

REGIONALNI CENTAR ZA TALENTE VRANJE

CULTS

KULTOVI

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CONTENT

ABSTRACT.....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
SURVEY	5
GENERAL DATA ABOUT THE SURVEY.....	5
CHART 1.....	5
CHART 2.....	5
15-19 SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.....	6
MALE.....	6
FEMALE.....	7
32-57 MIDDLE AGE PEOPLE.....	8
MALE.....	8
FEMALE.....	9
GENERAL RESULTS.....	10
MOST KNOWN CULTS WORLDWIDE.....	12
CONCLUSION.....	13
APPENDIX	14
REFERENCES.....	14

Abstract

A **cult** is a religious group or other organization with deviant and novel beliefs and practices. The word is derived from Latin word *cultus* which literally means care. The cults are widely believed as negative and violent groups of people who do not believe in any of today's religions and gods, instead they believe in their own gods and prophecies. Their beliefs are considered brutal and grotesque and some people even describe them as downright sick and twisted. Most people who know something about them do not speak of them to anyone sometimes because of fear and sometimes because a member of a cult is a person they love and respect. There have been numerous researches of cults and their behavior which showed that not all cults have a brutal way of worshiping their gods and beliefs but in almost all of people's minds cults remain the embodiment of pure evil and blasphemy. This research will try to present common view on the cults in Grammar school "Stevan Jakovljevic" and their influence on its students.

Key words: *cults, influence, research, effect, students*

Kult je religiozna grupa ili neka organizacija sa izopaćenim i neobičnim verovanjima i praksama. Reč se sastoji od latinske reči *cultus* što bukvalno znači negovanje. Kultovi su smatrani za negativne i nasilne grupe ljudi koje ne veruju u današnje religije i bogove, umesto toga veruju u svoje bogove i proročanstva. Njihova verovanja su smatrana brutalnim i grotesknim a neki ljudi ih čak opisuju kao bolesna i izopačena. Većina ljudi koja zna nešto o njima ne priča o tome ponekad zbog straha a ponekad zato što je osoba koju vole ili poštuju član kulta. Postoje brojna istraživanja o kultovima i o njihovom ponašanju koja su pokazala da nemaju svi kultovi brutalan način obozavanja, ali u umovima skoro svih ljudi kultovi su ostali otelotvorenje zla i bogohulja. Ovo istraživanje će pokušati da predstavi opšti pogled na kultove u gimnaziji "Stevan Jakovljevic" i njihov uticaj na učenike.

Ključne reči: kult, uticaj, istraživanje, efekat, učenici

Introduction

Every day when we look around, we see different people around us. At first glance they are all ordinary people, they go about their own business and nobody really cares where they are heading or why they are heading there. But if we take a deeper look into their morning routines, we can see that some of them hold different beliefs not just regarding different myths, legends and gods but they have a totally different view on this world. Most of the time that view is very dark and grim filled with frightening legends and stories about gods who demand sacrifice and blood, about their prophecies which in most of the cases include that the believers of the prophecy are the alpha and omega of society, that they are on the top of the food chain and that they deserve to conquer this world which is only a small realm in a gigantic universe filled with people like them. They are more commonly called cultists and their main goal is to spread their beliefs and please their gods no matter how brutal the process is.

The first definition of cults was given by an American sociologist Howard P. Becker in 1930 but the term cult had been used long before, somewhere in XVII century in France. It consisted of the Latin word *cultus* which means *worshipped* but the British translate it as *brainwashing* in order to explain some of their conspiracy theories. The deeper meaning of the term was later researched by various sociologists and psychologists but the number of cults and their different beliefs and rituals have made it very hard to determine the true meaning of the word cult.

In theory a cult is a religious group or other organization with deviant and novel beliefs and practices. There has been a study of various cult types such as “Doomsday” cults, political cults, destructive cults, and terrorist cults. In Serbia there is a large gap of information regarding cults and their influence mainly because they tend to be very careful and their numbers do not increase as fast as in other famous worldwide cults. In Serbia only a few cults are known such as The Black Rose, The Adamantians, Free Masons, The Family of love and the most known cult worldwide Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact the Jehovah's Witnesses cult is so large that it has more than 7 million members and 5 headquarters around the world.

The cults in Serbia are very small, excluding The Jehovah's Witnesses, and they tend to operate in complete anonymity and darkness. This text will tell the reader about the cult

influence in our environment, about the thoughts of youth and their speculations regarding the cults. One of the main purposes of this text is to warn and tell young people how to protect themselves from the influence of many cults and how to recognize the cultists.

SURVEY

GENERAL DATA ABOUT THE SURVEY

The number of students included in this survey is 87 people who are divided in two groups (male and female) and two categories (secondary school students and middle age people). The examinees were given a list of questions (which is given in the appendix) which they answered with no one's interference. Each one of the examinees filled in the form of the poll and his/her answers are carefully analyzed and the average results for each group have been taken out. In order to present the results of the research, the numbers are presented for every of the age group separately.

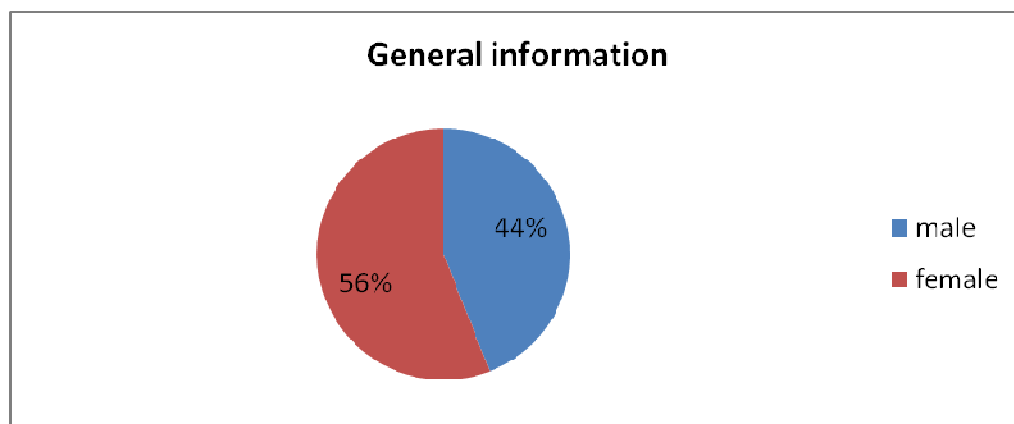


Chart 1

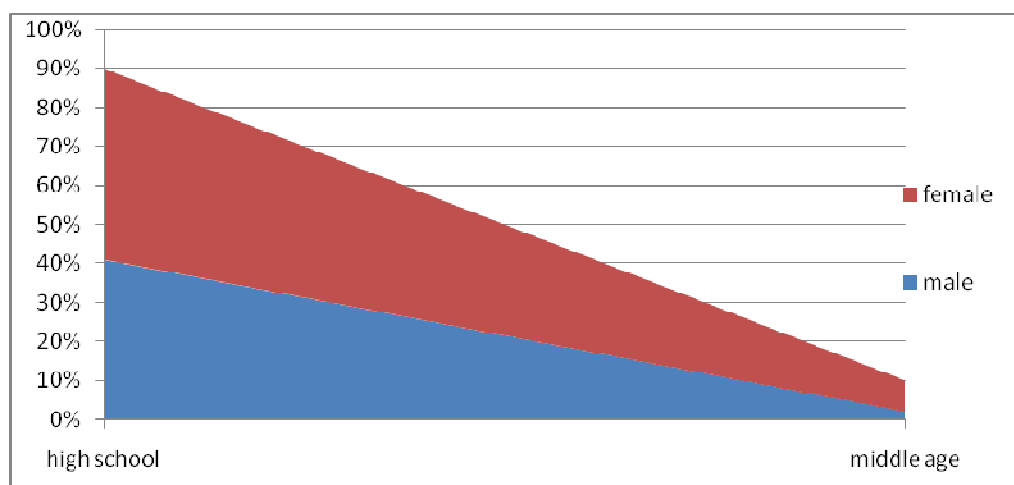


Chart 2

15-19 SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

In total there have been 79 examinees for this age group, which is 90% of total examinees in general. This group was separated in two gender groups so we can see how different their thoughts are.

MALE

In this survey a total of 36 male students were asked questions about cults, which is 42% of the complete survey. In general all of them know what a cult is, the common answers are “An organization which doesn’t believe in god“, “A group of people who share the same thoughts and organize themselves for rituals.” and “A cult is a group who believes in their own gods and rituals.” There are a few interesting things concerning this question, while most of them gave the right answer, some of them filled in that “cultists are people who are sick in the head and need medical attention”, which in some cases is absolutely correct, but in some cases it is not. Recent surveys have shown that most of the world media do not care about the peaceful cults because they do not bring good stories and are not interesting. Instead they talk about rituals, sacrifices and murders which attract our youth’s attention. This is proven in the second question of this survey, 78% or 30 in general have named several known destructive and violent cults such as Black Rose or Black Hand, other students have named the Jehovah’s Witnesses probably because they are widely known as the biggest cult in the world. The third question involved students’ way of seeing cultists. The answers were divided between b) a boy or a girl in punk/rock style clothes and a) a properly dressed man/woman. Exactly 50% of them believe it is a boy/girl in a punk rock style clothes and most of them roughly explained it in this way “I think they look weird so I assume they do weird stuff, too which also involves being in a cult”. While 33% answered that they would assume cultists are wearing proper clothes. Most of them think that that is because they want to be hidden and secretive, so proper clothes do not draw any suspicion. The rest of them believe that cultists are beggars in dirty, rugged clothes simply because they have nowhere else to go and in the end they join a cult so they could have some place to live because cults often have headquarters somewhere and offer shelter to all who join them. The answer to the fourth question was mostly no (30 out of 36 or 83%) probably because we live in a small town in which cults are not seen very often. But 6 of them (17%) believe that they have or think that they have seen a member of a cult. They all describe them as shady looking people and they all have seen them in dark secluded places doing something unknown to them. One examinee said that he saw a bald man without a shirt just sitting and watching the town from

atop of a monument hill of our town, he also said that he was whispering something very unnerving and intimidating. About their reaction they all said that they had left as soon as they could because they did not want to get involved in any of those things. The fifth question was expectedly answered *yes* by all male students, probably because all of them think cults have negative influence on everyone, which is not completely right. The reason it is not completely right is because some cults are very peaceful and harm no one, but unfortunately they are not as widely known as the destructive cults. The answers to the sixth question are very interesting because there are no two answers that are alike, but in context it implies that we should not talk to strange and suspicious people and if we see anything that looks like a cult we should leave immediately and report it to police. One of the examinees said that we should not buy books which are not approved by the Serbian government. The answers to the seventh question were mostly negative (32/36 or 88%). It is probably because we live in a small town and any kind of cult would be discovered very fast. Others who answered that there were cults in our town did not give the explanation to their answer which is affected by the lack of information. Also the eighth question was mostly answered negatively (only 3 admit that they know a member of a cult). Those who answered *yes* said that they did not try to make that person leave the cult; one of them said that it was because of fear, the second said that after he had found out that the person was in a cult he did not want to have anything with him anymore, and the third one said that even if he tried to make that person leave the cult, he would not listen to him. And as expected the answer to the ninth question is *no* (100% of examinees have answered no) because most of the male students present themselves as patriots and Christians and it would be a shame if they answered that they approve of the existence of cults. And the answers to the final question were quite colourful, the reason is that everyone has their own opinion and everyone looks and thinks about a cult in the same way. Even if the answers were all different the context was more or less the same. The first one is that cults should be fought against and stopped; while the other one is that we should mind our own business and pay no attention to the cults. The common opinion of male students about cults is that they are bad and are getting worse every moment, but the opinions differ related to the ways of handling that problem.

FEMALE

Exactly 43 female students participated in this survey (49% of total examinees). All of them knew what a cult was and they gave the appropriate definition of cults. As for the second question they named a few more cults in comparison to the male group, and again the cults

which are mostly listed are Black Rose and Black Hand. For the third question on the other hand the female examinees mostly answered a) (20%) and c) (74 %). The explanation for a) is the same as for the male examinees but the answer c) was not very popular with male examinees. That is probably because female students tend to be afraid of the people of that kind and stay away from them most of the time. The fourth question was divided between the answers "I think I saw a cultist but I'm not sure" (13 examinees or 30%) and "Yes, I have seen a cultist but I couldn't recognize him or her" (6 examinees or 13%) and "No I have never seen a cultist" (24 or 57%). About the ones who say that they have seen a cultist their reaction was very similar to the male reaction - they left as soon as they could. As for the fifth question all of the female examinees answered *yes*. They say that every cult can traumatize not only people who are in the cult but also the people who are in a close relationship with the member of the cult, this is absolutely correct but it also depends on cult's behavior and beliefs; it depends because it determines the actions and the way a cult works. And for the sixth question female students were a lot more imaginative in ways of protecting oneself against cult influence. Some of them said that you should wear amulets like crosses and small bibles. Others said that you should always stick in a group with at least 3 or more people, which makes you a harder target to cult members. And they also said that you should always be careful who you are talking to; one of the students said that she had encountered a cult member right outside her house and that he offered her a strange book. You should always decline those kind of things because they do not have just books, they have DVDs, newspapers and even their own music that they record some larger countries. Related to the seventh question few of the examinees believe that there are cults in their hometown (just 7 out of 43). The explanation for that is simple; they live in a small town where things like cults cannot be held secret for a long period of time. The eighth question was mostly answered negatively (34 out of 43 answered *no*) mainly because this is a small community and everybody knows everybody and a small town is not a proper place for a cult. However, the ones who answered positively admit they had never tried to make the person they know leave the cult; instead they stopped seeing them and stopped talking to them. The answer to the question number nine was as expected negative (all of the examinees answered *no*) simply because a cult is for them an embodiment of evil and wrong beliefs. Most of them say that their overall opinion of cults is that cults should be exterminated because they represent everything that is wrong and that they preach false prophecies and lie people just to make them join their cult.

36-59 MIDDLE AGE GROUP

This survey consists of the answers of 8 middle age people, 2 of whom are male and 6 are female. In order to derive the opinions of each gender this survey will be split in two groups (female and male).

MALE

A total of 2 middle aged people were given the questions (which is only 2% of the total percentage of examinees). Due to the small number of examinees their personal opinions will be listed in order to deepen the research. The answers to the first question were given quite fast by both of them and they were very precise in giving the definition of a cult. They know that a cult is a religious organization which is based on the same opinion on the subject of religion; they also think that there are numerous types of cults which are defined by their way of action and rituals. The second question was also answered very precisely, not only because they named more cults than the students but also because they even said something about their way of recruiting. For example, they said that the Jehovah Witnesses recruit by walking from house to house ringing bells and asking people if they want to hear something about Jehovah and his deeds. The third question was not answered, they simply believe that judging people by their way of dressing is wrong and that it cannot show if they belong to a cult or not. The fourth question however was answered by both of them positively mainly because they are far more experienced than students and have seen a lot more things than them. They say that it was a long time ago and that they do not remember everything very clearly, but their reaction was very similar to the students' one, they also walked away as soon as they could. The fifth question was answered differently, one of them knows that not all cults have bloody and murderous rituals, but the other one believes that all cults are bad and they can definitely traumatize and hurt people and in some cases even brutally sacrifice them to their imaginary gods. The sixth question was answered in details. They gave a few good tips on how to protect oneself from the cult influence which include the ones the students gave, too. The answer to the question number seven was *no*, they both answered in the same way and gave an explanation which is "Our town is very small and everything large that happens cannot be kept a secret for a long time. Maybe a few people in this town belong to a cult or an organization of that kind, but their base or headquarters are probably in larger cities." This explanation is a version of the students' explanation and it is probably correct. Regarding the seventh question both of their answers were positive and they said that they did not want to get involved in such activities and they stopped every contact whatsoever with that person. The answer to the ninth question was not the same; one of them thinks that cults are evil and

twisted, while the other one thinks that every human has the right to believe in whatever he wants which includes false gods that are not in any of today's accepted religions. Their overall opinion regarding cults is also different and is very similar to the answer they gave to the ninth question.

FEMALE

A total of 6 females have been asked the questions about cults (which is 6% out of total examinees). All the questions will be revised by their order but no answers will be quoted. They did not answer the first question as correctly as other examinees did. Almost all of them believe that cults are something that is bad and should not exist. They do not define them very accurately which is probably due to the lack of their interest in cults. The second question was also not answered in great details. Only 2 mentioned the Jehovah Witnesses. To the third question they mostly chose b) and c) (3 out of 6 chose c) and 2 of them chose b)). When they were asked to explain their answers the ones who answered b) think that the kids who wear that kind of clothes usually come from a bad family or even worse did not even have a family. Those who answered c) just say that people who have nothing will do even the weirdest things to get into a balanced situation. The fourth question was answered negatively; they say that they mostly do not pay attention to that kind of things and even if they *saw* a cult member they would not pay attention to him or her. Regarding the fifth question, all of them say that cults can certainly traumatize, hurt and even kill people. As far as the sixth question is concerned, they just say that we should not pay attention (even though according to many other people it is a wrong thing to do. The seventh question was also answered negatively by all of the middle aged females because as they point out they do not pay attention to it; the same goes for the eighth question. To the ninth question all of them say that they do not approve of any of the cults that exist at this time and that they should be prohibited. Their overall opinion was similar to the answer to the ninth question.

GENERAL RESULTS

General results should sum up the results of the research presented above and outline some facts which are most common and characteristic of today's cults and their influence on our students and youngsters. The chart for the first question is not needed since every examinee knows what a cult is. In each of their answers they mention that cults are religious organizations which do not believe in any of today's standard and accepted religions. Special chart will be given for the third question since it involves examinees' sense for judgment and the way of seeing cultists and their way of dressing.

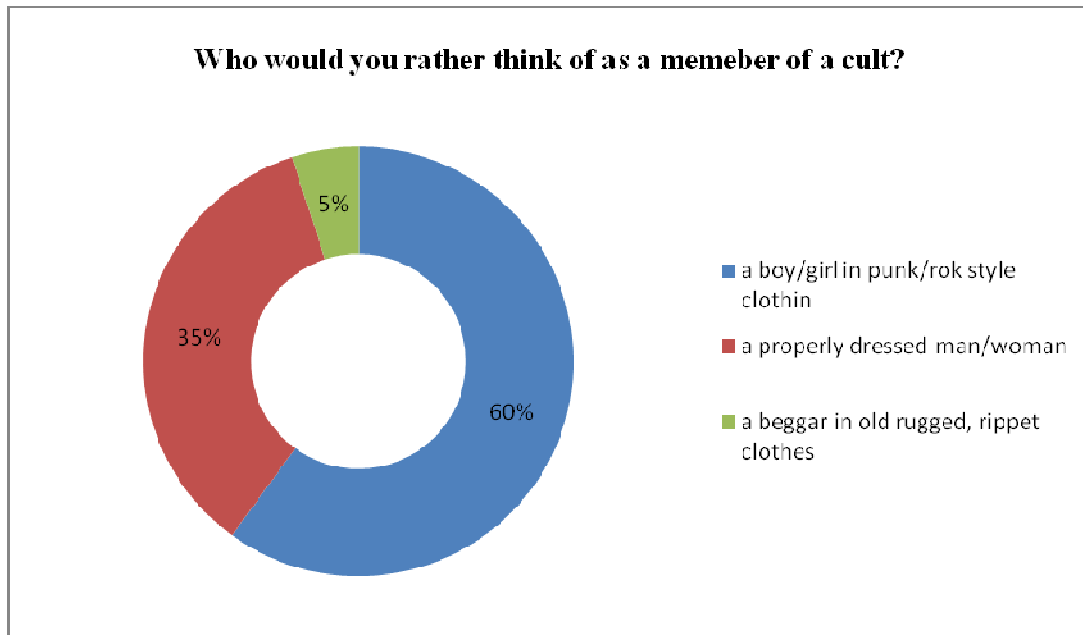


Chart 3

What this chart shows is that many examinees judge people by their way of dressing and they think that just by looking at them they can determine if they are members of a cult or not. However, not all the examinees thought that way, some of them thought outside the box and did not circle any of the offered answers, instead they just said that judging people by their way of dressing was wrong and deceptive. What must be pointed out is that all three answers are completely correct and their chances are the same. The recent surveys have showed that all social classes have chances of being in a cult - the rich, the poor and the medium class citizens. In fact most experts think that every day we see at least 3 people who belong to a cult but we do not pay attention because of our other concerns. Regarding other questions the answers were as expected very similar because almost all people who were examined have almost the same opinion of cults. The answers to questions nine and ten are of course *no*, only a few people (3 out of 87) have answered differently because they both think every human has the right to believe in what he / she thinks is right. This is not entirely good because if some cults believe in human sacrifice the three examinees approve of murders, but in other cases if cults are friendly (there are harmless cults who do not hurt people or animals in any way) this is a good opinion. Related to the cult activity in our town, most of the examinees believe that there are a few people who belong to a cult but they do not think that there is a cult base or headquarters in our town or even in our close environment (The Jablanica District). This is probably correct because of the reasons given and discussed in the survey above. However, each examinee named at least one way to protect oneself from the cult influence. The most common answers were “Don’t talk to strangers” and “Don’t buy

strange books which are not approved by the Serbian government”. These pieces of advice are very good and should be remembered but the truth is that nothing can completely shield us from the influence of cults since they are so widespread around the world and own a lot of the today’s media and press and the funny thing is that we know so much about cults from television shows and news without ever seeing them in the flesh that we already know how they do things they do. This can be quite helpful in the way we can see where they are most active and how dangerous they are.

MOST KNOWN CULTS WORLDWIDE

1. Jehovah Witnesses
2. Black Rose
3. Black Hand
4. New Age
5. Mormons
6. Children of God/Family of love
7. Peoples Temple
8. The Family
9. Serpent Handlers
10. Order of the Solar Temple

MOST DESTRUCTIVE CULTS

1. Movement of Restoration of the Ten Commandments “Uganda” (924 murders and above 2000 suicides)
2. Peoples Temple (total of 913 murders and 543 suicides)
3. Branch Davidians (total of 83 murders and 10 suicides)

4. Order of the Solar temple (total of 53 murders no suicides)
5. Heaven' Gate (total of 39 murders no suicides and 3 known terrorist attacks)
6. Snake Handlers (15 murders and no suicides)
7. Jeffrey Lundgren (no murders no suicides 2 terrorist attacks)
8. Aum Shinrikyo (5 known terrorist attacks)
9. Penitents (no murders, mass suicide)
10. Church of the Living God (1 known murder and 1 suicide)

CONCLUSION

Cults are widely known as the embodiment of evil and blasphemy, and that is the way most of the students in Grammar school "Stevan Jakovljevic" see them. In theory large majority of cults are dangerous and extreme but there are few exceptions which are not widely known as the extreme and murderous cults such as Black Hand or Black Rose. The main worry we should all have is their influence imposed through the mass media. Even if it is hard to believe some cults for example the Jehovah Witnesses possess multimillionaire companies and can have effect on many of today's important things and issues. The main reason for this survey is not to see how the young see cults in comparison to middle age people, but to see what their knowledge of cults is. As we could see in the survey conducted, young people know almost as much as the middle age group of people. Why? In my opinion, the answer is simple. Over the years the influence of cults has grown to that level that even children who have never seen a cult or a cultist before know so much about them. The only way to stop the influence of a cult is to be careful who you talk to and think about what you watch on television.

APPENDIX

Cults (questions)

1. Do you know what a cult is and can you describe your knowledge of them in a few short sentences.
2. Do you know the names of a few famous worldwide cults?
3. Who would you rather think of as a member of a cult? Why?
 - a) a properly dressed man/woman
 - b) a boy or a girl dressed in punk/rock style clothes
 - c) a beggar in old rugged , ripped and dirty clothes
4. Have you ever seen a member of a cult? What did he/she look like?
 - 4.1. If your answer was yes, what was your reaction?
5. Do you think certain cults can hurt or traumatize people?
6. Can you name a few ways of protecting yourself from the cult influence? What is the most efficient way according to you?
7. Are there any cults in your home town, and if there are can you tell something about their ways of recruiting and beliefs?
8. Are any of the people you know members of a cult and do you mind?
 - 8.1. Did you try to make that person leave the cult he/she is in? /
9. Do you approve of the existence of cults and depending on your answer why?
10. What is your overall opinion of cults?

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