there is a need for a more detailed research and new scientific evidence.

The goals of our research are as follows:

- the analysis of the term ‘sect’ and its categorization,
- the analysis of the reasons which stimulate young people to join religious organizations,
- a brief description of the problem on a global scale.

The researches of domestic and foreign scholars and legal instruments were used as a basis for this research. Theoretical and methodological basis of the study was formed by the concept S.L. Rubinstein’s perception, according to which perceptions always in one way or another affect the whole person, his attitude to perceive, his needs, interests, aspirations, desires and feelings [4]. We also relied on the theory of group identity of S. Moscovici [5], according to which a person perceives, classifies the world, selects the necessary information, make decisions and is doing things in accordance with the currently dominant in the identification. This identification is a kind of lens through which a person perceives the world. It also defines the parameters of their own group in comparison with other groups and people react to the people around the world from the standpoint of their group membership [4, p. 278].

2. Sects and their categorization

The word ‘sect’ in the context of modern culture is not always perceived as neutral, as in the past 100-150 years acquired many shades. In the minds of most people, the word is uniquely associated with a negative of a secret society, encroaching on the freedom, health and life. That is why members of some non-traditional religious groups tend to feel offended when they are called without explanation ‘sectarians’ and their Church or organization - a ‘sect’. None of the ‘sectarian’ considers himself as ‘sectarian’. Political correctness requires other expressions: church, denomination, religious or social organization, spiritual teaching, fraternity, movement, school. Meanwhile, the word ‘sect’ did not originally carry a negative meaning. In classical Latin, the term (Latin ‘Secta’ – ‘the party, school, fraction, teaching’) served to indicate the way of thinking, way of life, and in a more specific sense - a political party or a philosophical school, to which a man belonged [5-7].

The etymology of the Latin word is ambiguous. Some researchers associate it with the verb ‘Sekare’ (Latin Secare – ‘cut, split’); the others with the verb ‘sequi’ (Latin sequi – ‘follow anyone’). Therefore, developing a

definition is meant by a particular sect, a religious society or a group separated from the traditional Churches or traditional religion.

Historically, under different sects are understood the different circles and groups of people, dogmatic or fundamentalist interpreting certain sections of Scripture, considering its founders as the prophets. For example, the Mormon sect, or others departed from the traditional religious communities groups. In this regard, the modern definition of sects is expanded. The groups hold only minimal social norms of behaviour, find refuge in a special world, belong to the sect. For example, psycho groups, different totalitarian movements who try to deliberately isolate themselves from society. The need for these clarifies definitions due to the fact that 'not all radical groups are cults, and not all are destructive cults'. To recognize the sect as 'totalitarian' there are certain criteria:

1. The lack of freedom. The desire to involve many followers, and control all aspects of their lives and activities, including the most secret thoughts.
2. Hostility. On the one hand the propaganda of the sect is based on the negation of something, some traditions or styles. On the other hand, public opinion is set negatively.
3. The position of the official authorities. Totalitarian sect is recognized, if is required by the executive, the judiciary, the legislature and the media as a Church [8, 9].

E.N. Volkov, one of the few psychologists in Russia specialized in the study of cults, adopted as the basis of the work created in the West, the model of 'mind control', and wrote about the use of these terms in Russia: "The term 'destructive cults' seems preferable, as it allows to consider a wider range of internally homogeneous phenomena in a more accurate reflection of their identity. This term is not highlighted by the organization of life of these groups, but the main result of their practices - the destruction of personality. The term 'cult' in this case emphasizes that the uncritical worship of the idea or the leader of any rigid form of practice is the most important condition of manipulation and spiritual and psychological violence. We will use the term 'totalitarian sect' to refer to a particular subspecies of destructive cults, namely, some religious sects, such as the 'Jehovah's Witnesses' or 'White Brotherhood'." [10]

A common feature of destructive sects and cults are their confrontation with the traditional religious views, because of the fact that all these destructive communities are based on artificial worldview that does not have at base at a religious theology [11].

Characteristic features of all sectarian and religious organizations are very similar because there is a certain set of qualities. Among them are the extreme ambiguity and contradictions of ideology and doctrine, the spirit of secessionism and separatism, totalitarianism, harsh criticism of traditional religions for deviating from the original doctrines and practices. Structural organization, methods of influence and focus on the spiritual expansion of the population; particularly young people are similar among all sects and religious organizations.

Destructive cult sets its objectives on absolute isolation of the individual from society, creating a special niche for it, giving not only the new status, but the total change of personality. The destructive cults all efforts are directed to real or notional blockade significant motives, previously occupied by a certain place in the structure of personality. The new motive is seen as a universal way to resolve the pressing problems of life, removing the need for logical analysis, active independent action. A powerful psychological impact is achieved by changing the hierarchy in the same system of values.

Studies conducted by M. Asanbaev and L. Umirzakova based on descriptions of former adherents, show that “the totality of their doctrinal foundations is an eclectic mix of occult, magic, spiritualist, theosophical, anthroposophy and other anti-system attitudes, diluted hypnosis techniques and coding, mediumistic revelations of the spirit world” [1, p. 49]. The man they regarded as a secret carrier of spiritual forces, which are supposed to contribute to its liberation from the traditional religious experience, to overcome it as supposedly does not meet the needs of the mystical and intellectual abilities of contemporary identity. The manifestation of the characteristics of these flows is their tendency to quasi-religious and quasi-mystical experience, where acts the practice of active experiments with the psyche of people. The number of such ‘researches’ are - development of influence methods on the person and group, deeply embedded in the consciousness and sub consciousness of adherents; providing the strongest overwhelming influence on the person; preaching the possibility of the supernatural abilities of a person with an emphasis on group practices as a means to unity and etc. [1; 3, p. 264; 12, 13].

The totalitarian (destructive) sect is often headed by a charismatic leader or group of leaders. All sects are characterized by a fixation on his head. Members of the sect recognize his spiritual or religious authority. The founder of the sect dominates and suppresses the identity of the adepts of the sect. Many leaders of the sects present their work as a scientific, masking the true religious occurring mechanisms.

In recent years there has been a strong influence of doctrines, including the eastern meditation, healing attempts, tantric rituals, mystical therapy and tarot cards. Human dive into the world of far enough ideas helps stimulate the deep areas of his subconscious. Such a condition is unusual, is a threat to the integrity of the psyche, in breaking into the consciousness of the materials of the collective unconscious “... destructive sects and cults cause psychological damage, especially affecting the fledgling minds of young people, changing their usual religious orientation and breaking the younger generation system established ethnic and religious values. In fact, we are talking about activities, leading to the destabilization of religious situation and dangerous for any state and its indigenous population consequences.” [14]

3. Reasons for involvement in religious sects

The psychological literature gives different options to describe the people involved in religious sects. According to the sociological research, the following features make the portrait of a potential adept religious sect, to some extent inherent in any or all the potential followers of sects and cults [1]. Below are these features.

- a) No or greatly increased ability of critical thinking, the full comprehension of any emerging situations in life, and in particular those which require to make a choice between the two alternatives. At the same level of education, academic titles and degrees do not always indicate the presence of far-critical thinking and does not insure from falling into the sect. Moreover, even the knowledge of the dangers of sects are completely useless if the person is not able to think independently, critically perceive the information they receive, check and recheck the 'credibility' of its sources. That is why the lessons in logic, philosophy, and the development of critical thinking are much more useful than specialized lectures and books on Sect Studies.
- b) Absent or greatly reduced ability to make decisions, lack of skills and willingness to take responsibility for their actions. The sect often leave people seeking to 'be like everyone else', go with the flow, do not stand out from the general flow of escaping from their problems and opinions, that fear and fleeing from themselves. Sects provide their 'bread and circuses' and they willingly give it for their freedom and fullness of life. Such people are very grateful to those who will take on the hard work - for them to take all the important decisions;
- c) Missing or purely formal affiliation to traditional religion. Thorough knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of Islam or Christianity combined with the criticality of thought and inner freedom is an insurmountable obstacle to any attempt of human enslavement, retract it into the sect and other totalitarian systems. However, a simple baptism in the church without a regular and conscious spiritual activity is not enough.

Summing up these data, one can argue that not even the presence of all three characteristics in the complex, but only one of them significantly increases a person's risk for being involved in a sect. They differ only in the methods and results of the entrance into a religious organization. For non-believers, but responsible and critically thinking people, entering into the sect, quickly achieved leadership positions there. At the same time, deep faith, devoid of critical thinking and responsibility can lead a person to inner-sectarianism [1].

V.A. Martinovic identifies five personality types, potentially prone to care in sects and cults:

1. The first type includes people with any social problems (problems at work, in the study, dissatisfaction with their status and position in society, etc.) or personal (family problems, conflicts, mental or physical illness, etc.). People of this type are, consciously or unconsciously looking for 'salvation' of their difficulties in the sect. The sect claims to be a deep understanding

of their challenges, promises to give ready-made recipes, how to solve these problems. Person changes reality, with its complex and ambiguous situations, to the artificial, easy and carefree world of the sect, moving away from his life. He was so eager to believe in something that tells him a fairy tale - a 'real' life that the sectarians and work especially do not need to bring him into the fold. They are ready to dive head first into a new reality and did not think about the price they have to pay for it. A huge number of people in modern society try to escape from themselves and the world in alcohol, drugs, gambling and various sects.

2. The second type, paradoxically, are people who do not have any special problems. Arranged and secured, they just do not know what to do this safely, but a grey and monotonous world. Fed rebellion pushes them to 'search for adventure'. Sect for them is one of the entertainment options. Coming to a religious organization, they might as well stay in it and eventually sincerely believe in her faith. But the original motive in this case was not an escape from life's problems and find games, activities, new experiences, some new meaning in life. Again and again, a man willingly goes in search of what seems to him an interesting adventure, but in the end may result in a very sad event for him and his family.
3. Persons belonging to the third type, far from the extremes of the first two. As a rule, it is a closed, quiet, well-mannered, intelligent and courteous person, almost without friends and special interests. They do not attend church. They are fairly well developed moral and ethical code by which they are guided, in practice, is not, however, long-term basis in the form of a coherent belief system. Sect cleverly offers them such a justification in its doctrine and, most importantly, ensures its communication with people who show interest in them. These so what they are: closed, passive and a bit boring. Beliefs and rituals of the group are secondary for their. It is important to have feeling that they understand and accept, that there is someone with them, with whom you can talk to and who might help at the right moment. The majority of young people leaving sects refer precisely to this type.
4. The fourth type of people is quite self-confident, eager to learn something new, interesting and mysterious. They are capable of giving their all to the selected case, then it's no problem to quit, find a new hobby. Such people cannot distinguish between a serious, harmonious and deep knowledge of the system from rough forgery, claiming the absolute dominance in all areas of knowledge immediately. Religious knowledge as such is of primary interest to them. 'Religious' means 'good' - this is their main principle. The differences they do not see and therefore doomed to eternal wandering from one sect to another, taking everything, with all agreeing, could not understand until the end. In cases where these people are burdened with large enough charge activity, they can attract a lot of people into the sect.
5. The fifth type are people who seek to take an exclusive and 'elite' beliefs and worldview systems. Levels of education and income from them can be

very different. They are united by the rejection of all forms of mass and teamwork, which are for them synonymous with something primitive and false. In their opinion, only a small part of people can understand the 'true' essence of things and be implicated in a 'true' religion. Sects and cults, giving people a sense of their own uniqueness, chosen among the dark and uneducated crowd, quite easily find unsuspecting victims of their own delusions of grandeur or simply people seeking even somewhat exceed one and all [1].

The above socio-psychological characteristics are, according to Martinovic, the most important prerequisite of human care in sects and cults [1]. Often people in their psychological characteristics are sectarians even before the formal entry into the sect, which only reinforces their structural condition and attitude. The potential members of the sects are also people world elements which coincide with any of the components of the sect's teachings. It refers to the pseudoscientific and pseudo-ideas that are actively distributed in modern society, but none of the inhabitants are identified with sectarianism and therefore freely accepted as valid and true. The most famous of these ideas include faith in astrology, damage, evil eye, aura, bioenergy and psychic human capacity, reincarnation, UFOs, abnormal and geo-pathogenic zones, feng shui, and various divinations and so on. Meeting the sectarian doctrine, which in one form or another are present these ideas, the man realizes that it is not for from something radically new. He already believes in something from the fact that is offered by a religious organization. If he does not have social and psychological predisposition to care sect a person can think about, even if he does not enter into an organization that preaches something familiar. By themselves, these ideas and concepts are harmless. At the same time, they are the intermediate link on the way to joining the sects.

If a person wants to be deceived, and is ready to join the sect, for its recruitment requires a minimum effort. Remarkably, the streets and the apartment did not go to the leaders of sects, really capable of very competent 'to handle' man, but the rank and file followers. Some of them do not have even basic communication skills, not to mention the long-term methods of psychological influence on the consciousness and subconscious [1].

Another researcher of religious sects, F. Kondratiev [13] identifies four groups of people who have, in his opinion, the most weak and vulnerable places of personal storage that promote involvement in a cult or totalitarian sect:

1. Persons with a well-developed critical thinking, without neurotic complexes sufficiently independent in determining their behaviour-oriented macro-spiritual values. In these individuals there is dissatisfaction cultivated by hedonism in modern society, information hunger, thirst for spiritual food, and thirst for knowledge of the truth. This is the reason for forming the response to the invitation of the motivation to learn new, unusual religious teachings. Here we have an intellectual thirst for knowledge of the truth, the intellectual basis of motivation, without the participation of the leading spheres of the sensual mind.

2. Persons who are characterized by a lack of personal security in the presence of frustration, that is, with psychological stress, feelings of failure, the disappointment of their life. These people need a catharsis - the purification of the complex traumatic, 'acting out' affect previously repressed in the subconscious mind is the cause of neurotic conflict. Motivation is not the thirst for knowledge and thirst for recognition, to obtain sympathy and emotional support from others in their problematic situation. In other words, here it is based on sensual motivation. Opportunities are always meeting the latest in the arsenal of every sect. Sensual reduces the need for intelligent control, leading to a lack of resilience in the sect cultivated development techniques syndrome depending on the sect authorities. For such persons leaving the sect - is leaving in solitude, returning to the same stressful problems, not to mention the fear of their lives. These people are 'religious family' have found their 'anchor'; it became clear to all of them, and from this simple and easy. They say they have found in the sect feeling of happiness, 'spiritual sex', which is losing and do not want and fear. All this involves a subconscious feeling of insecurity in the sect. They do not want to listen to the evidence, argue the lack of originality, primitive doctrine, his spiritual inferiority. They do not allow the thought that there are hundreds of other neo-cults with gods-teachers with similar overall 'absolute truths'. These people have no clear idea of the dogma of the doctrine of neo-cults: they argue that the teacher has 'all knowledge', and it is enough that they believe him. All the great loss of his 'I', submission to the will of his will 'teachers' do these persons essentially intact to the attempts to show them their tragic situation and to the suggestions to help them. The award-range polar personality traits and motivations consent of initiation to the sect can note many variations.
3. Persons independent from the development of critical thinking, but distinguished by the absence of internal honesty and integrity. They are characterized by ambitiousness, authoritativeness and adventurer. Pretty soon they notice all the chimera of 'religious' teachings of their sect, but also quickly notice any possible benefits. They are tempted by the prospect of quick escape 'from the grey mass,' take 'officer' position in the sect (i.e. the role of supervisor, mentor, an active assistant, assistant to the head of the cult neoplasms, enter a leadership structure, visit the overseas centre of the sect) with all relevant benefits. The higher they climb the ladder, the closer they get to the big money and even the less sectarian 'spirituality' in them.
4. Persons - naive seekers of 'something new', unusual, mysterious. They also want to stand out from the grey mass, to be involved in the 'modern', 'international' spiritual movement. They entice enticing, promising advertising sects, the ability to communicate with overseas, 'internationally recognized' preachers, the prospects for free to go 'over the ocean'. On the warning about the dangers of arrogant sects they say they can, whenever they want, to quit this job. Unfortunately, they do not notice a hidden but

coherent psychological treatment and the gradual development of dependence syndrome, after the formation of which the reverse is practically closed [1].

According to M. Asanbaev and L. Umirzakova, among destructive sectarian and religious organizations that have achieved the greatest growth in the Republic of Kazakhstan, should be noted the sects: 'Family', 'Jehovah's Witnesses', 'Church of Scientology', 'International Society for Krishna Consciousness'. With regard to the sect of Satanists and adjoining cults, they are the most hidden organizations operating in Kazakhstan illegally. This category is the most destructive and dangerous. It has received notoriety in connection with multiple deaths as their followers, and foreign victims of mockery and terror sect-Satanists. According to unofficial data, in Kazakhstan there are about five Satanists community. To establish the exact number of their members is impossible, but those from a few hundred to more than 2 thousand people [1].

4. The problem of religious sects' activity and their influence on the youth

Religious sects have been well known around the world for a long time. A lot of people have a certain prejudice against them, which is for a good reason. It is sufficient to remember about the influence of such sects as Ku-Klux-Klan, Order of the Solar Temple, Peoples Temple and others.

In the most of developed countries (Germany, France, Great Britain) there are different legal acts, which regulate the activity of sects in the state [14, 15]. One of the constraining factors is the approval of traditional religions in the country. However, such measures could not stop their activity in full. For example, in 2015 there appeared the information about the revival of the Japanese sect 'Aum Sinrike', which organized the terrorist attack in Tokyo underground in 1995 [http://www.bbc.com/russian/society/2016/04/160406_aum_shinrikyo_in_europe]. In the last few years, the so-called satanic cults have been activated in Italy. According to the inexact information, the number of satanic followers could amount to 600,000 people. This cult is the most popular among the youth. They have access to the Internet, where the representatives of satanic cults feel impunity and could recruit new members.

In the CIS countries, the activity of sects is also under regulation, but they are still popular among the citizens of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus [16].

Kazakhstan remains an island of stability in a world based on religious interests and do not cease sectarian, economic, political and military clashes in the unrestrained quest for world domination. In this division the main emphasis is not on open warfare. In political technologies are taken into account first of all the internal potential destabilizing factors, exemplified by the collapse of the USSR. External forces need people who consume products of 'asocial' industry (as ideological, tobacco, alcoholic products and other which lead to addiction). It is important to remember that the involvement of youth in religious sects leads primarily to a split society. Therefore, the most urgent priority for Kazakhstan

today is the unity and harmony of peoples and ethnic groups of the country. In a crisis situation of society's development, more and more people are involved in the religious community as a result of economic and social contradictions. Young people are the vulnerable part of society. Unlike the older generation, whose main forms of protest are various kinds of mass actions, among young people (as shown by Western, Russian and Kazakh experience) tactics of violence as an instrument of struggle can get widespread [1, 10, 15, 16].

The deterioration of the overall situation in society and the increase in the number of children and young people entering the area at risk raises the questions of change of strategy and tactics of social prevention and psychological work. Extremism itself is not an ideology, but rather a strategy of violence aimed at the physical elimination, suppression and intimidation of opponents. The meaning of action is not in the act of violence but achieving the goals through intimidation [6-8].

The main religious teaching for the Kazakhs was Sunni of Hanafi mazhab, which takes into account and adapted the ancient religious cults of nomads of Great Steppe. Currently, the Sunnis make up about 90% of all Muslims in the world. Hanafi mazhab, in turn, is most prevalent among the four main schools of law in Sunni Islam. And through history Sunni was a moderate ideological current, condemning religious radicalism and extremism. Hanafism differs from other mazhabs of Sunnah even by a greater tolerance taking into account the customs of the local people. As a result, countries and people who adhere to this madhhab could make a significant contribution to world culture and science. Freedom, cultivated by Hanafism, led to the fact that brilliant scientists Al-Farabi and Avicenna have appeared on its ground. In this context, the traditional Kazakh Hanafi madhhab is an ideological platform for the formation of the cult of new knowledge in the country, striving for improvement and promotion of the country in the community of developed nations. However, in Islam, there are other trends which chose to move away from radical dogmas. Salafism, which claims to 'purification' of Islam, claim that they have a monopoly on truth. They call for the Caliphate, rejection of the secular state, consistently fighting for the establishment of a theocratic state and in favour of introducing sharia law and the courts. They forbid women to engage in any public activity or employment. While Kazakh women always have very high degree of freedom and self-realization, they also deny the indigenous Kazakh traditions as the commemoration of the dead, visiting graves and reading the Qur'an there, cooking ritual meal, the knowledge of several generations of their ancestors, believing all this heresy. It is worth noting that the radical call to abandon the practice of ancestor worship destroys the ideological base of the Kazakhstan patriotism as one of the basic concepts is love for the motherland. Salafis are showing extreme intolerance towards the followers of other religions. All these ideological positions are directly contrary to the national interests of Kazakhstan. Negative features of this religious movement are: obsession ideology, influence on the cognition of adherents, control over members of the group, exploitation of supporters of Salafism [6-8].

5. Conclusions

There are a number of meanings of the term 'sect', but all of them could be reduced to the following definition: a sect is an organization or a group of individuals, who act for their particularistic interests that are distinct from basic social interests, indifferent or opposed to them.

Nowadays, there are many sects in different countries. Most of the states try to regulate their activity, because sects have a strong psychological influence on children and the youth. This group is the most vulnerable to the influence of sects for a variety of reasons. This research helps to indicate some criteria, which stimulate young people to make contact with sects: 1) mental immaturity; 2) searching for one's own way, meaning of life; 3) the lack of awareness; 4) the economic reason; 5) loneliness, depression.

An understanding of these criteria will make it possible to prevent and reduce the risk of youth involvement in religious sects in all over the world and to develop preventive measures more actively and effectively. These measures are as follows: strengthening of the family; training and education of the younger generation with the introduction in the programs of the relevant knowledge on destructive cults; appropriate training of the teaching staff; activation of the purposeful work in terms of public awareness-raising in the media; integration of the efforts of government, non-governmental, youth and religious organizations.

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