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THE ARTICLE EXAMINES THE PROBLEM OF LONELINESS AMONG THE ELDERLY IN UZBEKISTAN AS ONE OF THE KEY SOCIAL RISKS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

ABSTRACT

The article examines the problem of loneliness among the elderly in Uzbekistan as one of the key social risks of the 21 st century. Taking into account the growth of migration and lifestyle changes, traditional family ties and support for the older generation are weakening, which leads to an increased sense of loneliness among older citizens. Special attention is paid to the role of the mahalla as an important institution for the prevention of social exclusion. Organizing regular «Gap»¹ meetings in makhallas can effectively strengthen social ties and enhance the emotional well-being of the elderly. The importance of involving young people and preserving traditional family values to solve this problem is discussed. The article emphasizes that only the joint efforts of the family, the mahalla and public organizations can ensure a decent quality of life for the older generation and strengthen social ties in society.

Key words: loneliness, culture, quality of life, social community, care, helplessness, social isolation, mahalla, depression, anxiety, cognitive disorders, dementia, traditional values, gap.

Introduction: In the context of the rapid development of modern technologies and urbanization, the problem of loneliness in old age is becoming one of the key social problems of the XXI century. As life expectancy increases and the demographic structure of the population

¹ Gap (from Persian. gap "conversation") is a traditional form of pastime and informal social organization (camaraderie) among Uzbeks and Tajiks of Uzbekistan in the form of periodic group meetings. Gap has several goals — informal communication, solving pressing issues, and mutual financial assistance. URL.: <https://ru.wikipedia.org>

changes, the proportion of older people experiencing loneliness and social isolation increases. This problem requires attention not only from society and the state, but also from the citizens themselves, since its consequences can have a negative impact on the quality of life and health of the older generation. In modern society, the problem of loneliness in old age is becoming more and more urgent, and Uzbekistan is no exception. Despite the traditionally strong family ties and respectful attitude towards the elderly in Uzbek culture, in recent years, growing social and economic changes have led to an increased sense of loneliness among older citizens. This problem acquires the character of a social risk and requires close attention from society and the state.

In Uzbekistan, it has always been customary for the older generation to live with their children and grandchildren, surrounded by care and attention. However, with changing lifestyles and increased migration within and outside the country, many families can no longer devote enough time to elderly relatives. Young people leave other cities in search of work or go abroad, leaving their parents alone in rural areas or even in large cities.

People of all ages strive for comfort and safety, but this need becomes especially important in older age. The years of youth, social activities, and family worries are left behind, and older people begin to experience loneliness and helplessness.

This situation leads not only to physical isolation but also to emotional alienation, leaving older people without customary support and interaction. For the older generation, accustomed to traditional family values, loneliness becomes unbearable, especially when their circle of communication is sharply narrowed.

Loneliness in old age is not merely a lack of communication but also a profound sense of uselessness and a loss of purpose. Many older people suffer from depression and anxiety, feeling that they have been forgotten and no longer appreciated. This feeling is aggravated by the lack of regular communication with children and grandchildren, as well as with limited access to modern means of communication.

In addition, older people face deteriorating health, which makes them even more vulnerable to loneliness. The lack of social connections and

support directly affects the state of health, increasing the risk of developing chronic diseases.

Uzbekistan has long had a tradition of respect for the older generation. It is customary for elderly parents to live with their children and grandchildren, surrounded by care and attention. However, in recent decades there has been a tendency to change these foundations. The younger generation is increasingly striving for an independent life, especially in the context of urbanization and the search for economic opportunities outside their small homeland. As a result, many elderly people are left alone. On the one hand, urbanization and migration provide young people with the opportunity to earn higher incomes and build a career, but on the other hand, they lead to older relatives being left without support and communication. As a result, traditional family ties are being severed, which contributes to the growth of social isolationism among the older generation.

Loneliness in old age is not only a social problem, but also a serious risk factor for health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized loneliness as a global public health problem, as it directly affects a person's mental and physical condition. Older people who experience loneliness are more prone to depression, anxiety, and even cognitive disorders such as dementia.

Research shows that «social isolation increases the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, type II diabetes and strokes. According to the pharmaceutical company STADA, about 26% of respondents in Uzbekistan experience a feeling of loneliness, and this figure continues to grow. About 16% associate their loneliness with the loss of loved ones, 15% — with remote work, and 12% — with a lack of work-life balance»²

The growing level of loneliness among the elderly is a social challenge that requires a comprehensive approach from the state, society and citizens themselves. First of all, it is necessary to develop social services and support programs for the elderly. For example, day care centers and interest clubs can become platforms for communication and activity, helping older people stay involved in social life.

² Uzbekistan News. URI UZ. «В Узбекистане живут самые счастливые люди, которые не озабочены старением и своей внешностью». 27-06-2024, URI.: <https://upl.uz/obshestvo/42841-news.html>

A notable example in Uzbekistan is the «Mahalla». **The Mahalla³ is a unique social institution in Uzbekistan, which can become a key element in solving the problem of loneliness among the elderly. The mahalla can play an important role in combating this social problem.**

In the context of modern challenges and social changes, when loneliness is becoming one of the main problems of the elderly, the traditional mahalla institute in Uzbekistan can offer an effective and sustainable solution. The mahalla is not just an administrative unit, but a whole system of mutual assistance and support that has existed in Uzbek culture for centuries. In the context of globalization and urbanization, the mahalla retains its importance and can become an example for other societies in solving the problems of the elderly.

The mahalla in Uzbekistan has always been the heart of social life. Here, people know each other, share their joys and difficulties, and provide assistance to those who need it.⁴ For the elderly, the mahalla becomes a source of support, especially in those moments when close relatives are far away. It is here that they can find the communication, attention and care that are so necessary at an older age.

One of the main aspects of the mahalla is its ability to unite people and create an atmosphere of community. Regular meetings, events and celebrations allow the elderly to remain active members of society. Even if the elderly live alone, thanks to the mahalla they feel like part of a large family.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has implemented many mahalla-level programs aimed at improving the lives of older people. For example, interest groups are created, health days are organized, where doctors come to the mahalla to examine elderly residents, as well as thematic meetings and master classes are held.

The Mahalla also actively attracts volunteers, especially among young people, to help the elderly. This may include regular visits, assistance with daily chores, food or medicine delivery. Thus, a close connection between

³ Mahally or mahalla (коротко маалла), also guzar (азерб. məhəllə; араб. محلة; бенг. মহল্লা; дари محله; перс. محله; тадж. маҳалла; тур. mahalle; тат. мэхаллэ; туркм. mahalla; узб. mahalla; уйғ. مەھەللە; урду محله; хинди मोहल्ला; баш. мэхәллә) — the traditional community

⁴ Shukur Askarov. Mahalla in the evolution of the city Archive copy dated June 3, 2013 Wayback Machine

generations is created, which helps to preserve respect for elders and strengthen traditional family values.

One of the key functions of the mahalla is to involve the elderly in public life. At a time when many pensioners feel unnecessary and lonely, the mahalla can provide them with the opportunity to participate in public affairs, share their experience and knowledge. Older people can become mentors for young people, participate in educational projects and cultural initiatives.

This helps them not only to avoid loneliness, but also to maintain a sense of self-importance and self-esteem. For example, mahalla often organizes meetings to teach traditional crafts, cooking and other skills, where older people can share their experiences with the younger generation. Such interaction benefits all participants and strengthens social ties.

In today's world, many aspects of life are being transferred to the online space, and older people who do not have the skills to work with technology often find themselves isolated. The mahalla can become a place where older people are trained to use smartphones, computers and social networks. This will allow them to keep in touch with relatives, even if they are abroad, and participate in online communities, which will help reduce the feeling of loneliness.

There are already initiatives in Uzbekistan to organize digital literacy courses in mahallas, where volunteers teach older people the basics of using the Internet and messengers. This contributes to their integration into modern society and helps to avoid social isolation.

Mahalla is a unique social institution that is able to offer an effective solution to the problem of loneliness among the elderly. It preserves the traditions of mutual assistance and support, creates conditions for the active participation of older people in society and supports intergenerational ties.

For other countries and cultures where the problem of loneliness is also becoming relevant, Mahali's experience can be an example for developing their own models of support for older people. If modern cities and societies can adopt the principles of the mahalla, many older people around the world will be able to escape loneliness and social isolation.

Preserving and strengthening the role of the mahalla in Uzbekistan should be a priority not only at the level of local authorities, but also within the framework of state policy. The support of this traditional institution can

be the key to solving many social problems and ensuring a better future for the older generation.

Mahalla and **Gap** meetings: traditions as prevention of loneliness. One of the striking examples of using the mahalla's capabilities to solve the problem of loneliness among the elderly is the organization of **Gap** meetings. This is a traditional form of meetings that helps strengthen social ties and supports the spirit of community. In an environment where older people are increasingly isolated due to the migration of children to other cities or abroad, Gap meetings can be an excellent tool for preventing loneliness and social isolation.

Gap meetings among the older generation are organized monthly in each mahalla. These meetings allow older people to come together, communicate, share life experiences and support each other. Unlike official events, **Gap** meetings are informal in nature, which creates a warm and friendly atmosphere. People can discuss pressing problems, recall the past, share joys and sorrows, as well as receive moral support from neighbors and friends.

For older people who are restricted in movement due to poor health or other reasons, such meetings become an important source of communication and help to avoid feelings of uselessness and isolation. This is especially true in conditions when many of them lack communication and attention from relatives. Such gatherings not only help to maintain the emotional well-being of the elderly, but also give them the opportunity to remain active members of society.

Monthly **Gap** meetings are already actively held in some mahallas of Uzbekistan, where elderly people can not only communicate, but also receive useful information about health, legal issues and modern technologies. This helps them keep up to date with current events and feel their importance in society.

Regular participation in such meetings has a positive effect on the psycho-emotional state of the elderly. This helps them avoid depression and anxiety, which often arise from loneliness. Moreover, participation in the Gap helps to strengthen the sense of solidarity and support among the residents of the mahalla, which contributes to the formation of a more cohesive and caring society.

Conclusion: The problem of loneliness among the elderly in Uzbekistan is one of the social challenges of the 21st century, which requires a comprehensive approach. In the context of rapid social changes, urbanization and migration, the preservation of traditional values and the support of the older generation are becoming especially important.

The most important role in the prevention of loneliness is played by families, who must educate young people in the spirit of respect for elders and maintaining close family ties. However, despite the importance of family support, mahalla plays an important role in solving this problem. These traditional communities are able to join forces to improve the quality of life of older people, providing them with the opportunity for regular communication and involvement in public life.

Organizing monthly Gap meetings in mahallas is an effective way to prevent the social isolation of the elderly. These meetings allow the older generation to share their experiences, receive emotional support and feel needed and respected. The involvement of young people in such initiatives helps to strengthen intergenerational ties and preserve cultural traditions.

Only through the joint efforts of the family, the mahalla and public organizations can conditions be created in which every elderly person will feel care and attention. Solving the problem of loneliness among the older generation will benefit the whole society by strengthening social ties and making it more cohesive and harmonious. Ultimately, this will help preserve not only the health and well-being of the elderly, but also the traditional values that make Uzbekistan a unique and strong nation.

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