

**PRRAEPGDA 2020****Personal and Regulatory Resources in Achieving Educational and Professional Goals in the Digital Age****MENTAL IMAGE OF AN ADOPTED CHILD AS A REGULATOR OF GUARDIANS' ACTIVITIES**

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***Abstract***

The article is aimed at studying the regulatory features of the mental image of an adopted child in adoptive parents with different forms of guardianship of orphaned children. The sample consisted of: 1. Guardians who performed their functions on the basis of a fee-based employment contract and raised different numbers of orphans; 2. Guardians who had a kinship with the orphaned children. A verbal version of the method "Structure of a Person's Image (Hierarchical)" proposed by Sitnikov was used to identify the peculiarities of the image of the adopted child. The following results were obtained: 1. In guardians' hierarchy of image components, the leading place belongs to the characteristics of the child, revealing his/her features as a subject of social interaction – the "Social" component. It was also established that for guardians with many adopted children, the behaviour of the child and his/her characteristics as a subject of activity were important. 2. It was established that the structure of the image of an adopted child among adoptive parents who had a kinship with the orphaned children lacked the "value of the family" component, which is an alarming fact. 3. When comparing the images of "good" and "bad" children, an important feature of the mentality of guardians with many children was revealed – the images of "good" and "bad" children turned out to be weakly differentiated in their structure.

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**Keywords:** Image of a child, mentality, regulation of behaviour, orphans, adoptive family, blood-related adoptive parents.



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## 1. Introduction

The experience of family arrangements gained in the recent years has revealed a lot of problems, which has been reflected not only in the increase in the number of rejections and returns of the children but also in the growth of domestic violence against adopted children. The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation has started preparing a draft bill that provides for the change in the system of selection and monitoring of adoptive families and has also raised the issue of limiting the number of adopted orphans in one family. In this regard, the research on the issues that are central for the well-being of adoptive families has become particularly relevant and important.

Solving problems related to the success of any activity involves the formation of a system of notions and mental images in the actor as a regulatory basis for achieving the goal. The mental image as a regulator of activity is interpreted quite widely in psychological literature. An image is a system object, a holistic, complex and multicomponent formation that is materialised through practical actions, language, and other sign systems. An image is defined as an "ideal subjective formation", and its regulatory function is considered in close connection with the features of the object that is reflected (Zavalova et al., 1986).

## 2. Problem Statement

The research conducted in educational psychology has shown that the effectiveness of educational influences depends on the completeness and accuracy of the teacher's (teacher, educator, teacher of a closed boarding school) ideas about the child (Aronson et al., 2016; Dunn & Craig, 2019; Kail, 2014; Kraig & Bokum, 2020; Rean, 2016).

In the works of Sitnikov, analysing the socio-perceptual features of perception of children by teachers and parents, it is shown that the mental image of a child is one of the main regulators of interaction in the dyad "child-adult". According to the author, along with such functions of the mental image as meaning-forming, motivating, predictive, and corrective, the regulatory function is highly significant for determining the nature of the child-parent relations and the entire trajectory of the overall development of the child (Sitnikov, 2001).

The data accumulated in the literature indicate that the image of a child is determined by many factors, among which the significant place belongs to both the characteristics of adults and the characteristics of children (Alikina, 2015; Burns, 1986; Nikolaeva et al., 2015). The sociological surveys aimed at analysing public opinion among the Russians about guardians who raise orphans have revealed a predominantly positive attitude toward such families. However, as for the image of an adopted child, researchers noted the dominance of negative assessments and opinions (Kuznetsova, 2003; Lou et al., 2018). According to the research, the Russians view an orphan as an aggressive, ill-mannered person, closed to others and poorly prepared for adult life. The positive characteristics usually mentioned by the respondents are independence, discipline, accuracy, compassion, and kindness (Simonova, 2015).

The analysis of the data conducted by Prisyazhnaya allowed the author to identify 7 stereotypes related to orphaned children: 1) have bad heredity and are predisposed to deviant behaviour; 2) have mental abnormalities; 3) have poor health and chronic diseases; 4) are prone to asocial behaviour; 5) are poorly adapted to the social environment; 6) are "ungrateful" to adults; 7) are unhappy, abandoned children. These attitudes are widespread among the public. People often avoid such children, considering

them a threat to societal peace (Prisyazhnaya, 2007). The literature review has shown the relevance of research to identify and form an objective image of a child left without adult care among different population groups, and, above all, among caregivers, guardians, and adoptive parents.

### 3. Research Questions

To solve the task, it seems necessary. To compare the image of a "bad-good" adopted child in the mental representation of guardians and blood-related adoptive parents. Explore the components of the image of an adopted child in the structure of mental representations of guardians and blood-related adoptive parents.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the presented work was to study the regulatory function of the mental image of an adopted child among blood-related adoptive parents and guardians.

### 5. Research Methods

The research was organized by the employees of the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the State-Financed Institution Centre "Detstvo" (Moscow). The sample was made up of guardians who raised orphaned children without adult care and blood-related adoptive parents who were relatives or children without parents (N = 110). The participants were divided into 3 groups: 1. guardians who had accepted no more than 2 orphans (n = 48), M = 50.57 ± 11.04 years (hereinafter – SC1); 2. guardians who were raising 3 or more orphans (n = 30), M = 50.71 ± 7.50 years (hereinafter - SC2); 3) blood-related adoptive parents who were raising 1-2 children (grandchildren, nephews/nieces) in the form of kinship guardianship (n = 32), M = 58.45 ± 9.79 years; 9.27 ± 5.30 years (hereinafter – BRG).

The study used an abbreviated version of the "Methodology for studying the image of a person" by Sitnikov (2001). The statistical processing included a frequency analysis and a correlation method.

### 6. Findings

Processing according to the method "Structure of a Person's Image (Hierarchical)" assumed the classification of the obtained associations in accordance with the following groups of characteristics (image components, according to Sitnikov): "Volitional"; "Activity-related"; "Intellectual"; "Behavioural"; "Social"; "Bodily-physical"; "Emotional". We have additionally identified two more categories: "Bad habits" and "Value of the family". The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Component structure of images of "good" and "bad" adopted children (%)

Components	"good" adopted child (%)			"bad" adopted child (%)		
	SC1	SC2	BRG	SC1	SC2	BRG
1. Volitional	3.38	2.25	3.16	2.91	2.34	5.50
2. Activity-related	7.89	14.04	12.03	10.47	19.53	13.76
3. Intellectual	13.53	10.11	13.92	6.40	6.25	3.67
4. Behavioural	18.80	14.04	17.72	25.00	16.41	33.94

5. Social	50.38	48.31	47.47	37.21	25.78	24.77
6. Bodily-physical	1.13	2.25	1.90	4.65	5.47	3.67
7. Emotional	1.50	2.81	3.80	5.81	6.25	2.75
8. Bad habits	0.38	1.12	0	7.56	17.97	11.93
9. Value of the family	3.01	5.06	0	3.01	5.06	0

As can be seen from Table 1, the "Social", "Behavioural" and "Intellectual" components were the most significant in the image of a "good" adopted child; these components reflect the features of interpersonal interaction and behavioural ways. The lowest ranking places were taken by "Bad habits" and "Bodily-physical" characteristics of the child. At the same time, the notions included in the "Value of the family" component were not used by blood-related adoptive parents at all.

The component structure of the image of a "bad" adopted child among guardians and blood-related adoptive parents differed and was specific for each group. "Behavioural" characteristics were rated number 1 for the BRG group; among the SC respondents, the "Social" component was expressed in the image of a "bad" adopted child. Activity characteristics were ranked third for the SC1 and BRG groups, second – for the SC2 group. The "Bad habits" component in the image of a "bad" adopted child was ranked third for SC2 group and fourth for the SC1 and BRG groups. Among guardians, the lowest ranking positions were taken by the "strong-willed" and "bodily-physical" components; among the BRG respondents, these were the "Intellectual", "Emotional" and "Bodily-physical" components.

Table 2 shows the comparison results of the component profiles of the image of the adopted child among the guardians of the SC1, SC2, and BRG groups.

**Table 2.** Results of a correlation analysis

	SC1 "good"	SC1 "bad"	SC2 "good"	SC2 "bad"	BRG "good"	BRG "bad"
SC1 "good"	1.00	.48*	.80**	0.54*	0.82**	0.36
SC1 "bad"	0.48*	1.00	0.67*	0.69*	0.51	0.57*
SC2 "good"	0.80**	0.67*	1.00	0.78**	0.73**	0.26
SC2 "bad"	0.54*	0.69*	0.78**	1.00	0.45	0.22
BRG "good"	0.81*	0.51	0.73**	0.46	1.00	0.45
BRG "bad"	0.36	0.57*	0.26	0.22	0.45	1.00

As can be seen from Table 2, the profiles that reflected the views among the parents from the SC1, SC2 and BRG groups about a "good adopted child" had statistically significant relationships ( $r = 0.73$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ). A comparison of the component structure of the image of a "bad adopted child" revealed a significant similarity of the parents' profiles in the SC1 and SC2 groups ( $r = 0.69$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ) and the SC1 and BRG groups ( $r = 0.57$ ;  $P < 0.22$ ). The coefficients related to the image of a "bad adopted child" showed that the profiles were similar in the SC1 and SC2 groups ( $r = 0.69$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ), as well as the SC1 and BRG groups ( $r = 0.57$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). The images of a "bad" child among the guardians of the SC2 and BRG groups did not match ( $r = 0.45$ ;  $P < 0.22$ ).

## 6.1. Discussion

The obtained results allowed concluding that the image of a "good adopted child" in the guardians' perception (blood-related adoptive parents and guardians) had a similar component structure. The first two ranks were taken by the "Social" and "Behavioural" components that reflected the features of interpersonal interaction and behavioural ways; these corresponded to the structure of the image among biological parents (according to Sitnikov). The image of a "bad" adopted child had a similar component structure among guardians (SC1 and SC2), as well as guardians who cared for 1-2 children and blood-related adoptive parents (SC1 and BRG).

The analysis of the obtained data showed that compared to other groups, the SC2 placed the most importance on the characteristics of an adopted child that displayed joint activities and communication. It could be assumed that attention to the "activity-related" characteristics was determined by the difficulties arising in families with many children, where several social orphans are raised at the same time; these children often have psychosomatic disorders and, according to the researchers working in this field, are "difficult children" (Shulga, 2016).

The concepts that revealed the child's attitude toward the life in an adoptive family, included in the "Value of the family" component, were found only among guardians and were absent in the blood-related adoptive parents' responses. Guardians emphasized the child's relationship to the family when describing a "good" ("attached to the family", etc.) and a "bad" adopted child ("does not value the family", etc.). This fact could be interpreted as a demonstration of the personal meaning of the conducted work and the desire to receive a positive response and acceptance of family values from the adopted children. However, the comparison of the images of "good" and "bad" children between the groups showed that the mental images of "bad" and "good" adopted children were poorly differentiated and coincided in their structure. Based on the results from the previously conducted studies and the data obtained from a sample of ordinary parents by Sitnikov, the authors could assume that many guardians were not always personally involved in the educational process. It was previously shown that the more children there were in a family, the less did the guardians focus on the value of the family as a small group. In other words, there was a clear contradiction in the mentality of guardians with many adopted children: on the one hand, they expected adopted children to have a value attitude toward being in an adoptive family (the "Value of the family" component). On the other hand, they were value-oriented toward "interesting work", "the beauty of nature and art", "love", which was reflected in behaviour (Aldasheva & Zelenova, 2018; Aldasheva et al., 2019).

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, the study revealed the structural features of the image of an adopted child in the mentality of adoptive parents with different forms of guardianship. The analysis showed that in the hierarchy of image components among guardians, the leading place belonged to the qualities of the child that demonstrated his/her features as a subject of social interaction – the "Social" component. It was also established that for the parents with many children, the characteristics of a child as a subject of activity – "Activity-related" and "Behavioural" components – were important. The authors explain this structural feature of the image

of a child in the mentality of parents with many children by the presence of many problems that arise in the dyad "adopted child – adoptive adult".

It was established that among the blood-related adoptive parents, the structure of the image of an adopted child lacked the "Value of the family" component, which is an alarming fact. It is widely known that family values, in particular, have a regulatory function and form the unity of a small group, consolidating the meaning of "we". This fact allowed supplementing the reasons for rejections of adopted children among the blood-related adoptive parents.

An important feature of guardians' mentality was revealed when comparing the images of "good" and "bad" children. In the context of previously known empirical data, this fact could be interpreted as a weak personal involvement in the upbringing process, as well as a mental attitude of guardians to demonstrate their good attitude toward adopted children.

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