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Goals in the Digital Age**

**SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF LABOR
MIGRANTS' CHILDREN IN CONDITIONS OF PRESCHOOL
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

In a modern world, labour migrants come to developed countries with their children, including children of preschool age, in search of better jobs. Today, in fact, there is absence of fundamental developments aimed at solving difficulties of an adaptation process for children of labour migrants who have insufficient experience in constructive socio-psychological interaction and are involved in building image representation systems of significant others and of their own selves. The paper presents results of an empirical study implemented on the basis of preschool educational institutions of the Penza region in which 120 children of labour migrants participated between the ages of 6-7. Authors conclude that children of labour migrants are the most vulnerable social group in need of psychological support. Most pronounced destructive impact on a preschooler's personality is expressed in a child-parent relationship. As main effects of a maladaptive behaviour of children from migrant families we can highlight: expressed anxiety, decreased self-esteem, neurotic reactions in social interaction, identification inconsistency, reduced social activity, intolerance of otherness and constant stress due to expectations of failure. Most children from migrant families express decreased or low self-esteem. The nature of a parent-child relationship is expressed in a collective image of a parent, in particular the image of the mother, and acts as an indicator of well-being / dysfunction of a child's personal development, his attitude to the world and his own self.

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Keywords: Social and psychological adaptation, migrant children, polycultural space, parent-child relationships.



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1. Introduction

Nowadays the migration flows regulation is an integral part of state migration policy. Migrant workers come to Russia in search of work and bring their children along, including those of preschool ages. In future, many of them may receive a Russian citizenship and find jobs in Russia. Children of labor migrants are the most vulnerable subjects of the migration process since they are forced to live in new social and cultural conditions and adapt to them. The adaptation process of migrant children is closely connected with certain economic and sociocultural factors. When joining a new sociocultural environment and constructing their adaptation trajectory, children intensively show specifics of their parents' adaptation period. Content and emotional background of parent-child relationships are among the most important factors in minimizing the children's situational anxiety in the new life conditions. Parents' socio-psychological state can be transmitted to children who, in their turn, are able to transform such experience into psychological or physical problems under conditions of a stressful situation. In many cases, due to lack of experience in constructive interaction in a new sociocultural environment, children's formed behavioral algorithms are focused exclusively on the attitudes and interpretations implemented by their parents. During the adaptation process, migrant children face a serious contradiction between the need to choose successful strategies for integration into a new multicultural environment, on one hand, and on the other, with the absence (or severe deficit) of such skills as stress resistance, self-regulation and correlation of existing experience with new experience in acting.

2. Problem Statement

In recent years, various studies on migrants' children adaptation have been conducted. Konstantinov (2017) presented some research data based on the study of social and psychological adaptation of migrants to a new life environment (Khukhlaev et al., 2019; Konstantinov, 2017). El-Awad et al. (2017) examined the mental health of juvenile refugees. Zhang and Benton (2019) studied babies' acculturation in Chinese migrant families. Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019) pointed out the defined alienation level among the majority of modern migrant children. In many cases, migrant children unconsciously take part in crisis-dependent behavior of their parents and actively assimilate and form a social relations construct. Some researchers express the idea that being "a migrant / a refugee" may be a base for stigmatization in the society and negatively mediate the self-attitude of children from migrant families (Ataiants et al., 2017; Haverkamp et al., 2016). Migrants' children quite often demonstrate a defined tendency to minimize social activity in a situation of uncertainty, when children begin to actively distance themselves from a new to them social space (Judah, 2013; Liao & Wang, 2013; Park et al., 2017; Sevim et al., 2016). In fact, children of this category are the most vulnerable social group, and problems associated with the adaptation process of their parents affect their worldview. Thus, migrant children are not ready to effectively use social support resources, find orientation to a narrow field of needs due to minimizing the severity of anxiety levels. Some studies show that being in maladaptive environment for a long time (i. e. the parent family in crisis) contributes to the formation of destruction in the emotional, behavioral and cognitive spheres of a personality, which entails possible identification disorders (Asis & Feranil, 2020; Lavrinets, 2017; Palagina, 2006). Makarova and Ivanova (2015) develop the thesis that the

prospect of full psychological support for migrant children is based on constructive intercultural exchange and familiarization with the new cultural values. Merkulova (2016) notes that the key to harmonious communication among children of migrants and the host society representatives is the homogenization of communication interaction contexts, which destroys barriers of misunderstanding.

3. Research Questions

Among many questions related to study of socio-psychological adaptation of migrant children, the main issue addressed in this study is the question of what mental characteristics of migrant children determine the success / failure of their adaptation process in a new life conditions.

4. Purpose of the Study

Analysing theoretical approaches to adaptation problems which labour migrants' children face, as well as identifying the main socio-psychological adaptation effects on migrant children in the conditions of preschool educational institutions is the main purpose of this study.

5. Research Methods

In January-February 2020 an empirical study of socio-psychological adaptation of migrant workers' children from preschool educational institutions was conducted. The study involved 120 children of migrants aged 6-7 years, legally residing in Russia, who arrived from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Armenia. During the course of the study, the following methods were used: observation, quantitative and qualitative analysis of empirical data. Diagnosis was carried out using the following methods: a projective test for the study of child anxiety Temple and Amen (1944), this technique is aimed at identifying the degree of a child's anxiety in relation to a number of typical life situations, gives indirect information about the nature his relationship with peers and adults in the family, kindergarten, school; technique Shchur (1982) «Ladder», which reveals the features of a child's self-esteem (as a general attitude towards himself) and the child's ideas about how other people evaluate him. Previously, using the projective methodology "Drawing of a Mother in the Image of an Animal", children's personality characteristics were studied, on the basis of which we split the children into two groups: children with a positive Image of themselves, and children with a negative Image of themselves (Zinkevich–Evstigneeva & Grabenko, 2003). Analysis of empirical data was carried out using SPSS 21.0 software and included descriptive statistics methods and Spearman correlation analysis.

6. Findings

The study showed that 67 % of preschool children were diagnosed with: a state of anxiety, a need for home and sense of community (53 %); strong emotional arousal (40 %), presence of aggressiveness and self-doubt (37 %). Psychological stress is found in 57 % of children, signs of asthenia and fear – in 47 %, impulsivity – in 33 %, low self-esteem – in 23 %, suspicion – in 20 %, reluctance to communicate, closeness and hostility are inherent in 17 % of preschool children.

Table 1. Statistical check (Drawing of the mother in an animal image) with the help of Pearson’s chi-squared test

| Child’s self-image | Features of the drawing analysed | Value of X ² |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Positive child’s self-image | Image esthetics | 7.385** |
| | Image position | 22.615** |
| | Image decoration | 37.385** |
| | Generic assignment | 59.769** |
| | Emotional relation | 0.462 |
| Negative child’s self-image | Image esthetics | 29.727** |
| | Image position | 24.818** |
| | Image decoration | 59.182** |
| | Generic assignment | 16.636** |
| | Emotional relation | 37.909** |

Note: ** $p \leq 0.001$

Using the analysis of the projective technique “Drawing of the mother in an animal image” (Table 1), it was revealed that children with a positive self-image painted figures with details. The figures of animals are mainly located closer to the center of the piece of paper. The depicted images are often called by diminutive and affectionate names. The description traces the change in the emotional background of the mood in relation to the depicted animal. The descriptions are short, but contain answers to the questions asked in the instructions. Children with negative self-image depicted animals with missing details. The figures sizes are mostly small, are often located lower to the bottom of the paper. Children often represent mothers as exotic animals. In the authors’ characteristics the depicted images are often called by the names of their pets, as well as by fiction names. Children’s emotional attitude towards the image is usually neutral, although, negative statements are not an exception. In their characteristics animal’s action description prevails over its qualities and properties. In the group of children with a negative self-image there were violations of instructions when children drew a human image instead of an animal one. This may indicate, for instance, the mother’s authoritarian position in the parent-child relationship. Using projective technique «Ladder», we studied self-esteem types and found: 20 respondents (17 %) showed overestimated self-esteem, 30 respondents (25 %) – adequate self-esteem, 45 respondents (37 %) – underestimated self-esteem in, 25 respondents (21 %) – low self-esteem. Inadequately overestimated, low self-esteem or dramatically low self-esteem was not identified among respondents. It is highly likely that these indicators are an indicator of the intrapsychic conflict between the desired and objective reality of the majority of respondents. Empirical data found with the help of methodology by R. Tammler, M. Dorki

1. Most respondents (65 %) showed high anxiety level. An average anxiety level was shown by 19 %, and low anxiety level was found among 16 %. These results may be linked to the fact that children living in migrant families experience significant difficulties in the process of acculturation in a new environment. Their individual resources are of short supply.

2. Respondents with high anxiety levels showed wide range of negative emotional choices in “child-child” situations and in situations simulating everyday actions. Those who noted negative emotional choices in a situation of child-adult relationship also showed high anxiety levels. These results

may be correlated to the age peculiarities of subjects and indicate a focus on the activity of joint actions among peers. However, this dissonance may be an indicator of lack of established skill of choosing effective interaction strategies. Thus, negatively assessed situations representing the child's daily actions ("Dressing up", "Going to bed", "Washing", "Picking up toys", etc.) show everyday stress and general background of anxiety in migrants' children.

With the help of SPSS 17.0 computer program and Spearman's rank correlation method we have analyzed relations between self-esteem and anxiety among preschool children from migrant families. Following significant relations were found:

The more unrealistically high preschoolers' self-esteem is, the lower the anxiety level is ($r_s = -0.506$, at $p \leq 0.005$). These results are likely to be connected with the fact that an uncritical perception of one's Self reduces the respondents' anticipatory and forms an imitative comfort field. No doubt that the illusory nature of subjectively perceived well-being does not appear to be stable, but plays a temporary, protective measure.

The lower respondents' self-esteem indicator (with low self-esteem) is, the more defined the anxiety indicators are ($r_s = 0.424$, at $p \leq 0.005$). This may be connected with depreciating own resources while including in the new multicultural social space. In this regard, children convey insecurity in their own abilities and defined anxiety.

The more balanced (under adequate self-esteem) self-esteem is, the more often the average anxiety level among respondents ($r_s = 0.646$, with $p \leq 0.001$) prevails. In other words, preschoolers from migrant families with adequate self-esteem tend to use stress resistance skills, realistically recognize their own resources and accept external assistance as an aid in case of uncertainty.

The unrealistically lower respondents' self-esteem indicator (with low self-esteem) is, the more defined the anxiety indices are ($r_s = 0.427$, at $p \leq 0.001$). This is probably due to the fact that stress becomes chronic which leads to depreciation of importance of one's own personality. Moreover, as a rule, such indicators are associated with experiencing a situation of "mismatching" of parents expectations and other significant adults, according to respondents.

7. Conclusion

Summarizing the theoretical data and empirical research results, we can state: Children from migrant families are the most vulnerable social group and need comprehensive psychological support of host multicultural space.

Main effects of migrant children's maladaptive behavior are defined as: anxiety, decreased self-esteem, markers of neurotic reactions during social contact, identification mismatch, decreased social activity, intolerance of otherness, stress chronization and failure expectations. Most children from migrant families show low self-esteem and self-depreciation. However, it should be noted that extreme demonstration of self-esteem (inadequately high and dramatically low) was not found among the respondents.

Majority of preschool children from migrant families have high anxiety levels and a negative assessment of everyday situations in the "child-child", "child-adult" systems. The conducted analysis allows us to conclude that forced migration causes a psychological trauma to a developing person, as

there is a break in relations with the environment, destruction of habitual life, sense of security loss, and world's instability and hostility. Migration traumatization causes long-term negative emotional states and activates unconstructive patterns of behavior.

Nature of parent-child relationships is expressed in the collective image of parents, in particular the image of a mother, and acts as an indicator of well-being/dysfunction of child's personal development, his or her attitude to the world and his own Self. This idea is reflected in the rooted representations of positive / negative migrant children's images of a mother during the course of socio-psychological adaptation.

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