

Opportunities for monitoring the comfort of children living in substitute families for sustainable social development

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Abstract. This article reflects the monitoring indicators from the research of living conditions in substitute families in the South of Russia. The authors present some study results of the living comfort in a substitute family, namely the relationships with foster parents; interaction with blood and other foster children in the family; the psycho-emotional state; physical, mental, and emotional violence in a foster family; the desire to live in a substitute family. The monitoring was carried out among 76 foster children being brought up in substitute families of the Azov city and the Azov district of the Rostov region and accompanied by the Azov Child Care Centre. The results obtained are of great importance for specialists of support services for substitute families, as well as researchers whose scientific interest is focused on studying substitute family care in Russia. The research has been carried out within the framework of the Ministry of General and Vocational Education order of the Rostov Region No. 747 of 28 July 2022 "On measures to assess the level of comfort of a child's stay in a substitute family".

1 Introduction

The substitute family has become an independent public institution integrating the family and state social values in the last decade.

A substitute family in Russia makes it possible to solve essential tasks for the state social policy related to the placement of children left without parental care for upbringing in the families of citizens. When solving issues of national importance, it is necessary to involve the scientific community in the study of the functioning efficiency of this social institution from various angles and to apply integrated methodological approaches.

Understanding the mechanisms of child-parent relationships in a substitute family, foster and blood children interaction and the mutual influence of the socio-cultural environment on a family with a foster child – all these indicators allow us to fulfill the social and state order

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at a qualitative level, to timely update the regulatory framework and determine the directions of the social policy in the family arrangement of orphans and children left without parental care.

More than one percent of the child population in Russia, for one reason or another, is brought up in substitute families. Research on the substitute family life in the context of the child's well-being is the subject of contemporary scientific works of Russian [1-6] and foreign authors [7-13]: T.V. Avakyan, E.A. Bayer, V.O. Volchanskaya, V.V. Hercik, M.V. Gorbaneva, M.V. Zaluzhnaya, Z.I. Lavrentieva, E.E. Leonova, G.N. Solomatina J.K.P. Greesonae, A.R. Garcia, S. Greenshields, J. Havlicek, K.W. Liming, J. Brook, B. Akin, H.V. Yuyinh, S.P. Limber, C.L. Gray, M.P. Thompson, A.I. Wasonga, V. Vann. However, with all the considerable range of scientific papers devoted to the issues of a foster child in a substitute family, there are not so many researches involving children in order to study and assess the comfort of their living from the perspective of children themselves.

Nowadays, cases of abused foster children in substitute families are being recorded, decisions on the transfer of children left without parental care to foster families are being cancelled, cases of improper performance of duties by substitute parents and misappropriation of ward children's funds are increasing. The relevance of systematic monitoring and research of substitute families is obvious and does not cause discussion. The subject of our research concerns children's relationships with foster parents, their interactions with blood and other foster children in the family, their psychological and emotional state, including physical, mental, or emotional violence, and the desire to live in a substitute family.

2 Materials and methods of research

The monitoring was carried out from August 1 to September 30, 2022 through a questionnaire; 76 foster children took part in it: 40 boys (53%) and 36 girls (47%).

The purpose of the research: prevention of violence and abuse of children in substitute families.

Methods and techniques: survey data collection, systematization and analysis of personal data, including frequency analysis. The questionnaire consisted of 8 questions aimed at identifying destructive aspects in the life of an adopted child.

Target audience: children living in substitute families supported by the Azov Child Care Centre of the Azov city and the Azov district of the Rostov Region. There were 76 respondents in total.

Stages of the research.

Stage 1. Primary diagnostics.

The methods of conversation or interview (with children from 5 to 10 years old) were used. They were based on the questionnaire to assess the child's living comfort in a substitute family and a written survey (for children over 10 years old).

The conditions for conducting the first stage of the research consisted in establishing contact with the underage children, working with the surveyed children without the substitute parents, and confidentiality of the monitoring results (the child had to be sure that the results would not be reported to the guardian).

The calculation of the total number of points was carried out on the basis of the developed keys to the questionnaire questions.

The substitute families with foster children who scored 25 or more points had to be included in the primary risk group.

Stage 2. With the children of the primary risk group, additional diagnostics of the idea of family relationships, the relations with other family members, the current emotional state, and the degree of adaptation in society were carried out.

3 The results of the research and their discussion

At the beginning of the survey, the respondents were asked to choose a judgment that “suits you more than others: in a foster family ...”.

The frequency analysis of the responses showed that most of the surveyed in the general sample felt good in the foster family and considered the substitute family to be their real home (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution by gender, age and the period of residence in a substitute family, frequency of responses of the surveyed to the first question of the questionnaire.

| Choose one judgment that suits you more than others: in a foster family... | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|----------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | GENDER | | AGE | | PERIOD OF RESIDENCE IN THE FAMILY | |
| | male | female | under 10 | older than 10 | less than 5 years | more than 5 years |
| I always feel good, this is my real home | 0.875 | 0.889 | 0.857 | 0.887 | 0.914 | 0.854 |
| I have pleasant events and big troubles | 0.075 | 0.056 | 0.143 | 0.048 | 0.857 | 0.049 |
| I most often feel uncomfortable, I want to go somewhere from here | 0.000 | 0.028 | 0.000 | 0.016 | 0.000 | 0.024 |
| I find it difficult to answer | 0.005 | 0.028 | 0.000 | 0.048 | 0.000 | 0.073 |

Most of the children who had lived in the family for less than 5 years indicated that they had pleasant events and big troubles, unlike those children who had been in the family for more than 5 years. The respondents under the age of 10 also had a higher frequency of responses “I have pleasant events and big troubles” than the children over the age of 10.

To the question “evaluate your relationships with foster parents ...” 96% (73 children) answered affirmatively that the relationships were warm and trusting, 2 children answered that “the parents are not interested in me, I am not interested in them” and one person replied that the relationships were more often of a conflict nature. The frequency analysis was not used on this issue since the responses of the entire sample were homogeneous.

The frequency analysis of the data on the question of satisfaction with the relationships that you have with other children in the family showed that the surveyed did not answer “no, I am not satisfied” (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution by gender, age and the period of residence in a substitute family, frequency of responses of the surveyed to the third question of the questionnaire.

| Are you happy with the relationships you have with the other children in the family? | | | | | | |
|---|--------|--------|----------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | GENDER | | AGE | | PERIOD OF RESIDENCE IN THE FAMILY | |
| | male | female | under 10 | older than 10 | less than 5 years | more than 5 years |
| Yes, I am satisfied | 0.800 | 0.806 | 1.000 | 0.774 | 0.829 | 0.780 |
| Something in between | 0.050 | 0.083 | 0.000 | 0.081 | 0.057 | 0.098 |
| No, I'm not happy | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| I am the only child in the family | 0.800 | 0.111 | 0.000 | 0.145 | 0.114 | 0.123 |

The rest of the responses were differentiated by gender, age and the period of residence in the substitute family. The analysis showed that the overwhelming majority of the answers to the questionnaire question were “yes, satisfied”. All the respondents under the age of 10 indicated that they were completely satisfied with the relationships with their brothers and sisters in the substitute family, and the children over the age of 10 defined their relationships with them as “something in between”, as well as nine respondents answered that they were “the only child in the family”. The frequency analysis of the indicator of living in a family for more than 5 years also showed similar results with the general sample.

To the questionnaire question “what mood do you have most often”, 64 children (84%) answered in the affirmative that “usually good”, 12 children (16%) spoke in favor of the answer as “something in between”.

During the study, the children were asked to answer the question “does any of the above relate to your life in the family?”, it was additionally indicated that several options could be chosen and the child could emphasize who it was. The following answers were received: the majority of the surveyed – 66 children (87%) did not answer the question, explaining that the listed statements were not relevant to their life in the substitute family. Three children answered that “I am being called names, humiliated, physically punished. I do not have enough time for study and entertainment because of a large number of responsibilities”, indicating that this occurred often. Seven children answered that “I have no right to take food from the refrigerator; good clothes are given out in rare cases», explaining that this happened once or twice a month.

During the monitoring, when assessing the psycho-emotional state of foster children, it was suggested to complete the statement: “Parents sometimes swear and insult me because ...”. 80% (61 children) of the respondents answered in the affirmative that they themselves provoked such a reaction from their parents. Three children explained this behavior of the parents as a reaction to their severe fatigue.

In the final part of the monitoring, the surveyed were asked to answer the question: “If you had an opportunity to choose where to live, what would you prefer?”, there were two answer options “to stay in this family” and “I would prefer another place”. Two out of 76 children indicated that they would like to live elsewhere.

According to the monitoring findings, the surveyed were divided into three groups: a group with comfortable residence of an adopted child in the family, a group with insufficiently comfortable residence, and the primary risk group (Table 3).

Table 3. Differentiation of the surveyed into groups, taking into account the distribution by gender, age and the period of residence in a substitute family.

| The comfort of the child’s residence in a substitute family | | | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|----------|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | GENDER | | AGE | | PERIOD OF RESIDENCE IN THE FAMILY | |
| | male | female | under 10 | older than 10 | less than 5 years | more than 5 years |
| Comfortable residence of a foster child in a substitute family (0-7 points) | 39% | 41% | 13% | 67% | 16% | 64% |
| Insufficiently comfortable residence of a minor child in a substitute family (8-24 points) | 13% | 7% | 13% | 7% | 11% | 9% |
| Uncomfortable residence of a child in a substitute family (25-34 points) | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

The surveyed who scored 25 or more points (the primary risk group) were not identified. Among the respondents with insufficiently comfortable residence in a substitute family, taking into account their gender, the following proportion was found: 13% male and 7% female respondents. The same proportion was found by the age indicator. According to the criterion of the “period of residence in a substitute family”, it was revealed that 11% of those living in a substitute family were under 5 years old and 9% of those living for more than 5 years old (Figure 1).

The respondents assigned to the group with comfortable residence in a substitute family made up the vast majority. By gender, they were differentiated as follows: 39% male and 41% female respondents. The children under 10 years of age with comfortable residence made up 13%, over 10 years of age – 67%. 64% of the foster children living in a family for more than 5 years were completely satisfied with their situation, less than 5 years – 16% of the surveyed.

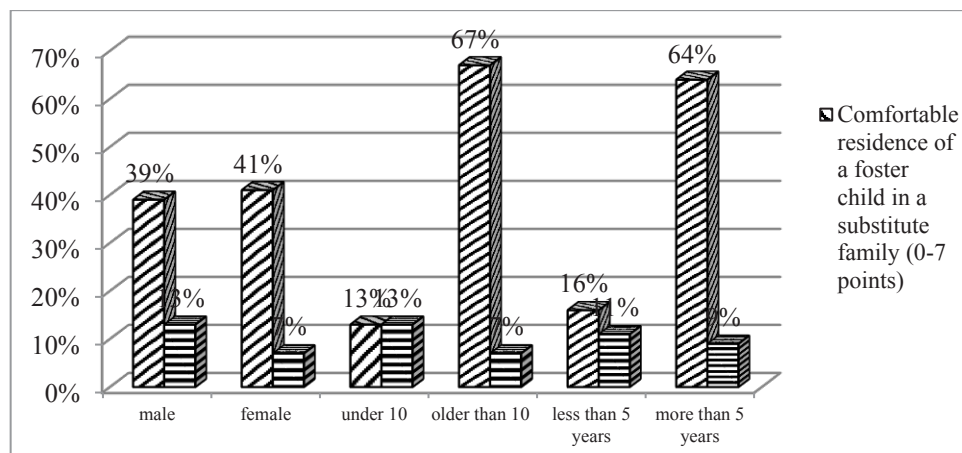


Fig. 1. Diagram of differentiating the surveyed into groups with comfortable residence of a foster child in a family and with insufficiently comfortable residence.

4 Conclusions

Thus, when monitoring the living comfort of 76 foster children in substitute families, the following conclusions were obtained:

1. 13% of the children surveyed indicated the presence of some signs of physical, mental and emotional violence against them in the substitute family. The respondents experienced increased anxiety. They had problems with sleep: insomnia, nightmares, excessive drowsiness. Eating disorder, such as decreased appetite or, conversely, excessive eating. Difficulties in studying: missing classes, decreased academic performance. Teenage foster children were pessimistic about the future;

2. 100% of the respondents noted the presence of verbal aggression towards them from the foster parents. The foster children noted that the parents often used a raised tone of conversation in relation to them, sometimes turning into a scream. Some respondents noted that the parents sometimes insulted them, used non-normative vocabulary or used ignoring forms of communication with them;

3. 3% of the surveyed foster children indicated that they would like to live elsewhere and change their substitute families. The age of the respondents who gave such an answer to the question: "If you had an opportunity to choose where to live, what would you prefer?" ranged from 12 to 16 years of age. The teenagers associated this desire with the fact that the relationships with their foster parents did not work out, the relationships were tense;

4. the analysis of the child-parent relationships showed that 96% of the foster children had warm and trusting relationships in the substitute families. Three children replied that "the parents are not interested in me, I am not interested in them", and also one child explained that the relationships were more often of a conflict nature;

5. 84% of the children surveyed gave the affirmative answer – "usually good" and 16% of the respondents answered – "something in between" to the question "what mood do you have most often?";

6. the analysis of the answers to the question concerning the feeling of satisfaction with the relationships that the foster child had with the other children in the family showed the absence of the answer "no, not satisfied";

7. it was found out that 80% of the surveyed children felt comfortable in the substitute family;

8. 20% of the respondents had some signs of insufficiently comfortable residence in the substitute family;

9. the primary risk group (those who scored 25 or more points) was not identified.

As a result of monitoring the comfort of foster children living in substitute families, specialists of the support service for substitute families of the Azov Child Care Centre conducted a number of activities:

1. The analytical report on the findings from the monitoring was presented to the guardianship specialists and guardianship authorities of the Azov city and the Azov district of the Rostov region;

2. The substitute families with an “insufficient level of comfortable living of the child” were put on crisis support by the centre specialists;

3. Three children were individually referred for consultation to medical specialists, a psychiatrist, and a neurologist.

4. Individual psychological correction was carried out with the substitute parents assigned to the crisis support;

5. This correction work was carried out on child-parent relationships with each family separately;

6. A repeated monitoring was carried out of the families with an “insufficient level of comfortable living of the child”.

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