

The Impact of Nihilism on Youth Alienation: An Analysis of Key Indicators

Markhabo Safarova

Senior Lecturer, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
markhaboj@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: This article explores the influence of nihilism on the process of youth alienation. Nihilism as a philosophical concept that denies all forms of objective reality, in recent decades, an increasing number of young people have experienced a sense of alienation from society and their environment.

In this context, this article presents an analysis of the main indicators related to the problem of nihilism and alienation of youth. The study is based on the analysis of academic articles, as well as official data related to the social and psychological aspects of this problem

KEYWORD: nihilism, alienation, youth, factors, F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger, A. Camus, L. Strauss, R. Inglehart, C. Welzel, C. Esposito.

INTRODUCTION

There is a need to create an environment that will help young people find meaning and purpose in life, develop their potential and confidence in their abilities, and create a just and equitable society.

Nihilism is a philosophical concept that denies or rejects the values, meaning and purpose of life and asserts that nothing has true value or significance. It arises from a sense of despair or disillusionment with existing reality and can have a significant impact on young people, leading to alienation from society and social isolation. In this article we will look at the factors of nihilism that influence young people's alienation, but firstly we will consider what is meant by nihilism.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Nihilism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an era of gradual rejection of religious and metaphysical beliefs. Philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus were important representatives.

One of the key ideas of Nihilism is the denial of the existence of objective truth or Metaphysics [1]. Nihilists believe that all statements and values are merely constructs or subjective interpretations, that moral and ethical standards are arbitrary and have no objective basis, rejecting the idea of obligation or duty, believing that each person is free and can choose their own values and actions.

Friedrich Nietzsche was one of the important philosophers of the nineteenth century who made significant contributions in the field of nihilism. Nietzsche's views on nihilism were quite complex and multifaceted.

Nietzsche distinguished between two forms of nihilism: passive nihilism, which denies values and meanings, and active nihilism, which affirms or creates new values and meanings. [2]

In his writings, he protested against the moral, religious, and cultural prevailing values of his time, such as Christian morals and ideals. However, Nietzsche did not advocate the worthlessness or negation of values in general. Instead, he advocated the creation of his own value system based on self-evaluation and freedom of choice. Calling for nihilism as a means to liberate oneself from external constraints and prejudices and allowing one to find one's own path and meaning in life.

Thus, Nietzsche's views on nihilism can be characterised as a critique and rejection of prevailing values and norms, as well as a call for individual freedom and the creation of one's own values and meaning in life.

Martin Heidegger, on the other hand, saw nihilism as the result of the forgetting of being, that is, the loss of connection with the true meaning and purpose of life.

He argued that modern society suffers from nihilism because it has forgotten its origin and nature. Heidegger called for awareness of one's existence and the search for the true meaning of life, criticised technological civilisation and modern science for turning man into an object and depriving him of freedom and meaning, which promotes nihilism, and called for awareness and overcoming this influence. [3]

Albert Camus in his works considered nihilism as a lack of meaning and purpose in life, which leads to a sense of absurdity. Nihilism is an inevitable consequence of the absence of objective values and the lack of understanding of one's place in the world. Camus called for the realisation of the absurdity of human existence and acceptance of this fact, i.e. man should create his own values, meaning of life and be responsible for his actions without relying on external authorities or religious doctrines that offer false promises of meaning and salvation, distracting people from reality and suppressing their freedom and responsibility. According to his theory, nihilism can be overcome by recognising and accepting the absurd and seeking freedom and meaning in one's own actions. He called for an active life and responsibility for one's actions, believing that this is the only way a person can overcome nihilism and find happiness and purpose in life [4].

Leo Strauss in his works criticised nihilism and considered it dangerous for development not only for the individual himself, but also for society. He believed that nihilism leads to the destruction of traditional values and social institutions such as family, religion and the state. He assumed that the denial of objective truth and values could lead to anarchy and chaos, and therefore called for the restoration and defence of traditional values and social institutions. Because through universally recognised values and norms it is possible to ensure the well-being and stability of society. [5]

Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish-British sociologist of modernity, explored nihilism as one of the main characteristics of modern society. He considered nihilism as a result of loss of stability and confidence in the future, as well as a manifestation of lack of trust in traditional institutions and values. [6]

R.Inglehart and K.Welzel consider nihilism as a result of spiritual crisis caused by disillusionment with traditional values and ideals. Modern society is experiencing a transition from traditional culture to postmodern culture, which leads to the loss of meaning and purpose in life. Nihilism arises due to the lack of commonly accepted values and ideals that used to guide people's behaviour and orientation. They believe that nihilism can be overcome by finding new values and ideals that can give meaning and direction to life by developing self-awareness and self-actualisation so that each person can find their individual purpose and meaning in life. They emphasise the importance of self-awareness and self-realisation of each individual in this process. [7]

K. Esposito in his works, on the contrary, approaches nihilism as a phenomenon of modernity, analysing its impact on social, political and cultural processes. Esposito argues that the contemporary situation is characterised by a profound crisis of values and meaning, which leads to the disintegration of traditional institutions and structures. He offers a new perspective on nihilism, considering it not an empty negation, but an opportunity for new forms of social organisation and self-organisation to emerge. According to Esposito, nihilism can be seen as a source of energy for creative activity and the construction of new models of social relations. Instead of rejecting nihilism, he suggests that it can be used in a constructive and progressive sense. [8]

Thus, C. Esposito proposes to overcome nihilism not by rejecting it, but by recognising its potential for change and transformation, i.e. modern trends proceed from the understanding of development rather than destruction.

In general, nihilism is a widely studied topic in modern social sciences, based on the above, nihilism can be divided into the following types:

1. Postmodern Nihilism argues that nihilism is the result of the postmodern rejection of the idea of objective truth and values. Within this theory, nihilism is seen as a reaction to disillusionment with existing social institutions and norms.
2. Cultural nihilism is a product of cultural change and a shift in values. It links nihilism to the development of a consumer society where individualism and materialism become priorities.
3. Psychological nihilism is the result of psychological factors such as feelings of helplessness, alienation and lack of meaning. Explores the relationship between nihilism and mental states such as depression and anxiety.
4. Social nihilism is the result of social factors such as inequality, political instability and lack of perspective on the future. Explores the role of social conditions in the formation of nihilistic attitudes in young people.

There are also different approaches of nihilism theory:

1-Epistemological nihilism asserts that true knowledge is unattainable or does not exist. It rejects the possibility of absolute truth and believes that all knowledge is relative and subjective.

2-Ethical nihilism denies the existence of moral values and norms. It asserts that all moral beliefs are derived from human perceptions and have no objective basis.

3-Metaphysical nihilism denies the existence of any supernatural or metaphysical reality. It rejects the idea of divinity, spirituality, or any other form of transcendence.

4-Emotional nihilism is based on negative or destructive emotions such as despair, grief or frustration. It believes that life is devoid of meaning and purpose and that suffering and illness exceed joy and pleasure.

Nihilism can have different forms and variations depending on how it is interpreted and applied. However, all of these theories and approaches centre on the refusal to accept any objective truths, values or goals in life. It follows that nihilism is measured by analysing the changes in values that lead to the question of meaning and purpose in life for each young person's search for self. In the next section we will look at the factors that contribute to young people's changing values and their alienation.

FACTORS OF YOUTH ALIENATION

Youth alienation is a serious problem that can lead to various negative consequences such as depression, violence or substance abuse. Understanding nihilism and its factors affecting youth alienation can help society and the state in its stable development.

As we learnt above nihilism arises from a change in values due to a lack of meaning and purpose in life. Young people who have no perspective and no clear goals may feel alienated and useless. In turn, the lack of meaning and purpose can lead to a loss of motivation and interest in life. [9] They may begin to deny or ignore everything that has to do with values and meaning, and this denial leads to the destruction of society and social relationships. [10]

Research on nihilism among young people is significant for understanding and analysing current social and psychological phenomena. [11] This phenomenon can have different forms of expression, and research can find out how and why young people adopt a nihilistic stance. A lot of studies focus on the causes and factors that influence the development of nihilism among youth. [12]

Some studies show that negative experiences of interacting with society, such as discrimination or social and economic inequality, can contribute to the development of nihilism. [13] Other studies analyse the influence of modern culture, such as mass media and social networks, on the development of nihilism. The great access to a variety of information and the ability to express oneself through networks can lead to the emergence of nihilistic attitudes as young people begin to reject commonly held values and ideals. [14]

There are also studies that analyse social and cultural changes that may contribute to the development of nihilism. For example, some believe that globalisation and the accelerated pace of life in modern society can cause a sense of futility and loss of meaning in young people.

Some studies also identify a link between nihilism and psychological factors such as depression, anxiety and emotional instability. Young people suffering from these conditions may be more prone to develop nihilism.

In this regard, the following factors can be identified as contributing to a young person's rejection behaviour:

1. Lack of meaning and purpose. One of the main factors in nihilism is the lack of meaning and purpose in life. Young people who have no perspective and no clear goals can feel alienated and useless. This can lead to a loss of motivation and interest in life. [15] Globally, one in seven (14%) adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 suffer from a mental health disorder, [16] which can lead to suicide (suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for youth aged 15-29). [17]

2. Disillusionment in society. Youth may experience frustration in society, especially if they see inequality, corruption and injustice around them. This can cause feelings of helplessness and alienation as they see no opportunity to change the situation. [18]

3. Information overload. Today's youth are faced with a huge amount of information and impressions every day. This can lead to overload and feelings of worthlessness as they cannot make sense of and process all this information. As a result, they may begin to deny or ignore anything that has value and meaning. According to a study by Oxford University on 120,000 young users of modern gadgets, found that using gadgets for 100 minutes leads to poor health and increased stress. [19]

4. Negative influences from the environment. Young people are often negatively influenced by their environment, such as friends, family and the media. If they are surrounded by people who deny or disregard the values and meaning of life, they may begin to adopt these views and feel alienated from society. [20] According to the UN, fighting and bullying are also common among young people. A study conducted in 40 developing countries shows that 8.6-45.2 per cent of boys and 4.8-35.8 per cent of girls are bullied. [21]

Alcohol use by young people is a serious problem in many countries. More than a quarter of adolescents aged 15-19 years globally, or 155 million people, currently use alcohol; in 2016, the prevalence of episodic alcohol use among youth aged 15-19 years was 13.6%, with young males most at risk. The most common psychoactive substance among youth is marijuana; in 2018, approximately 4.7% of 15-16 year olds had tried marijuana at least once. Alcohol and drug use in children and adolescents is associated with neurocognitive changes that can lead to behavioural, emotional, social and learning disorders later in life. [22]

5. Loss of faith in the future. Young people may lose faith in the future due to environmental problems, political instability and economic hardship. [23] This can cause feelings of hopelessness and alienation as they see no prospect of a better life.

Many of the main causes of behavioural change in young people are environmentally related. The dynamics of physiological development and the ongoing formation of body systems make young people vulnerable to environmental hazards and pollution. The health of adolescents and young people is mainly affected by environmental hazards and pollution such as air pollution, chemicals and heavy metals, climate change, ultraviolet radiation, urban environmental factors, water, sanitation and hygiene systems. [24]

Among other things, according to the US Council on Foreign Relations Global Conflict Tracker, there are currently 27 conflicts in the world, [25] - a quarter of the world's population lives in areas affected by military conflict and its aftermath. In 2021, 84 million people were displaced from their homes due to military conflict, political and ethnic violence, and human rights violations. In 2022, this number has tripled, with an estimated 274 million or more of the world's people in need of humanitarian assistance. [26] Consequently, young people living in the area are "unsure" of their future, let alone their future prospects.

Youth alienation is a serious problem that can lead to various negative consequences such as depression, violence, drug abuse, death and others. However, and the fact that young people deny norms and values is not only because of their certain attitudes, more as we see it is external factors that leave no choice for young people. And of course, "in the loss of faith in the future" many young people act on the principle of violence or take suicidal measures.

Based on the above, it should be noted that understanding the factors of nihilism that influence youth alienation can help society and the state to understand today's youth and develop appropriate strategies and programmes to support them at each age crisis stage of young people's formation and development.

REFERENCE

1. Nietzsche F. Human, too human / Op. in 2 vols. M., 1990. T. 1. C. 250.
2. Nietzsche F. The Will to Power. M., 1994. C. 40.
3. Heidegger M. European Nihilism. Five Main Headings in Nietzsche's Thought/Time and Being. M., 1993. C. 68.
4. Camus A. Rebellious Man. Philosophy. Politics. Art: Per. from Fr. - Moscow: Politizdat, 1990. - 415 c. - (Thinkers of the XX century)
5. Strauss L. Gesammelte Schriften, hrsg. von H. Maier. Bd. I-.... Stuttgart; Weimar, 1996.
6. Bauman Z. Paura liquida 2006.// trad. It.di M. Cupellaro, Laterza, Roma Bari, 2009.
7. Inglehart R., Welzel K. Modernisation, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Sequence of Human Development M.: New Publishing House, 2011. - 464 c. - (Library of the Liberal Mission Foundation).
8. Esposito C. Modern Nihilism. Chronicle / C. Esposito. Per s ital. Ya.A. Bogdanova, M: RIPOL Classics, 2022. 240c.

9. Mitchell, John J. Nihilism: Belief Crisis of Youth. Counselling and Values, v23 n2 p82-89 Feb 1979
10. Park, C. L. (2013). Religion and meaning. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality (pp. 357-379). The Guilford Press.
11. Battista, J., & Almond, R. (1973). The development of meaning in life. Psychiatry, 36(4), 409-427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1973.11023774>
12. Meerten B. ter Borg The Problem of Nihilism: A Sociological Approach Sociology of Religion, Volume 49, Issue 1, Spring 1988, Pages 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711099>.
13. Starosotskaya E.V. Dynamics of Youth Political Culture: From Nihilism to Maturity// UDC32 001+37.013.316// UDKK 60.542
14. A.Abbas Impacts of Internet Usage on Youth Behavior: A Case Study of University Students in Karachi August 2018
15. Battista, J., & Almond, R. (1973). The development of meaning in life. Psychiatry, 36(4), 409–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1973.11023774>
16. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>
17. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>
18. Zika, S., & Chamberlain, K. (1992). On the relation between meaning and psychological well-being. British Journal of Psychology, 83(1), 133–145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1992.tb02429.x>
19. Knapton S. 257 minutes: the time teens can spend on computers each day before harming wellbeing // <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/01/13/257-minutes-time-teens-can-spend-computers-day-harming-wellbeing/>
20. Abbas A. Impacts of Internet Usage on Youth Behavior: A Case Study of University Students in Karachi August 2018
21. <https://www.who.int/ru/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/youth-violence#:~:text=%D0%9F%D0%BE%20%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%2C%20%D0%B2%20%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B5%20%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%BE,%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B8%2C%20%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BA%20%D0%B8%20%D0%B2%D0%BD%D1%83%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%20%D1%81%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD>
22. <https://www.who.int/ru/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>
23. Jamila Michener Nihilism and Politics: The Constrained Life Chances of African American Youth// https://www.academia.edu/29372155/Nihilism_and_Politics_The_Constrained_Life_Chances_of_African_American_Youth
24. https://www.who.int/health-topics/children-environmental-health#tab=tab_1
25. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker>
26. <https://www.un.org/ru/global-issues/youth>