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The problem of the psychological resource of the substitutive family

The paper considers topical issues in the sphere of psychological and pedagogical support of substitutive families at a selection and preparation stage. It analyzes the research experience of distinguishing and search of personal and family resources of potential substitutive parents. The article also introduces the results of the empirical study of socio-demographic and psychological characteristics of the citizens who have expressed a wish to adopt an orphan child; the comparative analysis of these characteristics obtained in samples of lonely and family candidates is carried out.

Keywords: orphan child, adopted child, substitutive family, personal resources, family resources.

The development of social practice, transformations of a social and economic character, the change of a social situation of development of a rather great number of children have made the problem of research of viability, resources and risks of the substitutive family urgent in the last decade. Today in the psychological practice of our country there is a significant number of studies devoted to research of features of orphan children, conditions and factors of their adaptation in the substitutive family, to identification of criteria of successful substitutive care. At the same time the search of significant social and psychological criteria which would allow effectively to decide the issue of selection of a resource substitutive family and to predict the quality of substitutive care remains urgent.

The substitutive family has the specifics which is expressed in inclusion in the family system of the child needing the compensation of a lack of adults' love and warmth, rehabilitation after psychological traumas, correction of disorders of behavior, compensation of a lag in development in comparison with contemporaries. One more distinctive feature of the substitutive family is a necessity of creation of the relations "the substitutive parent – the adopted child" out of a common biological context taking into account the influence of the relation of substitutive parents to blood relatives of the adopted child on his/her development. Solving these problems presupposes the existence of considerable personal and family potentials of candidates for substitutive parents.

Now the state policy in the field of the development of a family life of children without parental support is focused on simplification of the procedure



of registration of necessary documents, material stimulation. At the same time the program of obligatory training of the citizens wishing to adopt an orphan child is approved.

The practical experience of support of substitutive families gives us understanding that training for adoption of the child decides only a part of the issues connected with adoption of the child, and is an auxiliary component which can be actualized at various stages of the substitutive parenthood. Even having the experience of passing training according to the program of "Schools of Adopting Parents", facing the reality of the adaptation period, substitutive parents experience the upbringing uncertainty, confusion, find it difficult to correlate the observed behavior of the adopted child to available knowledge of it (in the event if the parent has no experience of the adopted child upbringing). "Unnormativeness" of the behavior of the child comes into conflict with the available standard of social experience of the parent.

Studying personal and family resources of candidates for substitutive parents makes it possible to answer the following questions, "What should be a child or children that the family can adopt?"; "What is the basis for establishment of relations with the orphan child, during his/her upbringing?"

Studying of a psychological resource of candidates for substitutive parents was a purpose of this research. During this research we have solved the following tasks:

- 1) construction of a psychological portrait of the potential substitutive parent;
- 2) studying the motives of decision making concerning adoption of the child;
- 3) carrying out the comparative analysis of psychological characteristics of the married and lonely candidates;
- 4) revealing the request for a psychological assistance among potential substitutive parents.

Families have various compensatory opportunities which are reflected, according to V.N. Osion [3], in the nature of social communications of a family, its system features and the personal features of its members.

In result of studying social and psychological conditions of successful adaptation of the adopted child O.K. Minevich [2] has defined as the optimum: social experience of the child, his/her psychophysiological characteristics, personal features of both the child, and substitutive parents, and also the quality of matrimonial relations.

Studying social and psychological determinants of successful substitutive parenthood, O.G. Yaparova [5] distinguishes such personal characteristics of substitutive parents, as openness, flexibility of attitudes, tolerance, frankness,



self-control and emotional stability, low aggression, calm relation to failures which promote formation of effective relationships and interrelations in a foster home.

Considering socio-psychological and personal characteristics of readiness for substitutive parenthood, T.E. Kotova [1] has distinguished the following personal characteristics: authenticity and consciousness of a choice to become the parent of the adopted child, acceptance of the responsibility for making decisions, experience of crisis situations, need for self-realization as a reception parent, consciousness of own identity.

On the basis of the scientific-theoretical analysis we have revealed social and psychological criteria of an assessment of readiness of candidates for adoption of the child. It made it possible to create a predictive social and psychological portrait of the potential substitutive parent.

As criteria there were distinguished (J. Rycus, R. Hughes, V.N. Oslon): motivation to adoption, spouses' coherence of motives of adoption, relation of family members and immediate environment to adoption, stability and quality of matrimonial relations, degree of satisfaction with various aspects of candidates' activity (family, career, marriage, family values), ability of a family to cope with a stressful situation, relation to a biological family of a future adopted child, degree of openness of a family (ability to accept aid, to interact with immediate environment), degree of readiness for cooperation with support services, degree of personal maturity of candidates (ability to control emotions, critically to estimate own strengths and weaknesses, self-relation), actual functional state of the candidate, aggression level (formation of attitudes of social cooperation).

In the absence of children: existence of the experience of upbringing of somebody else's children having different problems (emotional, behavioural, physical).

In the presence of the blood or adopted children in a family: children's idea of the features of family relationships, features of upbringing (empathy, patronage level during upbringing, degree of satisfaction of children's needs, quantity and quality of requirements).

In the presence of the adopted children in a family: parental skills (enjoyment of upbringing, empathy, ability individually to approach a child and to react accordingly), degree of the child's satisfaction with living in a family (the system of relations to family members, self-relation, actual emotional condition, degree of adaptation in society – kindergarten, school), existence of positive dynamics in the child's development.

The distinguished criteria have formed the basis of the carried out research of psychological readiness for adoption of the child among the citizens, wishing to take part in a family life of children without parental support. 70 people



(persons) took part in the research (during 2011). The analysis of socio-demographic and psychological characteristics of the specified group reflects the similar tendencies observed in previous years (2009–2010). On this basis it is possible to consider that the data given below is representative.

In the studied scientific literature there are discrepant conclusions about the resources of lonely parents. So, as the risks of the development of the dysfunctional child-parental relations they specify the prevailing motive of overcoming of loneliness, compensation of a lack of emotionally close interpersonal relations, tendency to establish symbiotic relations with the adopted child, and unresolved problems of separation. On the other hand, according to V.N. Oslon, the incomplete family does for placement of children who have been recently withdrawn from a family owing to child abuse, sexual violence. As a result of the conducted research of socio-psychological determinants of a successful substitutive parenthood O.G. Yaparova draws a conclusion that such social factors as the type of family and marriage relations aren't significant at an assessment of the success of the child's adoption. This contradiction has caused the research interest.

On the basis of the received results there was an opportunity to make the typified portrait of lonely and family candidates and to assume that the degree of the expressiveness of the presented criteria in these two samples will be differ. According to the research project the samples of lonely and family candidates for substitutive parents were created.

51 persons have formed the sample of family candidates; it formed 60% of the total number of respondents, where according to gender distinction women prevail (57%). Higher index of women is provided at the expense of those who choose blood care and don't involve spouses in examination.

More than a half of the candidates are under the age of 40 years; they are characterized by a relative stability, both material, and personal, existence of the idea of extending life prospects and the need for self-realization. The candidates under the age of 50 years have made 28%; the index of candidates over the age of fifty years considerably decreases and forms 16%. 22% of respondents are city dwellers.

The educational qualification reflects prevalence of respondents with primary professional and secondary education (78 %) that characterizes the sample of family candidates as people focused on practice, who appreciate the process of activity, most often a traditional one (farming for self sufficiency combined with professional labor activity). 84% of candidates are considered busy (employed).

For 35% of respondents it is a second marriage. At the time of carrying out research the marriage of 66% of families lasted for 10 years. These are



spouses (in a first, or second marriage), feeling need for upbringing of a child together, which hasn't been satisfied at this life stage. As a rule, in the experience of married couples there is an unsuccessful pregnancy (Eco-pregnancy or natural pregnancy) or medical contraindications. Some people have no children for the reasons unspecified by medicine. 33% of candidates have no children.

Those family candidates who possess the experience of upbringing have realized it only concerning blood children, i.e. there are no candidates with the experience of upbringing of adopted children during 2011.

The tendency of prevalence of such form of a family life of orphan children and children without parental support as blood care (34% of families) remains. According to observations this indicator is rather stable. The index of the number of adoptions grows every year and is equal to blood care (also 34% of families); simple care makes 21% of families that reflects some decrease in comparison with the previous periods; the same tendency is also observed with opening of foster homes – 10%. Most likely, the low index of people wishing to open a foster home is explained by candidates' unreadiness to interference in a family life and control from the state. The increase in adoptive parents reflects a growing number of spouses who have the problems connected with reproductive health.

In result of the research it was shown that a psychological condition of the majority of candidates is favorable, which ensures them to cope with psychological and physical loads rather effectively. The index of anxiety of 81% of respondents corresponds to the low or average level.

In the sample of family candidates a variety of a motivational complex is noted. Quantitative expressiveness of motives of the sample of candidates for substitutive parents ensures to range according to the expressiveness degree the following of them: need for performance of parental duties, desire to keep conditions of family upbringing for the minor relative, desire to provide the orphan child with conditions of family upbringing, stabilization of matrimonial relations, compensation of the loss of a blood child, search of meaning of life and desire to improve the family economic conditions (possess equal expressiveness), opportunity to get a "friend" for a blood child, altruistic motive, call of duty, desire to correct errors of upbringing of blood children and to prepare the adopted child for adult life. According to many researchers, the motive at the heart of which the desire to execute parental functions lies, possesses the greatest energy potential.

The results of the analysis of family sociograms of candidates and comparison of the results with the results of questioning and interview show a lack of obvious conflicts between family members that is expressed in the presence



of the author in both versions of the sociogram and the presence of all family members. In 90% of cases there is an inclusion of the potential child in a family system in the version of an "ideal" family.

The dominating position of parents in relation to children's subsystem can become an essential compensatory resource of a substitutive family in upbringing of the adopted child feeling need for safety. The domination is expressed in predictability, sequence of a parental position, existence of clear and simple rules. Such a vertical hierarchy is more often observed among family candidates (65 %), than among lonely ones (27 %). The last assume more democratic relations which are expressed in a linear arrangement of the members with insufficient role differentiation.

At the same time 45% of candidates have a considerable expectation connected with the improvement of life quality after adoption of the child in a family, namely: increase of satisfaction in life (12% of candidates have a considerable difference in the version of a "real" and "ideal" family at the image of family system); the signs of improvement of a condition of family members after adoption of the child, increase of their importance, increase of unity between them (the increase in the size of the circles representing family members or the author, reduction of distances between family members) is expected among 31% of the examinees.

The results of the Colour Test of Relations (CTR) have revealed the positive relation of spouses to each other among 80% of candidates, the positive or positive and neutral attitude towards the potential child – among 85% of candidates. The overwhelming majority of respondents have a positive image of the present and the future. 55% of respondents have an unambiguously positive self-relation. The index of candidates with the neutral-negative and negative self-relation is considerable; it forms 18% and corresponds to some candidates who can't have blood children on health grounds.

The analysis of the data obtained in the sample by the Hand-test has revealed the existence of answers in all categories of the test that reflects, on the one hand, a difficult and rich mental life of candidates, and on the other – the answers of the Bas category (improbable and frightening answers) and the Fail category (absence of responses to the shown stimuli) in combination with the Des indicator (description without the motivation to act) increase the probability of a tendency to escape from reality, personal disadaptation.

The categories of answers reflecting a tendency to social cooperation, cooperation of Com (communication), Aff (emotional and positive relation) and Dep (dependence, support search) made 36% from the total number of answers that testifies to an orientation of candidates both on close emotional relationships, and on social contacts at a business level. These tendencies



counterbalance aggressive and directive ones – Agg (threat, attack) and Dir (domination, leadership), and reduce the probability of open aggressive behavior – a sample indicator $I < 0$. At the same time by consideration of individual indicators of I it should be noted that 10% of the examinees have $I = 0$ that increases the probability of manifestation of candidates' aggressive behavior in significant situations in a (inner circle) close circle; 20% of candidates have a real probability of the aggressive behavior actualization.

The indicators of the categories Act (actions not demanding the presence of another person) and Pas (passive not demanding the presence of another person), reflecting the expressivenesses of the experiences connected with the subject depersonalized environment of the examinee, are in norm limits. In this case the "norm" concept is used conditionally and reflects some balance between the tendency to decrease in the importance of society in life of the examinee and the tendency to the raised social susceptibility.

The sample of lonely candidates was formed as follows. 40% from the total number of families possess the status of incomplete families. The index of lonely women in the sample of incomplete families corresponds to 90%. For the further analysis we will use the part of the sample of incomplete families from which we have eliminated 42% of respondents since the form of a family life chosen by them (blood care) is initiated by temporary changes in a family situation (employment of parents in other city, moving of the child to more favorable southern climatic conditions) or radical changes (death of a parent).

In the studied sample, in comparison with family candidates, the age range has some shift, the main contingent is at the age from 34 to 45 years (82 %). The educational qualification reflects an equal ratio of candidates with primary professional and higher education. These indices differ from the indices on the educational level of family candidates among whom the persons with primary professional education prevail.

A third of women have no experience of upbringing of children; 18% of women have experience of education of both blood children and the adopted ones. The obtained data differ from the information on family candidates among whom no one possesses similar experience. It is necessary to notice that this tendency is characteristic only for the studied period. In previous years 30% of substitutive parents addressed to the experience of repeated adoption of the child.

In spite of the fact that 55% of respondents choose simple care as a form of a family life, as a rule they are focused on long substitutive care. The choice of the specified form is explained by the desire to keep the privileges guaranteed by the state for children from this category of families. The procedure of



adoption is chosen only by 18% of respondents. The same index reflects the candidates' desire to establish a foster home on a professional basis (18 %).

The neuropsychic condition of the overwhelming majority of potential substitutive parents of the studied sample is characterized as good. 73% of respondents possess a low or average level of anxiety that differs from the results in the sample of family candidates where this index is a little higher.

The motivational complex of this sample is presented by the need for performance of the duties of parents, desire to provide the orphan child with conditions of family upbringing, desire to overcome the feeling of loneliness, search of the meaning of life, and desire for self-assertion. From the presented information it is obvious that the motivational complex of lonely candidates isn't such a various complex in comparison with family candidates; it has both similar and different positions.

The analysis of the data obtained in the sample by means of the Hand-test has revealed the existence of answers on all categories except Fail F Bas. The categories of answers of Com and Aff, Dep made 37% of the total number of answers; it insignificantly differs from the index in the sample of family candidates. The indicator of aggressive and directive tendencies is insignificantly lower, than in the sample of family candidates. The low probability of the open aggressive behavior is predicted among 91% of candidates ($l < 0$) that considerably differs from family candidates (70%).

The indicators of the categories Act and Pas reflecting the degree of expressiveness of experiences, connected with the subject depersonalized environment of the examinee, are normal, but in comparison with indices of family candidates it is higher.

The data obtained by means of the Color Test of Relations of A.M. Etkind ensures us to say that 73% of respondents have the positive relation to the potential adopted child. 27% of respondents have neutral negative attitude. In this sample there is no negative self-relation among the candidates. 91% of respondents have a positive image of the present; 91% of respondents have a positive image of the future.

The results of the analysis of family sociogram of candidates show that, as a rule, they include the potential child in the family system in the version of an "ideal" family. The signs of the adequate family hierarchy are revealed among 27% of the examinees. 64% of the candidates from the sample of incomplete families have considerable difference in the version of a "real" and "ideal" family at the image of the family system. These distinctions can be shown not only in the image of the prospective husband, children (sometimes blood), but also dead close relatives (parents). That is the image of an ideal family for lonely candidates has a compensatory or unrealistic character.



The analysis of the obtained empirical data ensures us to create the program of the psychological support of candidates for substitutive parents.

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