

**THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE  
LIFESTRATEGIES OF UKRAINIAN YOUTH (BASED ON THE PUBLIC  
OPINION SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL  
AEROSPACE UNIVERSITY)**

*В статье раскрываются место, роль и ценность высшего образования в современном украинском обществе в условиях его трансформации и информатизации. Представлен анализ результатов социологического исследования, посвященного изучению мотивов получения высшего образования первокурсниками Национального аэрокосмического университета, их представлений о будущей профессии, а также роли высшего образования в достижении их жизненных целей. Изучение ожиданий студентов разных факультетов и специальностей при получении ими высшего образования позволило авторам выявить некоторые общие тенденции, связанные с изменением отношения молодежи к высшему образованию и падением престижа высшей школы в современной Украине.*

**Ключевые слова:** *ценность, высшее образование, студент, молодежь, мотивы, жизненные стратегии.*

*У статті розкрито місце, роль і цінність вищої освіти в сучасному українському суспільстві в умовах його трансформації та інформатизації. Подано аналіз результатів соціологічного дослідження, присвяченого вивченню мотивів здобуття вищої освіти першокурсниками Національного аерокосмічного університету, їхніх уявлень про майбутню професію, а також ролі вищої освіти в досягненні їхніх життєвих цілей. Вивчення очікувань студентів різних факультетів і спеціальностей під час отримання ними вищої освіти дозволило авторам виявити деякі загальні тенденції, пов'язані зі зміною ставлення молоді до вищої освіти й падінням престижу вищої школи в сучасній Україні.*

**Ключові слова:** *цінність, вища освіта, студент, молодь, мотиви, життєві стратегії.*

*The article considers the place, role and value of higher education in modern Ukrainian society under conditions of its transformation and computerization. The authors present the analysis of the results of sociological research that studied reasons of getting higher education by first-year students of National Aerospace University, their vision concerning future profession, as well as the role of higher education in realizing their goals in life. Analysis of expectations of students at different faculties in the process of getting higher education allowed the authors to identify some common tendencies, which reflect changes of youth attitude to higher education and show decrease of university reputation in modern Ukraine.*

**Keywords:** *value, higher education, student, youth, motives, life strategies.*

The current stage of development of Ukrainian society is characterized by profound changes in all spheres of life. Under the influence of these changes, special life strategies of Ukrainian youth associated with new types of values and norms of culture are formed. The processes of social transformation taking place in Ukraine are directly reflected in the state of the education system. On the one hand, the transition to market relations has led to an increase in demand for higher education without which further development of society is impossible. On the other hand, in the conditions of globalization and development of the

postindustrial society higher education became more and more massive, which gradually decreased its value in the labor market.

Currently the understanding of the place, role and value of higher education has changed significantly. More recently, in Ukrainian society the prevailing view was that for young people higher education was guarantee of obtaining a higher social status, ensuring a maximally stable and steady position in society. The value basis for obtaining higher education was not its content (knowledge, skills, abilities), but objectified «result» – a diploma of higher education. As a rule, this explains the universal desire to obtain higher education. A few years ago, in the process of forming life strategies young people regarded higher education as an obligatory and necessary condition for achieving life success. The fact of having / not having a diploma of higher education increased the gap in the opportunities for young people to achieve a certain social status. In this regard, there was a tendency among young people to acquire an education for the sake of a diploma.

Still the employer when applying for jobs primarily asks for the existence of a diploma of higher education, even if it doesn't match the job description. In such a situation, the diploma becomes an integral characteristic in employment. However, the majority of modern studies in the field of education confirm the thesis that the presence of a diploma is a big advantage only during employment. In the future work a young specialist needs professional knowledge and skills. And in this situation the attitude to higher education as an integral part of future success in the profession and career is beginning to change.

This is due not only to economic and political transformations in modern Ukraine, but also to the formation of an information society, that is a society in which the knowledge factor and the sphere of knowledge play a decisive role in social development. In a post-industrial society constant work with information is a condition for successful life activity, a factor of personal self-realization and professional growth. Accordingly, any active search, acquisition, processing and use of information leading to personal growth and the expansion of knowledge and capabilities can already be regarded as education.

T. Schulz, G. Becker at the turn of the 50's and 60's of the last century formulate the theory of human capital, which assumes the model of «education during life». Education as a process of acquiring knowledge and skills understood as the continuous accumulation of human capital, in the information society does not end with obtaining a diploma of an educational institution, but is an element of a way of life, an integral part of the life trajectory. In this regard, the principle of «education for life» is replaced by the «lifelong education» model.

In modern society value orientations have changed, which led to a change in attitudes toward higher education. If earlier the position in society was determined by education, it was prestigious to be a part of class of intellectuals, but now the prestige of the profession is directly connected with material well-being. A new structure of the value consciousness of the «consumer society» is being modeled, which is more pronounced among the youth, the demand for humanistic values is losing, and the role of consumer values is growing.

This again confirms the fact that the value system that dominates the society has a significant impact on the formation of life goals in the field of higher education. As E. Durkheim wrote on this subject: «He (man) felt a thirst for knowledge only when society awakened this thirst in him, and society awakened it only when it felt it necessary. This moment came when social life in all its forms became too complicated to function without

resorting to reflective thought, and therefore society demands it from its members and imposes it on them as a duty» [1, p. 23].

Of course, even today higher education acts as a differentiating factor. As before it remains the main sphere of human activity. Education in a decisive degree determines other aspects and aspects of life both for society as a whole and for individual. However, the role and importance of higher education are gradually changing. Therefore, the topic of the importance of higher education for achieving the life goals of youth today is of special scientific interest. The study of the process of inclusion of higher education in the life strategies of modern Ukrainian youth is also relevant in connection with the transformations that have taken place in Ukraine.

Negative political changes in our country as well as financial and economic problems contribute to reducing the standards of living, increasing unemployment and transforming the value-normative system of society. Therefore this, in turn, determines the conditions for the socialization of modern youth.

The difficulties of the transitional period have aggravated many of the problems of higher education in the country. First, because of the instability of the economic situation young people are increasingly focused on expanding the possibilities of material prosperity, rather than for university studies. Secondly, the transition to new types and forms of activity is the reason for changing the scale of the prestige of the professions. Therefore, the influx of entrants into many universities in recent years has dramatically decreased. Third, instability in the sphere of higher education is exacerbated by the outflow of the most gifted and talented people from universities. Fourth, political transformation has increased the marginalization of society. More and more people become those who lose belonging to a particular social group, lose the norms and values of the corresponding subculture, but do not belong to another group. Higher education has ceased to be a guarantee of raising the social status and prestige of the individual. This problem is especially urgent for Ukraine, because the professional development of young people with higher education is accompanied by a critical assessment of the «society of the past» and the «model of the future» that has not developed yet.

That is why there is so much talk about the value of higher education in modern Ukrainian society, its goals and tasks for the training of a modern specialist. We were more interested in the problem of studying the life strategies of that part of the youth, which aspires to achieve its goals and become a successful person through higher education and the chosen profession.

As practice shows the inclusion of the higher education system in the system of personal life strategies occurs only at the initial stage of the life course, usually after the end of the secondary school. In the subsequent period of life, interest in obtaining higher education is significantly reduced. Currently, there is a situation when more and more school graduates take a kind of vacation after school and before entering the university the so-called «Gap year» or «free» year. Such graduates spend school holidays on trips, volunteering, various trainings and part-time jobs. These changes most significantly affect the choice of life strategies of modern youth.

That is why the laboratory of sociological problems of the higher school of KhAI studied the section of public opinion of those who recently received secondary education and decided to get higher education. We interviewed our first-year students in the context of these problems and learned their understanding of the value of higher education for

achieving their life goals.

686 first-year students of all faculties of our university were interviewed, which amounted to almost 70% of the total number of enrolled in our university in 2017. Of those 391 people are guys and 295 people are girls which amounted to 57% and 43% respectively. The analysis of the data obtained during the survey made it possible to get the following information.

To the question «What is the value of higher education in modern Ukrainian society?» the students' answers were divided into three approximately equal groups. Although a little more (35.4%) still turned out to be those, who believe that higher education currently does not have much value, there is just a stereotype in our society of the need to get it. A person's individual desire for education, skills and abilities is much more important than having a diploma. 40% of the guys and 30% of the girls share this opinion. Almost one third of students (31.9%) noted that the value of higher education is declining, because many graduates of universities do not match the required level of qualification or are not in demand on the labor market. This opinion is shared by approximately equal number of girls and boys (about 30%). Only 32.7% of the surveyed first-year students are convinced that even now higher education is of great value, without it it's impossible to find a decent job and to become a qualified specialist. 29.3% of young boys and 36.7% of girls think so.

Hence, there are doubts about the necessity of higher education in modern conditions. In general, 42.3% of freshmen who entered our university have doubts about the necessity of higher education today (almost half of the boys and only a third of the girls). Although there was no such dilemma for the rest 57.7%. They definitely decided that it is worth entering a higher educational institution and they chose our university.

Distribution of students' opinions depending on the type of faculty they are enrolled in is presented on the Figure 1.

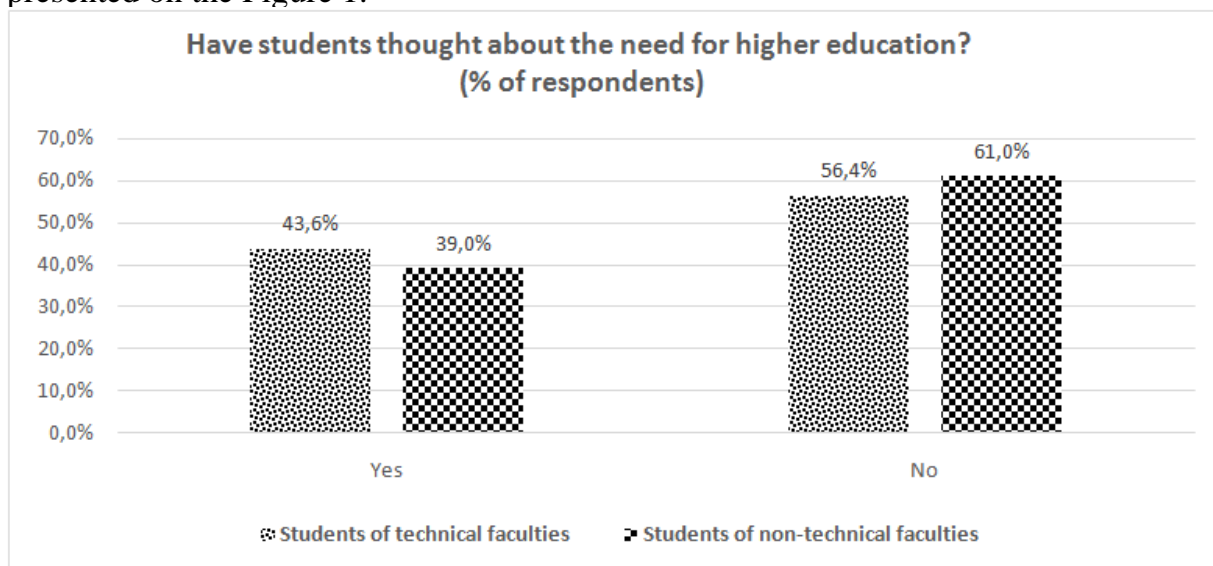


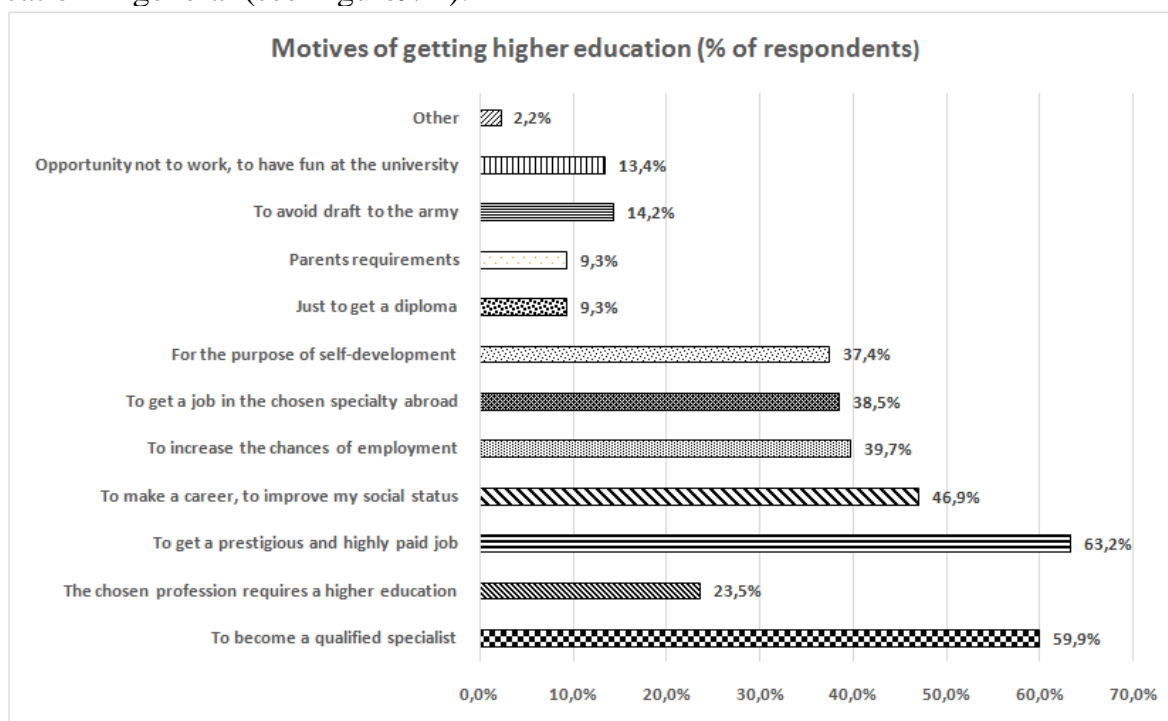
Figure №1

As can be seen from the answers, students of technical faculties have more doubts about the need of obtaining a higher education at present time than students of the humanitarian and economic faculties. However, as statistics shows, there become more and more doubters with each passing year.

*Kopylov V. A., Lobanova L. A.* **THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LIFE STRATEGIES OF UKRAINIAN YOUTH (BASED ON THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY OF FERST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL AEROSPACE UNIVERSITY)**

The problem of choice and self-determination is closely related to the fact that young people form their life strategies while being at risk. On the one hand, the representations and values of young people were formed during the period of radical transformation of Ukrainian society, the significant influence of the Western way of life. On the other hand, the socio-cultural space for young people is regular. Their maturation goes in parallel with social transformations, and as a result, young people are more adapted and more easily oriented in the current economic situation. Therefore, they perfectly understand now that the quality of higher education and the level of unemployment in the country drastically affect their chances of realization of their life strategies.

In this regard, we decided to find out what the first-year students are aiming at, and what are the motives for getting higher education in modern conditions. We were not interested in the motives for choosing our university, but in the motives for getting higher education in general (see Figure№2).



Figure№2

The highest percentage of students' choice received such motives for higher education as a desire to get prestigious and highly paid job (63.2%), as well as a desire to become a qualified specialist in a certain field (59.9%). And for boys and girls these two motives also prevail over others.

Most of those who believe that higher education will help them to get a prestigious and highly paid job, entered the technical faculties of our university (67%). The most of those who are willing to become a qualified specialist in a certain field are at the Faculty of Humanities (68.5%).

Only 46.9% of respondents associated acquisition of higher education with purpose of making a career in the future and increasing their social status. Thus, our hypothesis that higher education ceased to be the dominant factor for raising the social status and prestige of the individual was confirmed.

More interesting was the fact that the career at this stage is more important for the girls than for the boys (respectively 51.2% and 43.5%). Almost 60% of first-year students in the Faculty of Humanities want to make a career and are sure that the presence of higher education is necessary for this. It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of students in this faculty are girls. And again we see that the social values that are currently being formed in Ukraine have a significant impact on the formation of the life strategies of modern youth.

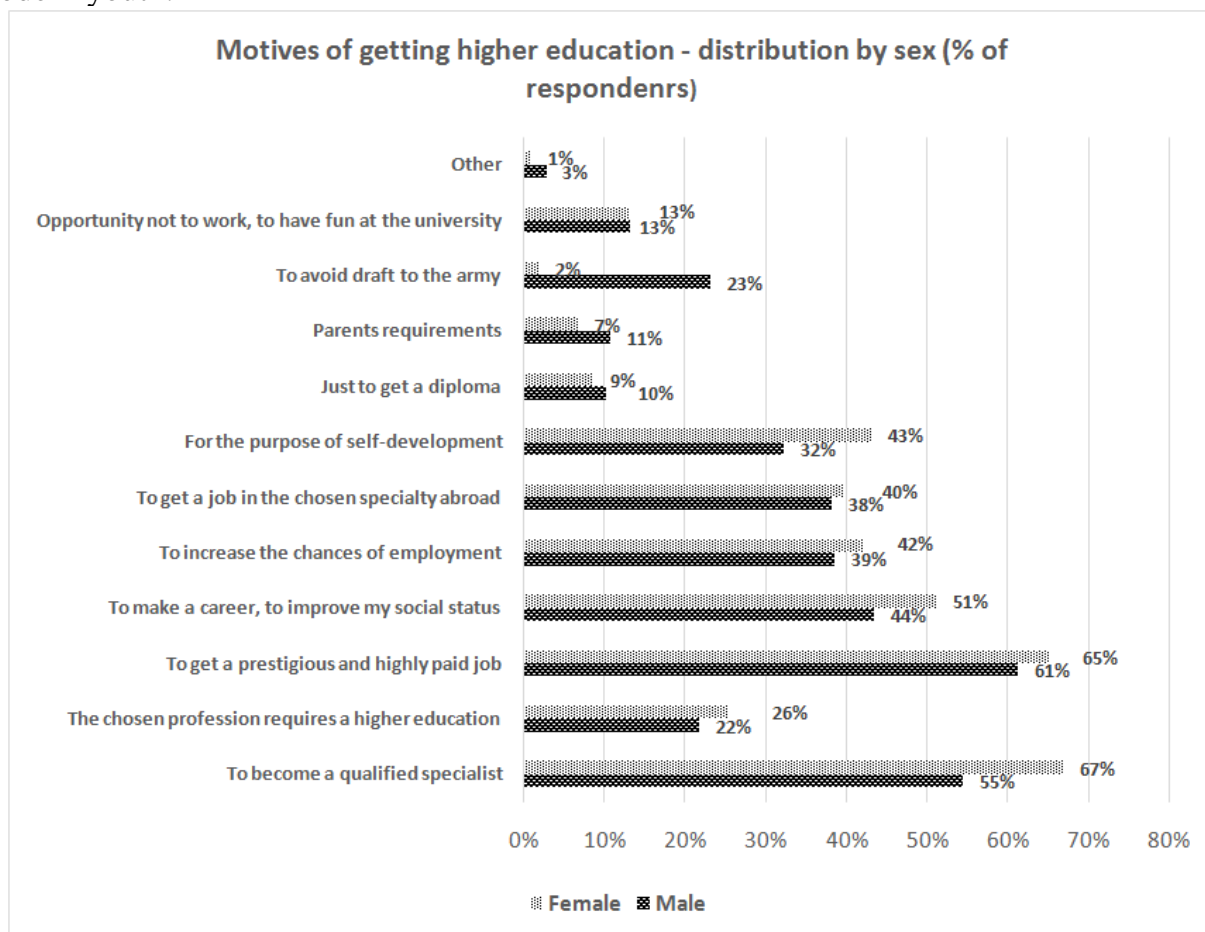


Figure 3

39.7% believe that higher education will increase their chances of employment and 38.5% think that it gives an opportunity to get a job in the chosen specialty abroad. Half of the interviewed first-year students of one of the technical faculties hope that their education will give an opportunity to get a job in the chosen specialty abroad. There are 40% such of students at the other technical faculties there. But students of non-technical faculties basically do not consider this motive for higher education. Only every third student of these faculties believes that education will increase their chances of finding employment abroad. Thus, a large number of students from all the main faculties of our university are oriented to work abroad.

More than a third of first-year students want to get higher education for self-development, development of communication skills, gaining self-confidence. But the biggest number of people, who have already caught the sense of getting higher education today turned out to be at the Faculty of Humanities (almost 50%). It's not just waiting for

you to be taught and educated, but also to educate yourself, getting more and more knowledge, skills, and experience every year, to develop as individual, more and more focusing on self-education. The university should help in teaching how to learn, how to obtain the necessary information, and how to strive to acquire new knowledge after graduation.

The value of any education is not only in the knowledge that we get, but in changing the outlook, the ability to independently formulate our life goals, not succumbing to the stereotypes that have been developed in society. Therefore, it was somewhat unexpected that in the course of our research the popular view that many people go to university just to get a diploma of higher education was not confirmed. Only 9.3% of respondents chose this motive for admission to the university. But still, it is alarming that the highest percentage of those who came to us to study mainly in order to just get a diploma, was in one of the main faculties of the university (11%). Apparently, for them the main reason to choose this faculty was not so much the desire to become an expert in this field, but the availability of budgetary places.

The desire to avoid draft to the army was one of the decisive factors for 14.2% of first-year students, and if you look at this factor through the eyes of girls and boys, then for boys this index immediately grows to 23.3%. This is a fairly large percentage, because almost every fourth young man considers studying at a university as an opportunity to postpone military service for at least a few years. Another possibility is not to work during the period of study at the university and to have fun at the university served as one of the reasons for obtaining higher education for 13.4% of our first-year students.

Studying in the university as an opportunity not to work during the period of study at the university seems attractive for representatives of all faculties on more or less equal basis, but the biggest number of students who think so are at the economic faculty - 20.3%.

This fact can be viewed from different angles. On the one hand, the desire of students not to focus only on study, but to spend these years so that they become some of the best and memorable years in their lives, can be regarded as a positive phenomenon. But it is important that this desire will not oust the desire to learn, acquire knowledge and receive a profession. On the other hand, modern education is viewed by young people not just as a preparatory stage for future professional activity, but as an instrumental and temporal value that allows us to realize a new style and quality of life, to realize ourselves in a new social space.

This leads to changes in attitudes toward learning, interaction with peers, teachers, society as a whole. Therefore, there are groups of students who are striving for "pleasant pastime", "parties" without thinking about the future, considering being in the university as a pleasant period in life.

However, most modern students of our university at this stage are mature enough to consider the goals of higher education and come to the university with serious intentions and expectations.

It can be said with certainty that the parents of our freshmen seriously influenced the formation of these goals and aspirations. Despite the fact that on average only 10% of respondents mentioned the parents' requirements to get higher education, the opinion of the older generation has become an increasingly important factor influencing the decision to continue education in the university. This fact is indicated by the data of our previous studies. Given the inability of a certain part of the youth to make timely decisions, parents'



demands can be considered in the context of G. Becker's theory of human capital. In it he discovered two most important regularities:

1. Return on investment in human capital is higher than in fixed assets, but it decreases faster with investment. Rational choice is that first you need to invest in the education of children and only after that go to the accumulation of property.

2. The family that want to leave an inheritance to their children, should invest money in their education first. If the family does not leave the inheritance, then earlier it stunted on educational expenses [2, 109–119].

At present, the efforts and material contributions of parents give them hope that their children, having received higher education, will be able to achieve their goals in life.

This is how the motives for obtaining higher education look through the eyes of first-year students of technical faculties (see Fig. 4).

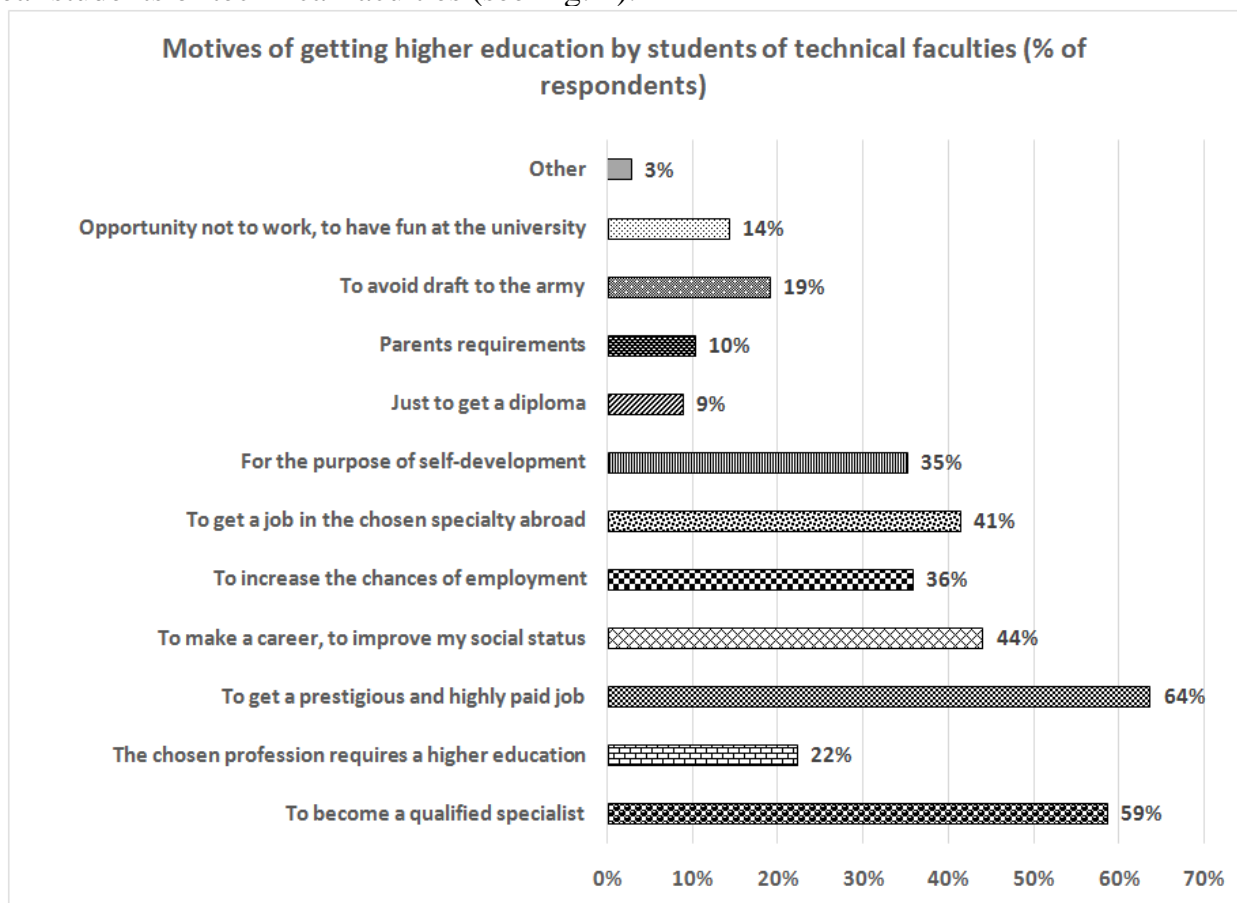


Figure 4

The figure of motivation in obtaining higher education in the humanities and economics faculties looks somewhat different. In our opinion, these differences are due not only to the fact that mostly these are predominantly «female» faculties. The demand for professions in the labor market, for which specialists are trained in these faculties, their prestige in modern Ukraine and abroad also seriously affect the dominance of certain motives.



*Kopylov V. A., Lobanova L. A.* **THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LIFE STRATEGIES OF UKRAINIAN YOUTH (BASED ON THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY OF FERST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL AEROSPACE UNIVERSITY)**

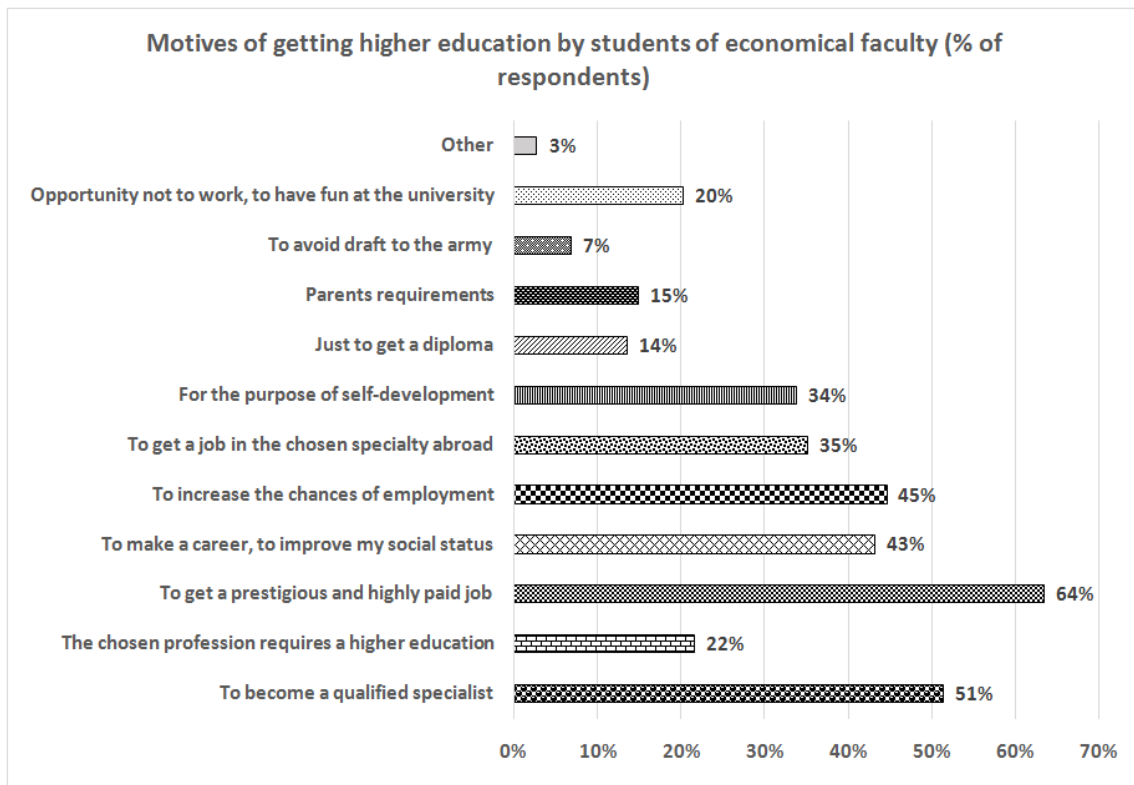


Figure 5

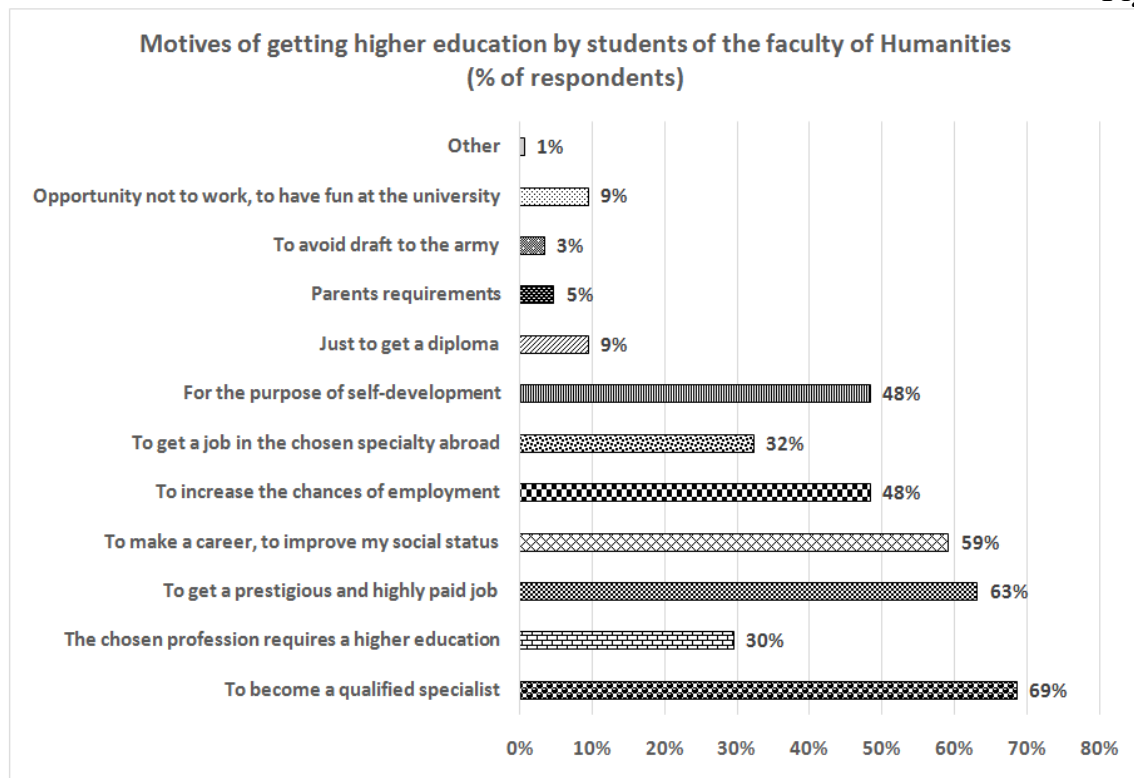


Figure 6

But more detailed and interesting is the analysis of the value of higher education for achieving life goals by our first-year students.

First of all, the majority of students (67.8%) consider that higher education is of great importance for those who want to be financially secure in the future. 59.3% hope that the availability of higher education will help them make a career, 56.4% want to get a high-demanded profession, 48.6% want realization of their abilities and talents. A little less of those who believe that higher education is important in order to earn a lot of money and become rich, only 40.4%. Only 36.2% of respondents noted that higher education is of great importance for the acquisition of high status in the society. A little more than a third of first-year students noted the high value of higher education in order to find good friends and create a strong family and raise children. But higher education does not matter much if you want to open your own business, in the opinion of our respondents. 63.1% of first-year students think so.

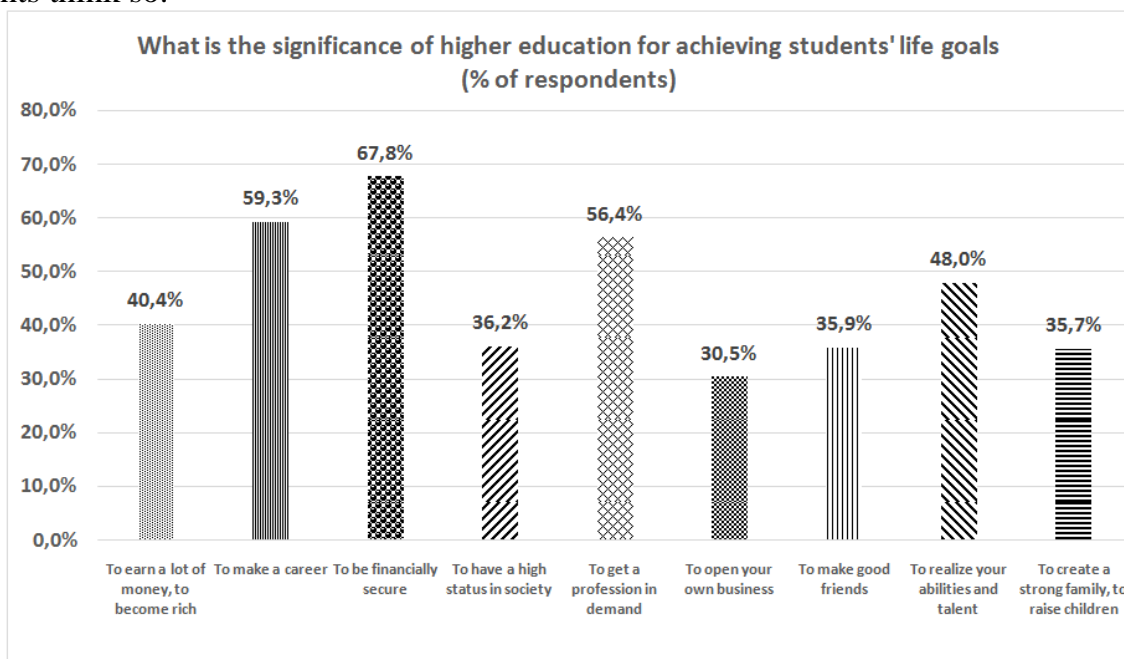


Figure 7

If we consider the relationship of the obtaining of higher education to achieving life goals by representatives of different faculties, then we can single out several interesting facts. The first-year students of the Faculty of Humanities want to earn money and become rich, 45% of students pointed to this factor. And 68.5% of them also intend to make a career. These two indicators are the least important among representatives of the Faculty of IT. Only 30.3% of first-year students of this faculty dream of becoming rich, while 48.2% of first-year students want to make a career. This is the lowest index among all other faculties.

Most of the students who look at higher education as a means to be financially secure are in the basic technical faculties of our university and in the humanitarian faculty (more than 70%). The least is at the Economics Faculty (54.8%).

There is a direct relationship between such facts: the less students believe that they will receive a high-demanded profession in the society, the more are those who dream of working abroad.

It was interesting to compare the opinions of those who live with their parents and those who live separately from them. More ambitious was the contingent of students who

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live independently, without the care of adults. For them, the achievement of all the listed life goals is more important than for those who live with their parents.

Distribution of opinions of girls and boys on this indicator see on Figure 8-16.

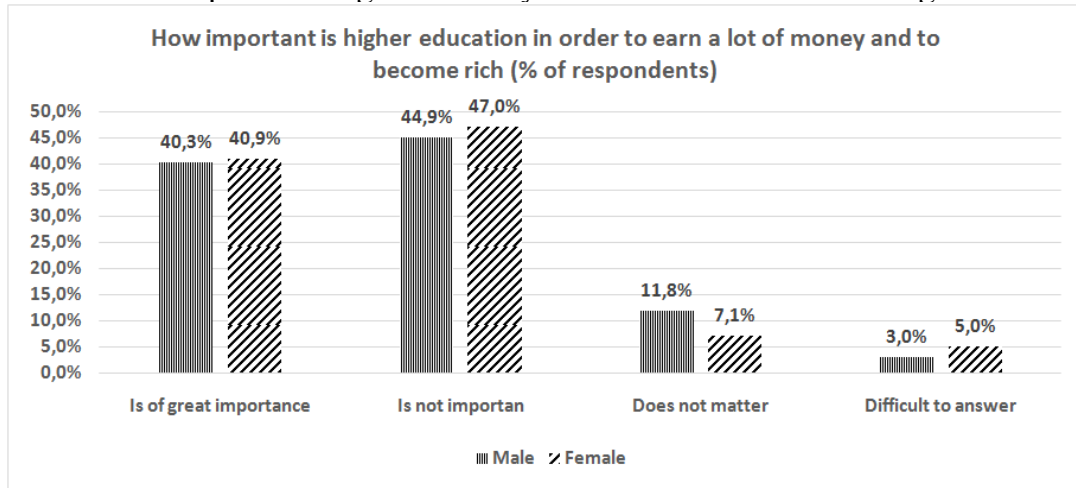


Figure 8

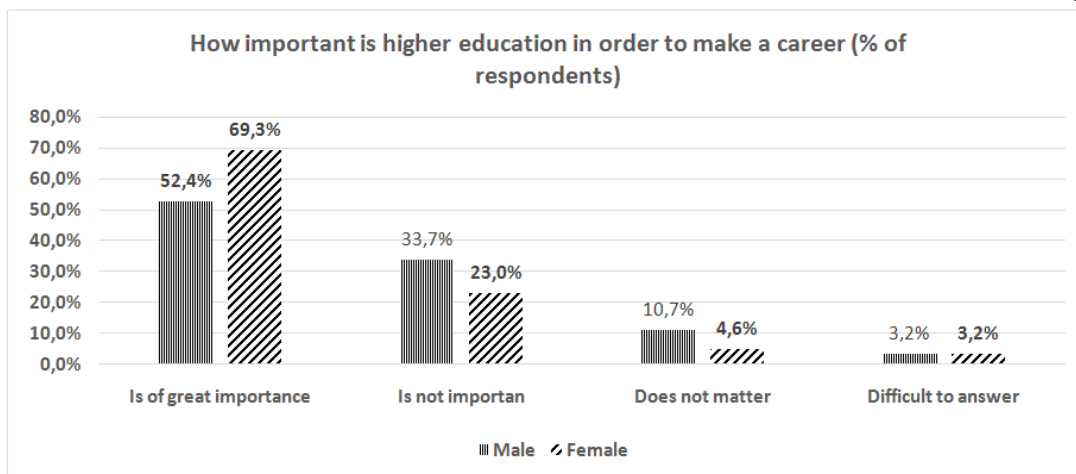


Figure 9

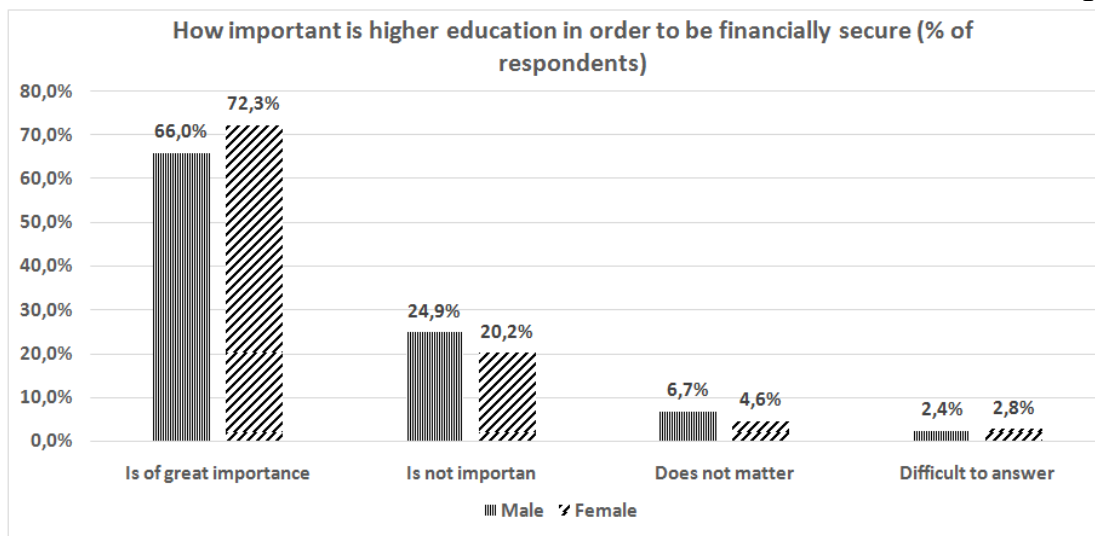


Figure 10

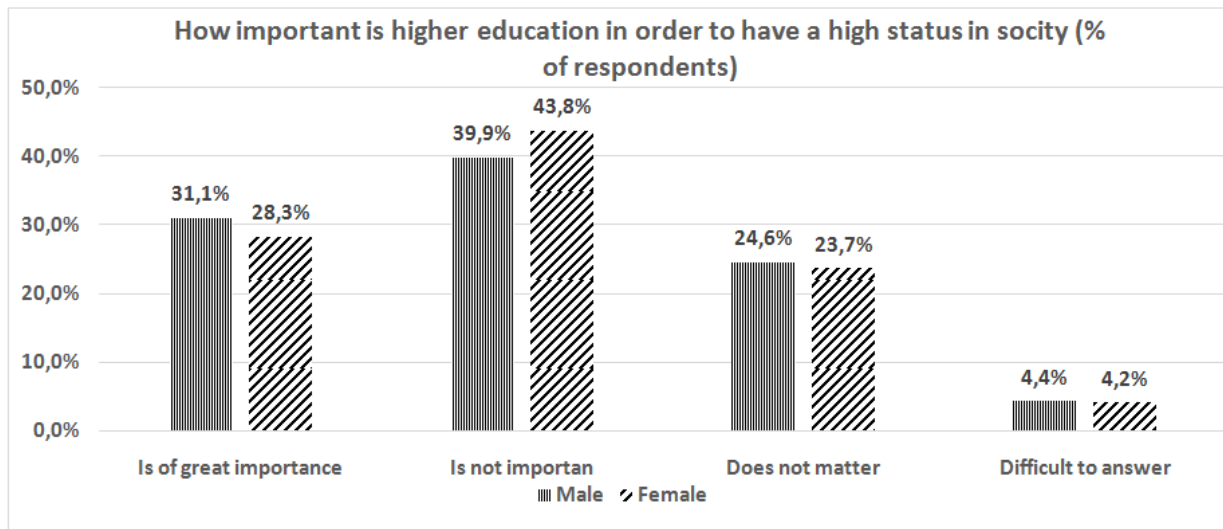


Figure 11

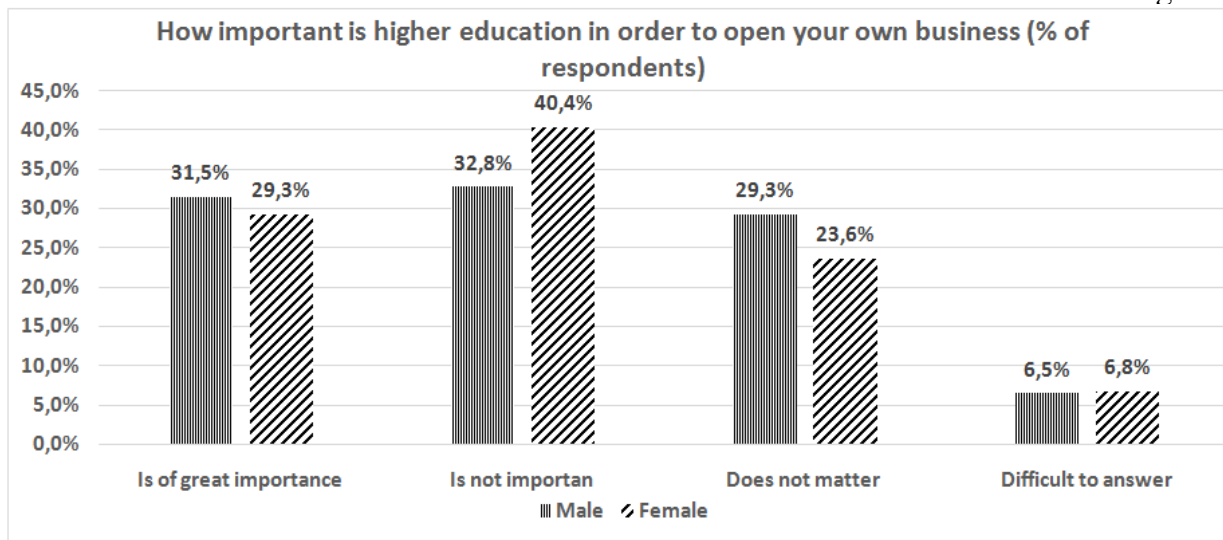


Figure 12

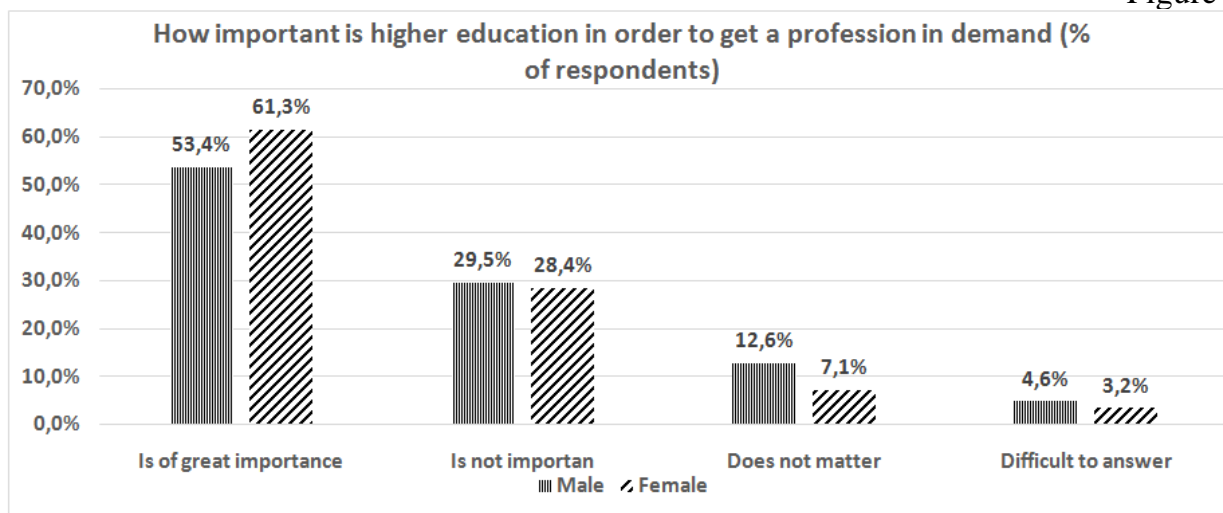


Figure 13

**Kopylov V. A., Lobanova L. A. THE VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LIFE STRATEGIES OF UKRAINIAN YOUTH (BASED ON THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY OF FERST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL AEROSPACE UNIVERSITY)**

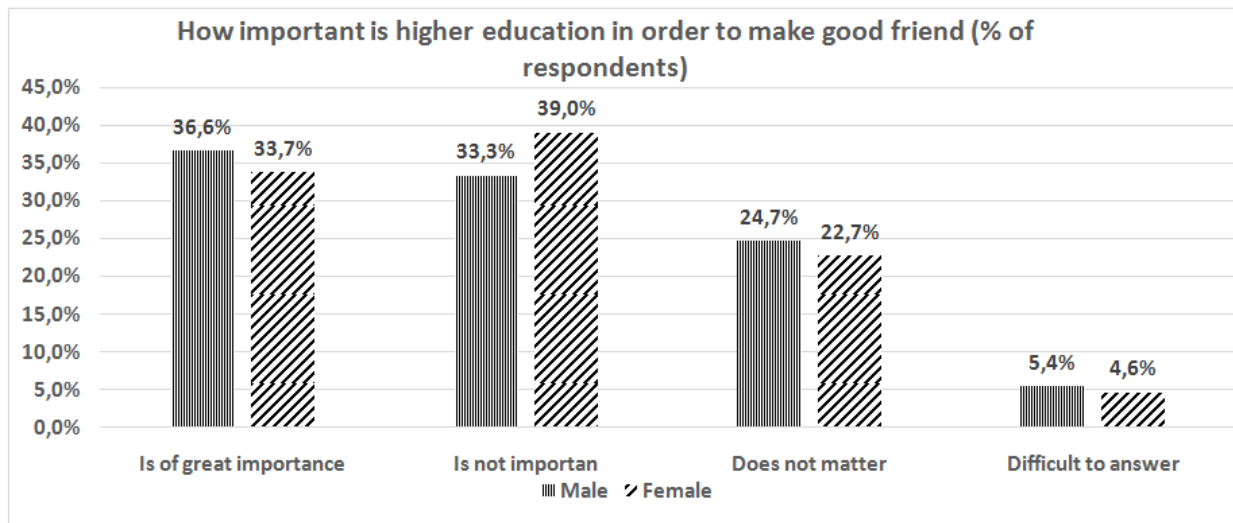


Figure 14

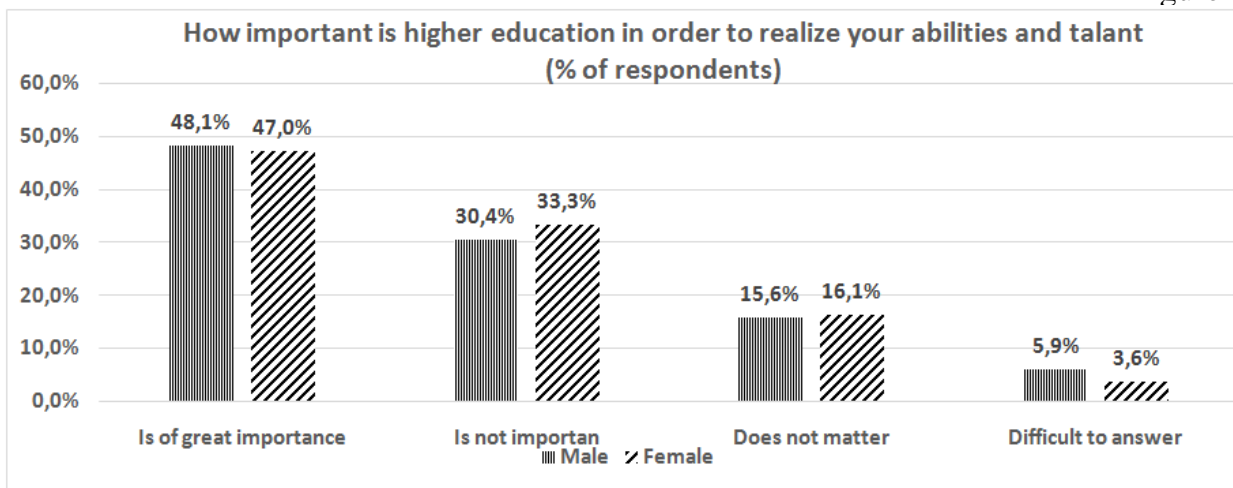


Figure 15

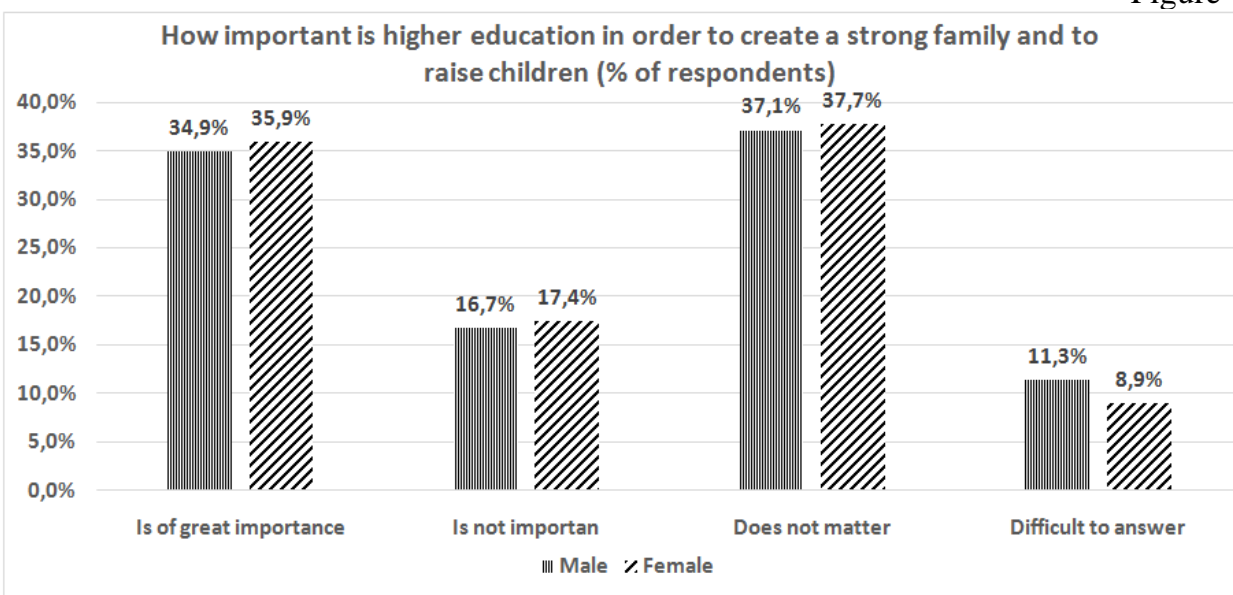


Figure 16

Comparing these indicators, we can state that young people receive higher education in order to acquire a demanded profession that will be able to provide them financially and improve their status in society. And this is typical for girls and for boys almost equally. Quite unexpectedly, there is a trend that the material component and career were more important life strategies for girls than for boys. And this proves the fact that over the past decades the changes that have taken place in the country have led to the transformation of the values of society.

As you know, values are the strongest regulating factor in the development of society. Recently, the value component of higher education has been steadily increasing. Nevertheless, in modern conditions the value of education is realized among young people through overcoming the imbalance between the desire for higher education and the complexity of its implementation at the end of the university. As a consequence, pragmatic value orientations dominate in obtaining higher education.

As a result, the list of attractive professions in the society dramatically changed which led to disproportions in the labor market. Sociologists note that these problems are explained by the fact that a large number of university graduates do not work by their speciality. At the same time, employers are increasingly discontent with the quality of higher education.

All attempts to reform the system of higher education in Ukraine today are aimed precisely at preparing a specialist in demand on the labor market and narrowing the gap between the requirements of modern employers and the quality of specialist training. This problem should be solved at the state level, when it is necessary to take into account the growth of unemployment among citizens who have not received the knowledge needed in the new economic conditions, the shortage of skilled labor, the growth of internal and external labor mobility.

Besides, education itself is becoming more mobile, including in time. The opportunity to acquire a second higher education in a short time, to study remotely, without interruption from work, to study practically at home - modern means of new information technologies are aimed at this.

Changes occur in the temporal parameters of education. The principle of «education for life» is replaced by the model «education during life». Successful career development today is not determined only by basic education and subsequent employment. In modern conditions, students face the dilemma of getting a diploma or gaining professional knowledge in the university, which in the future will help them achieve their life goals.

Therefore, we were interested how well our first-year students already understand the content of their future profession.

44.7% of first-year students are sure that they made the right choice and represent their future professional activity well. On the one hand, the indicator seems to be good, considering that at the time of the survey, the students studied for only 1.5 months. But on the other hand, the greater part of the students has either a very vague idea of the chosen profession and they hope that it will clear up at the beginning of practical activity (42.5%) or they now doubt the correctness of the chosen specialty and future profession (8, 6%). And 4.1% of first-year students in general have not even thought about this yet. It is

important for them just to get a higher education, and they do not think about future professional activity.

Guys more than girls understand the content of the chosen profession. Almost 50% of them are currently confident that they know what they will do after graduation. Among girls only 40% understand the content of the chosen profession and almost 10% of girls already doubt the correctness of their choice.

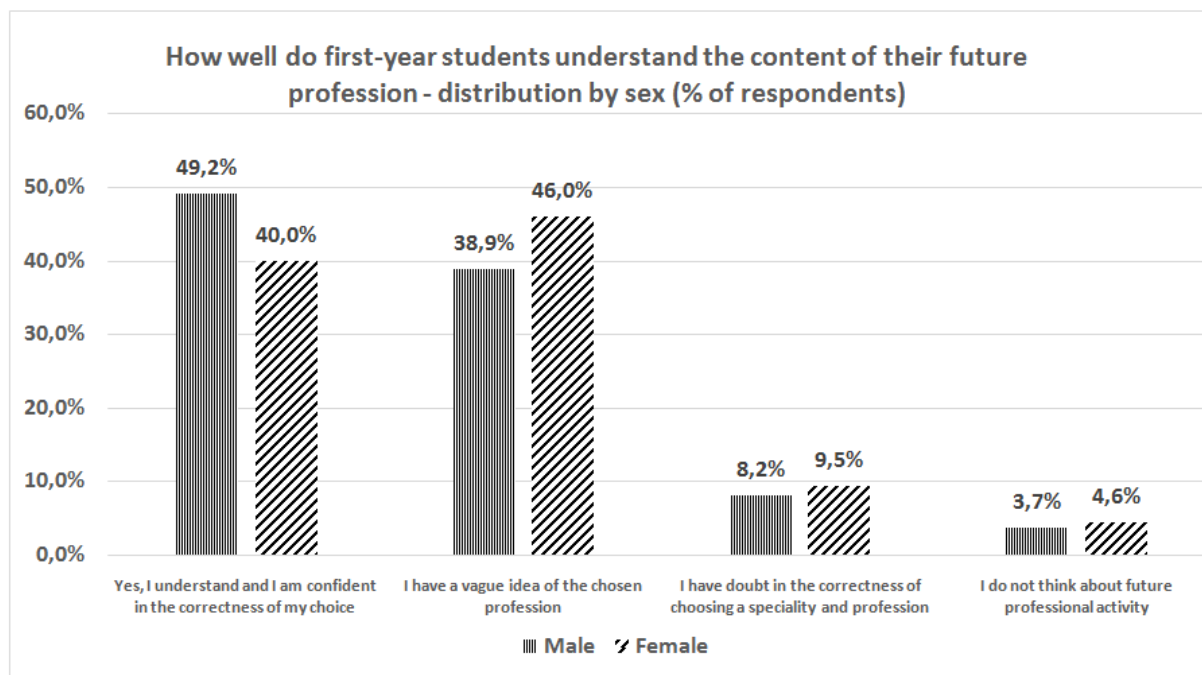


Figure 17

An analysis of the opinions of students from different faculties made it possible to conclude that the level of awareness varies from 50% in some faculties to 30% on others.

Thus, we see that only half of the students who come to us believe that they understand the content of their future profession well. But even with them painstaking work is needed that will lead to interest in the future profession, and, therefore, for learning as a whole. Most first-year students who come to our university have a desire to learn, to receive professional abilities and skills, to a certain extent, a system of values and goals has already been formed. First of all, modern youth strives to find a good job and become a professional with the help of education. The results of the study show that most of young people perceive education from the cognitive point of view. In other words, during the training the students hope to obtain certain knowledge, which in the future can be applied in practice. Focusing on the future, boys and girls perceive education as a capital for investing in a promising occupation, as a way to achieve material prosperity and a certain status in society.

Thus, summing up all of the above, we can draw the following conclusion. Currently, the society retains the value of higher professional education among the younger generation, but this is a less prevailing factor than before. In modern society value orientations have changed, which led to a change in attitudes toward higher education. The prestige of higher education in society is falling, despite the fact that many students see it as an important resource dramatically increasing the social mobility of the individual and its



competitiveness in the labor market. Improving the quality of higher education in modern Ukrainian society is possible only in the case of direct involvement of students in the process of cognition. Only the awareness that education is the most important element of human capital will help our students achieve their life strategies.

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