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10th International
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7-9 March, 2016
Valencia (Spain)

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ACCESSIBILITY TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Access to higher education, barriers and opportunities for its obtaining - issues that are constantly raised and discussed in the countries, where the government has a policy of development of democratic principles of organization of society. Higher education is defined as a factor of social mobility - with equal access and as a factor of differentiation fixation - in the absence of such equality. In general, Kazakhstan has the resources to provide access to higher education for all categories of young people, regardless of income level: there is the rise of higher educational institutions, including private ones. In 1990 there were 55 state universities with 300,000 students, and by 2012 their number reached 126 units, including public and private universities, respectively, the number of students has increased. There is a trend for reduction of the number of students in colleges: 2012 - 587,310; 2013 - 561 940; 2014 - 531 453 students. Each year, number of educational grants in universities increase. The rapid development of free education has made vocational education more affordable for individuals from families with medium and high incomes. However, the development of paid forms of higher education and the growth of spendings on training for admission by state grants (tutoring, extra classes, etc..) suggests that the economic barriers for obtaining higher education has increased. Despite the increase in the overall performance of admission to universities their accessibility for students from low-income families has decreased. The possibility of obtaining a prestigious, elite education are differentiated in the context of different social groups.

The article presents an empirical interpretation of the data of sociological surveys conducted in 2014 and 2015. The study consists of two phases. In the first phase of the study (2014) a survey among students aged 17-29 years in the cities of Astana, Almaty and Kazakhstan's five regions (Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern and Central regions) was conducted. The sample represents Kazakhstan student youth and covers 600 students. The study results are processed and analyzed using the licensed software SPSS for Windows (version 21).

The second phase of the study (2015) is based on a qualitative methodology. The study is based on 166 interviews with parents and high school graduates. We conducted interviews with 83 households in Astana (the capital), Almaty (largest city) and the small town of Shu. Interview with parents and graduates held separately (83 interviews). The study involved pupils of 11 grade (graduation year) of private schools, gymnasiums, lyceums, secondary schools. The collected material is processed in the program for data management of qualitative research Nvivo 7.

Keywords: higher education, youth, accessibility, barriers, starter educational capital, family resources.

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Kazakhstan is in the search of answers to global challenges dictated by global world trends, and is trying to respond with varying degrees of adequacy. In modern reality, education is becoming a kind of social "elevator" which is able to raise or hinder the movement of "passengers" to different floors in the hierarchy of educational (and of standing behind them - social) positions. The political and economic changes taking place in our country in the last decade have actualized the issue of analyzing current situation of the accessibility of education for Kazakh youth, that is socially differentiated in a new way, much more polar than ever. Moreover, the greatest significance acquires the discourse of higher education accessibility. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that higher education, opposed to the general, is not guaranteed by the state to all categories of young people. On the other hand, higher education is legitimately (by assigning diploma) promote occupying different socio-economically heterogeneous positions and thus ensuring social reproduction and creating social inequality of their position depending on the amount of material, cultural, power, symbolic resources owned in the long term.

The changes taking place in higher education of Kazakhstan are a response to the new demands of the labor market and society, as well as a response to new consumer demand of youth. In recent years, the number of higher education institutions has increased and, accordingly, so did the number of students. In addition to tuition free education, paid education market is developing. So, presumably, an increase in the number of HEIs and admission number expands opportunities for acquiring higher education. However, the simultaneous development of fee-based forms of education and paid services of preparation for entrance exams narrows the opportunities for children from low-income families to enroll in universities, especially in the prestigious and highly demanded ones. In this aspect the question arises: "What is the fundamental inequality in access to higher education in general and to quality higher education; to universities or professions?"

2 RESULTS

2.1 The importance of higher education in the structure of life values of young people

Raising the level of education is one of the main stages in the lives of young people, especially in today's world with its stiff competition in the labor market. Enrolment of young Kazakhs in higher education was 48.7% in 2015 and 48.37% in 2014, a few years ago the figures were slightly higher: 50.9% in 2013 and 53.39% in 2012. Student youth mostly concentrated in large metropolitan areas like Almaty and Astana, also in the Southern Kazakhstan and Karaganda regions, where the higher education infrastructure is more developed in comparison with other regions (Fig. 1).

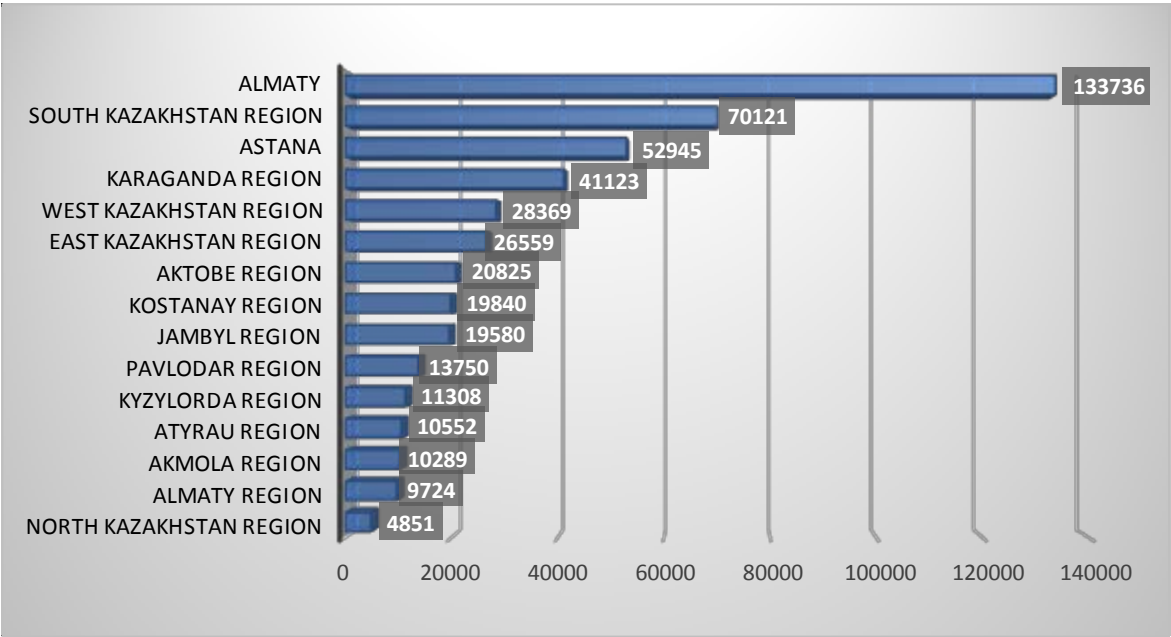


Fig. 1. Enrollment of young people in higher education (higher and postgraduate education) at the beginning of 2015 by region.

Source: Ministry of Education and Science of Republic of Kazakhstan.

Today receiving a high-quality education is one of the important life aspirations of young people. 40.7% of Kazakhstani youth aged 18-29 had already received it (according to self-assessments), and 47.8% expect to do so. But 8.5% of young people consider a good education as inaccessible for them. Presence of higher education serves as a sign of social status and is interpreted as mandatory, as evidenced by the results of regular sociological surveys of young people.

According to a study conducted in 2015, for a large part of Kazakhstan's youth higher education is important - 83%. The position "very important" has been chosen by more than half of the respondents, and other third believe that higher education is "rather important". Higher education is not important only for 15.8% of young people. In the analysis of this issue dynamic component is particularly important. As a result of the survey in 2013, half of the respondents (51.2%), answering the question

"What is necessary for success in life?" have chosen the position "It is necessary to work hard", which in 2015 decreased by 18.6% and amounted to 43.6%. Value of and orientation towards higher education are stable enough in the public consciousness of young Kazakhs, which also are an integral part of life-success, according to a one third of respondents (30.3%) in 2013 and 40.2% of respondents - in 2015.

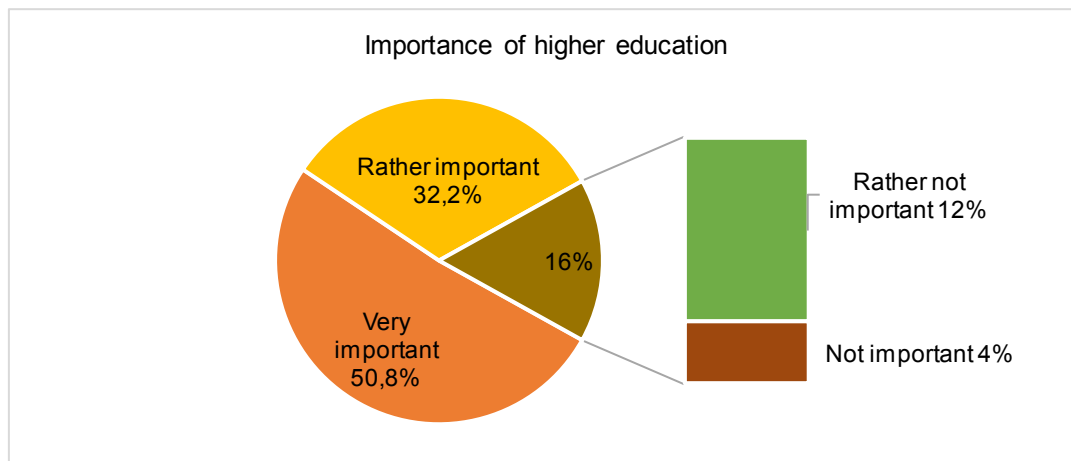


Fig. 2. The significance of higher education for Kazakh youth, N = 1000.

According to a sociological study conducted by the Research Center "Youth" in 2015, plans for 34.9% of the surveyed youth is in the foreground for higher education in the next five years.

47% of young people in Kazakhstan consider higher education its first (bachelor) and second (master) level necessary to achieve success in life.

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the question "What, in your opinion, the level of education is sufficient to succeed in life?", in %.

Answer Options	%
Incomplete secondary (basic)	2,0
Secondary education (technical, college, school, etc.)	7,4
Higher education (including bachelor and master)	47,0
Scientific degree, PhD	10,1
Education does not determine a life success	25,7
Difficult to say	7,8
Total	100,0

2.2 The importance of family resources in accessibility to higher education

R. Boudon distinguishes between primary and secondary effects of family resources in education. The primary effects are directly determined by the influence of the economic well being of families to the academic achievements of children [Goldthorpe, 1996]. Children from families with higher income study better than their counterparts from low-income families. Since the families with higher income provide their children with the best conditions for the development of high educational capital [Dhesi, 2001: 16]. As a result, high academic achievements define their future more ambitious educational choice [Herman G. van de Werfhorst, 2009; Conklin, Dailey, 1981; Looker, Pineo, 1983]. A secondary effect is determined by the impact of the economic well being of families for educational choices of children regardless of their academic achievements. Even if children have the same achievements, children of high-income families aspire to a higher level of education than children from low-income families [Erikson, Rudolphi, 2010; Erikson, Goldthorpe, Jackson, Yaish, Cox, 2005; Erikson, Jonsson,

1996; Jackson, Erikson, Goldthorpe, Yaish, 2007]. As the sources of inequality of opportunities for young people for entering universities, along with the material factor can act the social status of their parents (type of activity, employment, education) and social resources of the family (family, friends) [Coleman,1988]. In this aspect, in the vulnerable group can be included even capable high school graduates, if they are to compete for admission to HEIs with someone who has not only material but also social resources.

So, despite the fact, that most parents of school-graduates deny the impact of the economic well being of the family to the educational choice of their child, the analysis of the factors that are considered by school graduates when making a decision indicate a connection between the educational choices and economic well being of the family. Almost every tenth graduate from low-income families in the process of educational choice (9.9%) focuses on the financial situation of the family. Even if they choose prestigious HEIs, they focus on the less prestigious departments and specialties. Since there are cases when prestigious HEIs have in their composition non-prestigious faculties. *"I want to enter K.I. Satpayev KazNTU. Haven't chosen a specialty yet. I will focus on the availability of grants and low-fee specialties. The priority for me is to get the diploma of the prestigious university"*- says a graduate of the public school of a small city.

Economic accessibility of higher education for families is defined by two parameters: the possibility of education on a fee basis, and the ability to use various forms of preparation for entrance exams. In the total sample, the majority of families (61.4%) are willing to "invest" into the child's education (according to self-assessments), but for 14.5% - paid education is not acceptable at all and 14.5% can allocate some money from the family budget on education, but they are not sufficient to study at HEIs of Kazakhstan. The sharp difference appears between the affordable expenses and the tuition fee of HEI for families from rural areas.

Willingness to give education to a child on a fee-basis is expressed not only in the big cities, but also in rural areas (58.3%). Of course, in big cities this figure is higher by almost 20% and is equal to 76.2% (Fig.3).

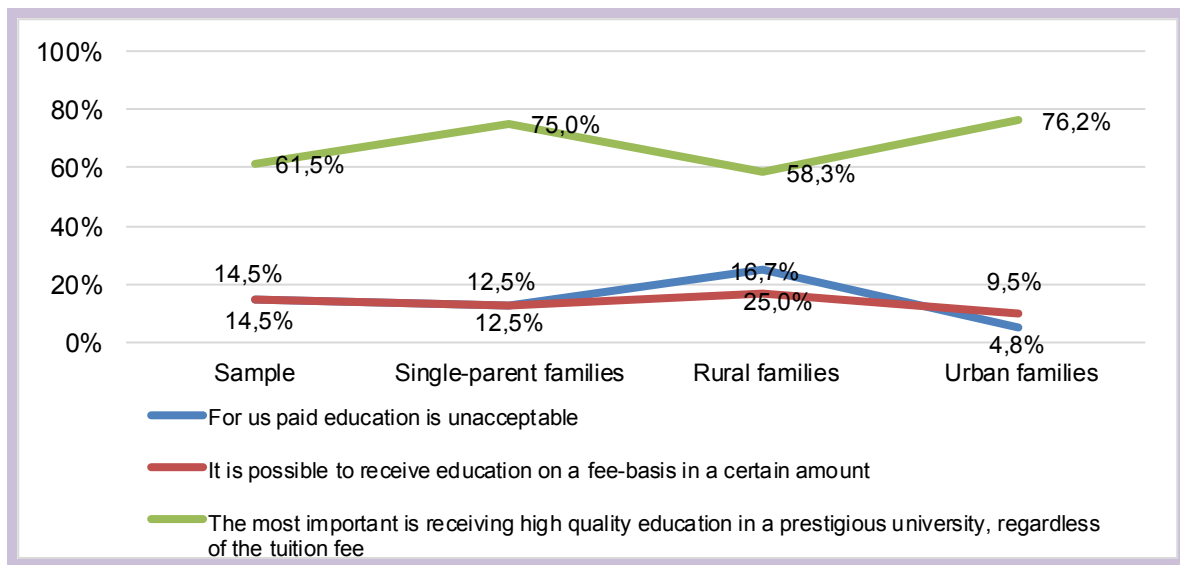


Fig 3. Accessibility of paid education in different social groups.

The ability of school graduates to study at the university on a fee basis is differentiated in the context of parents' income. So, for 28.6% of low-income families (less than 100 \$) consider education of a child in HEI on a fee-basis as a totally unacceptable option. Whereas, for 94.7% high-income families (more 500\$) priority is the quality of education, and not its price. They are ready and have the resources to "invest" in child's education. Parents from high-income families expand possibilities of a child to obtain the desired higher education, also on a fee-basis.

Table 2. Opportunity of education on a fee-basis in the context of the monthly family income.

Response options	less than 100\$	101\$-300\$	301\$-500\$	more than 501\$
For us paid education is unacceptable	28,6%	22,6%	15%	-
It is possible to receive education on a fee-basis in a certain amount	42,9%	16,1%	15%	5,3%
The most important is receiving high quality education in a prestigious university, regardless of the tuition fee	28,6%	61,3%	60%	94,7%

Analysis of the possibilities of using additional preparation for entrance exam that in the context of the location, no statistical differences in terms of additional preparation was revealed.

Table 3. Ranging students' responses to the question "Have you had an additional preparation at school for entrance exams?" in section of location.

Response option	Youth of major cities	Youth small/middle cities	Youth from rural areas
Yes	65,2%	64,8%	69,5%
No	34,8%	35,2%	30,5%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

However, the possibilities of youth of small and medium-sized cities are limited in additional preparation on a fee-basis. Among them, 46.9% attend paid additional classes, while in the big cities this figure is 56.2%. Even in rural areas the figure is slightly higher. This is due to the relatively high cost of paid preparation courses in small towns against the backdrop of "available" preparation courses of low quality in rural areas.

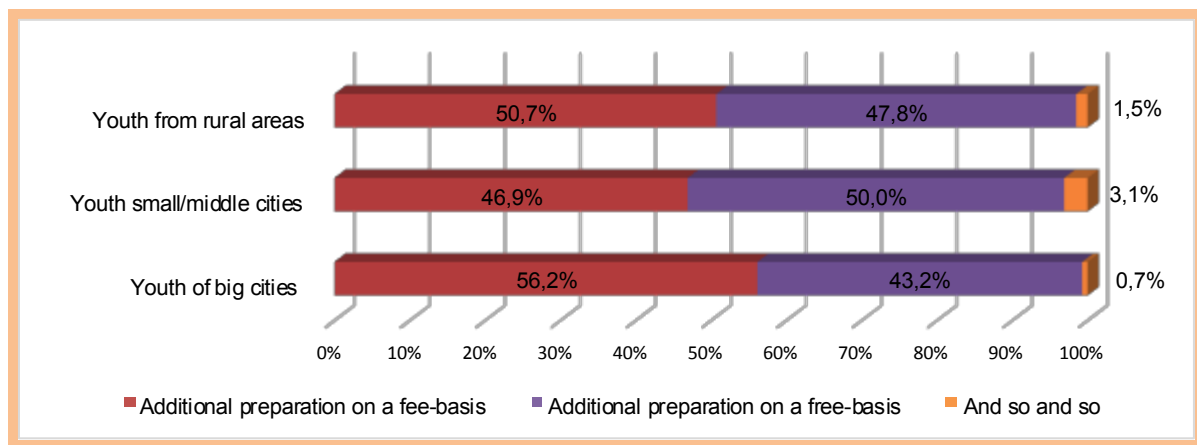


Fig 4. Ranging of the responses of student youth to the question "Please indicate the form of additional preparation" in the context of location.

As can be seen from data in Fig. 5, the educational plans of graduates to some extent depend on the parents' income. Thus, low-income families (less than 100 \$) do not even consider the option of studying in foreign universities. Also in this group number of considering to study in specialized

secondary educational institutions (colleges, technical schools) is higher than in other groups where parents' income is higher.

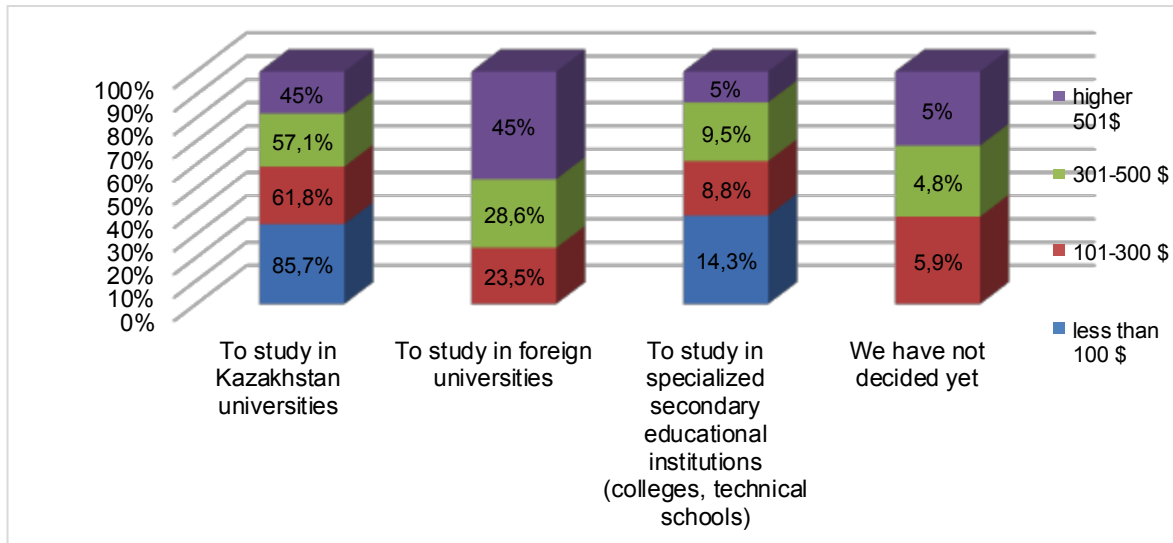


Fig 5. Plans of school graduates after graduating high-schools in the context of the family' income.

2.3 Systemic barriers to accessibility of higher education

Analyzing the accessibility of higher education, it is important to pay attention to the tendency of more and more early differentiation paths to its receiving. The emergence of specialized and private schools differentiate the level of knowledge and create new restrictions for graduates of regular schools, including rural ones. In rural areas and small towns educational choice is often determined or rather limited not only by family resources, but also by the volume of the starter educational capital of the graduates. Starter educational capital is formed in school, depending on the type and quality of education. In this context, the accessibility of higher education begins to be considered through the level of school education. Choice of school is determined not only by the financial situation of parents, but also by the degree of their concern for the future of their child and understanding the importance of formation of high quality educational capital of the child.

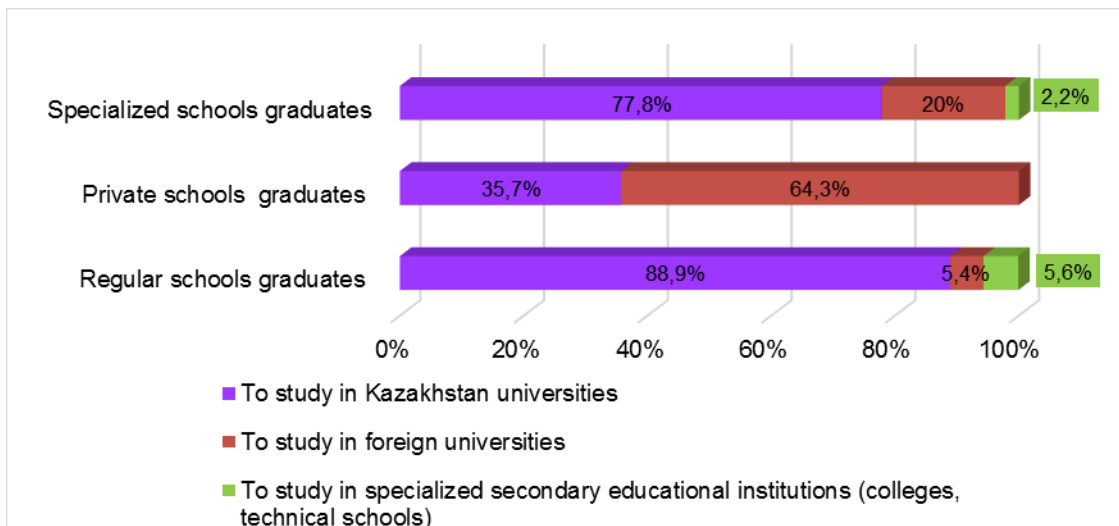


Fig 6. Educational plans of school graduates in the context of type of schools.

Thus, graduates of private schools (mainly children from families with higher income) in large cities are to the larger extent focused on foreign universities and considering studying in specialized secondary educational institutions. While graduates of regular schools (mostly children from low-income families)

are more focused on domestic HEIs, including middle range universities. In the education market graduates of regular schools become more vulnerable and often cannot compete. This problem is relatively easy solved only by those who have enough material resources to pay for tutor services and in a short time to prepare the graduate for entrance exams. In other cases, graduates of public schools (in rural and small towns) are in a worse position in terms of access to higher education in competition with graduates of specialized and private schools (living in large cities).

3 CONCLUSION

Analysis of the situation of education accessibility in Kazakhstan revealed the following trends on this issue:

- In the public consciousness of youth, there is high setting for receiving higher education, which is determined by a key criterion for success in life according to their evaluations.
- The differences expressed in intents are implicit. Plans to receive Higher education - 93.9%, including 23.2% in foreign universities. However, in practice, there is the influence of the material well being of a family and starter educational capital of a graduate (type of school) on accessibility to higher education.
- Inequality is revealed at the level of school choice. Since starter educational capital of the child is formed in the school and affects the possibility of entering universities through high / low indicators of entrance examinations. Further study is necessary to determine the dependence factors of the choice of school. What lies in the basis of choice: the ability of the child or parents' income.
- In general, higher education is no longer a prerogative of high-income families. High indicators of students graduating from schools are revealed, regardless of the economic situation of families, which increases the tendency of "universal higher education." However, social differentiation is expressed in terms of high quality education, which is likely related to a specific HEI and its "brand".
- The inequality of access to higher education is also reflected in the choice of prestigious / non-prestigious HEIs and specialties.

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