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# RETURNS OF ADOLESCENTS FROM ADOPTIVE FAMILIES: PROBLEMS AND PEDAGOGICAL SOLUTIONS

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### *Abstract*

The article discusses the problem of determining scientifically based pedagogical means of helping adolescents who had returned from adoptive families. The authors aim to identify the specifics of pedagogical activity with adolescents who returned from adoptive families, compared with adolescents who had returned from guardian and foster families. Based on the theoretical and methodological analysis of the literature, it is proposed to rely on indicators of the attitude of adolescents to the situation of return, such as the degree of trust in adults; level of vitality; assessment of social experience gained in a foster family. It is proved that these indicators allow one to shift the situation of return to the resource of designing the adolescent's future life. Primary diagnosis confirmed that adolescents who had returned from adoptive families more often than other categories of returnees do not trust adults. At the same time, they highly appreciate the experience gained in the family of adoptive parents. After the return, pedagogical activities must be organized on the support stage (experience, situational awareness), mobilization stage (use of experience gained in the family) and motivation stage (designing further life activities). As a result of the analysis of the experimental work, it was concluded that for adolescents who returned from adoptive families it is necessary to maximize the support stage.

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**Keywords:** Returns from adoptive families, trust, vitality, foster family, adolescents, social experience.



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## **1. Introduction**

Returns of children from adoptive families compared to returns from guardian and foster families are extremely rare, both in international practice and in Russia. Therefore, returns from adoptive families have long been outside the scope of scientific research. At the same time, educators of social institutions in which children end up immediately after returns urgently need specific pedagogical technologies to overcome the consequences of breaking the connection between themselves and the adoptive family. The problem is especially complicated when it comes to adolescents. The crisis of breaking the relations with the adoptive family is superimposed on the crisis of age development and complicates the adolescent's way out from the current situation with the least losses for further personal development. It is even more difficult to help adolescents who returned from adoptive families if the family have been keeping the adoption secret. Scientifically proven means of helping adolescents that would help neutralize complicated negative return factors and make it possible to consider return a resource for designing the adolescent's future life are necessary.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The objective of the study is the theoretical justification and experimental verification of pedagogical conditions to overcome the consequences of the return of adolescents from adoptive families.

## **3. Research Questions**

First of all, it is necessary to find out how specific the experience of returning of adolescents from adoptive families is compared with the experiences of adolescents who had returned from guardian and foster families. In addition, it is important to determine under what pedagogical conditions the return can be considered one of the resources for updating the adolescent's inner abilities in order to design their future life and with what pedagogical means this can be achieved.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to identify the specifics of pedagogical activity with adolescents who returned from adoptive families.

## **5. Research Methods**

The leading theoretical concept of this study is "the return of an adolescent from an adoptive family". An analysis of the literature showed that the term "return" refers to the termination of the adolescent's life within the family system and their transfer to a social institution (Leonova, 2017). Provided that the child returns from the family of the adoptive parents, it is the court decides to cancel the adoption. The adolescent, according to the law, is the subject of legal proceedings, again receiving the status of a child left without parental care, and falling under special state protection. For the adolescent themselves, the fact of the return is perceived as an acute psychological trauma: they begin to squeeze out from their consciousness any, including positive, social experience gained in the family of adoptive parents; cease all relations with the

adoptive family, begin to behave asocially (Kuftyak, 2012). All this leads to the fact that the adolescent, as it were, ejects a part of their life from the history of personal formation.

As shown by numerous Russian and international psychological studies, such an emotional and psychological state without the study of the loss leads to personality development anomalies (Schofield, Beek, Ward, & Biggart, 2013; Solomatina, 2017). Adolescents who have lost contact with the family, even the foster family, and who are denying its influence on their personal development, have their identities violated, self-esteem deformed, and unreasonable fears and stresses arise for them. In the long run, children who are placed in foster families and have not received a stable attachment in them cannot connect with their own children or may even refuse to give birth (Sherr, Roberts, & Croome, 2019). Instability and multiple placements lead to disruption of parent-child relationships (Koh, Rolock, Cross, & Eblen-Manning, 2014). They begin to distrust adults, try risky behavior, go into social loneliness (Makhnach, 2016; Taylor & Thoburn, 2016).

In our study, we selected the following indicators of the attitude of adolescents to the situation of return: the degree of trust in adults; level of vitality; assessment of social experience gained in a foster family.

For adolescents, the return from the family of adoptive parents is a repetition of their story with consanguineous parents: experiences associated with an old trauma intensify; there is a peculiar combination of the consequences of the loss of the blood family and the foster family. After returning from a foster family, it is difficult for children to trust people and build long-term relationships. The feasibility of restoring adolescents' confidence in adults is explained by the adolescent's need for safety, openness and freedom of action (Schofield & Beek, 2014). Without trust in adults, the outside world is perceived by an adolescent as hostile, causing fear, anxiety and desire for isolation.

Vitality, according to Leontiev and Rasskazova (2006), is a combination of love for life and energy; actual interest in life and opportunities to achieve one's goals; the ability to respond non-standard to standard life situations, which increases the likelihood of their successful resolution; an optimistic way of interacting with the world and surrounding people. As practice shows, in a return situation, a high degree of vitality of an adolescent is found: they do not show their emotions (do not cry, do not swear, do not blame), but constantly monitor themselves, they weaken stress resistance and accumulate negative emotions.

Social experience of an adolescent is the result of their own, direct, sensual-emotional interaction with the outside world, preserved in memory in the form of knowledge, skills, emotional states and value judgments and updated to solve practical problems and life problems. The appropriateness of the reflection of social experience gained by an adolescent in the family of adoptive parents is explained by the need to differentiate positive and negative experiences; subjective and objective characteristics of the experience gained in the family; the need to preserve the integrity and continuity of the accumulation of personal social experience.

The method of determining the level of trust in adults was the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES). Viability was revealed using adapted Leontiev and Rasskazova (2006) Hardiness Survey, developed by the American psychologist Salvatore Muddy. Assessment of social experience is carried out through questionnaires. In total, 100 adolescents being in situations of return from a foster family, including 25 adolescents having returned from families of adoptive parents, participated in the questionnaires. The study

is based on the social institutions in Novosibirsk and the Novosibirsk Region. The experimental groups were created in the centers for helping children without parental care, "Constellation", "ABC of Life", Baryshevsky orphanage and rehabilitation center for minors "Snegiri".

## 6. Findings

In order to identify the characteristics of the level of trust in adults among adolescents who had returned from adoptive families, we compared the data obtained by the same methods among adolescents returned from foster care and guardian families. For adolescents who had returned from custody, a low level of trust is observed for 57%, average level – 19%, high – 24%. This indicates that even after the return interpersonal (most often parental) relationships between the child and the former guardian (custodian) remain, the child accepts the return calmly. Adolescents who had returned from adoptive families are also characterized by a low level of trust – 61%, but an average level of trust is also characteristic for them – 35%, which indicates that children tend to aim to maintain relationships with former adoptive parents (or other family members). A high level of trust in adults is observed only in 4% of adolescents. All adolescents who were returned to the organization for orphans after adoption have been noted to have only a low level of trust. Despite the fact that this category is the smallest (in practice, the cancelation of adoption is also less common than the cancelation of guardianship or foster care), adolescents experience a more difficult return process, they tend to get isolated, shut in and not want to connect with anyone. Often the situation is aggravated by the fact that the parents have kept the adoption a secret, and the child finds out that they were adopted only during the process of return. Such children consider themselves betrayed, deceived and do not want to communicate with adults, believing everyone to be guilty of "deception."

The result of the study of the level of vitality showed that 62% of minors who had returned to an institution from the custody of their blood parents have a low level of vitality, 23% have an average level, and a small part of them – 15% of those surveyed have a high level. Among the children who have returned from foster care, the majority also have a low level of vitality – 57%, but a significant amount of them has average level – 38%. A high level is observed in 5% of respondents. Of the minors who had been adopted, 67% had shown low vitality indicators, 33% demonstrated an average level, and none of the respondents manifested a high level of vitality at the stage of diagnostics.

Comparing the assessment of social experience depending on the form of the family structure of orphans and children left without parental care, we obtained the following results: adolescents who are under guardianship in families of blood relatives positively assess social experience in 80% of cases; adolescents from foster families say that social experience is positive in only 50% of cases. In our opinion, this is due to the degree of attachment of the adolescent to new parents and the stability of trust in them. Adolescents who highly appreciated the social experience gained in the family of adoptive parents were not found at all. Only 64% of respondents rated trust at the average level; low, respectively – 36%. As the included observation showed, in the first days of staying in a social institution, adolescents from adoptive families rarely use the experience gained. They seem to “forget” it, do not consider it important, to turn to it outside of the family conditions.

So, the return of an adolescent from a family of adoptive parents is accompanied by a lack of trust in adults, a denial of social experience gained in the family, and a low level of vitality. The longer the child

lived in the family of adoptive parents, especially if the secret of adoption was kept, the more painful the child perceives the deceit and the more they refuse to trust in adults. A break in the family system entails a rejection of relationships with former foster parents.

The duration of the formative experiment for each adolescent ranged from 6 months to a year. Due to the fact that adolescents from adoptive families entered the organization for orphans at different times, the experimental group was not constant, the returned adolescents lived with other children from the institution. At the same time, each returned adolescent in the formative experiment went through the following stages:

- support stage (from 2 weeks to 1 month), the task of which was to create conditions for satisfying the needs of the returned child in safety and acceptance, which is the first necessary step on the way to their recovery;
- mobilization stage (from 2 months to six months), during which there was a stimulation of adolescents to restore trust, to reflect on the social experience and to mobilize internal resources to build vitality;
- motivation (from 2 to 4 months), involving the preparation of an adolescent to restore relations with the blood family/formation of readiness for the transition to a new foster family/for an independent life.

At the formative stage of the experimental work, a set of programs was implemented aimed at:

- restoration of trust in adults, including foster parents, through training and psychological counseling, inclusion in partnerships with adults, maintaining contacts with former members of the foster family (the "Mentoring" program);
- formation of vitality using reflection, pedagogical modeling, social hardening and the formation of value attitudes of adolescents (the "Book of Life" program);
- consolidation of the social experience of living in a foster family through the reflection of their own sensual and emotional interaction with the outside world, modeling of situations that contribute to the actualization of social experience to solve practical problems and life problems in the framework of the program "Module of independent living."

The specifics of the organization of pedagogical activity with adolescents returned from adoptive families was that, firstly, the support stage was maximized, providing for the understanding of the fact of return and the understanding that this fact can be used as a new opportunity for personal development in changing conditions; secondly, at the mobilization stage, the main focus was on restoring trust in adults in order to help adolescents gain a sense of security and maintain a desire for active interaction with others; thirdly, on the basis of the need of adolescents from adoptive families to live and be raised in a family, rather than in a social institution, at the motivational stage they were being prepared to move to new foster families more actively than adolescents from foster and guardian families.

In order to prove the effectiveness of the selected pedagogical programs and the specific conditions for their implementation in the experimental work, we carried out a re-diagnostics. According to the results of statistical analysis using the  $\chi^2$  - Pearson criterion, which was used to compare the data of the experimental and control groups, the obtained data demonstrate statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups after the experiment. The results of the experimental group on the variables of *trust* ( $\chi^2 = 12.398$  at  $p = 0.001$ ), *vitality* ( $\chi^2 = 16.234$  at  $p = 0.001$ ) and *experience* ( $\chi^2 = 7.843$  at  $p = 0.006$ ) are significantly higher than in the control group.

Comparison of the control and experimental groups according to the levels of traits after the experiment also revealed statistically significant differences. The results of the experimental group significantly exceed the results of the control group, namely: low ( $\chi^2 = 10.194$  at  $p = 0.002$ ), medium ( $\chi^2 = 4.058$  at  $p = 0.044$ ) level of confidence in adults, low ( $\chi^2 = 16.234$  at  $p = 0.001$ ), the average ( $\chi^2 = 9.033$  at  $p = 0.003$ ) level of vitality, low ( $\chi^2 = 9.490$  at  $p = 0.003$ ), high ( $\chi^2 = 14.446$  at  $p = 0.001$ ) the level of assessment of the experience gained in the adoptive family.

## 7. Conclusion

The return of adolescents from adoptive families from a pedagogical point of view should be considered a resource for their further development and socialization. An adolescent must be included in a pedagogically organized process that allows them to build a further life strategy using experience and awareness of the essence of return. The pedagogical conditions for shifting the return to the resource are: restoring the returned adolescent's trust in adults, strengthening vitality and using the experience of living in the family of adoptive parents. Compared with adolescents who had returned from guardian and foster families, adolescents returned from adoptive families need a longer process of restoring trust in adults and, more often referring to the experience of living in an adoptive family, express their willingness to move to a new foster family.

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