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**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF  
PARENTAL COMPETENCIES**

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***Abstract***

The paper presents the problem of child abuse in Russia and measures of its prevention. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, the situation worsens - the facts of domestic minor violence are registered more often. These data are different for the regions of Russia. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to record, describe and disseminate the successful experience of small non-governmental and inter-agency associations. Theoretical basic factors of domestic child abuse have been considered from the viewpoint of Russian social and general cultural background. Cruel treatment of teenagers by their parents is caused by: 1) high tension of parents due to social frustration, low emotional control, 2) conflict, developing between emancipation of teenagers and invariable parental impact. On the basis of this insight, the authors developed a training program for parents of teenagers, culminating in joint action of children and parents. Parents learn to control their emotions. Team work provides common information and makes it possible to analyze particular cases. The program for parents should culminate in a positive, creative and joint action with their teenagers: this consolidates the training effects and introduces them into family routine. Success of presented trainings for the parents of teenagers largely depends on solution by the parents of their own problems and on readiness to change. Parents need emotional support to overcome the difficulties in relations with their own maturing children.

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## 1. Introduction

The problem of preventing child abuse is topical not only for Russia; it is a worldwide problem. UN Convention on the Rights of Child (approved by the UN General Assembly on 20.11.1989, Article 19) requires the States Parties to use all necessary legislative, administrative, social and enlightenment efforts to protect a child from any forms of physical and verbal abuse, maltreatment or exploitation by any person taking care of a child.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Internal Affairs 70% of victims of domestic violence are women and children. The trend is increasing: in recent three years in the Russian Federation, the number of crimes committed against delinquents increased (2013 – 84100; 2014 – 85800; 2015 – 96500). In 2013 - 89100, in 2014 – 94800, in 2015 – 102600 children were recognized victims. The number of minors-victims of violent actions by members of their families (2013 - 8 328; 2014 - 9 133; 2015 - 11 756 cases) also increases.

In the Republic of Karelia, crimes against children are represented by the following figures: 2013 – 577, 2014 – 544, 2015 – 607. Crimes involving violent actions are observed to increase: 2013 – 369, 2014 – 355, 2015 – 393. In 2015, 113 crimes against children were committed by their parents (in 2014 – 82, in 2013 – 58). According to the results of the year of 2015, crimes against minors in Karelia increased by 10.3 %. (Report on activity of children’s rights ombudsman, 2015)

In 2015 in Russia, to prevent cruelty and violence against children, 64 constituent entities of the Russian Federation implemented the following: 43 regional innovative social programs; 96 innovative social projects of government and municipal institutions, non-commercial organizations and public associations; pilot project (based on a model program) to introduce social support for families with children. (Report on activities of Support foundation for children, 2015). Statistics of the recent years shows that the number of wrongful criminal acts against children tends to grow. It is obvious that the national children safeguarding policy is inefficient and cannot decrease or at least stop the increase of crimes against children (Semia, 2016; Khilazheva, 2015). Studies and developments at the local level make possible to give insight into basic factors which cause aggressive forms of upbringing by the parents and methods of eliminating them «en famille». In this connection, of special importance for practicing social counselors are the problems associated with investigation of causes of familial cruelty, and developments of reliable methods of safeguarding children from parental cruelty.

## 2. Problem Statement

According to official statistics, domestic violence annually kills more than half a million people in the world; a similar number of them are grievously bodily harmed (Slanova, 2015, Rodina, 2008, Pridemore, 2005). Violence as a method of resolving conflicts and disciplinary influence is used in every fourth Russian family.

Foreign experience the record of physical violence depends on the attitude to this phenomenon of public opinion, standpoint of experts working with children (doctors, nurses, social counselors, and teachers). Following publications in mass media of shocking news about child homicide, heavy bodily injury, the facts of physical violence are disclosed more often. According to Michael Freeman

(2014) and Bernadette J.Saunders (2014), child abuse frequently starts as disciplinary violence (punishment) and can be so strong that it can cause injury and even death. Therefore, the authors think it necessary to terminate physical violence against children, to introduce it in into legal environment, and to consider it as a crime.

Researchers distinguish several groups of causes increasing domestic abuse in the world.

### **2.1. Social causes of domestic child abuse**

The first group of causes is generally social and is inherent in general changes of the family functions. Among them, there is increasing involvement of women in production activities and their double burden – at work and in the family, time deficit for upbringing and familial communication. An important factor in this group of causes is low material security in a considerable part of Russian families, housing and financial difficulties giving rise to chronic stress of adult members of the family (fathers, in particular). Family and birth of children are a factor making life difficult, hindering the woman's career. This increases the age of marriage; in parents' opinion, good job for a daughter is a more significant factor of succeeding in life than a perfect marriage. Common-law marriage is becoming normal for the young people; hence, there is the lack of confidence of the woman in her own future and the future of her children (Zakharov, 2007).

Hyunil Kim and Brett Drake (2017) showed that the level of family violence is influenced by a substantial impact poverty, a low cultural level and social status of the family.

The research by Joshua P. Mersky, Colleen E. Janczewski, James Topitzes (2017) shows that adverse childhood experience for parents, especially mother (family financial problems, lack of food security, etc.), affect the degree of cruelty to their children. In other words, they follow the same mode of life and, as a result, mode of upbringing.

### **2.2. Psychological causes of domestic child abuse**

The second group of causes of domestic child abuse is psychological. They are associated with specifics of child-parent relations, pedagogical incompetence of parents, inborn aggressive tendencies, etc. Psychologically, the causes of family violence are most frequently explained by the learning theory, which considers cruelty as the form of social behavior learnt in the process of socialization. Aggressive reactions are learnt and supported by immediate involvement in manifestations of aggression, and as a result of passive witnessing of manifestation of aggression. If in the family of a today's parent, cruel forms of punishment were used and, if, in the parent opinion, they were successful, the possibility of resorting to violence in upbringing substantially increases (Tsimbal, 2007). And taking into account how much graphic violence is daily presented by hundreds of TV channels, it is easy to understand that the threshold of acceptable violence in human consciousness (and unconsciousness) lowers and they make admissible for themselves such forms of effect on the relatives.

In most cases, parents, committing cruel acts against their own children, employ violence in its different forms to solve problems of upbringing, without taking care to satisfy one of the most important needs of the child – the need for love and attention. Such parents are not cruel and evil people; they are rather helpless in the upbringing. It is this helplessness that causes the state of frustration with respect to

goals and objectives of upbringing; irrespective of how the parents understand it (frequently they are the goal of subduing the child and make him fulfill parents' demands). Frustration brings forth aggression towards the child – it is the child who is the «torturer» causing first anger and rage and “making” parents resort to physical punishment. Later, seeing the repeated failures, many parents feel guilty and frustrated. (Chiganova, 2012).

Pedagogically inconsistent parents expect from their children immediate obedience, unquestioning fulfillment of their demands, exerting on the child intolerable pressure disregarding the impact on the personality. Frequently, they reproduce the methods of upbringing used by their parents towards them or act thoughtlessly, having neither intelligible idea about family pedagogy nor any wish to acquire proper knowledge.

### **2.3. Upbringing cultural traditions as a cause of domestic child abuse**

The third group of causes is associated with specific culture and traditions, the upbringing traditions among them. Different nations have different ideas about methods of upbringing, the system of requirements to children, other members of the family. Collective consciousness (not only in Russia) has ingrained the notion that corporal punishment is the inherent right of parents. This is expressed in “Domostroi” (a monument of Russian literature of the 16 century, set of household rules, instructions and advices pertaining to various religious, social, domestic, and family matters of the Russian society), in orthodox religion canons (Alekseyeva & Novoselsky, 2006). It is this that brings forth prevalence of physical punishment as a basic method of upbringing in the family. Such cultural discourse gives rise to victim behavior of children enhancing family violence.

### **2.4. Focus groups data on the causes of parental violence**

Parents can be incompetent in situations of communicating with children that require expression of their emotions. Incapacity to express their emotions (both positive and negative) is a serious factor provoking family violence. Instead of explaining a child the feelings and consequences that the child's action can evoke, the parent “realized” the said emotion through strong language or beating.

To study the problem of family violence in Krasnoyarsk (Russia, Eastern Siberia), based on the initiative of “Verba” public organization in February-March 2015, the authors conducted focus-groups with medical workers, experts of different departments and institutions, public workers, social workers, citizens. In total, 8 focus-groups have been formed; the total audience was about 100 persons.

Practically all respondents recognize the topicality of the family violence problem. For example, the participants of the focus-group – doctors of children's surgical department of one of the regional children's hospital recognized that annually they treat 20-30 children – victims of their own parents. In most cases, no serious measures are taken against these parents as they explain the causes of children's trauma by negligence, needless tragedy, etc. Children, as a rule, confirm the words of their parents.

In the opinion of respondents, the problems occur due to the following factors: drawbacks of family upbringing, general social tension in the society, negative effect of mass media, inefficiency of measures, and lack of a consistent public opinion towards these phenomena. Among serious problems,

there is provoking victim behavior of children and women; the public opinion, which does not consider domestic violence as a serious problem.

### **3. Research Questions**

Our major was how to help parents prevent family violence against children. The authors understand that such assistance is related to the improvement of parental competence. I.A. Alekseyeva (2006), Ye.I. Tsymbal (2007) describe different models to render help to “difficult” parents. They pinpoint the following factors improving efficiency of group work: necessity of developing social experience of parents themselves; enhancement of their self-esteem and confidence in themselves; providing possibilities of emotional responding to negative emotions, etc.

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

The purpose of the study is to develop and test a parent support program to prevent domestic child abuse.

As a theoretical basis of the positive parenthood model, the authors used some studies of L.S. Vygotsky (1931), Yu. B. Gippenreiter (2011), R. and J. Bayard (1986), B. A. Akina and S. Gomib (2016); etc. Key ideas of these authors can be formulated as follows:

- Recognition of the naturalness of the uneven development of the child in adolescence natural, requiring recognition of his/her adulthood and search of new form of parental upbringing.
- Interaction with a child on the basis of principle of acceptance, love and understanding.
- Transfer to the child of responsibility for his/her own behavior.

Organization of the prevention system implies having information about the number of problem families in the area, analysis of available resources: public associations, municipal and government institutions involved in preventive work, and cultural-sports-recreation resources.

Krasnoyarskiy Kray has accumulated positive experience of the work of community organizers in this prevention line. Krasnoyarsk Regional Public Organization “Siberian Social Partnership” together with the Department of general and social pedagogy of Siberian Federal University have developed different models of preventive work with families employing violence against children: directly in work collectives, in communities, in educational establishments, etc.

For example, in a small town of Lesosibirsk, the authors held a discussion about the possibility of physical punishment in principle. The course of discussion disclosed three families having family problems – none of them was registered in any body. This is indicative of high latency of family violence. Special preventive measures were taken with respect to these families – consultations, social work, teaching non-violent resolution of conflicts.

Pryazha, the national municipal area of the Republic of Karelia successfully realizes the early prevention technology – “Council of the near and dear”. Early intervention makes it possible to overcome social ill-being of children in individual families. “The Council of the near and dear” technology applied in 17 families had positive effect in 15 cases. Resources of local communities have multiple aspects, they

have potential of solving many childhood problems, the prevention of child abuse in the families is among them. Communities of rural settlements in Karelia exhibit aspirations and opportunities of solving this problem in specific situations (Yeflova, 2016).

## **5. Research Methods**

To form a group, parents were informed about the goals and were invited to participate in the group activities at the high-school teacher-parent conferences. For the parents, employing violent upbringing methods, special invitations were prepared. So, their participation was supposed to be obligatory. But their activity was low. As a result, only 15 people attended the meetings.

Special diagnostics of child-parent relations was not used. However, all participants noted the difficulties in mutual understanding during domestic communication, children's disobedience and parental fear for their future. The observation of parents' activity and analysis of their statements and comments at these meetings served as the main tool for assessing the effectiveness of the program.

### **5.1. Structure of parental competences' training**

The structure of group training consists of the following stages:

- to establish trusting relation within the group, finding similar problems of parents;
- to teach parents to control their emotional condition, constructive resolution of conflict situations;
- development of skills of effective interaction and communication within the family
- to explain the parents age specifics of children;
- to develop skills of constructive behaviour with teenagers;
- social creative behaviour, search for new forms of parent-child interaction.

### **5.2. Description of the training Program of the parent' competence**

A development of the skills of productive parental behaviour started from lectures-discussions. Parents shared their opinion on most important issues, listened to opinions of other participants, and looked for a correct solution in their course. The conversation with parents began with the definition of parental love. Parents remembered the most bright, joyous moments of their relationship with the child. This has helped us establish a relationship of trust in the group, give parents confidence in success.

The main idea of the following lecture was to renounce the use of struggle in upbringing, because:

- this parents' behaviour does harm to both children and parents
- negative attention strengthens negative behaviour;
- relations with the child are tinted with the feelings of resentment, hostility, despair, soreness

These rules are explained by simple examples from family upbringing practices or from well-known movies, such as "Home alone" or Russian animated cartoons "Masha and the Bear". Analysis of these movies helps parents to "see" and comprehend themselves, their own mistakes, to have a new understanding of the feelings of their children.

The first message of the lecture: “Crisis – fast changes the parents are not ready for”. The second message is “Difficulties in upbringing teenagers as a consequence of neglect in upbringing the little children”. Parents have to realize that the visible drawbacks of their child have developed through their own participation, as a result of their actions or inactions. The resulting inharmonious situation has two parties – the child and the parents. The third message seems at first sight to be paradoxical – “do not attempt to change the child – change yourselves”. The main principle of the progress is “Begin with yourself”. Be kind and condescending towards yourselves, you have the right for happiness, freedom, respect, and love irrespective of the fact how your teenager studies and behaves.”

The termination event in the group work was a session of the mixed group of parents and teenagers “Join hands, friends” or “Why do we need holidays”. Participants were given “homework” – to prepare together with their children a presentation (film, collage, a file of photographs) about family leisure.

## 6. Findings

The session that the authors called “Happy parenthood” turned out to be successful. The message discussed at the lecture “Parents should and have the right to be happy” became relevant. Parents should be happy because being inapt to be happy they cannot teach their child to be happy. Parents have the right to be happy and should know how to assert this right – and teach their child to do this, too. At the beginning of the session, the authors asked the participants to recall and tell the audience about a situation in which they experienced the feeling of parental happiness. Stories told by the parents were very diverse. It was the emotional condition that was common. Parents again experienced fondness, pride and boundless love towards their children. During the earlier meetings, parents told about their parental disappointment and grief. The result of the session was obvious, it was vividly expressed by one of the participants: “We have wonderful children, but sometimes they behave ill”. This conclusion leaves no room to violence and aggression towards the child, the problem is insufficient pedagogical competence of parents themselves.

Among most-in-demand forms of work with parents, there were supervisions of specific difficulties in family upbringing. For example, after analyzing the session about parental statement in difficult situations of communication with a teenager, the mother reported: “I come from work - everything is in a disorder. Natasha is at the computer. And I tell her, “My dear, I would have been so happy to come and see everything tidied up and the mess sorted out”. She stared at me in round-eyed wonder – I’m not shouting. I left for my own room. In five minutes the mess was sorted out, and she looks at me. I embraced her. We were both happy”.

Parents see themselves from their own experience: exhausting, mutually hurting and causing aversion methods of impacting the child by oppression, violence can be excluded from the family upbringing armory and replaced with mutual agreements, quest for a compromise, committed respect towards the child’s personality and his right for his/her feelings and relations, the right to make the choice.

The results of the termination event surpassed all hopes. Besides very touching, cheerful, very beautiful movies about travels, about birthday parties, yearly concert of a dance group, the authors saw files of photographs prepared for the golden wedding of grandparents. Grandchildren prepared it studying

and collecting the history of the family. One of the teenagers together with his mother prepared a slide presentation about his participation in alpine sky competition when the entire family supported him and recited poems of his own manufacture dedicated to his sport.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper shows that the main factor to cause aggressive upbringing forms of the parents is their preoccupation with the job, resulting in emotional burnout, inaptitude to control their emotions, fears and mistrust towards their maturing children. Success of presented trainings for the parents of teenagers largely depends on solution by the parents of their own problems and on readiness to change. Parents need emotional support to overcome the difficulties of relations with their own maturing children.

Specialists are to organize and conduct such training work on prevention of child abuse and parental violence. Specialists who can manage the work in the training group, are able to reflect and differentiate emotions, thoughts and feelings, as well as to use non-directive methods of working with parents with problems of child abuse are necessary. For the preparation of such specialists, constant practice, combined with an in-depth and interested study of the theoretical bases, is very important. The modular project training with early and scattered practice is suitable for this purpose at the level of bachelor's training of pre-service social pedagogies.

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